Creating a “National” Church:
The De-Judaization of Protestantism and the Holocaust

by

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Abstract

While the majority of German Protestant churches were silent in response to the persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany, the *Deutsche Christen* or German Christian movement enthusiastically supported the Nazi regime's goals and was actively involved in efforts to extract "Jewish" elements from Protestantism in an effort to create a "pure" German religion. Many scholars view the radical form of Protestantism expressed by this group as a by-product of Nazism. However, I argue that ideas promoting the de-Judaization of Protestantism were already existent within Protestant theology and that Hitler's rise to power merely provided the *opportunity* for these ideas to come to fruition. I examine this topic by analyzing nationalistic and anti-Jewish ideas in German Protestant theological texts during the early twentieth century, focusing on how these ideas informed the later de-Judaization of certain churches between 1932 and 1945 under the German Christian movement, which included actions like eliminating the Old Testament from the Protestant Bible and refusing to recognize Jewish conversion to Christianity. I approach this topic by situating my analysis of several key Protestant theological texts within broader scholarly discussions about the position of the churches towards the Jews in Weimar and Nazi Germany.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee ..... **ii**
Abstract ..... **iii**
Table of Contents ..... **iv**
Acknowledgements ..... **v**
Introduction **1**
Chapter One: The Response of German Protestant Churches to the Holocaust **7**
Division between Antisemitism and Anti-Judaism 8
Protestant Churches in Nazi Germany 12
Debates about the Position of Protestant Churches under the Nazi Regime 14
Gaps in the Historiography: The Precursors to the German Christian Movement 28
Chapter Two: "The Chosen People": Redefining the Protestant Community **31**
From the Late Nineteenth Century to the 1920s: Establishing a "German" Protestantism 32
The Luther Renaissance: Resurrecting and Redefining Lutheran Theology 36
Anti-Jewish Attitudes in Twentieth Century German Protestantism 38
How Widespread Were These Ideas? 44
Chapter Three: Andersen's Conflation between Religion and Race **49**
Friedrich Andersen and Precursors to the German Christian Movement 50
Andersen's Opinions on the Old Testament and Mosaic Law 53
Separate Gods for Separate Peoples 57
The "Jewish Spirit" in Andersen's Texts 62
Chapter Four: The German Christians and the Creation of an "Exclusive" Church **66**
Formation and Consolidation of the German Christian Movement 67
A New Bible for a New Church 69
De-Judaizing the Physical Space of the Churches 74
The "Problem" of the Jewish Spirit 77
Justification for Genocide? The Churches' "Mission" in the Nazi State 80
Conclusion – Implications for Traditional Protestantism 83
References **88**

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Introduction

In 1922, Hitler stated in a speech that Jesus Christ "recognized these Jews for what they were and summoned men to fight against them and who, God's truth! was greatest not as a sufferer but as a fighter" (qtd. in Elmore 76). This interpretation of the Christian message as a struggle against the Jews and Judaism was not unique to Hitler, but was echoed by a number of prominent Protestant pastors and theologians both prior to and during the Holocaust. While most German Protestant churches were silent in response to the persecution of the Jews under the Nazi regime, one particularly radical group known as the German Christian movement [*Deutsche Christen*] went even further and attempted to de-Judaize the churches. For instance, they refused to recognize Jewish conversion to Christianity and eliminated the Old Testament from the Protestant Bible, republishing the latter as a reorganized New Testament that coincided with Nazi ideology.

To some extent, the attitude of these churches towards the Jews and Judaism was driven by external societal pressures, such as the increasingly nationalistic atmosphere in Germany itself. Even from unification in 1871, German nationalism was centered on a distinctly "German" form of cultural belonging based on shared customs, national "spirit," and *völkisch* elements (Kohn 454, 456). This concept of belonging became increasingly linked to race in the years leading up to 1933 and specifically began promoting the idea that the German nation was being weakened by the Jewish people/spirit (Kohn 459; Frølan 274). Similarly, Protestantism became increasingly "nationalized," which Richard Pierard indicates can at least be traced back to the nineteenth century, although some argue that this concept of a Germanized Christianity went back to Martin Luther's teachings themselves (9). However, while acknowledging the impact of these external influences on the German Christian movement and its precursors, my thesis

focuses more on exploring the religious origin of their actions. How could a religion supposedly promoting equal access to salvation for everyone (regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or class) become one that, in the case of churches within the German Christian movement, advocated for the elimination of any Jewish influences from within the churches? What ideas promoted by some German pastors and theologians legitimized the more explicitly antisemitic actions of the German Christian movement after Hitler came to power in 1933?

Until around the mid-1990s, many scholars emphasized the role of resistance among the churches, focusing on Dietrich Bonhoeffer and other prominent leaders of the Confessing Church who spoke out against the Nazi regime's persecution of the Jews (Cochrane; Barnett; Littell). This is no doubt important to consider when examining the response of the churches to the Holocaust, but it is integral to study the complicity of the churches as well, which has been addressed most prominently by Doris Bergen and Susannah Heschel in their research on the German Christian movement. Moreover, there is relatively little research on the connection between the anti-Jewish ideas promoted by select Protestant theologians, such as Friedrich Andersen, Emmanuel Hirsch, and Adolf von Harnack, in the decades before the Holocaust and the antisemitic actions of the German Christian movement. My thesis focuses on this side of the issue, as I believe it is important to situate the actions of the German Christian movement within this broader historical context in order to determine the origin of their actions. As Richard Steigmann-Gall explains, "much of the racialist and völkisch content of Nazi thought found a receptive home among particular varieties of Christian belief well before the arrival of Nazism and even before the turn of the twentieth century" (*The Holy Reich* 7).

This thesis shows the evolution of specific anti-Jewish ideas within particular German churches in the decades leading up to the Second World War, particularly focusing on their

critiques of the Old Testament, their creation of a "national" Christianity, and their condemnation of the Jews (in addition to Judaism). I contend that the existence of these precursors to the German Christian movement indicates that the anti-Jewish actions of the German Christian movement were not solely a by-product of Nazi ideology, but were rooted in earlier ideas not necessarily directly related to Nazi ideology itself. Hitler's rise to power thus provided a space for fulfilling anti-Jewish ideas that were already in existence within works written by certain German pastors/theologians, such as Friedrich Andersen.

By extracting "Jewish" elements from Protestantism, churches within the German Christian movement believed that they were carrying out the spiritual side of Hitler's mission to "de-Judaize" society (Hossenfelder 256; "An English Translation" 1). This de-Judaization of Protestantism is particularly problematic when considering the extent to which the Jews and Judaism were equated within some variants of Protestant thought in Weimar and Nazi Germany (Brökelschen 422; Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 160; Andersen 112, 124; Heschel, "Race" 229). If the Jews and the Jewish religion were considered inextricable from one another, the German Christian movement's proposed elimination of Jewish "influences" from within Protestantism and "Christian" society takes on much more disturbing (and possibly eliminationist) connotations. I argue that it would not have been so easy to implement this de-Judaization of the churches during the Holocaust, such as removing "Jewish" elements from the Protestant Bible, had anti-Jewish ideas not already comprised an accepted (if in a less radical form) component of a number of Protestant theological texts in the years leading up to 1933.

In my thesis, I frame my argument by situating my analysis of various primary sources within the already existent body of research on the churches (e.g. Heschel, Bergen, Ericksen, Hockenos). These primary documents include those written by prominent German Christian

leaders, such as Reinhold Krause and Joachim Hossenfelder, but I focus on analyzing two works written or co-written by Pastor Friedrich Andersen, namely *Deutschchristentum auf rein evangelischer Grundlage: 95 Leitsätze zum Reformationsfest 1917* [*German Christianity on a Pure Protestant Basis: 95 Principles for Reformation Day 1917*] and *Der deutsche Heiland* [*The German Saviour*]. Andersen was responsible for cofounding the *Bund für deutsche Kirche* [League for German Churches], the first direct precursor to the German Christian movement. These texts provide a representative sample of the gradual changes that occurred within the works of some Protestant theologians in the decades prior to 1933, as I compare the themes found in these earlier documents from the 1920s to statements made by the German Christian movement under the Nazi regime. I use secondary sources to contextualize my primary source analysis within the broader social circumstances in which these events were occurring. My research is situated specifically within the discipline of historical theology and in this way acknowledges the extent to which external circumstances impacted the development of Protestant theology during this time.

The four chapters of this thesis explore the evolution of anti-Jewish elements in Protestant theology. In the first chapter, I provide a broader historiographic overview of the response of the churches to the persecution of the Jews during the Holocaust, as this helps situate my research inside the broader field of scholarship on this topic. The second chapter discusses the nationalization of German Protestantism and evolution of anti-Jewish ideas within Protestant theology during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The third chapter is a case study, focusing on two texts written by the previously mentioned German pastor, Friedrich Andersen. Finally, the fourth chapter shows how these already existent anti-Jewish ideas were implemented under the direction of the German Christian movement. Less than two percent of Protestants in

Germany became actual members of this movement (e.g. around half a million people); however, this is not to say that its influence solely reached these individuals, as two thirds of Christians still voted for the German Christians in the 1932 Protestant church elections, meaning that this group was able to occupy positions of leadership in many churches throughout Germany (Mitchell 434; Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 228). Furthermore, in the late 1930s, members of the German Christian movement occupied over one third of academic positions within Protestant theological faculties, and, at its height, around one third of German Protestant pastors supported this movement (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 177 – 178). Even if only a minority of people became official members of the German Christian movement, Susannah Heschel notes that there was no widespread opposition to this group's ideas (aside from the Confessing Church), and many people were sympathetic to the German Christian movement, if not actually *joining* it (*The Aryan Jesus* 6).

My thesis highlights three central themes that emerge in certain Protestant texts written during Weimar and Nazi Germany: the idea that the Jewish God is different from the Christian God, the irrelevance of the Old Testament for Christians, and the problematization of the Jewish spirit's supposed influence on the churches/society. Examining the representation of these themes clearly exemplifies a transition from more traditional Protestant doctrine to this nationalistic and exclusive form of Protestantism, which became fully realized under the German Christian movement. Given the prevalence of anti-Jewish sentiments within Protestant theology prior to the Holocaust, my research highlights the importance of continuing to re-examine Protestant theology today, as a number of theologians who had promoted the de-Judaization of Christian texts retained prominent positions within the German churches after the fall of the Nazi regime (Heschel, "When Jesus Was an Aryan" 87). This makes it questionable whether or not

there was any great difference in Protestant thought before or after the Holocaust, considering that the post-1945 dismissal of pastors within the German Christian movement did not appear to be a particularly important issue for many churches. My research thus highlights the necessity of re-examining established forms of Protestant theology and interpretations of doctrinal texts. There is no simple solution to the issue of anti-Jewish thought within Protestantism, but it is important to question the belief systems in which events like the Holocaust were possible.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of the most prominent leaders of the Confessing Church that opposed the anti-Jewish revision of Protestantism under the German Christian movement, wrote in his *Letters from Prison*: "[t]he huge masquerade of evil has thrown all ethical concepts into confusion. That evil should appear in the form of light, good deeds, historical necessity, social justice is absolutely bewildering for one coming from the world of ethical concepts that we have received" (38). Perhaps it was this "masquerade of evil" within the German Christian movement and its precursors that had the most dangerous impact on professed Christians at this time. The German Christian movement presented Judaism and the Jewish God as "evil" and their God (Jesus) as a merciful (and distinctly "German") God of grace and love. They argued that Christians were commanded to "fight" against the Jews, as the latter were the physical manifestation of immorality (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 154; Gerdmar, "National Socialist" 170). This radicalization of the belief system that still constituted the primary moral code of behaviour for many people thus helped establish a church in which antisemitic actions became considered morally "good."

Chapter One: The Response of German Protestant Churches to the Holocaust

For a number of years after the Second World War, historians tended to emphasize the resistance of German churches to the Nazi regime from 1933 to 1945. However, more recent debates over the complicity of "ordinary Germans" during the Holocaust led scholars to begin questioning these conclusions (Barnett, "The Changing View" 637). At around this time, historians began arguing that, at best, most churches did not speak out against Nazi policies regarding the Jews and, at worst, actually actively supported the Nazi regime during the Holocaust. As Robert Ericksen explains, many German Protestant churches were initially quite supportive of Hitler, as they thought he was upholding the conservative values that they and the Nazi Party held in common, which brings to light many new questions (Ericksen, *Complicity* 37, 45). How did already existent elements within Protestant theology inform the actions/inaction of the churches during the Holocaust? To what degree did certain churches change and even rewrite their theological texts in order to justify their support of Nazi ideology?[1] In this chapter, I will specifically focus on discussing the viewpoints of several scholars regarding the position of the churches under the Nazi regime. This historiographic overview will provide a basis for subsequent chapters discussing the radicalization of anti-Jewish ideas espoused by certain Protestant groups in the 1920s and the relevance of these ideas to the antisemitic actions of the later German Christian movement [*Deutsche Christen*].

[1] When referencing "churches" throughout this essay, I am referring to the official position of various churches in response to the persecution of the Jews, which was typically informed by those holding positions of leadership within these churches, such as pastors and bishops. For instance, in terms of churches within the German Christian movement, Bishop Ludwig Müller was initially the overall leader of this group and was supported by many other church leaders, including Pastor Julius Leutheuser and Pastor Joachim Hossenfelder. In the Confessing Church, other leaders, such as Martin Niemöller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, were integral in articulating the position of the church towards Nazi ideology. The position of lay members of these churches is too difficult to ascertain, but I would still suggest that, to some extent, their position was similar to that of their leaders, given that they stayed in these churches of their own volition.

While scholars have devoted much attention to discussing the German Christian movement, there is a lack of English language research about how these more radical theological ideas developed in the decades prior to the Holocaust. Most scholars devote only cursory attention to these earlier Protestant groups, presenting them primarily as "precursors" to the German Christian movement (Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*; Bergen, *Twisted Cross*), while others only mention them in passing when discussing the development of anti-Judaism throughout history (Michael; Probst). I argue that this gap in historiography is key to understanding the reason for this historiographic debate, as examining the radicalization of Protestant theology in the years directly prior to 1933 helps explicate what informed the blatantly antisemitic actions of the German Christians[2] and to what extent traditional Protestantism already was (and perhaps still is) anti-Jewish. In this way, I support the views of later historians like Susannah Heschel, Doris Bergen, and Stephen Eldridge, who contend that the German Christian movement was not simply an extension of Nazi power and that the antisemitic measures promoted while the Nazi regime was in power were a much less unprecedented phenomenon within the churches than depicted by most scholarship.

Division between Antisemitism and Anti-Judaism

Before discussing the historiography on the position of the churches during the Holocaust, I would like to define two terms employed frequently in this discussion: antisemitism and anti-Judaism. While this topic is too complex to fully address here, it is important to discuss it briefly. The tendency for some scholars to dismiss the culpability of the churches during the

[2] When using the term "German Christians" in this thesis, I am referring specifically to the *Deutsche Christen* (German Christian movement), not to Christians in general living in Germany at the time.

Holocaust is likely in part due to the contested nature of the relationship between anti-Judaism and antisemitism. In general, many scholars suggest that the anti-Judaism inherent within Christian churches was directed against Judaism and not the Jews themselves (Chazan viii; Nicholls xxi – xxii). William Nicholls qualifies this perspective by indicating that it is impossible to draw a line between hatred of the Jews and hatred of Judaism, as some theologians do. Nonetheless, he still presents anti-Judaism as a precursory ideology out of which antisemitism later developed (Nicholls 415). This idea has informed much of historiography on this topic, leading to a propensity to dismiss anti-Jewish ideas within Christianity as relatively "harmless" and associated only with religious conflicts. In this way of thinking, Christian anti-Judaism was solely a theological issue, even if it helped lay the foundation for later racial antisemitism (Chazan 241, 247).

Similarly, Jeremy Worthen writes that anti-Judaism is based on the idea that *Judaism* (not the Jews themselves) is Christianity's adversary, establishing a distinct difference between what he calls "racist antisemitism" and anti-Judaism (2, 243). In contrast to this religion-based hatred, antisemitism promotes the destruction of the Jewish people as a whole, thus going "beyond the framework of Christian anti-Judaism" (Ruether 224). Rosemary Ruether explains that anti-Jewish hatred is often defined as being on a trajectory leading from anti-Judaism to antisemitism, with anti-Judaism being a milder form of antisemitism. On the broadest level, the separation between the two results in the definition of anti-Judaism as religion-based hatred and antisemitism as race-based hatred (Ruether 7). Ruether herself does not entirely agree with this differentiation, suggesting that this division is not as clear as it might appear, as anti-Judaism can be "'fertilized' and develop into antisemitism" (8). Nonetheless, she still maintains that the two are distinguishable and that anti-Judaism is a less harmful version of anti-Jewish sentiment. In

the same way, Gavin Langmuir also states that anti-Judaism was the precursor to antisemitism and was intrinsically embedded within Christian theology (57). Anti-Judaism was only directed against Jews who actually practiced Judaism, thus differentiating it from antisemitism, which was directed against the Jews regardless of what religion they practiced (Langmuir 57).

I argue that the line between these two forms of anti-Jewish animosity is blurred and that it is impossible to fully separate one from the other. In the decades leading up to the Holocaust, anti-Jewish ideas within German Protestant theology began to be radicalized and were fully realized in the explicitly antisemitic form of Christianity promoted by the German Christian movement. Under this group, any theoretical dichotomy between religion and race was broken down. In support of this idea, Christopher Probst also argues against making a rigid distinction between these two terms, writing that "anti-Judaic ideas and antisemitic ideas existed side-by-side in Luther's and other's writings" (19). In this way, according to Probst, even within older forms of Christian "anti-Judaism," it was difficult to make a distinction between race and religion, showing how the two forms of anti-Jewish hatred cross over into one another quite easily. Probst goes on to say that scholars should avoid the typical "chronological" approach used when analyzing the evolution of anti-Jewish attitudes (19). In other words, Probst argues against viewing anti-Jewish hatred as a progression from religious anti-Judaism to racial antisemitism, explaining that "mixed motives for anti-Jewish hatred have long existed in Christian theological writings" (19). Similarly, others argue that although churches have often presented anti-Judaism as only being theologically motivated (Pawlikowski and Spicer xvi), the "sublimation of race into Christian theology had long been a part of particularly the Protestant past" (Steigmann-Gall, "Old Wine" 290).

In this thesis, I contend that the connection between the "mundane" anti-Judaism proposed by mainstream Protestantism and the more explicitly "racial" form of antisemitism promoted by the German Christian movement became increasingly evident in the early twentieth century, particularly during the Weimar Period. A little later, starting in the 1930s, some churches began to directly conflate the Jews and the Jewish religion within their own policies, as certain churches within the German Christian movement began refusing to recognize Jewish conversion to Christianity. In essence, at this point, some Christians believed that the Jews themselves were indelibly "corrupted" by the "problematic" Jewish religion and thus were an unacceptable influence within the churches, arguing that it was impossible to separate Judaism from the Jewish people (Brökelschen 422; Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 160; Andersen 112, 124; Heschel, "Race" 229). Given that the churches themselves did not see a strict dichotomy between the Jews and Judaism, particularly at this point in time, it then seems rather counterproductive to construct an artificial division between anti-Judaism and antisemitism, at least when discussing these terms in the context of the churches.

Furthermore, dismissing anti-Judaism as merely a religious form of antisemitism results in a simultaneous dismissal of the importance of examining evidence of anti-Jewish attitudes within Christian theology. When anti-Judaism is represented as only associated with religious issues, it is also often viewed as relatively innocuous, somewhat antiquated, and thus has not been analyzed fully in relation to modern anti-Jewish attitudes. Stephen Eldridge argues against the harmlessness of religious anti-Jewish sentiment, stating that theological anti-Judaism could quite easily become more malicious at an opportune moment (157). Even in regards to the Nazi regime itself, Alon Confino contends that it is vital to recognize the cultural and religious hatred intrinsic within the Nazi regime (and thus not only the churches) (*World* 8). It is impossible to

fully understand the "reason" for the Holocaust if only focusing on the racial element of Nazi antisemitism, as the Nazi Party was also very concerned with creating a fully "German" culture (Confino, *World* 4). Consequently, there was a much more intimate connection between Nazi antisemitism and Protestant Christianity than scholars have previously indicated (Confino, *World* 8). While Robert Michael argues that Hitler was important in transforming the anti-Judaic attitudes of the Christians into the eliminationist antisemitism promoted by the Nazis (12), he also states that the "historical continuity of anti-Jewish ideas and imagery is clear testimony that no essential difference exists between anti-Judaism and antisemitism" (167). In essence, Michael believes that presenting antisemitism as only associated with biological race results in a very narrow conception of the term, as religion and race are almost inextricable when considering anti-Jewish attitudes, whether expressed by the churches or the Nazi regime itself (11).

Protestant Churches in Nazi Germany

In the years leading up to 1933, an increasing number of more radically anti-Jewish Protestant groups emerged within the *Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchenbund* or German Evangelical Church Confederation, which was the umbrella organization for all Protestant denominations in Germany at this time, predominantly Lutheranism, Reformed, and United (a combination of Lutheran and Reformed churches). These more radically anti-Jewish groups caused some contention within the church confederation in the 1920s and early 1930s when they began proposing progressively more radical anti-Jewish measures, such as removing the "Jewish" Old Testament from the Bible (Bergen, "Ironies of Accommodation" 204; Spencer 528). These tensions increased after Hitler was elected. At this point, the German Christian movement – perhaps the most radical of these anti-Jewish Protestant groups – gained enough

power within the church confederation to reorganize it under the new name of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* or German Evangelical Church, which was led by pro-Nazi pastor, Ludwig Müller (Baranowski, "The 1933" 303). The German Christian movement then increased their efforts to align the church confederation alongside Nazi ideological aims (Eldridge 158). While somewhat unclear, its membership numbers were never particularly high (although Heschel points out that these numbers may have been higher than previously supposed), but it nonetheless maintained enough influence among Protestant Christians to attain a majority in the 1932 church elections and create a rupture within the church body as a whole (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 2; Gailus, qtd. in Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* 5 – 6). The German Christian movement itself was made up of a confederation of Lutheran, United, and Reformed churches that all embraced this Nazified version of Protestantism and controlled many of the Protestant churches in Germany, indicating that it was not a particular denomination that accepted such notions, but that they were more widespread (Eldridge 158).

Tensions within the confederation increased to the point that some churches began distancing themselves from the German Evangelical Church. The German Christians began promoting increasingly radical ideas, such as the importance of establishing of a purely Aryan church, the integral place of race within Protestant Christianity, and the necessity of purging Protestantism of all Jewish influences (Eldridge 159). In 1934, a group of pastors who disagreed with this alignment of Nazi ideology and Christian thought formed the *Bekennende Kirche* or Confessing Church in response to the establishment of the German Christian movement, taking issue both with the German Christian movement's revision of Protestantism and its ideological alignment with Nazi antisemitism (Eldridge 160; Baranowski, "The Confessing Church" 90; Barnett, *For the Soul* 125). The churches within the German Evangelical Church finally

separated into three major groups: the German Christian movement, the Confessing Church, and a "middle" group unaffiliated with either side that comprised the majority of Protestant churches (Hockenos, "The Church Struggle" 3). The "middle" group of churches remained uncommitted to either the radical beliefs of the German Christian movement or the anti-Nazi resistance of the Confessing Church, although they generally did not speak out against the Nazi regime's persecution of the Jews (Hockenos, "The Church Struggle" 3; Barnett, *For the Soul* 152).

Debates about the Position of Protestant Churches under the Nazi Regime

In order to situate my research within the larger body of scholarship on this subject, I will examine the viewpoints of several scholars who have written fairly extensively on the response of the churches to the persecution of the Jews during the Holocaust. These scholars debate the degree to which the anti-Jewish form of theology promoted by the German Christian movement influenced the Protestant churches as a whole. The question that is important to my research, however, is not necessarily the degree to which the German Christian movement influenced other churches, but *why* this de-Judaization of the churches occurred in the first place, an issue that has been met with significant debate, some scholars stating that it was primarily informed by the Nazi regime and others focusing on exploring its roots in theological anti-Judaism.

In particular, there is a distinct division between the ways in which earlier and more recent scholarship represent the German Christian movement. For the most part, scholars before the mid-1990s presented this movement as a fringe group that was basically an extension of Nazi power, rather than one having any significant influence among the Protestant churches in general (Barnes 37, 39; Barnett, *For the Soul* 19, 27). More recently, however, scholars have shown that

the German Christian movement was quite influential and operated independently from the Nazi Party, likely owing in part to anti-Jewish attitudes already existent within the churches (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 2 – 3, 143; Ericksen, *Complicity* 26 – 27; Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* 169). Examining this controversy in historiography is significant primarily because it highlights the underlying question of the extent to which the ideas promoted by the German Christian movement were already implicit within Protestantism before the Nazi Party came to power. I will examine this debate by analyzing the arguments of several key scholars writing about this topic.

In general, earlier historiography tends to justify the inaction of the churches, ignoring the role of Protestant theology in bringing about these changes and emphasizing the resistance of the Confessing Church, which, while it is not specifically the focus of my research, nonetheless exemplifies the state of the historiography on this subject prior to the mid-1990s. By resistance, these scholars are referring to the ways in which the Confessing Church actively opposed both the actions of the Nazi regime and the German Christian movement, whether by speeches condemning the Nazis' actions, helping Jews to escape, or hiding Jews (Barnett, *For the Soul* 19). Indeed, many of the members of this church faced imprisonment or incarceration in Nazi camps for their resistance to the Nazi regime (Barnett, *For the Soul* 4; Cochrane 38 – 39). While Arthur Cochrane suggests that the opposition of the Confessing Church was driven predominantly by the desire to retain its autonomy within Nazi Germany, he states that it nonetheless embodied a struggle for the rights of people in general, including the Jews (39 – 40), as they believed that the Nazis' treatment of the Jews was a violation of Christian doctrine (Barnett, *For the Soul* 125). In the same way, Franklin Littell emphasizes that the Confessing Church recognized early on that there was a conflict between Nazi ideology and the teachings of

Christianity and quickly took a stand against what Littell terms the "false 'spirituality'" promoted by the Third Reich (211, 215).

While Kenneth Barnes and Robert Drinan take a slightly less optimistic view of the Protestant churches, they still present them as being overall a site of active resistance to the Nazis' persecution of the Jews. For instance, while Barnes concedes that neither the Confessing Church nor the German Protestant churches in general offered any sort of "social ethic for the state" (153), he nonetheless emphasizes the fact that some Confessing Church members did speak out against the violence of the Nazis (163). However, most churches, including those that belonged to the Confessing Church, did not take action in response to the persecution of the Jews (Barnes 152, 169). Drinan is perhaps the most wary of heroizing the role of the churches, stating that while there were notable exceptions, the Protestant response as a whole was rather insignificant. Instead, it was marked by silence among both Protestants and Catholics, meaning that the churches did not actively promote Nazi antisemitism, but also did not speak out against it or attempt to help the Jews. Drinan explains that this silence was caused by many factors, such as the fear of retaliation by the Nazi regime and the desire to stay on the good side of public opinion. However, Drinan still emphasizes the resistance of certain churches, such as the Confessing Church, highlighting their *ineffectuality* in resisting the Nazis, rather than their *inaction* (Drinan 179, 182). In this way, both Barnes and Drinan indicate that specific factions of the churches, primarily the Confessing Church, attempted to help the Jews, even if they were ultimately unsuccessful. Even Cochrane and Barnett acknowledge the silence of the other German Protestant churches and at times the silence of the Confessing Church itself in response to Nazi antisemitism (Cochrane 34; Barnett, *For the Soul* 125). However, they fail to fully

explicate *why* this passivity existed in the first place, which is an important factor that later scholars, such as Stephen Eldridge and Matthew Hockenos, discuss in more detail.

Instead, these earlier scholars attempt to vindicate the churches' inaction in response to the Holocaust, stating that few realized that early Nazi ideology was irreconcilable with Christianity, owing to the fact that they shared certain conservative values (Cochrane 36; Barnett, *For the Soul* 32; Littell 211). In addition, there was little guidance from church leaders regarding the right way to act at this time, which led to silence on the part of many clergy in response to the Nazi persecution of the Jews (Littell 212). According to Barnes, however, the protest of the Confessing Church becomes even *more* significant when considering that the majority of churches did not speak out against the Nazi regime (169). Barnes and Littell go on to attempt to justify the churches' inaction in general by arguing that the churches did not actually support the Nazis' actions against the Jews, but were silent because Protestant theology taught that the laws of the state must be obeyed (Barnes 153; Littell 218). Churches were required to support the work of the state and were seen as only responsible for spiritual concerns (Barnes 158, 160). While the Weimar Constitution (1919) had technically enshrined the separation of church and state in Germany, many church leaders still considered the relationship between church and state as closely connected (Tal 31). Furthermore, this issue becomes additionally complicated when examining it in the context of Hitler's rise to power, as the churches doubtless faced a significant degree of pressure to conform to Nazi ideology, despite being technically autonomous (Cochrane 39).

However, in my view, these scholars discussing the churches' silence in response to the persecution of the Jews do not address the key issue here, which is the role of anti-Judaism within theology in driving this inaction on the part of the churches. To be fair, as Cochrane

explains, organized resistance on the part of the churches was practically impossible. In other words, although the churches were unable to *prevent* the crimes of the Nazis, he indicates that the churches were still the only institutions that provided "the resistance of a large section of the population" (Cochrane 39 – 40). Cochrane's view is not necessarily wrong, but by continuing to avoid the issue of the churches' culpability and by providing a rationale to justify their inaction during the Holocaust, he and these other historians evade the idea that anti-Jewish ideas already existent within traditional Protestant theology were a factor that may have led to their failure to act.

Some, like Barnes and Drinan, do acknowledge anti-Jewish ideas and their prevalence in the German churches, but continue to emphasize the integral role of the Nazi state in promoting such ideas (Barnes 33; Drinan 180). For instance, Drinan admits that it was the same anti-Judaism present within the churches that "contributed to modern antisemitism" (181). Anti-Judaism within the churches had a long history and simply had the opportunity to develop *racial* dimensions with the rise of the Nazi regime (Drinan 180 – 181). Christian anti-Judaism was so embedded within Protestant theology that no one even thought to question it (Barnett, *For the Soul* 154). In essence, "it was not just helplessness but callousness that kept the church from not speaking out" (Barnett, *For the Soul* 153). Despite these concessions, Drinan still emphasizes that regardless of this shared heritage of anti-Jewish sentiments, the silence of the churches during the Holocaust itself was *directly* caused by other factors, namely the fear of Nazi retaliation and "reluctance to alienate public opinion" (182). In addition, Barnett argues that the churches believed they could not do more for the Jews because they needed to ensure that they retained their position in society (*For the Soul* 153). In this way, they once again distance the churches' culpability from this issue of internal anti-Judaic elements, still placing the majority of

the blame on the Nazi regime and the role of external factors in driving the churches' inaction. In large part, then, earlier scholarship assuages the guilt of the churches by emphasizing the ways in which the Nazi regime interfered in the operation of these churches, arguing that there is little if any correlation between already existent anti-Jewish attitudes within the churches and Nazi antisemitism.

Even when examining the more overtly antisemitic actions of the German Christian movement, most of these earlier historians (aside from Cochrane) also dismiss the German Christians as a fringe movement that had little influence within the German churches as a whole. Cochrane opposes this view, outlining the rise of the German Christian movement after World War I and thus showing its development over a more extended period of time. He states that the Confessing Church explicitly opposed the theological errors of the German Christians starting in 1934, which indicates that they saw the teachings of the German Christians as a tangible theological threat (Cochrane 8, 75). However, for the most part, earlier historiography opposes this view. For instance, Barnett writes that most mainstream Protestant churches viewed the German Christian movement as a "politicized group whose faith was no longer based upon the Bible but upon Nazi ideology" (*For the Soul* 27). They were merely an instrument of the Nazis and never gained much leverage within the majority of Protestant churches. Indeed, most Protestant theologians did not accept the overtly antisemitic measures, such as removing the "Jewish" Old Testament from the Protestant Bible, taken by the German Christian movement (Barnett, *For the Soul* 27, 37). The rise of the German Christian movement simply weakened the overall *unity* of the Protestant churches, indicating that most churches were not part of this group (Drinan 181). Littell barely references the German Christian movement at all, and Barnes dismisses them as a radical minority who were really only vocal in 1933 (168).

In short, most of these historians view the German Christians as representative of only a tiny minority of Protestant churches. Furthermore, this view of the German Christian movement means that these earlier historians often dismiss this group as simply another organization heavily influenced by the Nazis, rather than being a "legitimate" Protestant group, thus once again not looking at the role of Protestant theology in influencing these antisemitic actions. To some extent, they have a point, as the Nazi regime did have some degree of influence within the German Christian movement. For instance, Cochrane states that the German Christian movement was a tool of the Nazis that became increasingly controlled by the state. Hitler supported this group and its desire to eliminate the Jewish roots of Christianity and merge Christian and National Socialist ideas (Cochrane 37, 75, 105). Similarly, Littell also argues that Nazi ideology was the main impetus for the new and violent attitude of the German Christian churches towards the Jews during the Holocaust. Like Drinan, he even argues that the rise of the Nazi regime caused more traditional Christian anti-Judaism to develop racial dimensions, as it no longer was solely directed against Judaism, but also condemned association with the Jews and missions to the Jews (Littell 222). Nonetheless, some fault lay with the churches themselves, as the rise of "liberal theology" in Germany promoted new explicitly racial ideas (Littell 219), such as the replacement of the "Jewish law of the Old Testament by the disposal of the Old Testament by the autonomous law of each race and nation respectively" (Hromadka, qtd. in Littell 219). Littell does not go into much depth about this "liberal culture-religion," but by dismissing it as an antisemitic form of Christianity, Littell once again dissociates the religion of the German Christians from the "true" Christianity espoused by other Protestant churches (219). Similarly, Barnes argues that because of the general commitment within the Protestant churches to following the law of the state, they could not oppose the state. Consequently, if Nazi Germany

became antisemitic, then the church had to be as well (Barnes 153). By presenting the German Christian movement as an extension of Nazi power, these scholars to some extent mitigate the guilt of the religious institutions themselves, even when considering the churches' direct actions against the Jews. They instead indicate that the form of Christian antisemitism promoted by the German Christian movement had little in common with more traditional forms of anti-Judaism, rather than examining how a group that two thirds of Christians in Germany supported in the 1932 church elections could ever come to justify such explicitly antisemitic actions. The question is not *was* this group influenced by the Nazis, which doubtless was the case, but how a group professing to be "Christian" could ever morally legitimize their antisemitic actions and achieve the degree of influence among Christians that it did.

On the whole, it is clear that the scholarship written before the mid-1990s accentuates the overall opposition of the churches to the Nazi regime. By contrast, historians writing after this time emphasize the importance of the German Christian movement, arguing that the explicitly antisemitic ideas and actions prevalent in this movement were widely accepted by most Protestants, thus indicating that this movement arose from ideas within Protestant theology that did not necessarily owe their existence to the Nazi regime. For example, Stephen Eldridge argues that German churches in general frequently paired Nazi ideology with Christianity (Eldridge 158). Similarly, Doris Bergen and Susannah Heschel also argue that this view of the German Christian movement as a marginal and insignificant group is inaccurate. Bergen states that they "maintained a significant presence throughout the years of National Socialist rule," sustaining "a mass movement of over half a million members" throughout Germany (*Twisted Cross* 2). Many of the members of this church held important positions within the Protestant churches and in theological faculties (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 2). German Christian publications were also widely

distributed throughout mainstream Protestant churches (Heschel, "When Jesus Was an Aryan" 87). Furthermore, prominent members within the German Christian movement retained their roles within churches and theological faculties in Germany well after 1945, implying that the ideas promoted by these theologians/pastors were not considered "problematic" enough to be subject to "denazification" efforts after the end of World War II (Heschel, "When Jesus Was an Aryan" 87). The question of *why* these efforts were not considered particularly "problematic" leads to the crux of this issue that my own research explores.

While older historiography sidesteps the role of anti-Jewish thought within traditional Protestant theology in determining the response of the churches to the Holocaust, more recent publications have emphasized the notion that the overwhelming inaction of the churches was primarily rooted in their heritage of anti-Jewish theology. Protestant churches shared the notion that the Jewish influence within German culture threatened Christian religion and families (Haynes, "Who Needs Enemies" 351 – 352). While the German Christians were the most forceful in implementing anti-Jewish measures, Protestants in general sought the "removal of every influence of the Jewish spirit from the life of the German Volk" (Haynes, "Who Needs Enemies" 352). Similarly, Bergen suggests that the majority of Protestant churches took a neutral position in the conflict between the Confessing Church and German Christian movement, which arguably "often implied sympathy for German Christian views" (Bergen 13). In essence, Bergen and Stephen Haynes suggest that other Protestant groups even endorsed the German Christians' attempts to de-Judaize the Protestant churches, although never to the same extent as the German Christians.

In the same way, Eldridge argues that German citizens lived in a "society saturated with anti-Jewish thought," even if not everyone embraced the more violent forms of Nazi

antisemitism (156). He concludes that the legacy of anti-Judaism within Protestant theology was the main reason for the churches' silence in response to the Nazis' persecution of the Jews (Eldridge 157). Although such anti-Judaic sentiments were primarily directed against the Jewish religion, rather than the Jews themselves, Christian antisemitism still "quite often had the potential for viciousness given the right circumstances" (Eldridge 157). Haynes supports this view by exploring the longer trajectory of such antisemitic views in German society, arguing that Protestant pastors in Germany were already worried about the purportedly negative influence of the Jews long before 1933. As early as the 1920s, there was already an added racial connotation to their formerly *theological* concerns about Judaism (Haynes, "Who Needs Enemies?" 351). In such a way, these scholars distance themselves from earlier scholarship that emphasized the marginality of the German Christian movement and complete division between how it and other Protestant denominations thought about the Jews and their place within Christian society. However, Hockenos is somewhat reluctant to completely dismiss the Nazis' role in determining the more virulent antisemitic actions of the German Christian movement, stating that this group was both supported and influenced by the Nazi regime (18, 23). Nonetheless, he still admits that Protestants in general shared Hitler's "nationalist, anticommunist, and antisemitic rhetoric" (Hockenos, *A Church Divided*, 17 – 18). In fact, the majority of Protestants *initially* greeted Hitler's ideas with enthusiasm, believing the values he espoused to be similar to their own (Hockenos, *A Church Divided*, 17 – 18). On the whole, then, recent historiography indicates that Protestant anti-Jewish sentiment, rather than the state, played an important role in determining the actions of the churches during the Holocaust.

Owing to this heritage of anti-Judaism, in contrast to earlier scholars, many of these scholars contend that the German Christian movement was an autonomous group that accepted

Nazi antisemitism on its own terms, at least to a certain extent. As Bergen explains, the Nazi Party often denounced this movement, resenting "its attempt to complete National Socialism by combining it with Christianity" (*Twisted Cross* 3). Furthermore, this group enthusiastically supported the Nazis by trying to de-Judaize Protestantism, such as republishing the Bible without the "Jewish" Old Testament and refusing to recognize Jewish conversion, as it was eager to institute an anti-Jewish form of Christianity (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 3, 24; Heschel, "When Jesus Was An Aryan" 69 – 70). Heschel takes this idea even further, arguing that there is "no evidence that the churches were in any danger of being dissolved" had they refused to Nazify their religion ("When Jesus Was An Aryan" 80). The antisemitism of the German Christians then was not rhetorical, but actively supported the Nazi regime (Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* 9). Indeed, the church-funded Institute for the Study and Elimination of Jewish Influence on German Church Life [*Institut zur Erforschung und Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben*] enthusiastically promoted their racial and antisemitic ideas through publications, conferences, and lecture tours (Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* 104). Robert Ericksen uses the example of the Aryan Paragraph of 1933 to further prove this point. This regulation was intended to prohibit Jews who had converted to Christianity from serving as leaders within the churches. Ericksen contends that, at this point, the Nazis did not insist on the imposition of the Aryan Paragraph within the churches, as they did not want to get involved in an altercation with the church about this matter yet. Instead, the German Christian movement wanted to prove the churches' loyalty to the state and so pressured Protestant churches to voluntarily accept it (Ericksen, *Complicity* 26 – 27).

Furthermore, these historians emphasize the fact that the churches within the German Christian movement were not simply silent in the face of Jewish persecution, but actively

enacted antisemitic measures. While some restrictions were implemented by the Nazis, such as the prevention of the baptism of Jews into Christian churches (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 93), these churches took these antisemitic ideas even further on their own by attempting to strip Protestantism of its Judaic roots and remove "Jewish" elements from the Bible and church music (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 143; Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* 104; Eldridge 159). They actively supported the Nazis' persecution of the Jews and made race the "organizing principle" of their churches (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 3). The German Christian movement found the Jewish roots of their religion humiliating, particularly in light of their commitment to Nazi ideology. By removing Jews from their church and Judaic elements from their religious texts, they tried to sever Christianity from its Jewish roots, which brings the discussion back to theological anti-Judaism, as it promoted similar ideas, even if not implementing them (Ericksen, *Complicity* 27, 121). Heschel even argues that the German Christians intended to push the Nazis' policies in a more radical direction, although this is not a point of view shared by most scholars. She cites theologians Siegfried Leffler and Gerhard Kittel's discussions about killing the Jews as a possible "solution" to the "Jewish problem" to support her statement, as they were referencing such eliminationist ideas in 1933 and 1938 – before the Final Solution had actually been implemented, further indicating that such eliminationist ideas were rooted more deeply within Protestant theology (Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* 10).

The question of the Protestant churches on a broader scale (not just the German Christian movement) is the point at which these arguments become more nuanced. As Matthew Hockenos explains, while most churches were silent in response to the Nazi regime's oppression of the Jews, they did not all actively participate in this persecution. He argues that there was a variety of responses to Nazism, ranging from active support to opposition. For instance, a small group of

people in the churches occasionally critiqued the implementation of particular Nazi policies, such as the euthanasia program and policies affecting the churches (Hockenos, *A Church Divided* 37, 15 – 16). Similarly, Eldridge states that some Christians were hesitant about the pairing of National Socialism and Christianity (152 – 153). This brings this discussion back to the Confessing Church, regarding which Eldridge states that despite "its shortcomings, there were elements within the Confessing Church that worked tirelessly to help German Jews" (162).

However, more recent historiography is also critical even of the Confessing Church's response to the Holocaust. Rather than presenting it as a heroic example of resistance, many of them conclude that the Confessing Church opposed the Nazis more out of concern for preserving its own autonomy that out of concern for the Jews, implying that anti-Judaism also played a significant role in influencing even the position of churches that *resisted* the Nazi regime. Many scholars agree that it shared the German Christians' negative attitude toward the Jews, although these groups had different opinions on how to deal with the so-called "Jewish problem" (Ericksen, *Complicity* 37; Hockenos, *A Church Divided* 16). While the Confessing Church defended the Jews to some extent, Hockenos and Ericksen argue that it was generally silent and chiefly concerned with protecting the Jewish converts to Christianity, in this way indicating that they were more concerned about protecting members of their church than they were about the Jews in general (Hockenos, *A Church Divided* 36; Ericksen, *Complicity* 95, 119). Ericksen takes this idea even further by contending that they were most worried about protecting their Christian traditions and spiritual authority. For instance, pastors who were part of the Confessing Church spoke out against forbidding Jewish Christians from attending church, as they did not like the fact that the Nazis were usurping the churches' right to determine who was considered a

Christian, but were not concerned about the fact that Jews were being discriminated against by this policy (Ericksen, *Complicity* 28).

Heschel and Haynes agree, contending that the Confessing Church's opposition to the German Christian movement was not directed against its antisemitic measures, but was directed against its alterations to traditional Christian doctrine (Heschel, "When Jesus was an Aryan" 84; Haynes, "Who Needs Enemies?" 358). Indeed, the Confessing Church even accused the German Christians of succumbing to the threat of "Judaization," as they believed that the German Christian movement was promoting "an antispiritual, materialistic theology" that was associated with "Jewishness," evidently viewing this as a problem (Heschel, "When Jesus was an Aryan," 86). Members of the Confessing Church created a theoretical link between Jewish and German Christian attitudes by arguing that they both saw race as determining whether or not someone could belong to a particular religion. In essence, Judaism is an ethnic religion, and the Confessing Church deemed it problematic that the German Christians were trying to redefine Christianity as also being a supposedly "ethnic" religion that only included those of the "Aryan" race (Haynes, "Who Needs Enemies" 344 – 345). In short, these scholars suggest that the Confessing Church's opposition was not very extensive and was rooted in concern for its own theological autonomy, rather than concern for the Jews. In fact, it shared many of the same anti-Jewish sentiments as the German Christian movement, showing that they shared this heritage of anti-Judaism, if expressing it in different ways.

Hockenos explains that members of the church "rarely took a public or political stance against Nazism," thus suggesting that resistance was far less widespread than earlier historiography indicates (*A Church Divided*, 47). To come to the point, even when these scholars concede that the church did offer some opposition to the Nazis, they still agree that this

opposition was relatively minimal. On the whole, later scholarship is much more critical of the churches' role in the Holocaust than those writing before the mid-1990s, emphasizing the influence of the radical German Christian movement and downplaying the resistance of the Confessing Church. Many of them highlight the role existing anti-Jewish sentiments within Protestant theology played in determining churches' passivity or active support of the Nazi regime. While acknowledging that the German Christian group was likely influenced to some extent by the rise of Nazi power, I chiefly support the position of more recent scholarship in this debate. I argue against the idea that the German Christian movement was a mere extension of the Nazi regime, contending that already existent anti-Jewish elements within Protestant theology were the main factors informing the antisemitic actions of the German Christian movement. Furthermore, examining the radicalization of Protestant theology in the decades prior to the Holocaust shows that the German Christians' antisemitic actions were the opportunistic realization of anti-Jewish ideas embedded within Protestant theology.

Gaps in the Historiography: The Precursors to the German Christian Movement

Richard Steigmann-Gall writes that Protestants were already considering their religion as "superior to Judaism" and had been advocating for completely separating Christianity from its Jewish associations *for some time* (*The Holy Reich* 38 – 39; emphasis added). This statement highlights an important gap in the historiography just discussed. In general, English language scholarship on the German Christian movement and the position of the Protestant churches during the Nazi regime does not often address the movements directly preceding the German Christian movement very extensively. Some scholars, such as Heschel, Bergen, and Cochrane, reference them as being precursors to the German Christian movement, but there has not been a

significant amount of English language research devoted to these movements in particular. While there has been quite a bit of research on Protestant church life in the 1920s that addresses related issues in connection with later developments in the German churches (Haynes, "Between the Times"; Rasmusson; Borg), there is still a lack of scholarship that specifically establishes a link between earlier Protestant anti-Jewish ideas in these precursory movements and those expressed by the German Christian movement.

The next two chapters of this thesis will address this gap in scholarship, examining the radicalization of Protestant theology in the years leading up to 1933 and the ways in which this period acted as a transition between traditional Protestantism and the later more explicitly racial antisemitism of the German Christian movement. Examining this topic helps further demonstrate the extent to which any ostensible distinction between anti-Judaism and antisemitism is irrelevant, showing that the German Christian movement did not emerge out of Nazi antisemitism, but was rather a movement that saw the rise of the Nazi regime as an opportunity to realize goals already existent within its own theology. The actions of the German Christian movement were not simply the result of external Nazi pressure, as some scholars suggest (Barnes 37, 39; Barnett, *For the Soul* 19, 27). Instead, these actions evolved out of anti-Jewish ideas already set in motion during the early twentieth century, which promoted measures like the removal of the Old Testament from the Protestant canon. Rather than examining the German Christian movement as an extremist outlier, it is important to study it alongside its precursors in order to better understand the link between traditional Christian anti-Jewish thought and modern antisemitism.

In conclusion, this chapter has presented an overview of scholarly debates about the response of the Protestant churches to Nazi ideology and the persecution of the Jews under the

Nazi regime, showing a shift from a relatively positive view of the churches to a more negative one that highlights the silence/complicity of the churches. Scholarship before the mid-1990s focuses predominantly on the heroic role of the Confessing Church during the Holocaust, while minimizing the role of the German Christian movement. Later historiography on this topic focuses more on the German Christian movement and the ways in which anti-Jewish ideas informed the response of the churches to the Holocaust. Many of these historians agree that even if German Protestant churches did not all actively persecute the Jews, almost all of them were silent in response to the Holocaust, probably owing to their shared heritage of anti-Judaism (Hockenos, "The Church Struggle" 17; Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 3 – 4).

Chapter Two: "The Chosen People": Redefining the Protestant Community

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, German Protestantism underwent several changes that may have seemed minor at the time, but in retrospect, signaled a significant shift in Protestant belief. In a 1918 address delivered at the Business Men's Club in Cincinnati, Rabbi David Philipson referenced perhaps the most significant change in German Protestantism at this time:

> The conviction that they are the chosen people of these latter ages has become a leading article of German belief; it has imbued the German people with a feeling of superiority over all other nations; they have become obsessed with the idea that they are God's favorites; they speak of God as the German God, implying thereby that other peoples are without the pale of His special concern. (4)

In other words, the definition of Christian "belonging" within certain Protestant churches became increasingly racialized and exclusionary in the years leading up to World War II. While many Christians had long accepted the idea of being God's "chosen" people who had replaced the Jews, this concept now began to be applied to the *German* people specifically. The interpretation of German "nationality" is where this issue became particularly problematic, as those of Jewish ethnicity, for instance, began to be excluded from this progressively more "racial" definition of nationality. Race rather than belief began to define membership within certain Protestant churches.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how scholars' views on the later German Christian movement range from representing it as an extension of Nazi power to describing it as a movement expressing ideas predating the Nazi regime, emerging out of established elements of Protestant theology. I support the latter view. In this chapter, I will examine precursors to the

German Christian movement, as the early 1920s marked the emergence of more radically nationalistic and anti-Jewish ideas within Protestant theology. In this way, I not only address a gap in research on this topic, but establish the link between earlier theological ideas and those expressed by the radical German Christian movement, showing how already existent elements in Protestant theology became increasingly more radical in the years leading up to 1933. I argue that anti-Jewish elements within Protestant theology created a space for the development of a race-based and exclusionary definition of Christian belonging at this time. When referring to "radicalization" or "radical" in this chapter, I am assessing the Protestant churches' actions in relation to more traditional Protestant thought, as the anti-Jewish actions/ideas expressed by the Protestant theologians/pastors under discussion in this chapter went beyond more traditional Christian anti-Judaism.

From the Late Nineteenth Century to the 1920s: Establishing a "German" Protestantism

Anti-Jewish ideas have been present within Protestant theology almost since the Protestant Reformation. This chapter, however, will examine the point at which Protestant theology became more racially exclusionary in Germany, legitimating a form of Protestantism in which the removal of Jewish influences became seen as necessitous to maintain the integrity of the religion. Despite the predisposition towards anti-Jewish actions within traditional Protestant theology, the implementation of these antisemitic ideas after Hitler came to power was not a foregone conclusion. For instance, pastors who later formed the Confessing Church rejected the explicitly antisemitic theology expressed by these more radical groups.

In general, the definition of national belonging had become increasingly exclusive within Germany and other modern nation-states during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century,

corresponding to and perhaps promoting these changes in Protestant theology. Norman Naimark argues that one of the factors that made genocide possible was the modern nation-state's increasingly exclusionary definition of national belonging (8), which led to the adoption of *exclusivist* forms of nationalism that emphasized the necessity of an ethnically homogenous nation (Mylonas 85; Xu 239). Those who did not belong were defined as an "other" that was undermining the nation and must be eliminated or purged from within it. In Germany, nationalism began as a more culturally-based definition of national belonging, but this concept of belonging became increasingly linked to race as the years progressed (Kohn 459). In particular, German nationalism began promoting the idea that the nation was being weakened by the Jewish people/spirit (Frølan 274).

The churches followed suit in an effort to create an ethnically homogeneous "German" religious community. German Protestant doctrine increasingly began to position itself against those deemed *religiously* unassimilable, particularly the Jews. Conversion to Christianity has always been a central element of the Christian faith, even to the point of missionizing to convert others ("Christian Conversion" 1). Theoretically, any human can be saved and become a "Christian," regardless of race, gender, social status, or nationality ("Introduction" 7). However, this theoretical definition of Christian belonging slowly began to change for a number of German Protestant churches throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Just as national belonging was no longer defined on the basis of assimilation into the culture of the majority, Christian belonging within certain Protestant churches began to move away from being defined on the basis of conversion, although this aim was not fully realized until the 1930s. Some Protestant pastors argued that God had chosen to have a special relationship with the German people and that the Germans, rather than the Jews, were the "chosen people" of God (McLeod

18). This idea helped create harmony between nationalism and Protestant Christianity, as both emphasized "German exceptionalism" (Conway 821).

How could these Protestant theologians justify shifting the definition of Christian "belonging" from one based on faith to an exclusionary one based on race? I contend that this shift was possible because this concept of Christian exclusivity was already present to some extent within traditional Protestant theology, particularly in terms of castigating the Jews as "outsiders." For instance, traditional Protestant theology indicated that after Jesus Christ came to earth and died for humankind, "God's purposes for, and love of, the Jewish people came to an end" (McGarry 120). Theologians, including Martin Luther, argued that the Jews had rejected Jesus as their Messiah, resulting in their rejection by God and replacement by the New Israel represented by the Protestant Church (Pak 2). For instance, Adolf Von Harnack, a prominent German theologian during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, contended that God had renounced the Jewish people (*Outlines* 42). This statement, while perhaps not explicitly antisemitic, nonetheless emphasized God's rejection of the Jewish people and their replacement by the Protestant Church. This idea that Germans were the "chosen people" of God instead of the Jews may seem novel, but in fact was a Germanization of ideas long present within Protestant theology.

This promotion of a distinctly "German" Protestantism began to filter into speeches and publications given in the late nineteenth century by some church leaders, such as court chaplain Adolf Stöcker (Probst 25). In one speech given in 1879, Stöcker argued that Judaism was filled with errors and that it was the German Christians who had first corrected these problems (4). The emergent concept of a "German" Christianity is also evident in this speech, as Stöcker associates the German nation with "true" Christianity, arguing that the Germans would be a people without

honour if continuing "to yield to the effects of the Jewish spirit that de-Germanizes and de-Christianizes them" (6). While not yet promoting the elimination of the Jews, he still believed that they should be put to the side to allow for the development of true German Protestantism, thus promoting an exclusionary definition of Christian "belonging."

There is some debate over whether or not Stöcker was actually antisemitic (versus being anti-Judaic) (Telman 93). However, even if arguing that it is possible to distinguish between these two types of anti-Jewish thought, Stöcker nonetheless mentioned race as one of the issues that was part of the "Jewish question." This statement indicates that Stöcker's understanding of being "German" did not include those who were ethnically Jewish, regardless of their actual nationality. He appeared to consider it impossible for even Jewish converts to Christianity to be fully assimilated into a "Christian" German nation, thus demonstrating the ways in which the Jewish race and religion were increasingly being conflated within Protestant thought (Telman 96). Moreover, his proposed displacement of Jews from positions of influence within society, such as in schools and courts, reflects his belief that the influence of the Jews themselves (and not just their religion) was a problem for German society (Stöcker 8). His ideas more explicitly foreshadow the antisemitic form of Protestantism expressed by the German Christian movement, as he began to actively advocate for the exclusion of Judaism *and* the Jews from within Christian society. Judaism was thus no longer the only issue; instead, church leaders like Stöcker began to present the Jewish people themselves as problematic, regardless of religious affiliation. While perhaps this idea had been present within Protestant theology prior to this point, it now began to be more openly discussed.

Nationalizing Protestantism was also seen as a means of unifying church and state, linking loyalty to church with loyalty to state (Conway 820). As this "German" form of

Protestantism gained popularity, theologians and pastors also increasingly emphasized the importance of obeying state authorities (Bigler 426). By defining Protestantism as a German religion, they hoped to demonstrate their loyalty to the German nation as a whole. According to traditional Protestant theology, Christians were obliged to obey secular authorities except if they commanded "something contrary to Scripture" (Estes 200). The state, however, was supposed to be in charge of political affairs and not religious ones. Ernst Troeltsch, Harnack, and other theologians took this belief and began to alter it to fit with this rebirth of German nationalism, arguing that the state's ethics were "rooted…in the nationalism of the Second Reich which is essentially a Protestant nationalism, and in the glory of the fatherland which, again, is essentially a fatherland of Christians" (Tal 31). These theologians essentially conflated the ethics of the state with those of Protestant Christianity. Since the state was seen as Protestant, it was difficult to make a distinction between religious and political affairs, making it arbitrary which aspects of society were under the jurisdiction of the church. In short, while traditional Protestant theology may have provided the space for anti-Jewish ideas, the increasingly nationalistic atmosphere in Germany during the late nineteenth century helped further radicalize these ideas, resulting in the establishment of an exclusivist and distinctly "German" variant of Protestant Christianity.

The Luther Renaissance: Resurrecting and Redefining Lutheran Theology

After the Weimar Republic was founded, pastors and theologians, perhaps most predominantly Paul Althaus, Gerhard Kittel, and Emmanuel Hirsch (as Robert Ericksen suggests), began promoting a *völkisch* version of Protestantism that was specifically focused on critiquing Jewish influences found within Protestant theology (Haynes, "Between the Times" 34; Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* 44 – 45). One particularly important development in this *völkisch* form

of Protestantism was the "Luther Renaissance," which arose in Germany during the early twentieth century. At this time, Martin Luther's works were revived for a new study and critique (Cochrane 61). According to Karl Kupisch, this "rebirth" of Luther began at German unification in 1871, as "Luther and the Reformation were regarded exclusively as German national phenomena" (40 – 41). Karl Holl, one of the founders of the Luther Renaissance, argued that the Protestant Reformation was not only a "contribution of the Germans to Christianity" as a whole, but also provided "a foundation for a German national religion" (Stayer 24). The nation-state, in Holl's view, should be the fundamental organizational principle of Christian society (Stayer 25). Once again, the church and state were depicted as interconnected and thus indivisible from one another. In essence, Luther (and thus Protestantism) was already historically associated with Germany, making the establishment of an exclusively "German" variant of Protestant Christianity a relatively unchallenging step.

However, it is important to recognize that such exclusionary tendencies were already present within Lutheran theology and were merely reinterpreted or emphasized in a way that established the necessity for a race-based form of Protestantism that coincided with contemporaneous definitions of national belonging. For instance, one particular element of Lutheran theology emphasized at this time was the doctrine of the "orders of creation," a term that continues to be problematized for leading to a segregationist variant of Protestant Christianity (Tafilowski, "Reappraisal" 304). In brief, this doctrine taught that God used fundamental features of human existence, such as economy and family, to organize Christian society (Tafilowski, "Reappraisal" 294). Paul Althaus, who later became the leader of the Luther Renaissance (Ericksen, "Political Theology" 548), simply added the German concepts of *Volk* and race to this structuring of society, arguing that "each *Volk* is to remain segregated from every

other *Volk* not only in its biological and cultural determination, but also in its own unique historical vocation" (Tafilowski, "Reappraisal" 291). Germans were the highest on the "spiritual hierarchy" established by this order (Tafilowski, "Reappraisal" 291). Essentially, the *Volk* was depicted as a God-ordered conglomeration of citizens. Adherence to nationalism and one's position within the *Volk* became elements of one's God-commanded duty to the state at this time (Mosher 304 – 305). In other words, Althaus took this hierarchical aspect of Lutheran theology and emphasized the importance of race as an organizing principle of society and, by implication, religion as well. He indicated that there was an "ethnic antipathy" inherent between races that was natural and could (should) not be eliminated (Tafilowski, "Reappraisal" 292). An exclusive definition of Christian belonging was then vital to this version of Protestantism.

It is important to note that not all theologians accepted this exclusionary interpretation of Luther's orders of creation. This is particularly evident in the work of theologians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who accepted the general doctrine of the orders of creation, but extended this concept of Christian belonging to the whole of humanity, thereby dismantling the national and racial boundaries that theologians like Althaus and Emmanuel Hirsch had established (Mosher 306). Others, including Karl Barth and Paul Tillich, who both rejected Nazi ideology, taught that Christ was the fundamental organizational principle of the churches, rather than race or nationhood (Ericksen, "Hirsch" 80). Still, these voices were few among an overwhelming emphasis on this exclusionary definition of Christian belonging within a number of Protestant churches.

Anti-Jewish Attitudes in Twentieth Century German Protestantism

Furthermore, establishing a distinctly "German" variant of Protestantism was not the only aim of these twentieth century theologians. Given that Protestant Christianity was now seen as a national religion, many believed that Protestant theology itself could not include any "Jewish" elements, as these influences supposedly undermined the integrity of a pure "German" Protestantism. I would like to draw particular attention to Althaus and Kittel's views as an example of how more traditional anti-Jewish ideas within Protestantism resulted in a religion necessitating the elimination of any Jewish influences.

To begin with, Paul Althaus was a professor of theology at one of the largest theological schools in Germany (Probst 7). In the early 1920s, Althaus's views were not particularly radical compared to traditional Christian theology. For instance, he did not yet promote the removal of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible from the Protestant canon, as the German Christian movement did later, who considered it too "Jewish" to retain within the Bible. Althaus's views initially coincided with more traditional theology, as he emphasized the importance of the Old Testament for informing the message of the New Testament, arguing that the latter revealed the message hidden within the former (*Theology* 87). Despite this more traditional position on the Old Testament, however, he later stated that "[w]e must deal with both the book of Israel [the Old Testament] and the book of Christ [the New Testament]…But there are two completely different viewpoints involved" (*Theology* 89). In essence, Althaus thus created a distinct division between the "Christian" Old Testament and the "Jewish" Old Testament. While not yet advocating the removal of the "Jewish" Old Testament from the Protestant canon (and thus significantly changing Protestant theology), he indicated that the viewpoints contained in both books could not be reconciled, thus excluding one from the other.

This example makes it easier to see how traditional elements in Christian theology could become radicalized quite quickly, as only a few years later, Althaus stated that the primary source of issues for the German people were Jewish influences. Similarly to Stöcker, Althaus emphasized two aspects of the so-called "Jewish Question" – one being theological and the other being sociopolitical – thus targeting the Jews in addition to Judaism (Tafilowski, *Dark* 11). Once again, the Jews and Judaism were being conflated. His more traditionally anti-Jewish view had thus developed into one in which the Jews themselves were a negative influence on "Christian" society, as this influence was harming the German nation (Probst 17).

Gerhard Kittel promoted a similarly exclusive version of Protestantism during the Weimar Republic. Like Althaus, Kittel held more traditional theological views prior to 1933 and in fact advocated for the importance of Judaism; however, he later joined the Nazi Party and applied his theological knowledge to the "Jewish Question" (Ericksen, "Gerhard Kittel" 602, 596). After World War II, Kittel was imprisoned for his participation with the Nazi regime, but he insisted that his position on this question was "a direct outcome of his Biblical studies" and "that the problem is primarily a religious one," thereby leveraging the perceived distinction between religious anti-Judaism and racial antisemitism to his advantage (Porter 401). He presented his views as harmless and merely as an extension of older Christian anti-Judaism.

How could a man who initially advocated for the importance of Judaism and Jewish texts turn into someone who advocated for elimination as a possible, although unfeasible, solution to the "Jewish problem" in 1933 (Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* 10)? Given his previously more traditional stance, Kittel's later radical antisemitism seems a somewhat unprecedented shift. Andres Gerdmar, however, argues that Kittel's earlier works were less supportive of Judaism than they might appear (*Roots* 420). For instance, in his *Jesus and the Rabbis* (1914), Kittel

states that the latter "were the circles that the Lord had been in conflict with during his life. The opposition to them had brought him death" (qtd. in Gerdmar, *Roots* 420). Gerdmar argues that despite the somewhat "respectful" approach that Kittel took towards Judaism in his early scholarship, he still set up an inherent opposition between Jesus and the rabbis, rather than establishing any sense of continuity between Judaism and Christianity (*Roots* 422 – 3). In further support of this idea, Kittel stated that "Palestinian Judaism" was the main root of Christianity and that this form of Judaism included many other cultural influences, in addition to Jewish ones, thus providing Christianity with a less "Jewish" origin (Gerdmar, *Roots* 428).

In essence, Gerdmar shows that Kittel's supposed "support" of the Jews nonetheless constructed a fundamental opposition between the two religions. Judaism was not only completely separate from Christianity, according to Kittel's point of view, but was actually opposed to it, undermining Christian society and religious practice. Arguably, in order to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, whose conflict with the Jews had led to his death, Protestants at this time were likewise responsible for opposing Jewish influences that infiltrated Christian society. Scholars' ignorance of these elements in Kittel's earlier work demonstrates an inability or at least unwillingness to perceive these almost "normalized" aspects of Christian anti-Jewish thought (namely this opposition between Christianity and Judaism), despite the fact that, in the case of Kittel, this view developed into a much more exclusivist and distinctly antisemitic form of Protestant Christianity.

Robert Michael locates the birth of this constructed opposition between these religions to the first centuries of the common era when the break between Christianity and Judaism was made, after which "the Church attempted to establish its own, unique identity, as independently as possible, from Judaism. To achieve this, the Church cast the Jews in the role of aliens,

monsters, pariahs" (1). Emmanuel Nathan makes a similar comment, tracing this conflict to "in German Lutheran terms, the opposition between *Gesetz* und *Evangelium*. This binary opposition sees an unbridgeable gap between two spheres of influence, the Law (Judaism) and the Gospel (Christianity)" (104). In short, this antagonistic relationship between Judaism and Christianity had long been present not only within Protestantism, but within Christianity in general. The nationalized version of Protestantism promoted by these German pastors was in part informed by the already existent relationship between Christianity and Judaism, in which Christians tried to distance their religion from any association with Jewish culture/religion. As the examples of Kittel and Althaus demonstrate, taking more traditional anti-Jewish ideas within Protestantism, such as the dismissal of the Old Testament's importance for Christians, and transforming them into more explicitly antisemitic notions, such as the removal of the Old Testament from the Bible, seemed to be a relatively uncomplicated step for these pastors/theologians, likely owing to the long history of Christian anti-Judaism.

These theologians and others were now increasingly defining Christianity against the Jews themselves, thus making race simply an added component of this battle against "Jewishness." For instance, Pastor Karl Gerecke wrote that the Jewish *spirit* opposed the spirit of God, in this way condemning more than just the Jewish religion (14). To Gerecke, Judaism was not only inconsequential, but sinful, poisoning society from within (23, 26). As Protestant theology became more explicitly directed against the Jewish people themselves, any perceived difference between anti-Judaism and antisemitism became increasingly indistinct.

In particular, these anti-Jewish ideas within Protestant Christianity began to find their way into theological discussions about the worth of the Old Testament, a text that had already been considered somewhat irrelevant by traditional Protestant theology, as the New Covenant of

the New Testament had supposedly made the Old Testament of the Jews obsolete (McGarry 120). In general, Protestant theology held "the belief that the Old Covenant was canceled by God, to be replaced by the far superior New Covenant" (Gregerman 38). How could the "Jewish" Old Testament continue to exist within an exclusively "Christian" religion? While there were certainly those who took such notions to an extreme and advocated for the Old Testament's elimination, there were others who believed that it still should be retained within the Protestant canon. However, they felt the need to justify this inclusion. For instance, in the early twentieth century, theologian Georg Beer argued that the Bible emerged out of Israelite culture, which he associated with Aryanism (24). He outlined multiple ways that other cultures influenced the early Israelite religion, which he indicated was *not* xenophobic, an attribute he attributed to contemporary Judaism (Beer 8). In this way, he argued for the importance of keeping the Old Testament in the Protestant canon, owing to the fact that it was not "Jewish" in the modern sense of the term. Wilhelm Erbt took this argument further, pointing out that Jesus had actually changed the Mosaic Law (309). The Gospels emerged solely from Christ's influence, not Jewish tradition or texts, which indicated that the Old Testament was completely irrelevant for Christians (Erbt 310).

Similarly, Von Harnack argued for the importance of Jesus and the Gospels in creating the Christian religion, avoiding the acknowledgement of any Jewish influences within Christianity (Axt-Piscaler 472 – 3). While this idea may seem relatively unproblematic, it took a darker turn when certain texts of Von Harnack's became associated with more explicitly antisemitic ideas, such as dismissing the importance of "Jewish" texts. For instance, he argued that "[t]he New Testament has secured the continuance of the Old Testament in the Church, and at the same time has guarded against the stunting effect of its Judaism, just because the Old

Testament was thrust into an inferior position by the New Testament" (*Origin* 130). In short, he did not completely dismiss the Old Testament (although he did later in life), but nonetheless argued that Judaism was harmful to modern Protestantism and that the Old Testament was less important than the New Testament (Ericksen, *Theologians* 50).

As the twentieth century progressed, these more radical forms of Protestantism became more virulently anti-Jewish, actively promoting the de-Judaization of German Protestantism by arguing that the Old Testament was completely irrelevant for German Protestants (Cochrane 75; Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* 44 – 45). Eventually, this opinion of the Old Testament was extended to promoting its actual elimination from the Protestant canon (Confino, "Why" 383 – 4). While perhaps this notion may have gained ground when the Nazi regime came to power, "expunging the Old Testament from the Christian Bible" had been discussed well before Nazi ideology took hold in Germany (Confino, "Why" 384). For instance, Pastor Friedrich Andersen and his three co-authors contended that Christianity did not emerge from Judaism or the Old Testament, but instead began at the time of God's revelation to Christ. Christianity's connection to Judaism was considered no longer tolerable and in fact was harming Christianity, thus necessitating the total elimination of any association between the two (Andersen et al. 14, 7). I will write about attacks against the Old Testament in more detail in subsequent chapters, but these examples begin to show that the elimination of Jewish influences like the Old Testament from within Protestant Christianity gradually became viewed as integral to the further advancement of this exclusivist variant of German Protestantism.

How Widespread Were These Ideas?

There has been some debate about the influence of these notions, some proposing that these ideas were held by a fringe group of theologians who had little, if anything, in common with the majority of Protestant churches. Many scholars present them essentially as being offshoots of early Nazi ideology. Doris Bergen and Heath Spencer, for instance, state that these more radically antisemitic notions were shared only by certain groups within the Protestant churches and were not espoused by the churches as a whole ("Ironies of Accommodation" 204; Spencer 528). Similarly, others argue that more radical theologians such as Adolf Harnack were outliers and that their ideas were the exception rather than the rule (Rasmusson 156).

However, it is important to remember a few key points when considering this discussion. One, these ideas were present within Protestant theology and had merely been radicalized by these theologians, meaning that these ideas did not appear out of nowhere. Two, even if they did not actively promote radical ideas like the elimination of the Old Testament, it is clear that a large percentage of theologians did attempt to "break free" of older theological constraints and reorient Protestant theology to fit with the new German nationalism that emerged after the First World War (Haynes, "Between the Times" 18). Finally, whether these ideas were commonly accepted or not, these anti-Jewish and nationalistic ideas were still considered seriously by prominent historians and theologians. For instance, Heschel argues that any theological resistance to the League for German Churches [*Bund für deutsche Kirche*], the first direct precursor to the German Christian movement, was rather weak, if existent at all (*The Aryan Jesus* 45 – 47). Why was this the case, if these ideas were merely radical outliers?

Furthermore, even if all Protestants did not share the more radical of these ideas, it is still true that Protestantism became increasingly associated with nationalism in an attempt to continue "to align the destiny of the nation with Protestantism," particularly within the new political

climate of the Weimar Republic, although the extent to which this was the case may have varied (Preisinger 43). The notion of a "people's church" was alive in the minds of most Germans during the 1920s, even if they did not all explicitly promote the de-Judaization of Protestantism (Borg 180). Even Spencer, who argues that antisemitic notions were shared by only a select few among the churches, admits that some pastors advocated for a Germanized version of Protestant Christianity, complete with a Germanized and abridged Old Testament and a Bible that started with the New Testament (535). While the majority of pastors may have argued against more radical beliefs, they still saw the Old Testament as "outdated," implying that their beliefs legitimized more radical actions, even if they did not outwardly advocate for such actions (Spencer 535). In sum, these ideas were already present within the Protestant churches. Some simply took the concept of a "nationalized" Protestantism further than others. The move towards exclusivism within both German culture and religion created a grounds for Protestantism to shift to defining itself *against* an "other," rather than seeking to assimilate that other by conversion, as had been the case in previous centuries.

However, as mentioned before, this was not an inevitable development within Protestantism. Some pastors utterly rejected this exclusivist variant of Protestantism, specifically those in the Confessing Church. This group was made up of a number of pastors including Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Karl Barth, who disagreed with the alignment of Nazi ideology and Christian thought, taking issue both with the German Christian movement's revision of Protestantism and the eliminationist form of antisemitism promoted by the Nazi Party (Eldridge 160; Baranowski, "The Confessing Church" 90; Barnett, *For the Soul* 125). For instance, Pastor Karl Barth advocated against the subordination of the church by National Socialism, although Carys Moseley points out that Barth was "a lone voice against National Socialism in the wider

German Protestant world" (114 – 115). He was not the only dissenter, however. Lutheran theologian Paul Tillich also protested against the link between Protestantism and nationalism (Reimer 37). Similarly, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Barth both rejected the radicalized German nationalism that emerged after World War I (Chvala-Smith 150). These ideas were so disturbing to some, such as those mentioned above, that they formed a new group of churches known as the Confessing Church. In other words, this shift in Protestantism was not inevitable. While few in number, there were nonetheless some protestors who rejected Protestantism's move towards being an exclusionary and antisemitic religion.

In conclusion, Rabbi Philipson was not exaggerating when he highlighted these concerning developments in Protestant theology in Germany. His last sentence emphasizing the fact that German Christianity deemed other peoples as "without the pale of His [God's] special concern" is perhaps most telling in relation to this complex era of change within the Protestant churches (4). In short, the churches not only became more "nationalistic," but began to redefine what being Christian meant, creating a far more exclusive definition of Christian "belonging." Salvation by the blood of Jesus was no longer depicted as the means to salvation; instead, one's own blood determined salvation, and later, even one's right to existence.

Examining precursors to the German Christian movement highlights a few points that are key to understanding the actions/inaction of churches in Nazi Germany. First, these precursors help illuminate to what extent the radical ideas of the German Christian movement were influenced by theological ideas predating Hitler's rise to power. Second, they begin to show the "darker" implications of theological antisemitism (i.e. eliminationism), demonstrating how within this new nationalistic and exclusive atmosphere, predominantly theological arguments against the Jewish religion began to be directed against the Jewish people as well. The fact that

Protestantism was nationalized and made more exclusive during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century does not preclude the fact that these ideas were derived from elements within Protestant theology. It was not a difficult task to radicalize these ideas, nor was it one met with much resistance by many leaders in Germany. Instead, this period preceding 1933 is representative of a time at which certain pastors and theologians took advantage of the increasingly nationalistic and antisemitic atmosphere in Germany, using this environment to further aims already existent within their theology. Such actions were not taken simply to maintain the position of the churches in an increasingly nationalistic society, but to fully realize exclusionary and anti-Jewish sentiments embedded within Protestant theology.

Chapter Three: Andersen's Conflation between Religion and Race

In 1917, Pastor Friedrich Andersen and his Protestant coauthors stated in their revised version of Martin Luther's *95 Theses* that the "Christianity of the Saviour is fundamentally related to our inner Germanness" (27). In this way, they established an inherent connection between race/nationality and religion. Only those considered "racially German" could be Christian, which excluded those who were not regarded as being "German" from belonging to these churches, particularly the Jews. To what extent did these German Protestant theologians present the Jewish religion and race as interconnected in the years leading up to 1933? Exploring this question is key to understanding the degree to which the redefinition of Christian belonging as based on race rather than faith and increasing attempts to "de-Judaize" Protestant theology legitimized the antisemitic actions later undertaken by churches within the German Christian movement, such as refusing to recognize Jewish conversion. In the previous chapter, I provided an overview of the nationalization and racialization of Protestant thought from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, before it culminated in the more explicitly antisemitic sentiments expressed by the German Christian movement. The Jewish religion and race were already being conflated within German Protestant thought long before Hitler came to power.

In this chapter, I will shift from this broader overview of German Protestant theology to examining one of the key figures involved with this topic, namely Pastor Friedrich Andersen (along with some of his colleagues). His work provides an effective illustration of this intersection between religion and race and the ways in which these two concepts were conflated within Protestant thought in the years leading up to 1933. Furthermore, his work demonstrates that these exclusionary ideas about the Jews and Judaism were not just a by-product of Nazi ideology, but were rooted in traditional Protestant theology. The radicalization of these

traditional elements of Protestantism resulted in the establishment of a racial definition of Christian belonging that left no place for the Jews or their religion within a Christian society.

Friedrich Andersen and Precursors to the German Christian Movement

Who was Pastor Friedrich Andersen? Why is he even important to study? His name is certainly not very well known now. He was not a particularly prominent theologian among his contemporaries, either. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Andersen helped found the first direct precursor to the German Christian movement in 1921, which was known as the *Bund für deutsche Kirche* or League for German Churches. His involvement in establishing this group is what makes his work of particular importance, as the formation of this movement signaled the beginning of the more explicitly antisemitic form of theology later expressed by the German Christian movement. This League for German Churches, or "the League" promoted the reformation of Protestant churches along nationalistic lines, maintaining that all churches should be "freed" from Jewish influences (Cochrane 75). While at first these *völkisch* ideas proposed by Andersen and others were offensive to mainstream Protestant churches, they gained increasing influence and, with few exceptions, the churches as a whole became much more receptive to such notions as time went on (Preisinger 44).

Even prior to the existence of the League, however, Andersen and his colleagues had already published an alternative version of Martin Luther's *95 Theses*, in which they proposed that Protestant Christianity should be reformed along nationalistic "German" lines.[3] They denounced any Jewish influences within Protestantism, proposing the abolition of the Old

[3] While I do not have the space to discuss Luther's own anti-Jewish ideas in more depth, it is important to note that Andersen and his colleagues aligned many of their ideas regarding Judaism and the Jews alongside Luther's, frequently citing from Luther about the religious issues under discussion.

Testament and the elimination of much of the New Testament (FitzGerald 1). It was after the publication of this text that they founded the League for German Churches and began publishing a bi-monthly magazine representing Jesus as Aryan and calling for the replacement of the Old Testament with German myths (FitzGerald 1). In 1926, the League for German Churches joined with a number of other Protestant groups to form the German Christian Working Community, which was aligned alongside *völkisch* ideas (Moseley 109; Preisinger 44). Other more radical and nationalist Protestant groups antedating the German Christian movement included the Christian-German Movement and the National Socialist Faith Movement of 'German Christians.' The latter movement emphasized the importance of the nation, but not race itself (Moseley 110). Similarly, the Christian-German movement was mainly concerned with political issues and using Christianity as a stabilizing force for the political situation in Germany, positioning itself in support of right-wing movements, yet avoiding a racial definition of national belonging (Cochrane 77).

As the 1920s continued to progress, even more explicitly antisemitic and race-based groups were established, such as the German Christian Working Group and the Thuringian German Christians' Church Movement, the latter being the most radical of these groups (Moseley 109; Cochrane 75). This movement was led by Siegfried Leffler and Julius Leutheuser and was closely aligned with Nazi ideology, as they saw nothing contradictory between "Hitler's mission" and Christianity (Cochrane 75). Both Leffler and Leutheuser were emphatic about "religious renewal along nationalist, völkisch lines" (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 5), Leffler arguing that the Germans (and not the Jews) were "the new people of God" (Cochrane 77).

When the German Christian movement finally emerged out of a coalition of the League and these other groups in 1932, 3,000 out of 17,000 German pastors immediately joined this

movement (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 5). This shows how Andersen, a relatively insignificant pastor, and his colleagues had started a small religious group that developed into a movement that held a more significant degree of influence within Germany (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 6; Walpole et al. 283). Its influence increased over the following years, although it is difficult to determine the full extent of its impact (Head 424). Furthermore, even if not all Protestant pastors decided to join this group, in 1933, seventy-five percent of pastors in Germany still were in agreement about the necessity of de-Judaizing the churches, even if they were not part of the German Christian movement itself ("German Christian"). While it would take too long to describe every one of these movements, these groups were some of the central precursors to the German Christian movement that helped promote this increasing radicalization of Protestant theology.

Shifting focus back to the first precursor to this group, I will analyze the anti-Jewish and exclusivist ideas within Andersen's writings that helped lead to the eventual establishment of the German Christian movement. Two of the most important theological texts that Andersen either wrote or co-wrote are *Deutschchristentum auf rein evangelischer Grundlage: 95 Leitsätze zum Reformationsfest 1917* [*German Christianity on a Pure Protestant Basis: 95 Principles for Reformation Day 1917*], which Andersen co-wrote with Adolf Bartels, Hans Paul Frieherrn von Wolzogen, and Ernst Katzer, and *Der deutsche Heiland* [*The German Saviour*]. In the latter text, Andersen promoted a theoretical link between Jesus Christ and "German" Christianity, arguing that the Old Testament was completely unnecessary to Christianity. Instead, he argued that Protestant Christianity should be re-founded as a religion based solely on Jesus's teachings (Koehne 770). Both of these works advocated for the elimination of Jewish elements from Protestantism, such as the Old Testament. This discussion about elimination became particularly

problematic when Andersen and his co-authors began linking the Jewish race and religion. In this chapter, I will analyze both of these texts and their representations of the Jewish people and Judaism.

Andersen's Opinions on the Old Testament and Mosaic Law

I will begin by discussing Andersen et al.'s position on the Old Testament and Mosaic Law, which they believed should be eliminated entirely from Protestant Christianity. As stated in the previous chapters, this notion had been in existence for a long period of time, as many pastors and theologians believed that the Old Testament was inferior to the New Testament and that the Mosaic Law had been rendered unnecessary with Jesus's sacrifice. As Walter Kaiser explains, this antipathy towards the Old Testament had "begun as early as the middle of the second Christian century with a ship-owner named Marcion...he argued that the Old Testament was not a Christian book and the New Testament superseded it" (9 – 10). Even today, this idea remains an aspect of traditional Christianity, at least to a certain extent. J. Hampton Keathley explains that "[o]ne of the profound emphases of the New Testament, especially the epistles of Paul, is that Christians are no longer under the rule of the Mosaic law…In the coming of Christ and His death on the cross, the Mosaic Law as a rule of life was terminated" (1).

Andersen, however, took this question about the applicability of the Old Testament for Christians further, advocating for its complete removal from the Protestant Bible. He and his colleagues argued that keeping the Old Testament in the Protestant Bible amounted to "religious hermaphroditism," stating that the Old Testament's position within Protestantism severely damaged the German "culture" along with Protestantism, given the latter's influence on culture

(16).[4] They went on to provide a solution to this so-called problem, namely arguing that references to the Old Testament must be removed from Christian practice and preaching, religious education, sermons, and songbooks (16; Andersen 27).

Andersen et al. begin by questioning how Protestantism could have ever reached this place of "corruption" in the first place, eventually laying this down to the fact that the Old Testament had corrupted the Catholic Church before Protestantism had the chance to emerge (8). In their words, this "servile system" of Christianity embraced by the Catholic Church did not coincide with Jesus's message of free redemption and grace (Andersen et al. 8). Andersen et al. celebrated Martin Luther's role in reforming Christianity from its original Catholic state, arguing that it was Luther who began purging out foreign (Jewish) influences and loosening it from its harmful attachment to the Old Testament (12, 53). In fact, Andersen et al. argued that one of the most important results of the Protestant Reformation was the "return to the original source of Christianity, the gospel of Jesus," contending that "[t]he Christian religion is therefore…completely unattached and independent from the Jewish Old Testament" (13). The Old Testament was then not only irrelevant to Christians, but was completely unrelated to Christianity. In fact, the continued retention of the Ten Commandments by churches represented a problematic shift away from "true" Christian belief – the Gospels alone were supposed to be the law for Christians (Andersen 73). In essence, Andersen and his colleagues believed that while Luther started the process of creating a "pure" Christianity founded solely on the Gospels, he did not go far enough, as he did not eliminate the Old Testament from Protestantism.

[4] This reference to religious hermaphroditism deserves further attention, but I do not have the space to discuss it in sufficient depth in this chapter. However, considering the fact that Judaism was often represented as "feminine" at the time and the attempts of nationalistic German Protestants to establish a more "masculine" Christianity (particularly during the 1930s), this term may be referencing what Andersen viewed as an "unnatural" and problematic combination of "masculine" (Christian) and "feminine" (Jewish) religious characteristics within traditional Protestantism.

Andersen's references to Luther highlight a differentiation between more traditional medieval anti-Judaism and this somewhat "new" and specifically Protestant variant of anti-Judaism. Andersen and his colleagues believed they were continuing Luther's reformation of Christianity, which was necessary in order to rid Christianity of the "evil" influences of the Jews/Judaism that had been retained within Catholicism (8). These efforts thus did not coincide directly with more traditional forms of medieval anti-Judaism that were primarily directed against the Jews because they were practicing a different religion. Instead, these Protestants wanted to completely reform their religion and even deny its heritage in order to create a religion devoid of any Jewish influences. They were concerned with internally "purifying" their religion at this time, which they believed had been Luther's ultimate goal as well.

Andersen et al. took traditional Christianity's position on the irrelevance of the Old Testament to an extreme by indicating that it also had significant moral issues associated with it. For instance, Andersen argued that it promoted immoral actions like barbarism in war (13). He contended that it was in part responsible for the churches' past participation in the witch trials, the Spanish Inquisition, and other such acts of intolerance, stating that Christians participated in these acts only as a natural response to the influence of stories in the Old Testament (65). This spirit of intolerance among Christians had clearly come from the Old Testament and not from Jesus's words (Andersen 66). Andersen thus viewed the "Jewish" Old Testament as responsible for acts of violence and destruction committed by *Christian* nations in the past. This view of the Old Testament was hardly a unique one, as Christians before and since have often represented Old Testament justice as "harsh, retributive, and unjust" (Fishman 404 – 5). As Paul Anderson states, "[o]f the many tensions rising from a careful reading of the Bible, none of them is as striking or problematic as God's commanding genocide in the conquest, indeed, extermination of

the Canaanites; and Jesus's clearly teaching nonviolence and love for one's enemies," in this way employing examples also utilized by Friedrich Andersen (31). This castigation of the Old Testament as immoral served to simultaneously castigate those who practiced any religion based on such a text.

Andersen's worst book in the Old Testament – one he called "the book of curses and hatred" – was Deuteronomy (123). He stated that it was full of "Jewish ideas," probably owing to its focus on the Old Testament law (123). There was no space for "Jewish ideas" within Protestant Christianity, and the Old Testament must be removed from the Bible and from "pan-Germanism" itself (Andersen 128). At this point, Andersen's vitriolic attitude towards the Old Testament clearly began to blur any constructed boundary between religion and the people associated with this religion. Furthermore, he not only found the *Old* Testament troublesome for this reason, but also problematized the inclusion of Jewish ideas within the *New* Testament, stating that Protestants must be aware of places where the Jewish spirit is evident in this text (154). Such statements about "ideas" and "spirit" (rather than just the Jewish religion itself) reflect a more cultural and almost racial conception of "German" Christianity, which I will discuss in more depth later in this chapter.

Andersen et al. argued that Christians must go back to the supposed roots of Christianity in order to see the connection between the Saviour and Germanness (27). According to Andersen et al., only "our ancestors" were able to recognize the courage and heroism of Jesus (22). In contrast, the Jews were unable to grasp Jesus's self-sacrifice and gift of grace, being blind and depraved (Andersen et al. 23). This was then not intended to be a re-*creation* of Christianity to *make* it more "German," but rather a return to the *original* essence of Christianity. As Andersen explained, Jesus did not learn religion from the Old Testament, but from his own godly spirit

(58). Had the "Jewish" Old Testament then *ever* had a place within Christianity? The German people were supposedly unable to formulate their own history because they were being taught the religious history of the Jews instead (Andersen 132). Nazi ideology echoed similar ideas later. According to Alon Confino, Nazi ideology indicated that it was necessary to create a fully German culture free of Jewish influences ("Why" 327). The Jews destroyed and corrupted culture, and the only true culture was a national "German" one (Confino, "Why" 390). Common to both Nazi ideology and Andersen's texts was the belief that a "pure" German culture/religion could only be created by the elimination of Jewish influences.

Separate Gods for Separate Peoples

In order to establish this "German" religion devoid of any Jewish influences, the "chosen" people of God had to be redefined as well, as discussed to some extent in the previous chapter. According to Andersen, the Germans were God's chosen people instead of the Jews. The idea that Christians had replaced the Jews in this way was common within Christian theology at this time. For instance, Eva Fleischner argues that "[t]he Jewish people, the old people of God, has outlived its role and purpose – to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah – and has been replaced by the Church, the new people of God" (44). The birth of the Christian church had thus displaced the position of the Jews as God's original people. However, this idea was nationalized and associated with the Germans in particular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As Hugh McLeod explains, God had supposedly decided to have a special relationship with the German people, meaning that the Germans, rather than the Jews, were the "chosen people" of God (18).

In Andersen's texts, however, this concept of replacement became radicalized to mean expulsion and arguably elimination in some cases. In Andersen's view, Judaism and Protestant Christianity *could* not coexist, an opinion he justified by presenting Christ as the "German" God and the so-called "Jahwe" as the "Jewish" God. The Jewish God, however, was an angry god, and his religion was destroying humanity, as he incited "his 'chosen' ones" to take part in "shameful" deeds (Andersen 18, 101). The Christian God (Jesus) was different from this God. In fact, he stood in complete contrast to Judaism, from which he was expelled and eventually killed (Andersen et al. 18). While Christian theology maintains that living according to Jesus's teachings "could not be the same way a life was lived under Judaism as dictated by the Law of Moses" (Adeyemi 442), Andersen took this more traditional idea further by arguing that the actual gods for each religion were different from one another. As he and his colleagues explained, Jesus's message of "free grace" contrasted greatly with the "intolerant religion of the Jewish people" and the "partial and unjust" Jewish God who only loved his own people (19, 59). Even if few took this idea to the extreme that Andersen did, this contrast between the God of the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament was a common theological concern. This concept of "two Gods" had been echoed by earlier theologians like Marcion in previous centuries. For instance, as early as the second century, there were a number of theologians who believed that there was a "high god" besides Christ, but that this god was certainly *not* the god represented in the Jewish scriptures (Fredriksen 210). Both Andersen's work and traditional Christian theology presented Jesus as being a God of grace, while this was definitely not the case with the God of the Old Testament.

In order to legitimize this complete separation of Protestant Christianity and the Christian God from Judaism and the Jewish God, Andersen et al. believed that churches needed to define

Jesus as not being Jewish. While not yet stating that Jesus was Aryan, although allowing that as a likely possibility, they argued that he was certainly not "all" Jewish (19). Furthermore, even if Jesus *was* racially Jewish, Andersen et al. argued that Protestants must detach him from his "historically Jewish clothing and establish a spiritualized image" that corresponded to the current cultural context (20). In essence, continuing to associate Jesus with the Jewish race was problematic, regardless of his true racial heritage; instead, Christians were responsible for re-establishing a form of Christianity that fit with this new age, complete with a truly "German" God.

These examples show that Andersen had a different approach to replacement theology than most other theologians: the Jews were the chosen people only of the *Jewish* God, and the Christian/German people were the people of the Christian God or Jesus. For instance, after condemning the Jewish God as "unjust," he went on to state that the Jewish God "has very strange taste, as he has chosen the simplest and lowest species among the people of the earth" (59). This view was different from most Christian theologians in that Andersen did not say that the Jews had been renounced by God, as was typical in more traditional Christianity (Von Harnack, *Outlines* 42), but rather indicated that they had been selected by the "unjust" God of the Jews and not by the moral God of the Christians. Jesus then did not die to "fulfill" the Law, as traditional theology taught, but died as a result of his struggle *against* Judaism. Given this intrinsic opposition between Jesus and Judaism, the Jews could not have been Jesus's "chosen" people, but Christians had been the true people of God for centuries (Andersen 60). The "Christian" God had never had to renounce the Jewish people because he had never accepted them in the first place.

Andersen et al. "proved" that the German people had been selected by God since the founding of Christianity by arguing that the latter was primarily rooted in old Germanic religions, rather than Judaism (7, 33). Building on this idea of the "chosen" German people, Andersen promoted a very ethnocentric and exclusivist conception of Christianity. Race rather than faith was seen as determining one's Christian "belonging," at the same time as national belonging was being increasingly defined on the basis of race, rather than cultural assimilation (Park 585). This being the case, Andersen denounced conversion, arguing that the Jews only converted to Christianity in order to "attain earthly benefits" (79). Conversion weakened the church internally (Andersen 79). Citing Luther as support, Andersen described the Jews as continuing their fight against Christianity even when occupying high positions in the church (75, 72). Jewish conversion not only spoiled "the race of the Indo-Germanic people," but also led "real" Christians to sympathize with and defend the Jews from persecution, which Andersen saw as a problem (79).

This racial understanding of Christian belonging exemplifies perhaps the most radical aspect of Andersen's texts, as it dissolved any perceived boundary between anti-Judaism and antisemitism. Within traditional Christian theology, *any* person theoretically could be saved and become a "Christian" ("Introduction"). This is not to say that churches or particular denominations of Christianity always adhered to this particular criteria of Christian belonging, but regardless, Andersen still had changed the definition of Christian belonging quite drastically at this point.

This process of redefining Christianity and making it completely "German" meant liberating it from Jewish influences (Andersen et al. 5). Andersen et al. argued that Luther started Christianity on this path of liberation, and it was now the current German population's task to

complete this Germanization of Christianity within themselves (5). Creating a *völkisch* religion was part of creating a strong German culture, and Andersen et al. condemned Jewish influences and miscegenation as undermining this perfect *völkisch* and Christian community, thus once again establishing a distinct relationship between race and religio-cultural influences (5). As mentioned in the previous section, Andersen et al. indicated that they were not trying to create a German religion per se, but actually were trying to make the German people *truly* Christian (6). In essence, they viewed Protestant Christianity as inherently "German." German people had become corrupted by the Jewish influences within Protestantism; to make the German nation fully Christian, these influences had to be eliminated, which would return Protestant Christianity to its true essence.

This close association between the Jewish religion and race in Andersen's texts made this actual process of de-Judaization very problematic. Because Andersen believed that Christianity was a German religion since its inception, nationality/race became a fundamental part of the rebirth of this religion. The Jews and Judaism were seen as contaminating "Christian" German society, meaning that their influence also had to be eliminated (Andersen 130). For instance, Andersen stated that Jesus had described the Jews as the "children of the devil" and that their "work" must be destroyed (129), a sentiment likely borrowed from Luther (56). Furthermore, he argued that Jesus had said that the Jews themselves should be expelled (from what he does not explain) (Andersen 60). Germans must struggle against Jewish ideas, particularly the one that the Jews were the "chosen people," as this supposedly led Germans to believe that the whole world revolved around the Jews (Andersen 126). In essence, Andersen did not see it as possible for the Jews to convert to Christianity. He also viewed any type of Jewish influence as undermining Christian society. What place could the Jews have in a so-called "Christian" society that

condemned the Jews and Judaism and also did not allow for the possibility of Jewish conversion? This conflation between race and religion within Andersen's texts thus put the Jews in a very untenable position within a "Christian" society.

The "Jewish Spirit" in Andersen's Texts

This discussion about race brings us to the final theme in these texts that I will discuss: the references to "Jewishness" or the Jewish spirit. Andersen's use of these particular terms helps explicate this conflation between the Jewish race and religion and the link between racial antisemitism and theological anti-Judaism. The extent of this conflation between the Jews and Judaism, particularly during the Holocaust, has long been a topic of debate among scholars (Munson 1; Probst 19; Chazan 241). These particular texts, especially the one authored solely by Andersen, clearly demonstrate a constructed correlation between race and religion. Andersen not only condemned the Jewish religion, but condemned the Jewish people themselves, whom he argued had been innately corrupted by their religion.

Perhaps the most significant passage demonstrating this conflation between race and religion is one near the middle of Andersen's book, in which Andersen *denied* that it is the Jewish race that has been problematic (112). This statement at first seems like a contradiction of Andersen's earlier assertions about the problems associated with Jewish conversion. However, Andersen went on to clarify this statement, arguing that it is not a common race that binds the Jews together, but their spiritual and religious practices. These practices have created a Jewish "spirit" that they then transmit to any population of which they are a part (Andersen 112). This "common intellectual education" and the teachings of Moses helped make the Jews a self-aware group (Andersen 123). This Jewish spirit was then passed into the Jewish flesh and blood,

making this spirit both racial *and* religious and indicating that the Jewish idea was the first enemy, followed by the Jewish race imbued with this idea (Andersen 112, 124).

This argument might seem unusual, but according to Susannah Heschel, such sentiments were not uncommon in late nineteenth and early twentieth century German theology. As Heschel explains, "[r]acists worried about the moral and spiritual threat of lesser races, such as Jews; the inferior bodies of those races were carriers of their corrupt spirits, not causes of the corruption" (229). Andersen's work certainly exemplifies Heschel's argument. In his view, Jewish conversion was out of the question because he considered it impossible to extract religion from race in the case of the Jews, debatably an argument also presented by Luther in some of his later works (Grislis 66). In essence, Andersen argued that it is the Jewish religion itself that has polluted the racial group. What one took in spiritually physically changed him/her (Andersen 125), a notion that while unscientific, no doubt held some influence in the minds of certain theologians at that time. Andersen's argument complicates the perceived division between religious anti-Judaism and racial antisemitism typically used to excuse the actions of the churches during the Holocaust (Munson 1). In this case, *religious* discrimination was used as a justification for *racial* discrimination.

To reiterate, biological race was not the problem with the Jews, according to Andersen, as he clarified that they were never what he considered a "pure" race in the first place (112). Instead, the problem with the Jews was that they had become inherently religious as a group, which "polluted" them physically. Moreover, if that religion is "evil" (as Andersen indicated), then it follows that the people themselves necessarily become "evil" as well. This idea becomes particularly concerning when considering Andersen's arguments about the necessity of eliminating the Jewish spirit/ideas/religion. Given that Andersen viewed the latter as an intrinsic

and inseparable part of the Jewish people themselves, this proposed eradication takes on a much darker tone.

Moreover, Andersen viewed almost every aspect of society as polluted by this so-called Jewish spirit, not just Protestant Christianity (120). What it meant to "be Christian" was something that should be applied to the entirety of the German Protestant nation, not just a church. The Jewish influences undermining the purity of the Protestant Church could not be maintained in a "Christian" society/nation either. In fact, according to Andersen, Judaism was a danger threatening humanity as a whole (122). For instance, Andersen stated that the Jews were determined to destroy Christians, their spirit infiltrating Christian sects like the Seventh Day Adventists (72). Given the destructive influence of the Jewish spirit, it was thus vital to completely release Christianity as a whole from Judaism (5). Judaism could not be the foundation of Christianity, as Judaism supposedly brought destruction with it wherever it went (Andersen 31). Once again, it is important to recognize that Andersen did not say that the Jews should be eliminated themselves, only their religion/ideas. However, how could the Jewish people retain their place in a Christian society if they were supposedly fundamentally contaminated by the Jewish religious spirit?

One could argue that Andersen was simply trying to cleanse Christianity. However, this does not really seem to be the case given his continual references to the Jews themselves and to a Christian German *society* (rather than just referring to the churches). In addition, Andersen interspersed his discussion about religion with more traditionally antisemitic comments, for instance referencing the "world conspiracy" of Jews, the dangers of Jewish capitalism, and the idea that Jews only care about and look after themselves (102, 108, 112). These examples show that the boundaries between religion and race were often blurred in Andersen's writings, and it

becomes almost impossible to extricate one from the other, given the fact that Andersen himself viewed them as intrinsically interconnected. This type of attitude towards the Jews was not rare among Christian theologians, although few took it to the extreme that Andersen did. Many, for instance, emphasized the notion of the Jews exploiting Christians and as being allied with the anti-Christ (Michael 105). Robert Michael goes on to explain that "both humanists and Protestants felt that before Church and society could be fundamentally reformed, they had to be totally cleansed of their Jewish spirit" (106). In essence, the Jews' very existence within a Christian society posed a problem for these Christians. Cleansing Christian society of the Jewish spirit was then the final step in the reformation started by Luther.

In conclusion, as outlined in this chapter, a pairing or conflation between religion and race becomes very apparent within these two texts written by Andersen and his colleagues. The concerns expressed by Andersen, the founder of the first precursor to the German Christian movement, were not merely associated with the Jewish religion, but targeted the Jewish people as well. These "new" ideas were not completely alien to traditional Protestantism either. Rather than being an extension of Nazi ideology, these notions expressed many years prior to 1933 were a radicalized version of ideas already present within Christian theology. In addition, Andersen's discussion about a "Jewish spirit" problematizes any constructed distinction between anti-Judaism and antisemitism. Given that Andersen's proposed form of Protestantism emphasized the displacement and replacement of the Jews *because* of their "corruptive" beliefs, we might question what place the Jews could then occupy in this truly "Christian" society. Certainly, race may not have been the main issue for these Christians, but the Jewish people (as inherently corrupted by Judaism) still remained the central problem – regardless of whether they were defined by religion or biology.

Chapter Four: The German Christians and the Creation of an "Exclusive" Church

The previous chapters have outlined the emergence of anti-Jewish ideas that helped lead to a concerted effort to remove Jewish influences from certain German Protestant churches between 1932 and 1945 under the direction of the *Deutsche Christen* or German Christian movement. In 1933, Arnold Dannenman, a prominent German Christian leader, wrote that "[b]efore the aims of the German Christians could be implemented, there first had to be a unified people under National Socialist leadership. In the old liberal state a national church could not come into being" (152). Despite the rather dubious truth of any claims made by pastors within the German Christian movement, I believe he was right in this case. In essence, Dannenman argued that the ideas promoted by the German Christian movement had already been existent prior to Hitler's appointment as chancellor in 1933, but could only be implemented after the installation of the Nazi regime. The Nazi state allowed a space for the fruition of such ideas without being directly responsible for their implementation, legitimatizing the problematic measures undertaken by the German Christian movement, which included the physical and theological de-Judaization of particular churches.

This discussion highlights the dangers of theological anti-Judaism, as many German Christian pastors and theologians maintained that the "Jewish problem" was not caused by race, but by a (religious) spirit that had infiltrated and indelibly corrupted the Jews. Examining the crux of the development of these anti-Jewish ideas and their transformation from idea to action after Hitler came to power exemplifies the ways in which certain forms of theological thought contributed to creating and supporting the conditions in which the Holocaust occurred. This chapter outlines the ways in which earlier anti-Jewish ideas regarding Judaism, the relevance of the Old Testament, the position of the Jews in Christian society, and the necessity of removing

Jewish influences from Christianity (and society as a whole) were radicalized under the leadership of the German Christian movement, to the extent that a few pastors even proposed the elimination of the Jewish people as a solution to this "problem."

Formation and Consolidation of the German Christian Movement

Although I briefly outlined the position of the churches in Nazi Germany in the first chapter, I will now discuss the formation of the German Christian movement in a little more detail. After the Nazi regime came to power, the German Christian movement sought to create a National Protestant Church or *Reichskirche* that unified all church denominations into one church, adhering to a version of Protestantism that coincided with Nazi ideology. According to Arnold Dannenman, Hitler himself had created the name for this group led by Ludwig Müller and supported by many others, such as Reinhold Krause, Gerhard Kittel, and Emmanuel Hirsch, as they had originally decided to call their movement the National Protestants. Dannenman went on to say that "[w]ith the exceptional gift that Adolf Hitler has for naming things in a way that shapes the future, he has created a concept that will have extraordinary significance throughout the entire history of the church" (135). Interestingly, however, the Nazi regime was not always particularly supportive of this group of churches, as they worried that it would undermine some of their own authority (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 3).

This national church was to be Lutheran in character, operate according to Nazi principles, and be a completely "Germanized" church (Dannenman 160; Chvala-Smith 155 – 160). In July 1933, twenty-nine regional Protestant churches became part of this "national" church, and around two thirds of voters supported it in the 1932 church elections, which essentially meant that the German Christian leadership ended up dominating many churches in

Germany at this point (Solberg, "Introduction" 24; Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 5). At around this time, owing to differences in theology and opinions regarding the Nazi regime, the churches once loosely organized under the German Evangelical Church separated into three main bodies in the early 1930s: the German Christian movement, the Confessing Church, and the uncommitted middle group that remained unaffiliated with either of the other two groups.

While Doris Bergen acknowledges that the German Christian movement has been represented as a marginal group that lost much of its initial influence after 1933, she argues that historical evidence instead indicates that the German Christian movement maintained a noteworthy degree of influence among the church body throughout much of the war, even if its actual membership numbers remained fairly low, which she estimates at approximately 500,000 (*Twisted Cross* 2). Susannah Heschel points out that earlier estimates of its membership were assumed to be lower than they really were. For instance, she discusses a more recent case study of church parishes in Berlin that concluded approximately "forty percent of pastors were, at least for some time during the Reich, oriented towards the German Christian movement…Of 131 church congregations, he found that one quarter were dominated by German Christians, and half were split between Confessing Church and German Christians" (Gailus, qtd. in Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* 5 – 6). The full extent of this group's influence is somewhat uncertain, but it is clear that the German Christian movement continued to promote their anti-Jewish variant of Protestantism to some degree or another throughout the war until this group finally dissolved in 1945 (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 2).

Those in the Confessing Church expressed their concern about the German Christian movement's influence on the churches, writing many tracts denouncing its interpretation of Christian belonging as race-based rather than faith-based. For example, Karl Barth, a prominent

theologian in the Confessing Church, wrote that there was a "puzzling lack of resistance on the part of pastors and members of congregations and leaders of the church, professors and students of theology, educated and uneducated people, old and young people…who have succumbed in droves to the assault of this movement" (100). However, when considering the long heritage of such anti-Jewish ideas, the churches' lack of resistance is not particularly "puzzling." As mentioned in previous chapters, while not all churches joined the German Christian movement, many still held similar notions, adhering to the more nationalistic variant of German Protestantism that arose out of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

A New Bible for a New Church

The pastors and theologians leading the German Christian movement had redefined the origins of Protestantism as "Aryan." This acted as a form of theological justification for both nationalizing Protestant Christianity and eliminating Jewish influences from the churches under the German Christian movement's jurisdiction, which they viewed as their contribution to the Nazi regime's concurrent "de-Judaization" of society. As part of this effort, this movement helped establish *Das Institut zur Erforschung und Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben* or The Institute for the Study and Elimination of Jewish Influence on German Church Life. Given that the German Christians had "determined" that Christianity and Judaism had nothing in common, they saw no reason to retain any "Jewish" elements within their religion. They defined their church as "anti-Jewish" above all other things, and race became an integral part of their theology (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 22, 32).

German Christian leaders carried out this goal of creating a de-Judaized and "Aryan" church in several ways. For instance, they restructured and rewrote certain parts of the New

Testament and revised their church music and catechism in order to make these texts align more closely with Nazi ideology (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 143). One of their most significant efforts to "cleanse" the churches was an attempt to eliminate the Old Testament from the Protestant Bible, an idea that had already been discussed in previous years, but never implemented. This removal of the Old Testament occurred because the latter was based primarily on the Hebrew Bible, which supposedly made the Old Testament too "Jewish" to retain within a "German" church. As Reinhold Krause wrote, to bring people back to the churches, the latter first had to seek "liberation from everything in the worship service and our confession of faith that is not German, liberation from the Old Testament with its Jewish reward-and-punishment morality…For all practical purposes, the one excludes the other" (258). In short, he and other leaders of the German Christian movement viewed the inclusion of the "Jewish" Old Testament and New Testament within one Bible as a paradoxical combination of opposites.

Instead, many of those in the German Christian movement viewed Christianity as completely separate from Judaism. As Constantin Grossmann explained, German Christians were supposed to follow a "pure" religion based solely on Jesus's words (322). Jesus Christ of the New Testament was redefined as Aryan, rather than Jewish, bearing no relation to the "Jewish" God of the Old Testament (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 154). Pastor Friedrich Wieneke argued that the "God of the Old Testament has all the deficiencies of the Jewish race and is therefore utterly different from the God of the New Testament" (289). According to Grossmann, there was a distinct "contrast between the ludicrous egomania, the greed, and misanthropy the Jews 'project' into their concept of God, on the one hand, and the 'highest and best nature of the Aryans,' which is that of the heavenly father of Jesus Christ…Putting the two together [the Old and New Testaments] is clearly ridiculous, not to say an insult to Jesus Christ" (322). Jesus was

defined not only as being Aryan and completely different from the Old Testament God, but also as being an enemy of the Jews (Brökelschen 416). To the German Christians, it was inconceivable that the Jewish God and the Old Testament could continue to be linked with the Christian God and the New Testament. The Germans themselves were supposed to be a "counter-people" to the Jews (Althaus, "Political Christianity" 377).

In addition, the German Christian movement further legitimized the removal of the Old Testament by questioning its "morality," viewing it not only as irrelevant, as common in traditional Protestantism, but as actually morally problematic. The German Christians echoed earlier theologians like Friedrich Andersen and Adolf Bartels by outlining "problematic" elements of the Old Testament like the Israelites' "indiscriminate slaughter of whole populations," the pillaging of Egypt by the Israelites, and the promotion of "[t]reachery and assassination," which became "the source of religious intolerance, the Inquisition, and the elimination of heretics," in the words of Grossmann (320 – 322). Grossmann essentially blamed the influence of the Old Testament for various atrocities committed by Christian nations in the past, even though some of these attacks had specifically targeted the Jews. The Organization for German Christianity [*Bund für deutsches Christentum*], which was founded to demonstrate the German Christian movement's adherence to Nazism, published a pamphlet about the ways in which the Jewish influence in general had harmed the German nation, stating that the "Germans" had suffered "unspeakably" because of the influence of the Jews ("Jesus and the Jews" 440, 446). Any theoretical division between antisemitism and anti-Judaism was becoming increasingly blurred in these discussions, given this condemnation of the Jewish people in addition to Judaism. By retaining the Old Testament within the Protestant Bible, Christians were

supposedly leaving their religion open to the infiltration of Jewish "degeneracy" (Bernhardi, qtd. in Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 144).

Certain German Christian leaders still highlighted some redeeming traits of the Old Testament and, even while acknowledging its so-called "problematic" elements, did not believe it should be removed entirely from the Protestant Bible. For instance, Emmanuel Hirsch defended the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament, but once again tried to distance it from its "Jewishness" by stating that in Martin Luther's translation, he let "the poet of the Psalms speak in German terms" (122). As an example, he mentions that Luther used German alliteration in some of the Psalms (Hirsch 122). In essence, Hirsch argued that the way in which Luther chose to translate the original Hebrew text had already sufficiently de-Judaized the Psalms. Others, such as Friedrich Wieneke, argued against the issue of the Old Testament God by explaining that he was only being equated with the *Jews'* conception of the Old Testament God, which was wrong (297). Regardless of their views regarding the Old Testament's legitimacy in the Christian canon, it is clear that these pastors and theologians all concurred that its "Jewishness" was its main problematic characteristic. Furthermore, even if the German Christians did not think removing the Old Testament from the Protestant Bible was a good option, they certainly believed that it still had problematic elements and that the New Testament "superseded" the Old Testament (Brökelschen 414). Ultimately, these half-hearted attempts at saving the Old Testament did not amount to much, as, together with the Institute, the German Christian movement published *Die Botschaft Gottes* [*The Message of God*] in place of the traditional Protestant Bible in 1939.

Die Botschaft Gottes was originally supposed to have three parts, but only the first part (a revised compilation of the Gospels) was ever published (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 162). It sold

150,000 to 200,000 copies upon its release (Gerdmar, "National Socialist" 157). This book was a "Germanized" version of the New Testament that was revised and greatly abridged, with all references to the Old Testament removed. Certain passages were reworded to fit with Nazi ideology (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 143, 162 – 163, 171). While the German Christians believed the New Testament was the most important Protestant theological text, it also contained too many Jewish elements to retain in its original form. This being the case, any positive references to the Jews, genealogies (that demonstrated Jesus's Jewish heritage), and "Jewish" words like "Sabbath" or "hallelujah" were also eliminated from *Die Botschaft Gottes* (Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* 110). For instance, in the New Testament, there are several passages that refer to Jesus celebrating Jewish holidays. These passages were removed because they indicated that Jesus was Jewish rather than "Aryan" (Gerdmar, "National Socialist" 174).

This revised and rewritten version of the New Testament established a new narrative that positioned Christianity and Christ in complete opposition to Judaism and the Jews (Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* 106). The editors noted that they created this text during "the decisive German struggle…[as] a service to the soul of the German people" ("An English Translation" 1). If by a service, they meant a theological justification of the "struggle" of the Nazi regime against the Jews, they were certainly correct, as a large number of churches accepted this de-Judaized German New Testament (Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* 112). Rather than the salvation of all humankind, the revised message of this New Testament commanded them to continue Christ's supposed struggle to defeat Judaism and the Jews, who were "representatives of the satanic countervailing force" (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 154; Fromm, qtd. in Gerdmar, "National Socialist"165). This book emphasized Jesus's appellation of the Pharisees as being the "children of the devil," equating the Jewish Pharisees in the New Testament with the entirety of the Jewish

people (Gerdmar, “National Socialist” 170). In this exclusivist and national form of Protestantism, the Jews and Judaism were viewed as factors undermining and threatening “German” Christianity, which thus had to be purged from within their religion.

De-Judaizing the Physical Space of the Churches

Such actions and ideas helped further justify the removal not only of Jewish influences from within hymns and theological texts, but also of “non-Aryan” groups, particularly Jewish people, from within the churches themselves. The German Christians defined Protestantism “as a religion at war with Judaism,” meaning that the definition of being “Christian” now necessitated enmity with the Jews, as they were viewed as a threat undermining Christian religion and society (Heschel, “Race” 211). Furthermore, given the fact that race had become an intrinsic part of theology and that the Jews and Judaism were now viewed as the enemies of Christ and Christianity, the position of Jewish converts in the national church increasingly became a point of contention, although the “legitimacy” of Jewish conversion had already been questioned prior to this date. Establishing an “Aryan” church was the German Christian movement’s God-given mission, and the existence of converted Jews within the Protestant churches was impeding the realization of this goal (Eldridge 157, 159).

One of the first measures that altered the definition of both Christian and national belonging simultaneously was the Aryan Paragraph of 1933, which allowed corporations to bar Jews from various positions of employment in society. Jewish citizens were discriminated against in terms of employment because they were excluded from the state’s definition of national “belonging.” In addition, those who were not of “Aryan” descent or married to someone who was “non-Aryan” could not be clergy or church officials, meaning that Jewish converts

could not serve as Christian leaders (Ericksen, *Complicity* 26; "The Aryan Paragraph" 65). However, Robert Ericksen points out that this measure was not *forcibly* enacted by the Nazi regime at this time (*Complicity* 27). Furthermore, in an effort to lessen resistance they foresaw coming from the churches, the Nazi Party later stated that these regulations did not yet apply to religious organizations ("The Aryan Paragraph" 26). Nevertheless, the German Christian movement eagerly accepted the Aryan paragraph (Ericksen, *Complicity* 27). Indeed, the Aryan paragraph was accepted by the *majority* of Protestant churches, aside from the Confessing Church (Barnett, *For the Soul* 35). Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of the founders of the Confessing Church, argued that Jewish converts should be seen as Christian above all, which was the traditional stance of the church regarding Jewish conversion ("The Aryan Paragraph" 78). For centuries, conversion had been the signifier of Christian belonging. Everyone was supposed to have free access to salvation through Christ, regardless of race or ethnicity. Now, however, the German Christian movement redefined Christian belonging as based on race, coinciding with the Nazi regime's promotion of a "racially pure" German society. Previously to this, conversion had typically been one way for Jews to escape Christian persecution, but now this "option" of sorts was also taken away from them, demonstrating how anti-Jewish ideas within Christianity were now blended with racial ideas within Nazi ideology.

At this point, Jewish converts were completely barred from attending certain churches, even as ordinary members, particularly from those churches within the German Christian movement (Barnett, *For the Soul* 35). Some stopped recognizing Jewish baptism altogether (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 86). This was not surprising when considering that Arnold Dannenman, one of the key figures in this movement, defined the church as a "National Protestant Church…of German Christians, that is, of Christians of the Aryan race" (160). The German

Christians only allowed so-called "Aryans" to join their churches (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 95), as they were committed to what they believed were the God-mandated "doctrines of blood and race" ("Handbook" 179). In their view, God had commanded them to maintain this race-based order to creation within the churches, in which some racial groups supposedly had more value than others (Hossenfelder 247).

Theologian Gerhard Kittel did not entirely reject the idea of Jewish conversion, but still argued that these Jewish converts must create a separate "Jewish Christian" church in order to maintain the integrity of the national "German" church (Kittel 230). Issues about the status of Jewish converts would become clearer once "*the fatal union of baptism and assimilation is abolished*" (Kittel 232). In other words, Kittel, Dannenman, and others rejected the notion that the Jews could join "German" churches by converting to Christianity, thus completely redefining what it meant to be Christian. Furthermore, Christian "associations with the Jews and even missions to the Jews" were also condemned by Kittel (223). In this way, the churches attempted to go beyond the physical bounds of the church as a space of exclusion. Missions to the Jews were considered dangerous because they supposedly were the point at which "foreign blood enters the body of our people" (Hossenfelder 59). In addition to discouraging Jewish conversion, miscegenation was also seen as unacceptable, as marriage was a system intended to keep the "Aryan" race "pure and healthy according to God" (Hossenfelder 58; "Handbook" 180).

It is clear that as the Nazi state became increasingly exclusionary, barring Jews and other marginalized groups from being considered full citizens, many churches that were part of the German Christian movement also adopted this national definition of belonging, excluding those who did not correspond to their new racial definition of Christian "belonging." With this revised conception of Protestant membership, it no longer mattered whether the Jews converted to

Christianity or not, given that "even if they became Christians they would not be allowed to partake in the life of the German church" (Pierard 20). The Jews were seen as an "alien ethnic body" in the midst of the German nation as a whole ("The Aryan Paragraph" 76). Rather than an inclusive Christian community, the German Christians instead created an "Aryan" one. The establishment of "Aryan" Christianity was the goal of the German Christians, an aim they justified by arguing that "[t]he Christian faith is the unbridgeable religious opposite of Judaism" (Heschel, "When" 69; "Godesberg Declaration" 446). The German Christians were then not only de-Judaizing their own theology, but were also physically de-Judaizing the churches themselves. This action represented a significant shift from anti-Jewish sentiments primarily directed at the Jewish religion to ones directed at the Jewish people as well.

The "Problem" of the Jewish Spirit

However, perhaps this shift was less radical than it might appear, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Any perceived distinction between religion and race within the anti-Jewish sentiments expressed by the churches was blurred within discussions regarding the Jewish "spirit." By de-Judaizing the churches and reorienting the church and Christian theology along so-called "German" lines, the leaders of the German Christian movement believed they were promoting a German spirit countering the Jewish "spirit" currently infiltrating society. For instance, in *Die Botschaft Gottes*, the Greek word "logos" (translated in English as "the Word" in reference to Jesus) was translated as "eternal Spirit." In their view, this "eternal spirit" not only referred to Jesus, but was an age-old spirit that had been incarnated in the person of Jesus and at the same time included aspects of ancient Germanic cultures (Gerdmar, "National Socialist" 172). Perhaps this also sheds light on the fact that many German Christian authors depicted

Hitler as a Jesus type figure or, in Dr. Reinhold Krause's words, as the "liberator and savior whom God has sent" (261). If "the Word" represented a broader spiritual concept than simply Jesus himself, the German Christians may also have viewed Hitler as embodying this collective "German" spirit in some sense. For instance, Julius Leutheuser wrote that "[i]f the German who truly believed in Jesus could find the Spirit of the kingdom of God anywhere, he could find it in Adolf Hitler's movement" (340).

In contrast to this collective German spirit, the Jewish spirit was seen as inherently corrupting the Jewish people themselves and "Christian" society as a whole. The so-called Jewish spirit "infected the thinking of all other peoples and in this way destroyed their cohesion" (Leffler 355). This concept of a "Jewish spirit" highlights the specific dangers of theological anti-Jewish sentiments, as the German Christians considered this spirit that was supposedly informed by Jewish religious practices (as discussed in more depth in the previous chapter) as the most significant problem for Christian society. Their condemnation of the Jewish spirit's influence on Christian theology (and society as whole) began prior to the 1930s, but continued to find its way into discussions about the legitimacy of "Jewish" aspects of Christian theology like the Old Testament during the 1930s and early 1940s. For instance, Otto Brökelschen and others also mentioned that Christianity must be freed from the Jewish spirit, as the latter was influencing people "on the sly" in the Christian churches both via Christian theology and through the physical presence of Jewish converts in the churches (422, "Jesus and the Jews" 444). In fact, some German Christian leaders argued that Jewish converts decided to join the Christian churches so that the Jewish spirit would supposedly dominate in (and thus corrupt) the churches, in addition to dominating Christian society as a whole (Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 160). In these

pastors' view, Jewish conversion was not sincere, but was based on a desire to undermine Christianity from within.

In essence, for the German Christian movement, biological conceptions of race were still not the primary issue: this Jewish (religious) spirit that supposedly had inherently corrupted the Jewish people themselves was the main "problem." As Heschel writes, "[t]he tired argument that racism is about biology fails to recognize that racism emphasizes the dangers posed by the body to the spirit" ("Race" 229). These pastors and theologians were determined to create a German church that arose out of a truly "German" spirit (Solberg, Introduction 270 – 271). As Grossmann explained, the physical attributes of being German were not the issue at stake in creating this "Aryan" church; instead, it was vital that Christians let themselves be molded by the Nordic spirit, as they could not understand the German faith without having a German soul (327). This mission to defeat the Jewish *spirit* in particular was also an issue for the Nazi Party itself, not only for these German Christian pastors and theologians (Spielvogel and Redles). Even in publications dating as early as the 1920 Nazi Party Platform, the Nazi Party argued that positive Christianity "combats the Jewish-materialistic spirit within and without us" (Weir 609).

Once again, one could bring up the question of the position of non-practicing Jews in Christian society. However, according to Gerhard Kittel, a Jewish race cannot exist without a Jewish religion, as it would then be "without a soul" (223). While this view of the Jewish religion could certainly be problematized from a modern perspective, this connection between race and religion was nonetheless one a number of theologians and pastors subscribed to, viewing Jews and their religion as inseparable. The physical body by itself was not "dangerous" as such, but it was dangerous insofar as it was the physical incarnation of the Jewish spirit (McNutt 281). This discussion about eliminating the Jewish "spirit" from society thus became

much more disturbing. If the Jewish religion corrupted Christian society as a whole and the Jews were inherently corrupted by their religion, then the (religious) anti-Jewish sentiments expressed by the German Christian movement had somewhat eliminationist connotations, which I will discuss in the following section of this chapter.

Justification for Genocide? The Churches' "Mission" in the Nazi State

These German Christian pastors and theologians arguably promoted a form of cultural genocide. They echoed the Nazi regime's belief that they had to eliminate Jewish culture and religion from the "new" Germany in order to set themselves free from the figurative power of the Jews represented in German history and memory (Confino, "Why" 386). Interestingly, scholarship about the Holocaust primarily focuses on the biological impetus for the Nazi regime's persecution of the Jews. Some scholars, however, problematize this predominantly biological focus on the Holocaust, arguing that it is vital to recognize the religio-cultural dimension of this genocide as well (Confino, "Why" 372, 377; Stone 64 – 65; Halberstam 63). According to Alon Confino, for instance, solely focusing on race takes away from an important aspect of Nazi policy: the Nazi Party believed that it was necessary to create a fully German culture, free from any Jewish influences ("Why" 390). Nazi propaganda taught that the Jews destroyed and corrupted culture and that the only true culture was a "national" one (Esser). As Hitler himself explained, the Reich government had to purge problematic influences not only from the political system within Germany, but also from the "educational system, the theatre, the cinema, literature, the Press, and the wireless," which could then serve as a reflection of truly "German" values ("Hitler Explains").

While the focus of the German Christian movement was on expelling Jewish influences from Protestant Churches, the close link established between church and nation and the fact that German society was supposed to be "Christian" meant that effectively what they were working towards was removing Jewish culture/religion (and Jews) from their society as a whole. As Marcin Marcinko explains, actions directed "at the destruction of culture, religion or other intellectual assets of suppressed nations" are integral aspects of genocide (694). Similarly, Raphael Lemkin identified assaults on culture as an important component of Nazi genocidal policies, indicating that the German Christian churches' de-Judaization policies contributed to the antisemitic measures perpetrated by the Nazi regime (Scheck 116). Of course, Lemkin himself was not referring explicitly to the churches, but nonetheless highlighted an important aspect of genocide: cultural cleansing. The German Christian churches certainly carried out such actions on a limited scale, even if perhaps not to the extent required to define such actions as genocidal. They eliminated Jewish elements of Christianity and banned Jews from certain churches in an attempt to "de-Judaize" Christian society and cleanse it from the supposedly harmful influence of Jewish culture/religion. Moreover, these ideas stretched beyond the physical church, as Stephen Haynes indicates that Protestants sought the "removal of every influence of the Jewish spirit from the life of the German *Volk*" ("Who" 352). Many Protestant Christians believed that the Jews' influence within German society, including religion, was a problem that needed to be resolved (Haynes, "Who" 351; Munson 13; Kittel 212). This idea was not solely a theological issue, but was seen as an issue threatening Christian society as a whole. These examples make it difficult to argue that the German Christian movement was merely *following* Nazi ideology, indicating that many of its leaders actually *believed* these ideas were an integral part of truly being Christian.

Furthermore, the German Christians believed that by completely de-Judaizing the Protestant Church, they would be playing their part in Hitler's struggle against "world Jewry" (Heschel, "When" 70). There was already a tendency within the church to view itself as closely tied to the state, a sentiment that only grew stronger in the early twentieth century (Conway 820; Barnes 158, 160). As one pastor explained, Christians were obliged to "fight on behalf of race and *Volkstum*…the church should be the state's strong helper" (Hossenfelder 256). Joachim Hossenfelder went on to emphasize that a battle was already "being waged against subversive powers," of which he specifically references Judaism (256). Another pastor, Siegfried Leffler, argued that the German nation's duty was to "exorcise the forces of destruction," by which he meant the Jews (356 – 7). Such statements show the German Christians' belief that they were obliged to join the Nazi regime's "struggle" against the Jews. They viewed this "struggle" as a spiritual battle as well as a physical one, meaning that the "Jewish influence on all areas of German life, including on religious-church life, must be exposed and broken" (Heschel, "Race" 21). The German Christians then considered it their duty to carry out the spiritual side of this struggle via their de-Judaization of the churches and, by extension, Christian society as a whole.

Dr. Martin Sasse, a Protestant bishop in the German Christian movement, not only supported the burning of synagogues and Jewish books and the eradication of Judaism, but also supported the November pogrom and published a pamphlet in response to it titled "Martin Luther on the Jews: Get Rid of Them," arguing that the pogrom coincided with Luther's own ideas regarding the Jews (Heschel, "When" 71). Furthermore, while most of these theologians did not actually advocate for physical genocide, some, however, did reference physical elimination as a possible solution to the supposedly negative influence of the Jews on Christian society. For instance, in 1933, theologian Gerhard Kittel proposed a variety of possible solutions to the

Jewish question, which were "extermination, Zionism, assimilation, and guest status" (Haynes, "Who" 352). Ultimately, Kittel decided against elimination as a possible solution, but only because it had not worked in the past and so seemed unfeasible (214). Another prominent member of the German Christian movement, Siegfried Leffler, also discussed killing the Jews as a proposed solution to the "Jewish question" before the Second World War even began (Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* 10). Leffler, however, placed the burden of guilt on the government, arguing that he would "have to kill him [a Jewish person], have to shoot him" if the state required it (qtd. in Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* 10). As these examples demonstrate, a few of these German Christian pastors actually promoted physical genocide. Moreover, the German Christian movement as a whole provided a form of moral justification for the genocidal actions of the Nazi regime at least to some extent, even if it was not actively engaged in physical genocide itself.

Conclusion – Implications for Traditional Protestantism

As this chapter has demonstrated, the ideas promoted by some theologians and pastors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Germany were echoed and radicalized into a form of theology that advocated for the de-Judaization of the churches, not only on a theological level, but on a physical level as well. Any conceptual division between theological anti-Judaism and racial antisemitism in this particular context had been largely dissolved. The German Christian movement redefined Christianity as a religion based on race, which legitimized and necessitated an exclusionary definition of Christian belonging denying the Jews a position not only within the Christian churches, but within society as a whole. While perhaps not necessarily genocidal, the fact that these churches saw themselves as fulfilling the cultural side of the Nazi mission hints at underlying eliminationist motives, as expressed by Sasse, Leffler, and Kittel.

This chapter demonstrates how the actions undertaken by pastors and theologians within the German Christian movement acted as the fulfillment of earlier and primarily theological anti-Jewish sentiments expressed by Protestant theologians and pastors in Weimar and Nazi Germany specifically, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three. The latter chapters focused more specifically on the evolution of anti-Jewish sentiment, discussing it within the context of the Weimar Republic and the work of Pastor Friedrich Andersen, while Chapter One centered on a historiographic overview of Protestant churches' response to the Nazi persecution of the Jews. Presenting this process of de-Judaization as one that was more gradual destabilizes the more conventional argument that the actions undertaken by the German Christian movement were an anomaly, suggesting that the latter were instead in part based on a steady radicalization of anti-Judaism within Protestant theology.

To demonstrate this evolution of anti-Jewish sentiments in Protestant theology, I situated my analysis of various primary sources within the body of secondary research on this topic, specifically focusing on expressions of anti-Jewish sentiments in theological documents from Weimar and Nazi Germany, including those by Friedrich Andersen, Constantin Grossmann, Arnold Dannenman, and Karl Gerecke. Secondary sources, particularly those by Doris Bergen and Susannah Heschel, helped inform my discussion of the historical context associated with this topic. In addition to using these texts focusing more specifically on the German Christian movement, I also employed more general texts on the position of the churches prior to and during the Holocaust (e.g. those written by Matthew Hockenos, John Conway, and Arthur Cochrane, among others) as well as some theoretical sources discussing Christian antisemitism in general, including texts by Stephen Haynes, Anders Gerdmar, and Robert Chazan. My primary source research employed both translated texts (primarily from Mary Solberg's *A*

Church Undone: Documents from the German Christian Faith Movement, 1932 – 1940) and my own translations of various texts written during the Weimar Period, especially those written by Friedrich Andersen. I chose to focus on Andersen's work because it clearly showed the bridge between ideas more explicitly associated with racial antisemitism and older theological forms of anti-Jewish sentiment.

Using these sources to inform my research, I argued that the anti-Jewish actions of a number of churches within the German Christian movement, such as refusing to recognize Jewish conversion and republishing the Bible without the Old Testament, were rooted in anti-Jewish ideas that emerged predominantly during the Weimar Period. In the 1930s and 1940s, these pre-existing ideas, which increased in influence, frequency, and radicalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, had the opportunity to come to fruition. Furthermore, this thesis demonstrates that these ideas cannot be dismissed as a purely religious issue, highlighting the dangers of theological anti-Jewish sentiment specifically. When this "religious" issue becomes one advocating for similar notions to that of a genocidal regime like the Nazi Party, its danger becomes much more apparent.

Some scholars view these anti-Jewish ideas expressed by the churches as much more deeply rooted in Protestantism, a concept that I did not have the space to discuss in this thesis, but which nonetheless deserves further attention. Specifically, they see these ideas as rooted in supersessionism, which has been in existence since far prior to the birth of Protestantism itself and remained a core doctrine within almost all Christian denominations until after the Holocaust. Supersessionism asserts that after Jesus Christ came to earth and died for humankind, "God's purposes for, and love of, the Jewish people came to an end" (McGarry 120). The New Covenant

of the New Testament had made the Old Testament of the Jews obsolete, and the Christians replaced the Jews as God's "chosen people" (McGarry 120).

Some scholars propose that this doctrine was directly connected to the eliminationist antisemitism of the Nazi regime, believing that anti-Judaism had "murderous implications" if carried out to its full potential (Haynes, "Christian Holocaust Theology" 566; McGarry 120). Still, it is important to note that this eliminationist "solution" was not expressed openly by the majority of Protestant churches, even those associated with the German Christian movement. So, while it would not be fair to deem all Protestant churches as eliminationist, the idea promoting the "replacement" of Judaism and the Jews still clearly reflected anti-Jewish sentiments endorsed by the Protestant churches long before the Holocaust. After World War II, many Christian denominations renounced supersessionism, possibly because of its eliminationist connotations (Breidenthal 319). Theologians and churches as a whole began reconsidering this doctrine after the Holocaust and tried to establish a more Judeo-Christian tradition, rather than seeing the two religions in opposition to one another. However, despite these theological arguments renouncing supersessionism, many mainstream churches continue to promote the idea that Christianity has replaced Judaism (Bader-Saye 256).

To reiterate, I have concluded that the antisemitic actions of the German Christian movement were derived from earlier anti-Jewish theological ideas, which were radicalized during the Weimar Republic and even in the years preceding this era. Alice Eckardt even goes so far as to argue that "the Holocaust could not have occurred" without the background of Christian anti-Judaism, stating that "[i]n that sense, the Shoah is the culmination of the thrust of much (if not in fact most) of Christian faith and history" (229). While perhaps Eckardt takes this idea too far, as there are problems inherent with using any sort of "master narrative," including religious

ones, to "explain" the Holocaust (Von Kellenbach 656 – 657), this discussion of Protestant anti-Judaism as presented in this thesis nonetheless highlights the necessity of re-examining Protestant doctrine. Does it inherently carry anti-Jewish associations? Can churches escape such sentiments when continuing to argue that Christianity has replaced Judaism? These questions are integral to address within mainstream Christianity today, in order to avoid the possibility of perpetuating anti-Jewish propensities within modern theology. While I would argue that it is inaccurate to view the churches as either completely resistant or complicit with the Nazi regime, most scholars agree that most Protestant churches did not speak out on behalf of the plight of the Jews, even if they did not actively persecute them (Hockenos, "The Church Struggle" 17; Bergen 3 – 4). The Protestant churches in Nazi Germany may not have actively promoted the annihilation of the European Jewish population, but their ideas provided a religious and moral justification for the elimination of both the Jewish religion and, by extension, the Jewish people as well.

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