LUTHERANS AGAINST HITLER

THE UNTOLD STORY

Lowell C. Green

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For my beloved wife, Vilma, and our dear children, Daniel Green, Katharine Olah, Sonja Link, and Barbara Savereide

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Quotations marked KJV or noted as "Authorized Version" are from the King James or Authorized Version of the Bible.

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Foreword

Even before the Third Reich came to its smoldering end, an extensive discussion had developed about how such an evil regime could ever have come to power and how it could have repeatedly used that power, without any real challenge, to commit its horrifying crimes. This discussion has lasted to the present day, and no consensus has been met. One reason for the length of this debate is that while the issues seem to be easily simplified, in actuality they are quite complex. Hence, the simple explanations have been regularly refuted by available evidence. But another reason is that some components are still, after all these years, misunderstood.

An instructive example of this refutation of simple explanations has to do with the lack of any coherent and unified anti-Nazi effort by Germany's religious leaders. The facts are not in dispute. Leaders of all the Christian churches in Germany have acknowledged and repented their failures. What makes the issue perplexing is that there never should have been such failures, for Adolf Hitler's basic beliefs and actions were as anti-Christian as it is possible to be. He promoted hatred, lies, theft, murder—even idolatry. The Christian clergy, in all variations, had preached against every one of these sins, yet very few Christian clergymen were willing to declare publicly that Hitler and his movement represented a frontal assault upon the Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus. So we face a conundrum. It is logical to suppose that adherents of the Christian faith ought to have united instantly around its basic precepts and denounced Hitler. But they did not. Why not?

Helping us to analyze this mystery is the great contribution of Lowell C. Green's book. By examining one religious denomination, the Confessional Lutheran Church, and by explaining its behavior not on the basis of our assumptions but on its terms and by drawing on extensive inside knowledge, Professor Green shows us what is distorted in the analysis I have just summarized above.

Despite their common adhesion to several fundamental principles, the Christians of Germany cannot be put together as a bloc. Even setting aside the deep divisions between Catholics and Protestants, one cannot accurately categorize even all Protestants as forming a coherent entity. Instead, one must comprehend what divided the various Protestant churches and understand how those divisions were based upon deep theological commitments plus intense and never-forgotten historical experiences. As one reads through Lowell C. Green's book, one increasingly grasps this central fact: The inherited divisions formed the prime impediment to collective action.

Upon reflection, this should not surprise us. Adolf Hitler came to power by exploiting the divisions of Germans—political, social, and economic. He kept his hold over Germans because they continued to be divided. One of his central propaganda themes—and a classic "big lie"—was that he had unified the country: *ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer*. In reality, his great weapon was the classic formula for power: divide and rule.

What Lowell C. Green has done is illustrate how these divisions affected even Germans who were fundamentally anti-Nazi: the Lutheran leaders. These leaders included men who were Professor Green's teachers while he studied theology at the University of Erlangen after World War II, so his insights are based upon a close acquaintance with the key actors. Further, as an ordained Lutheran minister and a specialist on the history of the Reformation, Green has a deep understanding of the theological positions that were at the core of the behavior of the Lutheran leaders. This helps make the book uniquely useful.

But this book will also cause considerable controversy, though it should elevate the level of current debates. The author's interpretations are presented with great vigor, and I certainly do not agree with everything he has written. For example, I think Professor Green is wrong to blame the theories of Charles Darwin for contributing to Nazi ideology. I would certainly agree that the "social Darwinists" should be blamed, though what they primarily did was to provide a new vocabulary and some pseudoscientific justifications for preexistent racist ideas. They did that by seriously distorting Darwin's theories.

But this and most of my other quibbles are minor in comparison to the major contributions Lowell C. Green has made. This is an important book that will significantly strengthen our understanding of Nazi Germany. It will not end the long-standing and ongoing discussion about how the Third Reich could have happened. No single book will ever do that. But it does point us firmly in the right direction for comprehending the apparently puzzling behavior of Christians in Germany under the Hitler dictatorship.

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Preface

How did a scholar who specializes in Renaissance humanism and the theology of the Lutheran Reformation come to write a book about Germany during Hitler's Third Reich? As William Sheridan Allen has indicated in the foreword, it was my privilege to study at the University of Erlangen during one of the greatest periods in its illustrious history. Among my teachers were renowned scholars such as Werner Elert, Paul Althaus, Walther von Loewenich, Walter Künneth, Friedrich Baumgärtel, and Wilhelm Maurer. As the book unfolds, the reader will discover these names falling into place. But why should I have even thought of undertaking the arduous task of writing such a book? This pursuit was goaded by the words and actions of postwar historians who wrote essays that were derogatory to those professors to whom I owed so much and were historically inaccurate of the church of my fathers, back to the days of Martin Luther.

Previous histories about the terrible days of the Third Reich had imbibed the propagandistic practices of the Fascists, Soviet Communists, and National Socialists, in which denunciation played a prominent role. For me, as a citizen of the United States, it was intolerable to hear the denunciations by those living in an easy post-Hitler era who were scolding those who had done their best in dark and cloudy times—especially when these detractors suppressed historical documents and facts that gave an entirely different picture. And when one of the later historians at the University of Erlangen led student radicals in a demonstration against the former home of Werner Elert, which had subsequently become a student hospice, and demanded that the "evil" name of Elert be taken down—an act that the Frankfurt newspaper called "dirtying one's own nest"—his credibility as an impartial historian was completely destroyed. I felt that the distortions that appeared in this man's essays needed to be counteracted with the facts as I knew them.

William Sheridan Allen mentions my personal acquaintance with many of the chief actors in the story. Besides those named above, I have spent time with people such as Bishop Hans Meiser, Theodore and Eva Baudler, Alfred Drung, Eduard Putz, Hilmar Ratz, Ernst Kinder, Jan and Charlotte Bender, Carl Stange, Martin and Eva Schmidt, Karlmann Beyschlag, Wilhelm and Hanna Elert Gerhoh, Rudolf Hermann, Hans Volz, Emanuel Hirsch, Theodor Strohm, Heinrich Grüber, Julius Bodensieck, and, last but not least, Paul Leo, his wife, Eva (née Dittrich), and his daughter, Anne Leo Ellis. More brief encounters were with Friedrich Gogarten, Friedrich Hauck, Heinrich Bornkamm, Hanns Rückert, Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, Julius Schieder, Martin Niemöller, Hans Asmussen, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Heinrich Vogel, and Bruno Doehring. In some cases it was merely a glimpse, in others there was a conversation, and in still others there were many and prolonged discussions. All these connections have given me insights into the task at hand. Thus when Carl Stange related to me how Karl Barth had offended his colleagues at Göttingen by his imperious ways, this seemed to confirm my own appraisal of the Swiss theologian.

Spending several years as a graduate student in Germany, living in the Martin Luther Heim among other theological students (all of whom had vivid memories of the Third Reich and World War II), visiting places that were involved in the story, seeing the war's destruction evidenced in the bombed buildings, talking with people who had come through the war, traveling to Berlin and Hamburg and Bremen and Basel and many other places, and hearing hundreds of anecdotes that people were still relating all gave me a rich store of memories from which to draw. Only the reader will be able to decide whether these experiences enhance the book or detract from its worth.

In the pages that follow, most of the translations from German texts are my own. Where there are exceptions, I have tried to give due credit to the translator. In rendering German lines, I have generally tried to give equivalent meanings in idiomatic English rather than supplying literal translations, but where I have thought it crucial, I have given literal renditions.

Acknowledgments are owed to many people. Karlmann Beyschlag, Wilhelm and Hanna Elert Gerhoh, Gerhard Althaus, and Niels-Peter Moritzen (director of the Theological Archives at Erlangen) provided documents and valuable comments. Ronald Feuerhahn of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, expressed support for this project from the start and repeatedly encouraged me as new problems arose. Charles Ford of St. Louis University provided important insights into the position of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.[1] William Sheridan Allen of the State

1 Charles E. Ford wrote the important article, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Resistance, and the Two Kingdoms," *Lutheran Forum* 27, no. 3 (August 1993): 28–34. This issue of

University of New York at Buffalo encouraged my publishing efforts. Karlmann Beyschlag assisted with gathering the photographs, and Karl E. Schmidt, also of Buffalo, New York, assisted in drawing the maps. Lois Elert Veseley, an American member of the Elert family, provided me with rich genealogical information about the family's origins in Pomerania.

Grateful recognition is owed the many librarians who went far beyond the normal demands of duty and without whose help this book could not have been written. Special mention must be made of David O. Berger of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, and Robert V. Roethemeyer of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, and the library staff at the State University of New York at Buffalo, who were always helpful and who solved many problems expeditiously. Special thanks are owed Nancy Haberly and Jacques Berlin, leaders in the Computer Society of Western New York, who gave me indispensable help with computer problems.

Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to my dear wife, Vilma, whose warm, loving care was a constant inspiration. She patiently put up with many lonely evenings while I was at the computer desk and encouraged me in many different ways. To all these and to many others who helped, my heartfelt thanks.

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Lutheran Forum also included significant essays on Bonhoeffer by other writers. Ford also brought to my attention the paper by Uriel Tal, "On Modern Lutheranism and the Jews," which had appeared in *Luther, Lutheranism and the Jews: A Record of the Second Consultation between Representatives of The International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations and The Lutheran World Federation* held in Stockholm, Sweden, 11–13 July 1983, edited by Jean Halpérin and Arne Sovik (Geneva: Department of Studies, The Lutheran World Federation, 1984). We shall take up Tal's study in greater detail in chapter 5.

Abbreviations of Literature

In citing works in the footnotes, short titles or abbreviations have been used as listed below.

AELKZ	*Allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Kirchenzeitung*
AGK	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes. More than 55 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958ff.
Althaus, *Stunde*	Paul Althaus. *Die deutsche Stunde der Kirche*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933.
Althaus, *Th. Ord.*	Paul Althaus. *Theologie der Ordnungen.* 2d ed. Gütersloh: Evangelischer Verlag "Der Rufer," 1935.
Althaus, "Volkstum"	Paul Althaus. "Kirche und Volkstum." Pages 113–43 in *Evangelium und Leben: Gesammelte Vorträge*. Gütersloh: Carl Bertelsmann, 1927.
ATF	Archives of the Theological Faculty of the University of Erlangen.
Beyschlag	Karlmann Beyschlag. *Die Erlanger Theologie*. Einzelarbeiten aus der Kirchengeschichte Bayerns 67. Erlangen: Martin Luther Verlag, 1993.
Bonhoeffer	Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*. Vol. 12: *Berlin, 1932–1933*. Edited by Carsten Nicolaisen and Ernst-Albert Scharffenorth. Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1997.
BSKO	*Bekenntnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen der nach Gottes Wort Reformierten Kirche*. Edited by Wilhelm Niesel. 3d ed. Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1938.
BSLK	*Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1930.

Carter	Guy Christopher Carter. "Confession at Bethel, August 1933—Enduring Witness: The Formation, Revision and Significance of the First Full Theological Confession of the Evangelical Church Struggle in Nazi Germany." Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1987. (Printed by Ann Arbor: Dissertations Information Service, 1988.)
Dietzfelbinger	Hermann Dietzfelbinger. *Veränderung und Beständigkeit: Erinnerungen.* Munich: Claudius, 1984.
EKL	Heinz Brunotte and Otto Weber, ed. *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon.* 4 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956–1961.
ELC	Julius Bodensieck, ed. *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church.* 3 vols. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1965.
Elert, *Ausgang*	Werner Elert. *Der Ausgang der altkirchlichen Christologie: Eine Untersuchung über Theodor von Pharan und seine Zeit als Einführung in die alte Dogmengeschichte.* Posthumously edited by Wilhelm Maurer and Elisabeth Bergsträßer. Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1957.
Elert, *BBB*	Werner Elert. *Bekenntnis, Blut und Boden: Drei theologische Vorträge.* Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1934.
Elert, *Christian Ethos*	Werner Elert. *Christian Ethos.* Translated by Carl J. Schindler. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957.
Elert, *Ethos*	Werner Elert. *Das christliche Ethos: Grundlinien der lutherischen Ethik.* Tübingen: Furche-Verlag, 1949.
Elert, *Ein Lehrer*	Werner Elert. *Ein Lehrer der Kirche: Kirchlich-theologische Aufsätze und Vorträge.* Edited by Max Keller-Hüschemenger. Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1967.
Elert, *Zwischen Gnade*	Werner Elert. *Zwischen Gnade und Ungnade: Abwandlungen des Themas Gesetz und Evangelium*. Munich: Evangelischer Presseverband für Bayern, 1948.
ELKZ	*Evangelische Lutherische Kirchen-Zeitung*. Successor to *AELKZ*.
Eyjólfsson	Sigurjón Arni Eyjólfsson. *Rechtfertigung und Schöpfung in der Theologie Werner Elerts.* Arbeiten zur Geschichte und Theologie des Luthertums, new ser., 10. Hanover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1994.
Hamm	Berndt Hamm. "Schuld und Verstrickung der Kirche: Vorüberlegungen zu einer Darstellung der Erlanger Theologie in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus." In *Kirche und Nationalsozialismus*, edited by Wolfgang Stegemann. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990.

Helmreich	Ernst Christian Helmreich. *The German Churches under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979.
Hermelink	Heinrich Hermelink. *Kirche im Kampf: Dokumente des Widerstands und des Aufbaus in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands von 1933 bis 1945*. Tübingen: R. Wunderlich, 1950.
JMLB	*Lutherische Kirche in der Welt. Jahrbuch des Martin-Luther-Bundes.* Berlin: Martin Luther-Verlag, 1969–.
Kater	Horst Kater. *Die Deutsche Evangelische Kirche in den Jahren 1933 und 1934: Eine rechts- und verfassungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Gründung und Zerfall einer Kirche in nationalsozialistischen Staat.* Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes 24. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970.
KJahr 1932	*Kirchliches Jahrbuch für die evangelischen Landeskirchen Deutschlands 1932.* Ein Hilfsbuch zur Kirchenkunde der Gegenwart 59, edited by Hermann Sasse. Gütersloh: Carl Bertelsmann, 1932.
KJahr 1933–1944	*Kirchliches Jahrbuch für die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland 1933–1944.* Single volume edited by Joachim Beckmann. Gütersloh: Carl Bertelsmann, 1948.
Klügel, *Dokumente*	Eberhard Klügel. *Die lutherische Landeskirche Hannovers und ihr Bischof, 1933–1945: Dokumente.* Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1965.
Klügel, *Landeskirche*	Eberhard Klügel. *Die lutherische Landeskirche Hannovers und ihr Bischof, 1933–1945.* Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1964.
Korblatt	*Korrespondenzblatt für die evangelisch-lutherischen Geistlichen in Bayern.*
Künneth, *Abfall*	Walter Künneth. *Der große Abfall: Eine geschichtstheologische Untersuchung der Begegnung zwischen Nationalsozialismus und Christentum*. Hamburg: Friedrich Wittig, 1947.
Künneth, *Lebensführungen*	Walter Künneth. *Lebensführungen: Der Wahrheit verpflichtet.* Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1979.
Künneth, *Politik*	Walter Künneth. *Politik zwischen Dämon und Gott: Eine christliche Ethik des Politischen.* Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1954.
Künneth and Schreiner, *Die Nation*	Walter Künneth and Helmuth Schreiner, ed. *Die Nation vor Gott: Zur Botschaft der Kirche im dritten Reich.* Berlin: Wichern, 1933.

KZ — *Kirchliche Zeitschrift.* Published since 1876. Pertinent volumes edited by Johann Michael Reu. Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1930–1943.

Lau, *"Äußerliche Ordnung"* — Franz Lau. *"Äußerliche Ordnung" und "weltlich Ding" in Luthers Theologie.* Studien zur systematischen Theologie 12. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933.

Lau, "Two Kingdoms" — Franz Lau. "The Lutheran Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms." *Lutheran World* 12 (1965): 355–72.

Loewenich, *Erlebte Theologie* — Walther von Loewenich. *Erlebte Theologie: Begegnungen, Erfahrungen, Erwägungen.* Munich: Claudius, 1979.

Meier, *Deutschen Christen* — Kurt Meier. *Die Deutschen Christen: Das Bild einer Bewegung im Kirchenkampf des Dritten Reiches.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964.

Meier, *EKK* — Kurt Meier. *Der evangelische Kirchenkampf.* 3 vols. Göttingen: Vandehoeck & Ruprecht, 1976–1984.

Meier, *Kirche und Judentum* — Kurt Meier. *Kirche und Judentum: Die Haltung der evangelischen Kirche zur Judenpolitik des Dritten Reiches.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968.

Meiser, *Verantwortung* — Hans Meiser. *Verantwortung für die Kirche: Stenographische Aufzeichnungen und Mitschriften von Landesbischof Hans Meiser 1933–1955.* Edited by Hannelore Braun and Carsten Nicolaisen. Vol. 1: *Sommer 1933 bis Sommer 1935.* Vol. 2: *Herbst 1935 bis Frühjahr 1937.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985–1993.

Niemöller, *Evangelische Kirche* — Wilhelm Niemöller. *Die evangelische Kirche im Dritten Reich: Handbuch des Kirchenkampfes.* Bielefeld: Ludwig Bechauf, 1956.

Reese — Hans-Jörg Reese. *Bekenntnis und Bekennen: Vom 19. Jahrhundert zum Kirchenkampf der nationalsozialistisischen Zeit.* Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes 28. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974.

Sasse, *In Statu Confessionis* — Hermann Sasse. *In Statu Confessionis.* Edited by Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf. Vol. 1: *Gesammelte Aufsätze.* Vol. 2: *Gesammelte Aufsätze und Kleine Schriften.* Berlin: Verlag die Spur, 1975–1976.

Schäfer, *Wurm*	Gerhard Schäfer, comp. *Landesbischof D. Wurm und der nationalsozialistische Staat 1940–1945: Eine Dokumentation.* Stuttgart: Calwer, 1968.
Schäfer, *Württemberg*	Gerhard Schäfer, comp. *Die Evangelische Landeskirche in Württemberg und der Nationalsozialismus: Eine Dokumentation zum Kirchenkampf.* 6 vols. Stuttgart: Calwer, 1971–1986.
Schmidt, *Bekenntnisse*	Kurt Dietrich Schmidt. *Die Bekenntnisse und grundsätzlichen Äußerungen zur Kirchenfrage.* Vol. 1: *Des Jahres 1933.* Vol. 2: *Das Jahr 1934.* Vol. 3: *Das Jahr 1935.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1934–1936.
Schmidt, *Dokumente*	Kurt Dietrich Schmidt, ed. *Dokumente des Kirchenkampfes II: Die Zeit des Reichskirchenausschußes 1935–1937.* 2 parts. Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes 13–14. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964–1965.
Scholder, *Kirchen*	Klaus Scholder. *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich.* Vol. 1: *Vorgeschichte und Zeit der Illusionen, 1918–1934.* Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1977. Vol. 2: *Das Jahr der Ernüchterung 1934, Barmen und Rom.* Berlin: Siedler, 1985.
Simon	Bettina Simon. *Ausgegrenzt, entrechtet, verraten: Paul Leo—Biographische Spurensuche im Kontext des Verhaltens der ev.-luth. Landeskirche Hannovers (1933ff.) gegenüber ihren Pastoren jüdischer Herkunft* (*Ostracized, Delegalized, Betrayed: Paul Leo—Biographical Traces in the Context of the Procedure of the Evangelical Lutheran Land Church of Hanover (1933ff.) regarding Its Pastors of Jewish Descent*). Hausarbeit im Rahmen der Ersten Staatsprüfung für das Lehramt an Gymnasien. Universität Göttingen. Göttingen, unpublished thesis, June 12, 1996.
Tutzing	Paul Rieger and Johannes Strauß, ed. *Tutzinger Texte.* Edited for the Evangelische Akademie Tutzing. Vol. 1: *Kirche und Nationalsozialismus zur Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes.* Munich: Claudius, 1969.
WA	Martin Luther. *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. 65 vols. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus, 1883–1993.
ZwKK	Helmut Winter, ed. *Zwischen Kanzel und Kerker: Augenzeugen berichten vom Kirchenkampf im Dritten Reich.* Munich: Claudius, 1982.

Abbreviations of Organizations

AELK	*Allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Konferenz*	General Evangelical Lutheran Conference
AVSPW	*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Völkisch-Soziale Pfarrer Württembergs*	Study Association of *Völkisch*-Social Pastors in Württemberg
BDL	*Bund deutscher Lutheraner*	Federation of German Lutherans
CDB	*Christliche-Deutsche Bewegung*	Christian-German Movement
CVDP	*Christlicher Volksdienst Partei*	Christian *Volk*-Service Party
DEK	*Deutsche evangelische Kirche*	German Evangelical Church; Reich Church
DEKB	*Deutscher evangelische Kirchen Bund*	German Evangelical Church Federation *or* Federation of German Evangelical Churches
DGB	*Deutsche Glaubens-Bewegung*	German-Faith Movement; the German-Faithful
DNVP	*Deutschnationalen Volkspartei*	German National *Volk* Party
DVP	*Deutsche Volkspartei*	German *Volk* Party
EKD	Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland	Evangelical Church in Germany (after WWII)
EKU	*Evangelische Kirche der Union*	Evangelical Church of the Union
GDC	*Glaubensbewegung Deutscher Christen*	German-Christian (Faith) Movement
HJ	*Hitler-Jugend*	Hitler Youth
JB	*Jungreformatorische Bewegung*	Young Reformation Movement

KDC	*Kirchenbewegung Deutsche-Christen*	Church Movement of German-Christians (Thuringia)
LWF		Lutheran World Federation
NSDAP	*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeitpartei*	National Socialist German Workers Party; National Socialists; Nazi Party
PNB	*Pfarrernotbund*	Pastors Emergency League
RKA	*Reichskirchenausschuß*	Reich Church Commission
SS	*Schutzstaffel*	Nazi elite guard
VELKD	*Vereinigte evangelische-lutherische Kirche in Deutschland*	United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany
VKL	*Vorläufige Kirchenleitung*	Provisional Church Leadership

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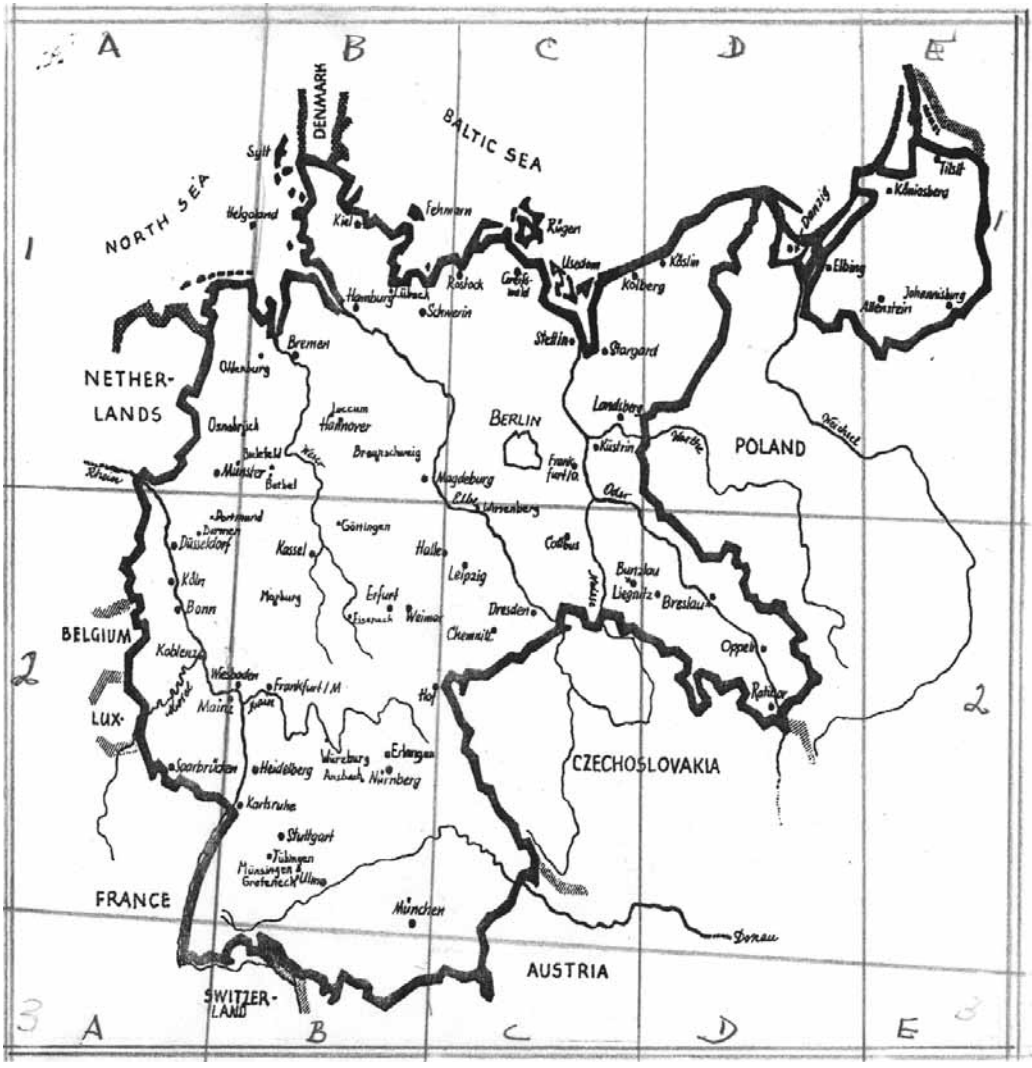

Fig. 1: Germany in 1935

Introduction

Much has been written about the Christian churches in Germany during the Hitler years. A bibliography published in 1958 on the history of the church struggle from 1933 to 1945 listed 5,566 titles already available at that time, and hundreds, if not thousands, of books and articles have appeared subsequently. So why has the present volume been written at all? Briefly, there are three reasons behind this book. First, though Lutherans comprise the majority of the German population, the history of the Confessional Lutheran churches during the Third Reich has never been written. Second, the fragmentary discussions of Lutherans in some of the more general histories of this period have been unsatisfactory and call for a correction. Third, important new historical sources that have recently become available shed a different light upon the teachings and actions of Lutherans under Adolf Hitler.

In the pages that follow, the viewpoint of the Confessional Lutheran churches and their leaders and theologians will be presented. Occasionally, this will lead to pointing out where Lutheran teachings and practices differed from Calvinism, Barthianism, and the Prussian Union. Because previous histories generally presented Reformed Protestant thinking, the present book offers a new perspective. This history could not have been written without noting these distinctions because the behavior of the Confessional Lutherans would be inexplicable in isolation from their ideology. Some stricter Lutherans, for example, feared that participation in the attempted German Evangelical Church advocated by Hitler would drag them into a new Union church. Their resistance was not necessarily the result of personal virtue; the restraints came from their understanding of what comprised the church. That the author sees himself as a Confessional Lutheran will doubtless be discernible, but the intention of this book is to explain

why German Lutherans were cautious of attempts at unification and how this led them to act as they did.

Church Rivalries in Germany

Since the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, there has been unfriendly rivalry between Lutheran and Reformed or Calvinist church bodies. It has been difficult for German Lutherans to forget the aggressive, deep inroads made by Calvinism into Lutheran church bodies throughout the preceding centuries. Almost every Protestant territory that later became a Reformed or Union land church[1] (*Landeskirche*) had once been Lutheran and had been "converted" by a Calvinist or Reformed ruler or by a Crypto-Calvinist theologian. The list of those Lutheran territories is long and includes, among others, the Palatinate, Anhalt, Bremen, East Friesland, and Galicia. On the other hand, there was scarcely a case in which Lutherans subverted Calvinist territories. Moreover, the Electorate of Saxony twice fell to a takeover by deceptive Crypto-Calvinist theologians, takeovers that were later reversed. Lutherans often wondered why the Reformed were constantly seeking church fellowship despite their almost contemptuous attitude toward the "Catholic" character of Lutheran doctrine and liturgy.

A Great Misfortune: The Prussian Union

Then came the greatest aggression of all: the Prussian Union, engineered by Frederick William III, a Hohenzollern king of the Reformed faith.[2] Frederick had married a Lutheran woman, with whom he could not receive Communion in the Lutheran Church. He was determined to overcome the long-held rule that Lutheran altars are only for Lutheran communicants. Beginning in 1817, the king carried out his unification program, which included his *Union Agenda* (a book that was supposed to provide uniform services in Lutheran and Reformed churches) and the implementation of his political structure that forcibly united

1 The use of the term "land church" or "territorial church" denotes a church of a particular territory or region of the German federal union.

2 Occasionally in the literature, the royal Prussian Church formed by Frederick William III is designated as the "Old Prussian Union" to differentiate it from later territorial and political manifestations, including the church body formed by the German Empire and the socialist interim government from November 1918 to August 1919. The Union church that survived into the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) remained historically based on the earlier Church of the Prussian Union. Therefore this book simplifies the discussion by using the "Prussian Union" to describe the consistent theological and cultural motifs of unionism throughout various political epochs.

the members of 7,000 Lutheran congregations with fewer than 130 Reformed congregations. This structure was called the Prussian Union.

Although approximately 98 percent of the Prussian Union consisted of Lutheran congregations, the Prussian crown introduced measures that strongly discriminated against Lutherans. In fact, it became illegal to recognize a Lutheran church within the Prussian Union. During a period of stern persecution, a group that called itself the "Old Lutherans" withdrew from the state church and established its own denomination, the Free Lutheran Church. At first the members of the Free Lutheran Church were bitterly persecuted by the state church, but later the Old Lutherans won toleration.[3] Seeking to avoid the persecution befalling Lutherans who adhered to the Confessions, other Old Lutherans, looking for religious liberty, immigrated to the United States or to Australia. It is estimated that about 8,000 people came from Prussia to the United States during this period of persecution.[4] Most of these immigrants joined one of two conservative bodies: either The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod or the Buffalo Synod, which today is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The forced merger (*Gleichschaltung*) in Germany of Lutherans and Calvinists into one state church established the pattern for Adolf Hitler's endeavor a century later to herd all German Protestants into one Reich Church that would be submissive to him. As a mixture of conflicting confessions, the Prussian Union lacked unity in doctrine and practice. It was actually a bureaucratic system of church administration more than it was a real church. As a huge ecclesiastical umbrella, the Prussian Union destroyed the former paternalistic system in which the members of a small German territorial church, governed by a Lutheran prince, felt

3 The classic example of persecution of Lutherans under the Prussian Union took place in the church at Hönigern, Silesia. After four months of resistance by the people, during which time their dauntless pastor was imprisoned, the lay leaders still refused to accept a Union pastor or to turn over the keys of the church. On December 22, 1834, the Prussian Union authorities returned with 400 infantry soldiers, 50 cuirassiers, and 50 hussars. When the leaders of the congregation continued to refuse to turn over the keys, the military smashed open the church doors with battering rams and seized possession of the building. On Christmas Day 1834, the new pastor, fortified by the presence of several officials of the Prussian Union, conducted the service according to the *Union Agenda*. After this violent introduction of the Prussian Union, the church life of the congregation at Hönigern declined rapidly (related in Sasse, *In Statu Confessionis*, 2:184–93). The Prussian Union and events at Hönigern are also described in Hans Preuß, *Von den Katakomben bis zu den Zeichen der Zeit* (Erlangen: Martin Luther-Verlag, 1936).

4 See Jobst Schöne, "Georg Philip Eduard Huschke (1801–1886): Ein Rückblick," *Lutherische Beiträge* 6, no. 3 (2001): 205–13; for numbers of immigrants to the United States, see Schöne, "Huschke," 207.

themselves united with their ruler in one faith. The people lost their sense of ownership as their historic church was replaced and their Lutheran faith was suppressed in the interest of "unity." Thus church life declined alarmingly in the Prussian Union. Moreover, the Prussian state, with its militarist and expansionist policies, spread its tentacles over neighboring German territories, such as Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein, Rhineland, Westphalia, Hanover, and Hesse.

Even as the political leaders fought the Prussian advance, unwilling churchmen in these neighboring territories struggled against a takeover by the Prussian Union Church. These church leaders justifiably feared a loss of confessional integrity and a repetition of the Lutheran persecutions that had occurred in Prussia. This led to the formation of federations between members of the Confessional Lutheran land churches and Lutherans within the "destroyed" churches that already had been absorbed into the Prussian Union. Out of this situation, a rivalry developed between the leaders of the Lutheran land churches and those of the Union land churches who owed their power to the Prussian state.

The Confessional Lutherans, mindful of the past aggressive behavior of the Prussian Union, found themselves faced with a threefold threat to their independence during the Third Reich: the German Evangelical Church or Reich Church, the Confessing Church, and the Barmen Declaration. The Confessional Lutherans also were surrounded by the so-called German-Christians, whom they came increasingly to recognize as henchmen of the Nazi Party.[5] What stance should Confessional Lutherans take toward the formation of the German Evangelical Church or DEK (*Deutsche evangelische Kirche*)? Some of the professors at the University of Erlangen regarded the DEK as a harmless reorganization of the old Federation of German Evangelical Churches. These professors, including Werner Elert and Paul Althaus, thought that within this new organization the Lutheran Church could retain its identity and even assume its rightful place as the dominant Protestant denomination in Germany. Other professors at the University of Erlangen, including Hermann Sasse and Friedrich Ulmer, took a more negative

5 *Christliche-Deutsche Bewegung* (CDB), the original title for the Christian-Germans, is a hyphenated title in which *Christliche* and *Deutsche* are adjectival and therefore bound together with the hyphen. They are translated accordingly into English. Most Christian-Germans espoused traditional Christianity and refrained from political activism. The *Glaubensbewegung Deutscher Christen* (GDC), which is not adjectival in the German, translates into English as the "German-Christian Faith Movement" or, more succinctly, "German-Christian Movement" (because *German* and *Christian* are adjectival in the English translation, the hyphen is added). Because many German-Christians sympathized with the Nazis and infiltrated the churches to hamper legitimate work, the retention of the hyphen should help to remind the reader that these Germans opposed traditional Christianity.

attitude, regarding the DEK as a Trojan horse that would later bring the Lutheran land churches into an enlarged Union church.

Although the Confessional Lutheran land churches of Bavaria, Hanover, and Württemberg avoided a takeover by the National Socialists, the Prussian Union, with its unwieldy size and its ambiguity in faith and practice, fell with little resistance into the hands of the German-Christians in 1934. Henceforth, its huge bureaucracy was controlled by the Nazis. Church leaders who refused to recognize the Nazi leadership in the Prussian Union formed the Confessing Church, which was also a unionistic church. Out of its circles, and strongly influenced by the theological system of Karl Barth, came the leading ideas of the Barmen Declaration, which placed the Lutheran and Reformed creeds on the same level, calling them both "Reformational confessions." This declaration was stoutly rejected by most Confessional Lutherans.

Struggles within the Union Churches

One can feel the shame and pain of those Lutheran members of the Prussian Union as their denomination, its backbone removed and robbed of its theological integrity by King Frederick William III, skidded into Hitler's Reich Church and became a puppet sect. With their denomination in the ruthless hands of German-Christians, those who cared about truth and integrity built and participated in, at great personal peril, an underground church, the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*). Courageous members of the "destroyed" Prussian Union churches rejected the new official Nazi church bureaucracies that were dominated by the German-Christians. Instead, they set up governing systems that they called "Brethren Councils" (*Brüder-Räte*). Confessing Church members lived under the constant threat of the fury of Hitler's puppet churchmen. Many church leaders landed in concentration camps or found a martyr's death, desolate and removed from family and friends.

Members of the Confessing Church often resented the fact that the intact churches did not develop underground systems to work closely with the Brethren Councils of the destroyed churches. However, many leaders in the destroyed Lutheran land churches were wary of involvement in the Brethren Councils, which they regarded as a form of the Prussian Union operating within the Confessing Church. Therefore the leaders in the destroyed Lutheran churches turned to their colleagues in the intact Lutheran land churches for support. To avoid becoming part of the Union churches, they set up "Luther Councils" (*Luther-Räte*) after the pattern of the Brethren Councils. This development was deeply resented by some leaders of the Confessing Church, particularly by those involved in its more radical wing, the Dahlem Front, which was led by Martin Niemöller.

Instead of being jealous of and angry with the Confessional Lutheran churches, some of the leaders of the Confessing Church, such as Wilhelm Zoellner, recognized the need to correct the weaknesses in doctrine and practice of the Union churches. After the fall of Nazism in 1945, some members of the Dahlem Front, still resenting Confessional Lutheran solidarity, resumed the church struggle (*Kirchenkampf*), this time against the Lutheran land churches. Local Brethren Councils became a lobbying force by which zealots of the Confessing Church countermanded conservative Lutherans and their duly constituted church governments.

Guarding against Writing History out of Context

After World War II the rivalry between the Union churches and the Confessional Lutheran churches was reflected in the early histories of the church struggle. Church historians with Union church leanings chronicled the events under the Third Reich in a manner that discredited the Confessional Lutherans. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the discussions concerning the Lutheran opposition to the Barmen Declaration. Perhaps it was not always the deliberate intention of historians to present the Lutheran churches and their people in an unfavorable light. A history of Confessional Lutherans during the Third Reich was lacking and much important information was unavailable. Especially in the first two decades following World War II, historians lacked access to source materials. But this has changed. For example, Bishop August Marahrens and the Church of Hanover had been presented as shameless collaborators with the Nazis, but studies by Eberhard Klügel and his publication of important documents relating to Marahrens and the Hanoverian church did much to exonerate the bishop and to provide a more balanced picture.[6] Another important event was the publication of the journals of Bishop Hans Meiser and the papers of Bishop Theophil Wurm; both projects have provided a different picture of Confessional Lutherans during the Third Reich.[7] Because the thrust of Prussian anger has been directed against the three intact Lutheran land churches of Bavaria, Württemberg, and Hanover,

6 See p. 17 for bibliographic information on Klügel's work. Klügel's positive assessment of Marahrens was challenged by Gerhard Besier, "*Selbstreinigung" unter britischer Besatzungsherrschaft: Die Evangelisch-lutherische Landeskirche Hannovers und ihr Landesbischof Marahrens 1945–1947* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986). Of course, the years covered by Besier do not fall within the scope of the present study, which ends with the fall of Nazism in 1945.

7 For the papers of Bishop Hans Meiser, see Meiser, *Verantwortung*. For the papers of Bishop Theophil Wurm, see Schäfer, *Wurm*; see also Schäfer, *Württemberg*.

the discovery and availability of these primary sources makes a fresh study mandatory.

Moreover, some previous writers, besides holding an undue bias in favor of the Prussian Union, lacked a sense of the historical context or what is called in the science of historiography a "historical frame of reference." Some writers were too quick to judge people from the past without proper attention to circumstances during the Third Reich. These writers harshly condemned their subjects on the basis of the far better conditions prevailing in the 1960s or 1970s. The time has come for a historical treatment in which the writer avoids judging the motives of Christians who struggled during the Third Reich and a treatment in which a broader understanding is given to the difficulties of those who suffered in the Nazi police state.

It is difficult for us to place ourselves in the historic circumstances of those who lived in Hitler's totalitarian state. The Germans who by 1938 or 1940 were strongly against Hitler could not see the danger in 1933.[8] For example, Friedrich Baumgärtel, a professor at the University of Erlangen who had been an officer in the German army during World War II and who was noted for his steadfast opposition to National Socialism, once told me that a U.S. journalist had asked him, "How could you have been an army officer at Hamburg and have done nothing to stop the goings-on in the concentration camp there?" Baumgärtel responded, "Sir, as one coming from a free society, you have no concept of what it was like to live in a totalitarian state, where all information was controlled by an evil government and where everyone was moved by fear." He then told the young reporter, "I did not know that there was a prison camp near Hamburg, but if I had found out about it, I can assure you that I wouldn't have told a single soul." It is almost impossible for us to imagine the anxiety and fear imposed by a terrorist police state. The scholarly historian must, of course, chronicle the vices as well as the virtues that are a part of the story. The historian must control the temptation to judge those who lived in a fascist state so there can be an understanding of what really happened.

Paul Althaus, in his classroom lecture on Christian ethics, commented in 1953 about the problems that earnest Christians faced during the Third Reich. He

8 Even Karl Barth, who severely castigated the Confessional Lutherans after 1945 for not recognizing Hitler's agenda earlier, admitted an inability in 1938 to see the true dangers of Nazism, describing "how the two great opponents in this struggled . . . confronted each other, how in this meeting at first neither side understood the other, and how then both the church as well as the state revealed themselves in their true nature, how they got into conflict and what, at the end, on the part of both sides, became the final result of the controversy" (*Not und Verheißung im Deutscher Kirchenkampf* [Bern: Buchhandlung der Evangelischen Gesellschaft, 1938], 3).

pointed out that many government officials found themselves in positions in which the Nazi government demanded actions the officials felt to be wicked. Such calls to action demanded officials make a decision between right and wrong, obedience or disobedience, and conscience and the ruling party. These officials also had to take into consideration the personal consequences of the decision, as well as the consequences that might be applied to their families or others. If an official resigned, what kind of person would the replacement be? Thousands who defied orders wound up in concentration camps and their positions were given to corrupt Nazis who followed diabolical orders without question and who chose to inflict additional suffering on the people with whom they dealt. Therefore many earnest Christians tried to pursue a moderate course, avoiding trouble by pretending to support the Nazi cause but attempting to mitigate evil measures whenever possible.

Several Previous Studies

At this point, let us look briefly at the works of several previous writers. One of the most widely known books on the churches during the Third Reich is the two-volume *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich* by Klaus Scholder.[9] Scholder must be commended for his painstaking and detailed research. Unfortunately, he is strongly biased against the Confessional Lutherans and favors those who support the Union church and the Barmen Declaration. Thus Scholder's stance leads him at times to a misleading presentation of the facts. For example, he often lumps Paul Althaus with Wilhelm Stapel, Emanuel Hirsch, and Friedrich Gogarten as members of a group of "political theologians." This "guilt by association" grouping is misleading, not only because Stapel was not a theologian but also because Althaus rejected the extreme positions of these three writers. Actually, Karl Barth, whom Scholder places in a favorable light, was the political theologian *par excellence*. Unfortunately, Scholder's work was never completed; it stopped in the year 1934 because of Scholder's untimely death.

A similar prejudice is visible in Arthur C. Cochrane, an American pupil of Karl Barth. Cochrane authored *The Church's Confession under Hitler*.[10] Cochrane regards the Barmen Declaration as the only "confession under Hitler," quite oblivious to its contradictions of Lutheran theology. Although he acknowledges that Hermann Sasse was the first to write against Nazi ideology (in 1932), Cochrane

9 See p. 19 for bibliographic details. The English translation is *The Churches and the Third Reich*, trans. John Bowden, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987–1988).

10 Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Church's Confession under Hitler* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962).

blames even Sasse for rejecting the Barmen Declaration in favor of Lutheran Confessional theology, as if one does not have the right to speak out as a Lutheran.

The German Churches under Hitler, the impartial and fair monograph by another American, Ernst Christian Helmreich, is perhaps the most useful book on the subject in English. More evenhanded than Scholder is the massive three-volume work completed by Kurt Meier, *Der evangelische Kirchenkampf.* Moreover, whereas the early death of Scholder prevented his work from going beyond the year 1934, Meier's massive work covers the entire period in great detail. Meier presented much material found nowhere else, and his large work is a valuable mine of historical information, to which the present writer gladly confesses his indebtedness, as is shown by the large number of acknowledgments to Meier in the notes of this work. Also helpful are Meier's earlier monographs on the Jewish people and on the German-Christians; much of the material in these smaller books was incorporated into his later three-volume history.[11]

The publications of Wilhelm Niemöller and Berndt Hamm are highly partisan and one-sided. Niemöller published one of the earliest accounts of the church struggle in his monograph *Die evangelische Kirche im Dritten Reich*.[12] Hamm, Werner Elert's successor in the chair of church history at the University of Erlangen, writes extremely disparaging accounts of Elert and Althaus. Hamm's essays are marked by three fatal weaknesses: (1) In criticizing his subjects, he fails to consider the historical context of the difficult times under Hitler and condemns people from a postwar vantage point. (2) He seems to manipulate historical facts to achieve his purpose, leaving out details prejudicial to his own interests. (3) He exhibits an accusatory style that some people in the Confessing Church learned from their Nazi opponents.

Friedrich Baumgärtel of Erlangen sounded a warning against manipulating the facts of history. Initially, he wrote only a book review of Niemöller's monograph, pointing out some serious discrepancies in Niemöller's work. After Niemöller angrily responded to the book review, Baumgärtel expanded his study into a small book published in 1959 as *Wider die Kirchenkampf-Legenden*.[13] Baumgärtel criticized Niemöller, noting that he had selected material that made the Confessional Lutherans look bad and had suppressed evidence that was unfavorable to the Prussian Union, of which Niemöller was a member. Although Baumgärtel's slim volume provoked much anger from the Dahlem Front, sober historians have lauded its accuracy. Karlmann Beyschlag, a professor at the Uni-

11 See p. 17 for bibliographic details on the work by Helmreich and p. 18 for details on the work by Meier.

12 See p. 18 for bibliographic details.

13 Neuendettelsau: Freimund, 1959; repr., 1976.

versity of Erlangen, published a valuable history entitled *Die Erlanger Theologie*.[14] In an appendix, he provides important documents regarding Althaus and Elert during the *Kirchenkampf*.

14 See p. 15 for bibliographic details.

CHAPTER ONE

The Background of the Church Struggle (*Kirchenkampf*)

This opening chapter introduces the players in the drama of the *Kirchenkampf*: the different churches, the various organizations linking church leaders with the social and political currents, and the National Socialist Party (Nazi Party). This chapter defines the tenets of the Confessional Lutheran churches, the Prussian Union and other Union churches, the Confessing Church and its councils, as well as the other Protestant churches that were present when Adolf Hitler seized political power in Germany in 1933. After a brief review of the political and religious currents of the time, especially the role of the National Socialist Party and the Christian-German and German-Christian Movements, the focus turns to the various ways church leaders tried to respond to the challenge of the Nazi Party. Finally, the chapter closes with a look at the theological faculty at the University of Erlangen, which was the most prominent voice of Lutheran theology during the Third Reich.

The Protestant Churches of Germany in 1933–1934

In Germany all the state churches were abolished as such in 1918 and replaced by twenty-seven autonomous land churches, besides the provincial churches of the Prussian Union.[1] Together, Protestants made up about 60 percent of the total German population in 1933. Lutherans, both in confessional churches and in Union churches, made up almost all of this number.

1 A list of the Free Lutheran churches is given in Hermelink, 29–30.

The following list identifies the Confessional Lutheran land churches and their membership by state.

State	Membership	Percentage of Total Population
Bavaria	1,598,442	21 percent
Württemberg	1,722,295	67 percent
Hanover	2,414,232	92 percent
Schleswig-Holstein	1,420,777	94 percent
Free State of Saxony	4,465,880	89 percent
Mecklenburg (two land churches combined in 1934)	731,081	94 percent
Thuringia (numerous smaller territorial churches combined in 1920)	1,412,013	92 percent
Braunschweig	464,175	94 percent
Oldenburg	101,513	95 percent
Schaumburg-Lippe	45,001	98 percent

The old Hanseatic cities reported as follows:

City	Membership	Percentage of Total Population
Hamburg	1,006,206	85 percent
Lübeck	121,093	95 percent

Besides this, the ecclesiastical territories formerly belonging to the bishop of Lübeck, centering in the cities of Eutin and Oldenburg, had 45,895 Lutherans representing 97 percent of the population. Aside from a heavy plurality of Lutherans in the Union churches, the Confessional Lutheran churches in Germany totaled about 14,200,000 members in 1933.

There were relatively few purely Reformed land churches in Germany. Nineteenth-century Prussia had had only about 130 Calvinist congregations, and when they were forcibly united with 7,000 Lutheran congregations by Frederick William III into the Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union, their identity was seriously impaired. As more Union churches were formed, Reformed congregations disappeared. In 1933–1934 a Reformed church remained in the state of Hanover with 228,775 members, which comprised 7 percent of the population. Birkenfeld, a former territory about 40 miles north of Saarbrücken, also had a Reformed church that had 43,721 members, which represented 79 percent of the population. The

Reformed church in the state of Lippe had 154,050 members or 94 percent of the population; however, a separate "Lutheran Class" included eleven staunchly Confessional Lutheran congregations. The largest Reformed city was Bremen, though the Reformed members were contained within a Union church. Additionally, though many of the churches were Reformed, the cathedral and several parishes in Bremen had remained Lutheran after the forceful introduction of Calvinism. In Bavaria there also were several Reformed congregations, including the Huguenot church in Erlangen and St. Martha in Nuremberg.

There were various separate Union churches. The Prussian Union, which numbered about 20,000,000 members, was divided among the following provincial churches:

State	Percentage of Total Population
East Prussia	82 percent
Brandenburg	91 percent
Pomerania	94 percent
Posen	62 percent
Silesia	50 percent
Saxony Province	89 percent
Westphalia	46 percent
Rhineland	29 percent
Memel	92 percent
Danzig	56 percent
Poland	12 to 13 percent
Upper Silesia	19 congregations[2]

In several cases, the merger of Lutherans and Calvinists took place during a Prussian military occupation and was subsequently never rescinded. In 1933, there were four Union churches in Hesse with membership totaling about 2,541,000 members. In Baden there was a Union church of 895,469 members that represented 66 percent of the population. The Union Church of Anhalt, with a strong Reformed presence, had 319,129 members, embracing 91 percent of the population. The church with the longest name was the United Protestant Evangelical Christian Church of the Palatinate, which had 544,991 members or 53 percent of the population. The Palatinate was strongly Calvinist.[3]

2 The exact percentile, a tiny fraction of the total population, was not supplied.

3 All the preceding statistics are from *KJahr 1932*, 561–69. For the sake of completeness, the list of Prussian Union churches includes Upper Silesia; however, Upper Silesia

Eight Free Lutheran churches were listed in the 1932 *Kirchliches Jahrbuch*.[4] The incomplete figures listed 4,900 members besides those of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Prussia (Old Lutheran), which had 57,000 members and 153 churches.

Other denominations in Germany in 1933 included the Moravians with 9,640 members; the Mennonites with 21,390 members; the Baptists with 68,000 adult members; the Methodists with 51,396 members; the Salvation Army, which listed 189,440 employees and adherents; and several smaller evangelical groups that totaled fewer than 50,000 members.[5]

In 1866 the rule of Prussia had spread, and as it expanded, so did the tentacles of the Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union. It moved into previously Lutheran territories and took over or absorbed churches in Schleswig-Holstein, Hanover, and Hesse. Because the minister for culture and education (*Kultusminister*) exerted a strong influence over higher education, the universities of Kiel, Göttingen, and Marburg became staffed with professors who were friendly to the Prussian Union and critical of Confessional Lutheranism. These universities never regained their status as strong centers of Lutheranism. Three universities remained the bulwark of Lutheran theology: Erlangen, Leipzig, and Rostock. At times, Greifswald and Dorpat (Tartu, in Estonia) were also centers of Confessional Lutheranism.[6]

Hermann Sasse, who had grown up in the Prussian Union and served in it before moving to the University of Erlangen in 1933, wrote in 1945 that the Prussian Union had for a long time been a political instrument of the state, that its theologians had been the spokesmen of an ideology of ecclesial subservience to the civil order, and that these theologians had thereby distorted the teaching of Luther.[7] Sasse pointed out that not only had Luther called civil rulers "heroes and miracle men" but also that he had sometimes named them "God's jailors and hangmen" and that on occasion he pilloried them as "usually the greatest fools or the most evil rascals on earth." Sasse charged that in the 1930s not only Prussian Union theologians but also Confessional Lutherans were prone to quote Luther's complimentary descriptions of political leaders and keep his biting criticisms of rulers well hidden in a drawer.[8]

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had only a small number of churches and the percentage of the population is not provided.

4 *KJahr 1932*, 588.

5 *KJahr 1932*, 590–94.

6 Sasse, *In Statu Confessionis*, 1:293.

7 Sasse, *In Statu Confessionis*, 1:298.

8 Sasse, *In Statu Confessionis*, 1:297.