

# *ACCH Quarterly* Vol. 18, No. 2, June 2012

## Letter from the editors: June 2012.



The Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche, located at Breitscheidplatz in West Berlin, stands as a memorial to the destruction of the Second World War. It is a member of the Community of the Cross of Nails at Coventry Cathedral, devoted to forgiveness and reconciliation in the wake of the bombing raids and building 'a kinder, more Christ-like world.'

Dear Friends,

Once again we are pleased to present you with a new issue of the *ACCH Quarterly*. As is so often the case, our attention returns to two prominent themes in modern German church history: Dietrich Bonhoeffer (and more broadly, the Confessing Church) and the Holocaust.

On the former theme, John Conway reviews the newest (and final) volume of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, English Edition, which considers Bonhoeffer's work in theological education during the later 1930s. Alongside this, we have included Matthew Hockenos' interesting reflection on Confessing Church leader Martin Niemöller's relationship with post-war America, and Manfred Gailus' memorial address celebrating the life and death of Friedrich Weissler, the first member of the Confessing Church to have been murdered by the National Socialist regime in the course of its campaign against the German churches. We hope to bring you further reflections of this sort in the future, as we seek to broaden the ways in which the *ACCH Quarterly* interacts with the history of German and European church history over the past century.

The second theme – the relationship of the Christian churches to the Holocaust – is taken up by Victoria Barnett, who reviews two monographs on the subject of the complicity of the churches and other institutions in the Holocaust. This subject also appears in a review of the conference “Betrayal of the Humanities.” John Conway reviews Israeli politician Avraham Burg’s meditation on the legacy of the Holocaust in Israel, while Matthew Hockenos reports from the Scholars’ Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches, which took place recently in Rochester, NY.

We believe that these and other contributions to the journal contribute to the ongoing historical, theological, and moral dialogue about the relationship between church and state and the responsibilities of Christians in times of crisis.

On behalf of all the *ACCH Quarterly* editors,

Kyle Jantzen, Ambrose University College

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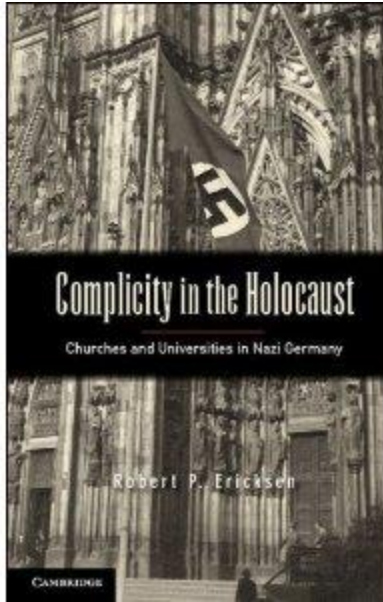
## Review Article: Academic and Ecclesiastical Complicity in the Third Reich

By Victoria J. Barnett, Director of Church Relations, U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

Robert P. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Jens Gundlach, *Heinz Brunotte 1896-1984: Anpassung des Evangeliums an die NS-Diktatur. Eine biographische Studie* (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 2010).

The issue of complicity has become a major focus of Holocaust historiography in recent years, fueled by the research of historians like Christopher Browning, Robert Gellately, Peter Hayes and many others. While the very word "complicity" connotes a more secondary, passive role, the work of these scholars has documented the extent to which complicity was in fact an active and participatory process, particularly with regard to the persecution of the Jews. Germans from every walk of life participated in and benefited from these measures.



The role of academic and religious leadership deserves particular scrutiny. We hold these sectors to a higher standard, professionally and personally, not only because we expect that these people should have known better, but because of their role as authorities and models for millions of German students, academics, and churchgoers. One of the troubling questions, as Robert Ericksen notes in his new book, is whether the complicity of these leaders was a significant factor in giving legitimacy to the Nazi state – and therefore whether, as he puts it, the “ordinary Germans who became killers for the Nazi state felt that they had received permission from their churches or from their universities.”

In addition to being an excellent overview of the historical record of complicity in churches and universities, Ericksen’s book is a thoughtful and provocative study of the broader implications of this complicity, both during the Holocaust and in its aftermath. It is a revealing picture of the process by which these academic and church leaders, many of whom were internationally known, became complicit in a brutal, murderous dictatorship. While the reasons behind this were often complex, Ericksen states that the most straightforward conclusion is that they found the regime “acceptable.”

For many of these people, it appears that this acceptability was grounded in their ethnic nationalism and anti-Semitism, which obviously went hand-in-hand. Ericksen documents not only the widespread nature of both sentiments but their rapid growth in both churches and universities after World War I. In fact, one of the most interesting aspects of this book is the extent to which these attitudes were shaping German academics and church leaders long before the Nazi regime came to power. Göttingen historian Karl Brandt, for example, who was also vice-president of the International Society of Historians, wrote in 1914 of his hopes that regions both to the west and east could be reclaimed for Germany. For people like Brandt, Nazism represented the continuity of such hopes and the Second World War their possible fulfillment.

Ericksen also shows the extent to which National Socialism's early widespread appeal among younger Germans influenced the subsequent dynamics in universities. Nazi student organizations held the student leadership in many universities by 1931, which led to demonstrations, mobilization on behalf of Nazi causes (and attacks on critics of Nazi ideology) even before the Nazis came to power, notably in the 1931 case of pacifist theologian Günther Dehn. This also set the foundation for academic culture's rapid conformity to Nazism after January 1933 – helped, to be sure, by the civil service laws passed in April of that year, which at Göttingen University alone led to the dismissal of 25 percent of the faculty.

Ericksen does a good job of showing how these developments unfolded on the national level, but he focuses in particular on Göttingen University, which was internationally renowned not only for its theological faculty, but for a number of departments, including its math, physics, and history departments. In 1933, prominent and distinguished Jewish faculty throughout the university lost their jobs while equally prominent and distinguished faculty either refused to protest or publicly acquiesced. One of the few who protested was James Franck, a Jewish professor of physics who had been awarded the Nobel Prize in 1924 and was spared the first round of dismissals only because he was a World War I veteran. After he publicly resigned in protest he became the target of a petition circulated by his colleagues who accused him of “behaving dishonorably against the new German state.”

Ericksen traces not only the historical record but the intellectual history of historiography itself, showing the path by which respected academics adapted and accommodated their scholarship to Nazi ideology. As Ericksen shows, the roots of the *Historikerstreit* during the 1980s can be traced back to the ways in which prominent German historians during the Nazi era like Karl Brandt, Werner Conze and Theodor Schieder allowed their ideological agendas to distort their scholarship. One sees a very similar dynamic among the theologians who “nazified” their theology.

Ericksen's bleak portrayal of the universities is matched by his chapters on the Confessing Church and the Protestant and Catholic churches as a whole. Ericksen examines the attitudes toward Nazism before 1933 and then summarizes the reactions from within both churches from 1933-45. I found his analysis of the pre-1933 period and the early months of the dictatorship of greater interest, particularly in the case of the Catholic Church, which for a number of reasons was more critical of Nazi ideology during the 1920s. While there was greater openness toward Nazism among Protestants – evident particularly in the rise of the German Christian Faith Movement and related groups – Catholic leaders were concerned about the syncretism they saw in the NDSAP and the extreme views of spokesmen like Alfred Rosenberg. Yet after January 30, 1933, pragmatism and institutional self-interest carried the day. Once Hitler was in power, the Catholic Church found a way to make its arrangements with the regime; even the Center party voted for the Enabling Act in March 1933. As in the universities, the root of complicity in both churches was the “acceptability” of the core themes on the Nazi agenda, including remilitarization, restoration of national pride, and anti-Jewish measures. One doesn't get the sense from Ericksen's book that these theologians and academics “caved” under Nazi pressure but much rather that they welcomed the new regime and its possibilities, and successfully pursued their careers under it.



In many respects Heinz Brunotte is a textbook case of the issues that Ericksen raises – and yet in others his story is very complex. Brunotte was a pastor and church journalist who rose quickly through the ranks of the Hannover *Landeskirche* and became quite prominent after 1946, when he served terms as president of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany and the Evangelical Church of Germany.

Unlike most of the people Ericksen describes, Brunotte started out at the liberal end of the spectrum. A student of Karl Barth during the 1920s, he was a strong advocate of Weimar democracy who by the late 1920s joined the *Deinsener Konferenz*, a group of radical young pastors in Lower Saxony that had been founded by pacifist and Social Democrat Otto Piper. When the Nazi student organization at the university in Halle attacked Günther Dehn in 1931 and successfully thwarted his appointment as professor of theology (the Dehn affair is also discussed in Ericksen's book), Brunotte published a passionate defense of Dehn in the local *Protestantenblatt* that took the church to task for its failure to take a clear stand on the matter. Throughout 1931 and 1932 he wrote critically about the *völkisch* theology of people like Emanuel Hirsch and warned of the dangers National Socialism posed for the church. In 1932 he was already critical of the nationalism of his bishop August Marahrens; in 1933 he joined the *Pfarrernotbund* and eventually the Confessing Church.

Yet over the course of 1933 Brunotte began to shift toward a more favorable stance toward the German Christians and National Socialism itself. The shift was gradual and uneven – he was a member of the Confessing Church Council of Brethren until the end of 1934, and he remained sharply critical of Reich Bishop Ludwig Müller. For Brunotte the slippery slope toward complicity seems to have been paved by anti-Semitism, a certain openness to the Nazi national agenda, and a striking readiness to either compromise or pass the buck when the situation called for taking a stand – all the more puzzling given his outspoken record before 1933. Although he initially opposed the Aryan paragraph in the church, Brunotte did support Nazi anti-Jewish legislation and eventually wrote the 1939 German Evangelical Church *Erläss* that established regulations (including segregated congregations) for Christians of Jewish descent (and which was used to force them out of five *Landeskirchen*). Much later Brunotte

acknowledged that this was “a mistake,” but defended his actions, claiming that it was unrealistic to keep “non-Aryans” as members of the church at that time and that he thought differently later: “It was a mistake. This is what happens when one seeks to prevent something worse.”

Brunotte’s reaction to the cases of two “non-Aryan” pastors, Bruno Benfey and Paul Leo, is particularly telling. (Ericksen describes the Benfey case in his book as well.) Brunotte had known both pastors for years and considered Leo a close friend (like him, Leo had been a member of the *Deinsener Konferenz*). Benfey, a “non-Aryan” pastor in Göttingen, was the target of organized anti-Semitic attacks and propaganda both from outside the church and from within. After the church initiated disciplinary proceedings against him, Benfey lost his pastorate. After *Kristallnacht* he was sent to Buchenwald; he and his family were able to emigrate with the help of the *Büro Grüber*. Benfey had the support of some of his Göttingen parishioners, who sent a protest letter to Brunotte in the church leadership. Without comment, Brunotte simply forwarded the letter to the governing board of the Hannover church with a request for a report on the matter and what measures were being taken.

In 1946, Benfey returned to Germany and applied for reinstatement in his Göttingen parish, which was divided between parishioners who wanted his return and those who opposed it. Leading the opposition was one of Benfey’s co-pastors, Heinrich Runte, who had been a SA member and had been at the forefront of the move in 1937 to fire Benfey. Brunotte’s initial response (he was now a member of the Hannover governing church council) was to meet privately with Benfey and request that he withdraw his application. Benfey refused and pleaded with Brunotte to meet with his supporters, who included a high-ranking city official. Brunotte agreed to the meeting; in the meantime the issue had become public and Benfey’s supporters threatened to involve the British occupation authorities. Bowing to this pressure, the church superintendent created a third pastoral position in the parish for Benfey, who then had to begin a slow and uneasy process of reconciliation with Runte, who remained in the parish despite his SA background.

Paul Leo was forced into retirement and, like Benfey, taken to Buchenwald, where he was badly beaten. After his release the SS newspaper *Schwarzen Korps* published an article that attacked both Leo and the church for its support of “the Jew Leo” (the church was paying him a pension at that point). Brunotte wrote a lengthy internal memo about the case that defended Leo and his right to a pension – but noted that the ultimate decision in the matter had to be made by the church finance office in Hannover, which was directed by a German Christian. Brunotte also praised Leo’s gifts as a pastor “whose manner is not Jewish at all, even though he is 70% Jewish” and advised against any public comment by the church on the matter. Gundlach found no evidence that Brunotte became active on either man’s behalf in trying to get them released from Buchenwald. In both cases, Brunotte declared that his office was “not responsible” for the matter.

So it went. After September 1, 1939, Brunotte served as an officer in the invasion of Poland and wrote in his final report that “in general I was glad to be a soldier” (the Reich Church Ministry obtained an exemption for him in December and he returned to his church duties). During the war years Brunotte’s standard response to church

conflicts with the Nazi state – over issues like euthanasia and the plight of “non-Aryan Christians” – was to opt for what he described in one instance as “the lesser evil.” In fact, the “lesser evil” consistently meant compromising with the state and, as Gundlach notes, Brunotte’s language and arguments invariably tended to affirm the state’s positions, particularly where it concerned those affected by Nazi racial laws. He wrote a memo titled “The fight against wayward gypsies,” opposing their baptism, and wherever “non-Aryan Christians” were concerned his arguments were based entirely on Nazi legislation and the extent to which such individuals could be considered “Jewish” according to the Nuremberg laws.

At the time of Germany’s defeat in 1945, Brunotte was the senior official at the Evangelical Church Chancellery (Church President Friedrich Werner was a prisoner of war). His behavior in the early postwar period was a combination of opportunism with regard to the future and self-justification with respect to the past. As a member of the *Kommission für die Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes in der nationalsozialistischen Zeit*, Brunotte helped shape a hagiographic picture of the Protestant Church’s record under Nazism.

The storm broke in 1970 when Wolfgang Gerlach wrote his critical dissertation about the Confessing Church (ultimately published in 1987 as *Und die Zeugen schwiegen* and in English translation as *And the Witnesses were Silent*). Gerlach documented Brunotte’s complicity, including his authorship of the 1939 *Erlaß*. Brunotte worked actively to prevent the book’s German publication, accusing Gerlach of a retroactive morality that didn’t take into account what people knew and thought at the time. His criticism of Gerlach gives some insight into the larger dynamics of complicity (and the postwar rationalizations of such behavior): “One must know,” he wrote in refutation of Gerlach’s account, “that it was sometimes unavoidable first to emphasize that one was in agreement with the major goals of the state in order to gain any kind of hearing for what one was really aiming for.”

Reading Gundlach’s study in conjunction with Ericksen’s book is a fascinating and troubling exercise. One of the aspects of this history that has most haunted me personally over the years is how Germans could so completely abandon or turn against people they knew – colleagues, friends and neighbors – in some cases from one day to the next. How did they sleep at night? By what intellectual and moral sleights of hand did they rationalize such betrayals? In 1979 Brunotte even wrote the historian Hartmut Ludwig that Paul Leo had been “among my closest friends in the years before 1933.” Clearly Brunotte’s prejudices and his readiness to compromise with the state shaped his behavior, but in general his *modus operandi* was to avoid confrontation, to pass the buck, and then to rationalize his behavior. His record after 1933 is all the more troubling because of his early support of Günther Dehn, his opposition to National Socialism, his criticism of the narrowness of the church leadership in Hannover, and his membership in the Confessing Church.

Ericksen’s book is a large canvas, the superb product of his decades of study of German universities and churches and the processes of denazification and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Gundlach has given us a biographical study close-up view of how these issues played out in the life of one individual. Both books expand our understanding not only of the period from 1933 to 1945, but also of the larger implications for our understanding of the Holocaust,

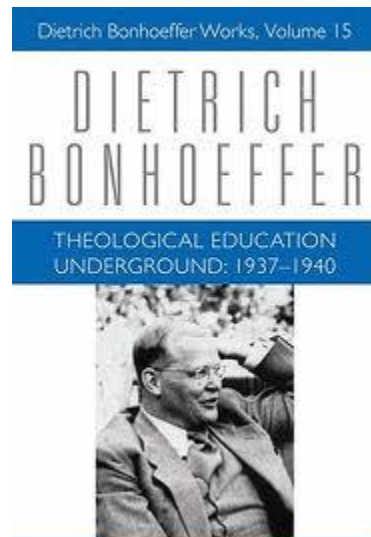


documenting, as Ericksen puts it, the “ease with which a commitment to one’s nation, plus some natural bending in the prevailing wind, can blind one to the moral implications of one’s stance.”

Tags: [complicity](#), [Heinz Brunotte](#), [Holocaust](#), [Jens Gundlach](#), [Robert P. Ericksen](#)

Review of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground: 1937-1940*, ed. Victoria J. Barnett, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 15 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 726 pp. ISBN 978-8006-9815-7.

By John S. Conway, University of British Columbia



In October 1937 the Gestapo ordered the closure of the Preachers Seminary for Confessing Church ordinands at Finkenwalde, which Dietrich Bonhoeffer had led for two and a half years. He now began a critical period of his life and ministry which was marked by much self-doubt and questioning about where his true discipleship lay. The letters, bible studies and essays contained in this volume give a vivid picture of his personal problems and choices, culminating in his visit to the United States in June-July 1939, but also in his well-known decision to return to Germany without delay to share his country’s fate since war looked inevitably close.

The central point of interest in this volume can be seen in the very full record of Bonhoeffer’s brief stay in New York, along with the evident disappointment of his American hosts, who thought they were offering him a valuable asylum from Europe’s turmoil. Essentially this visit revealed to Bonhoeffer the strength of his attachment to his home country and to the group of seminarians he had been training. It was this attachment which drew him back to Germany only weeks before the outbreak of hostilities. It was a decision he never regretted, even though the consequences for his career were to be so fateful. These dilemmas were to be well illustrated, particularly in the circular letters which he wrote to the now dispersed seminarians, most of whom were soon to be called up for

military service, and of whom a horrendously large proportion were to lose their lives. By such means Bonhoeffer tried to maintain their theological education underground, which the Gestapo was seeking to stamp out. Despite this harassment, Bonhoeffer firmly upheld his theological stance of resolute opposition to any measures designed to enforce obedience to the Nazi ideology.

It is however notable that this concentration of effort involved a reticence about the traumatic political events of those years, from the seizure of Austria, the Munich crisis of September 1938, the notorious pogrom against Germany's Jews in November, and the various steps which led to the outbreak of war in September 1939. It is not clear from the documents here printed whether this abstention from political comment was due to the heavy hand of Nazi intimidation and censorship, or whether Bonhoeffer was giving all his concentration to the pastoral and counselling needs of his students. He certainly undertook numerous visits to see them both before his American visit and after, until forbidden by the Gestapo to travel to Berlin and the surrounding districts of Brandenburg. Yet, as the editor of the English edition, Victoria Barnett, rightly points out, this restraint, whether self-imposed or indicative of his precarious political situation, serves as a corrective to any easy assumptions that Bonhoeffer was always in the forefront of resistance to Nazism or loudly protested its increasingly oppressive measures. For example, the only sign of his referring to the outbursts of violence against the Jews in 1938 was a reference to the biblical passages which "lead deeply into prayer."

By the beginning of 1939, his personal dilemmas grew more acute. He could foresee that, at the age of thirty-three, he would likely be called up for military service, which he was determined to avoid. So in April he paid a quick visit to London, meeting with various leaders of the ecumenical movement, including Reinhold Niebuhr, who vigorously pressed him to return to New York and to the Union Theological Seminary so that he could undertake a number of engagements for both the church and university. Niebuhr's advocacy pulled all the rights strings. So Bonhoeffer sailed across the Atlantic, having delegated his responsibilities at home to a chosen group of pupils.

Much of his subsequent correspondence during the crucial month of June 1939, both to his German relatives and partners, as well as to his American contacts, is by now well known and is often quoted. But the full texts show that Bonhoeffer's rejection of the American offers was not in any way due to an aversion to the church situation in the United States. Indeed his insightful comments on the American churches during his brief stay show that he was much more appreciative of their situation than he had been during his earlier visit in 1931. The text of his thirty-page essay on "Protestantism without Reformation" commenting with remarkable perception on the state of the United States Protestant churches, which was composed during the final days of his stay, is here reprinted in full.

There is however no reason to question the version that it was the intensity of his attachment to Germany and to his coterie of friends there which drew him back, even though as he admitted: "in all my decisions, I am never completely clear about my motives. Is that a lack of clarity, inner dishonesty, or is it a sign that we are led beyond that which we can discern, or is it both?" The clearest statement of his position is contained in his letter to Reinhold

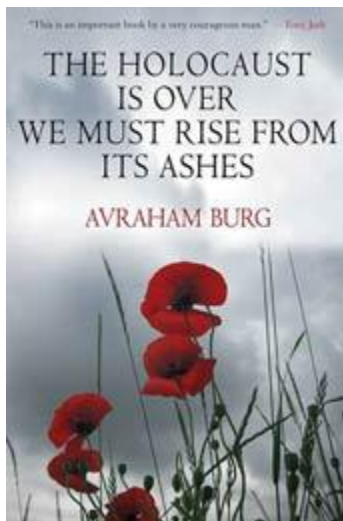
Niebuhr, outlining the terrible alternatives facing Christians in Germany. “I know which of these alternatives I must choose: but I cannot make that choice in security”.

Bonhoeffer's return to Germany was followed almost immediately by Hitler's ruthless aggression against Poland. The efforts of church leaders, including the Pope, to prevent the outbreak of hostilities had proved fruitless. But, even thereafter, during the period of the so-called “phony war,” several of Bonhoeffer's close associates in the ecumenical movement still tried to find some basis on which peace might be restored. But Bonhoeffer himself no longer indulged in such illusions. Instead he was to become persuaded that the only way ahead lay in the forcible overthrow of Hitler's regime. Needless to say, no surviving documents attest to this dramatic change from his earlier fervent advocacy of pacifism. The present volume therefore gives no hints, which are only spelled out in the subsequent and final volume dedicated to “Conspiracy and Imprisonment 1940-1945.”

Tags: [Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#), [Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works](#), [Theological Education Underground](#), [Victoria J. Barnett](#)

## Review of Avraham Burg, *The Holocaust Is Over. We Must Rise From Its Ashes*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 253 pp.

By John S. Conway, University of British Columbia



Twenty years ago Avraham Burg was elected to Israel's national parliament, the Knesset, and later became its speaker. He also took a leading position with the World Zionist Federation. His father was a long-time cabinet minister under Menachem Begin. So he belonged to the Israeli establishment. But more latterly, he has renounced his political career, being convinced that Israel's leaders have been following a dangerous and self-defeating course. Israel has for too long been captivated by the memory of the Holocaust and should now adopt a new and more liberal political stance. This book, with the provocative title *The Holocaust Is Over. We Must Rise From Its Ashes*. is his contribution towards this change of heart he now desires.

In Burg's view, since more than seventy years have now passed since the catastrophic crimes of the Holocaust, Israel must now move on. He believes that the legacy of the Holocaust has been misinterpreted and manipulated. The officially-sponsored commemoration ceremonies and rituals have only served to allow Israelis to cling to the tragedies of the past, and so block the path to a more positive future. He deplures, for instance, the fact that present-day school children are escorted to Poland to visit the death camps, and are taught to believe that they are all Shoah survivors. The Holocaust, he asserts, has produced in Israel a climate of defensive aggressiveness. Israel has adopted the legacy of insecurity characteristic of trauma victims. The result is a hard-faced belligerence, not only against the Palestinians inside its borders, but against all outsiders. Israel today is a nuclear power, armed to the teeth, and has the backing of the world's greatest power. Yet it believes it necessary to maintain a climate of hostility and isolation, upholding a militaristic society backed by all the latest weapons of mass destruction.

Israel, Burg believes, has developed muscle, not soul. Yet it remains haunted by the Shoah, which has become a stumbling block to any more positive steps for the future. As a result, Israel has followed a policy of repression of minorities at home, and of enmity towards such states as Syria, Libya and particularly at present Iran. When criticized by foreign observers, the Israeli leaders make use of the Holocaust as justification. Anyone who attacks them is seen as either an antisemite or as someone who can only imagine Jews as powerless victims. Netanyahu is only following the footsteps of many of his predecessors in demonizing Israel's enemies, and making plentiful use of comparisons with Nazism. Begin, for example, was ready enough to compare Arafat with Hitler, and to justify Israel's violent attack on Lebanon because "the alternative would be Treblinka, and we have decided there will be no more Treblinkas."

Burg's remedy is to move on, leave Auschwitz behind and learn to trust the world and humanity again. Israelis should take a wider view and universalize not nationalize the Holocaust. They should oppose human suffering in general rather than cling on to the one instance which most affected their predecessors seventy years ago. Instead of reproducing the mentality of an old, small East European Jewish town, forever persecuted, Israel should adopt the trail-blazing alternative forged by the early Zionists when they first arrived in the Middle East, redeeming the land through their hard labour and innovative social organisms.

Of course this criticism and these suggestions, coming from a prominent Israeli politician and opinion maker, aroused fierce anger in Israel's leading circles. He challenged the core of the national identity as developed over the past sixty years. Burg was dismissed as a romantic idealist, whose utopian solutions for world peace are wildly unrealistic. Yet Burg's optimistic hope is that Israel could become what its founders wanted – preaching and practising peace in a war-torn and strife-filled Middle East. This in his view could be the true legacy of the Holocaust.

In the wider perspective, Burg is surely right. Sooner or later the events of seventy years ago will begin to fade away. However much the memorialisation of the Holocaust is cultivated and expensively propagated amongst the Jewish population in Israel and abroad, there will come a time when the younger generation will look to other

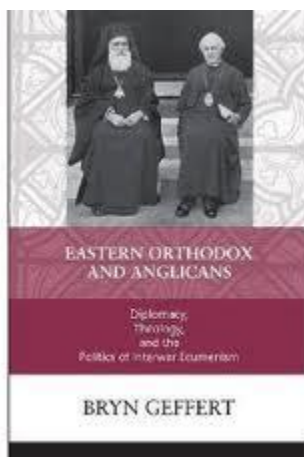
models for political guidance. The shock of the death camps, the gas chambers, the ghettos or the rampant brutality of Nazi thugs will all come to be seen as history, regrettable but over.

This translation into English from the original Hebrew is clearly aimed at the younger generation of American Jews, whom Burg believes will be the ones to give a new kind of leadership to the beleaguered Jewish community of today. American Jews are called, he claims, to take up the great spirit of universalism, once expressed by their nineteenth-century leader, Rabbi Julian Morgenstern. This would be a far more positive contribution than the continual emphasis on Holocaust disasters, so graphically rehearsed in American-made films. Modern Israel's identity, Burg holds, should be established on foundations of optimism, faith in humans and full trust in the family of nations. The era of fearful Judaism and paranoid Zionism is over. The faith of the Jewish people in the world and in humanity must be rehabilitated. But whether this passionate plea can outweigh the present Holocaust-dominated climate of fear and repression remains to be seen.

Tags: [Avraham Burg](#), [John S. Conway](#), [The Holocaust Is Over](#)

Review of Bryn Geffert, *Eastern Orthodox and Anglicans: Diplomacy, Theology, and the Politics of Interwar Ecumenism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 501 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-268-02975-3.

By John S. Conway, University of British Columbia



Sixty years ago, when I was a student at Cambridge, I attended meetings of the exotically named Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius. This organization, founded in the 1920s, was established to promote better relations between Anglicans and the Orthodox Churches of Eastern Europe. We were given a chance to meet heavily-bearded Russian clerics (in exile) or gaudily dressed Greek bishops. There was much talk about the desirability of church reunion. This was meat and drink for us members of the Student Christian Movement whose discipleship was largely based on promoting Christian unity through such bodies as the World Council of Churches. And the foreign visitors, despite their limited English, seemed glad to meet young, eager, but

ecumenically naive students at Britain's top university. But despite the high-flown rhetoric and the elaborate rituals, not much was achieved. Bryn Geffert's excellently researched and invigoratingly written survey of these relations during the twentieth century explains why. Or rather, why not.

After the disasters of the First World War, the leadership of the Anglican Church recognized the need for spiritual rebirth. They were well aware of the damage done to Christian credibility because of the churches' divisions. The Anglo-Catholic wing tried hard to patch over the long-standing quarrels with Rome but met only stinging rebuffs. So the Orthodox Churches looked to be more promising. In 1925 the sixteen hundredth anniversary of the Nicene Creed afforded the occasion to invite a high-ranking delegation of Orthodox clergy to come to England, where they were rapturously received. They were taken to Windsor Castle and Lambeth Palace. They met the Lord Mayor of London, and were feted at garden parties. The absence of theological discussions – and thus of theological disagreements – gave free rein to optimism about church reunion. They very much hoped that their example would draw other branches of the Christian world into the bosom of ecumenical unity. There was a great deal of wishful thinking.

For their part the Orthodox Churches, both in the Russian and Greek branches, desperately needed assistance. The 1917 Revolution had devastated the Russian Orthodox Church. Its patriarch was a prisoner of the Communists. Thousands of its priests, nuns and monks had been murdered. Its property had been confiscated. And its very survival, apart from the few clergy who had managed to escape, seemed problematical. Many of these now homeless exiles looked to the British government for both political and social relief. In Constantinople, the new Turkish government was waging a war against its Greek citizens, and expelling them en masse. Only the intervention of the British government saved the Ecumenical Patriarchate from being expelled too. Feuds amongst the Orthodox in the Middle East only added to their distress. All were in great need. Reunion, or at least closer relations with sympathetic Christian communities, offered some rays of hope.

The English response was warm-hearted and generous. The horrors of the Soviet repression evoked much sympathy. The new Patriarch in Constantinople, Meletios, seemed to be more open to Western ideas for reform. And in Jerusalem, the Orthodox Patriarch openly appealed to the newly-established British Mandate in Palestine to help him overcome his financial difficulties now that the flood of Russian pilgrims was no longer coming. Funds were raised through the Clergy and Church Aid Fund to assist the exiled communities and to sponsor a theological college in Paris. Cooperation with the YMCA and the World Student Christian Federation, which helped to promote many of the exiles' publications, showed their strong commitment to ecumenism.

But despite all this, large segments of the Church of England remained ignorant and apathetic towards Orthodox theology or any talk of reunion. Protestant Anglicans, especially the more mission-oriented Evangelicals, were openly hostile. And when discussions turned to more substantial theological issues, the gap between the rhetoric and the reality was soon clear enough. The Orthodox leaders were themselves divided on the doctrinal questions. They had had four centuries to ask whether the Church of England was a true church, or a heretical body. Were Anglican

orders valid or not? The conservatives on the whole thought the latter. They saw Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral as strongholds of modernism and westernization, both of which were perceived as a threat to Orthodox integrity. Furthermore there were bitter disputes and heated rivalries for supremacy among the different Orthodox groups, which prevented any united, let alone ecumenical, approach.

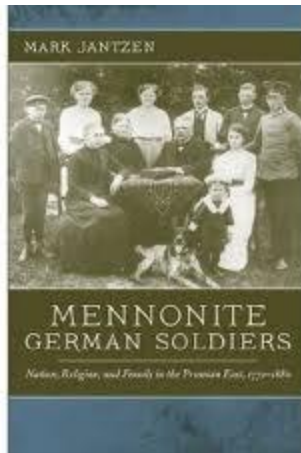
On the other side, relations were not improved by the split in the Church of England over a new Prayer Book, which in fact was turned down by a vote in Parliament in 1927. Its defeat disillusioned many Orthodox friends and raised once again doubts about Anglican heterodoxy. Thereafter relations drifted. It became clear that agreement on such broad questions as the nature of the Church or a common confession of faith was a pipe dream. Compromise solutions seemed vague and ambivalent, and were rejected by both sides. Church reunion was no nearer. Geffert's masterly dissection of these matters deserves close attention, showing all too clearly the thorn-filled path towards Christian unity.

For many years this unhappy situation has remained unchanged. The Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius still exists and is even said to have a branch in the Fraser Valley in Western Canada. But polite interest in the affairs of their respective churches does not amount to any serious commitment to ecumenical unity. Geffert's conclusion is rather damning. The schisms which plague Anglicanism have only widened theological misunderstandings, and in the revived Russia, Orthodoxy's hostility to ecumenism is more evident than ever. As Geffert concluded, "What is abundantly clear is this: so long as neither confession can get its house in order, any dream of inter-confessional unity stands no chance at all."

Tags: [Bryn Geffert](#), [Eastern Orthodox and Anglicans](#), [John S. Conway](#)

**Review of Mark Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers: Nation, Religion, and Family in the Prussian East, 1772-1880* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).**

**By Robert Beachy, Goucher College**



Mark Jantzen's study – titled *Mennonite German Soldiers*, which must sound oxymoronic to many – is a model of scrupulous, well-presented scholarship. Jantzen explains how the Prussian state succeeded over the course of a century in transforming a sect of pacifist peasants into self-conscious German nationalists. In ten chronological chapters, counting the introduction and conclusion, Jantzen demonstrates how this tortuous process was driven by “both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors” (p. 2). The heavy hand of the Prussian state imposed taxes for exemption from military service and at the same time restricted property ownership and other civil rights. Only the renunciation of a formal theological opposition to state-sponsored military service provided those Mennonites who remained in Germany after national unification (1871) full emancipation (p. 224). But the story, as Jantzen tells it, also sheds new light on the evolution of German nationalism and the peculiarities of German history. In that respect, his work will be as valuable, potentially, to historians of Germany as it is for students of Mennonite history.

Jantzen begins his narrative with the first partition of Poland in 1772, which added the Vistula Valley including a population of roughly 10,000 Mennonites to the territory of royal or West Prussia (p. 20). Formerly under Polish suzerainty, the Vistula communities had sought privilege and exemption from a range of local lords. Under their new Prussian overlord, however, the Mennonites faced a centralized and more uniform policy, or set of policies. At least during the reign of the irreligious Frederick the Great (1740-1786), the Vistula Mennonites were spared the worst bigotry and were able to purchase their exemption from military service with annual collective contributions of 5000 Reichsthaler (p. 30). An additional restriction imposed for their pacifism was a limitation on the acquisition of property from non-Mennonites. Already at this stage, liberal Russian policies that promised more favorable conditions lured many to emigrate to territories further east (p. 42).

The first comprehensive law, the so-called Prussian “Mennonite Edict,” was promulgated in 1789 and combined disparate regulations on exemption taxes, church taxes, and property ownership into a single policy (p. 55). This discriminatory law remained in effect until 1874. An elaboration of the 1789 edict issued in 1801 promised full emancipation for those who accepted military service. But those who continued to claim the exemption faced additional restrictions on property ownership: “only direct male descendants of current Mennonite property owners would be allowed to keep both their property and their exemption” (p. 69). Jantzen tells us that this reflected the nadir of Prussian anti-Mennonite discrimination.



The somewhat surprising result of the Napoleonic era and the Wars of Liberation was a more liberal policy towards Mennonite exceptionalism. Napoleon's defeat of Prussia in 1806 ultimately increased militarization and an incipient German nationalism, and in 1814 Prussia introduced universal conscription. Yet soon after, in 1815, the state issued a secretive exemption – never published – that allowed Mennonites to continue to observe their pacifist beliefs. The effect of this relief was to reinforce the separate, estate-like status of the Mennonites – an odd development in the *nineteenth* century – and likewise strengthen their communities' leaders, who continued to negotiate and represent their interests to the king and his ministers (pp. 93, 106).

The political differences between liberal and conservative Germans in the half century leading up to national unification (1871) was mirrored increasingly among Mennonites. The character of this division within the Mennonite community was extremely curious, however, and counterintuitive, perhaps, for a twentieth-first century observer. German liberals supported equal rights (and obligations) for religious minorities, and were therefore staunch proponents of Jewish (and Mennonite) emancipation. But since full citizenship demanded military service, according to liberals, it should be expected of all regardless of creed. In contrast, German conservatives sought to maintain traditional estate differences and had no problem with the differential treatment of religious minorities. These philosophical differences, Jantzen explains, inclined the Mennonite traditionalists who clung to their pacifism to embrace the German conservatives, while those willing to accept conscription identified with and gave political support to the liberals. For this reason, Mennonite pacifists made common cause with German conservatives while those willing to surrender their pacifism followed the liberals (p. 159).

Jantzen's account of Mennonite acculturation also offers a valuable contribution to the broad historiography of German Central Europe. For one, the more traditional depiction of a German state riven between a monolithic Protestant majority and substantial Catholic minority is an oversimplification. Not only Germany's tiny Jewish community but also the many smaller non-Catholic sects, such as the Mennonites, complicate the too-easy depiction of a tidy Catholic-Protestant division. Jantzen asserts that the Vistula Delta Mennonites “developed their own customized version of German national identity” by about 1880 (p. 6). A central issue in this process was the requirement of military service, a feature of citizenship and national identity that has been neglected, Jantzen suggests, in much of the literature on nationalism. As his analysis also illustrates, nationalism was never simply a state-sponsored project imposed from on high but rather a process in which individual actors and their communities participated in drawn-out negotiations with a range of cultural and state institutions (p. 9).

Tags: [Mark Jantzen](#), [Mennonite German Soldiers](#), [Robert Beachy](#)

## **Conference Paper: “Martin Niemöller in America, 1946-1947: ‘A Hero with Limitations’”**

# Plenary Session: Disputed Memories of Complicity and Righteousness, 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches, May 12-14, 2012.

By **Matthew D. Hockenos, Skidmore College**

From the mid-1930s to the early 1980s Martin Niemöller was a cause célèbre in the United States. He is best known in America as the pugnacious Prussian minister who Hitler imprisoned in a concentration camp for eight years and after his liberation made the famous postwar confession:

*First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out –*

*Because I was not a Socialist.*

*Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out –*

*Because I was not a Trade Unionist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out –*

*Because I was not a Jew.*

*Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.<sup>11</sup>*

From 1946 until his death in 1984 Niemöller visited the United States regularly. None of his visits was as wrought with controversy as his very first. Niemöller first set foot in the U.S. in late 1946 to embark on a speaking tour sponsored by the Federal Council of Churches (FCC). For the next five months his every move was followed closely in the local and national media including the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Time* magazine as well as in religious publications like *The Christian Century*. The average American was more likely to know more about Martin Niemöller than about any other German living in the immediate postwar era. When Hitler locked him up in the notorious Sachsenhausen concentration camp in 1938 as his own private prisoner, churches across America and the world prayed for his release. When he toured the United States after gaining his freedom, many American Protestants greeted him like a rock star. Tens of thousands of enraptured fans attended his addresses and listen to him on the radio. But many other Americans, including some very prominent ones, such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Rabbi Stephen Wise, called into question Niemöller's resistance credentials and voiced their adamant opposition to his visit.

In the 1930s Niemöller became a hero in the U.S. almost overnight as word spread about his leadership of the Confessing Church and his defiance of Hitler. Under sensational headlines declaring “Protestants Push Fight Upon the Nazis” and “Insurgent Pastors Disobey the Reich Bishop’s Orders” the print media followed the dramatic events of the German Church Struggle and its increasingly famous personality. Although much of the early reporting was misinformed and often hagiographic, Americans were inundated with news about Niemöller’s plight and the Church’s “resistance.”

On July 1, 1937 the Gestapo arrested Niemöller and held him for eight months in Moabit prison. He was tried in early 1938 for “causing unrest among the people” among other things. Although exonerated of the charges later that month, Hitler ordered him re-arrested in March 1938 and imprisoned him in Sachsenhausen as his own private prisoner. The Federal Council of Churches of Christ reacted to Niemöller’s imprisonment by calling on the churches of America to hold special prayer vigils and ring the church bells. Throughout his years of captivity American Protestants commemorated various Niemöller anniversaries: his birthday, the original date of his arrest, the day Hitler declared that Niemöller was his private prisoner, etc. Henry Smith Leiper, executive secretary for church relations in the FCC, exhorted Protestant ministers to “preach sermons on the modern Luther.”<sup>[2]</sup> On Sunday March 5, 1939, the second anniversary of Niemöller’s imprisonment in Sachsenhausen, Presbyterian Rev. John Paul Jones of the Union Church in Bay Ridge Brooklyn took it one step further by re-enacting Niemöller’s arrest. When pastor Jones mounted his pulpit that Sunday morning he appeared to be seized and dragged away by two men wearing Nazi uniforms. He then proceeded to give his sermon from behind a replica of a prison door with a barred window and “Sachsenhausen” inscribed over the door.<sup>[3]</sup>

Although there seemed to be no limit to the exaltation bestowed on Niemöller’s acts of defiance, there were, to be sure, some critics who pointed to his ardent love for his Fatherland and his enthusiastic participation in the unrestricted submarine warfare in World War One, for which he received an Iron Cross. Samuel Volkman, a rabbi in Chicago, however, took aim at Niemöller’s antisemitism, a topic rarely discussed in the American press. In a letter to *The Christian Century* Rabbi Volkman wrote:

I note from your issue of March 1, 1939, that the Federal Council of Churches is inviting the churches across America to give special recognition to Pastor Martin Niemöller and the cause for which he stands. As a rabbi, nothing would give the writer greater pleasure than to join Christian brethren in honoring one of the few exemplars of true religious heroism in our day. But in thumbing through the sermons of Niemöller [collected in the book *Here I Stand*], I came upon this passage “We speak of the ‘eternal Jew’ and conjure up the picture of a restless wanderer who has no home and can find no peace. We find a highly gifted people which produces idea after idea for the benefit of the world, but whatever it takes up becomes poisoned, and all that it ever reaps is contempt and hatred because ever and anon the world notices the deception and avenges itself in its own way.” (*Here I Stand*, p. 195) . . . [Rabbi Volkman then goes on to ask] Is the spiritual heritage of Israel a well of poison? . . . Who but the bigot will deny that [this] is as malevolent as it is unjust? Nor is this the only passage of its kind in the book. It is hoped that

when the churches of America unite to do honor to the spirit of Niemöller, they will dissociate themselves from what can be regarded as nothing less than a particularly obnoxious kind of sanctimonious froth.<sup>[4]</sup>

What many Americans found more distressing than Niemöller's antisemitism was his decision at the outbreak of the Second World War to volunteer his services to the German Navy to fight for his Fatherland. The editors of *The Christian Century* and Karl Barth in *The Watchman Examiner* tried to explain to their readers that Niemöller was, in fact, not an out-and-out anti-Nazi but rather a critic of Hitler's church policy and that his offer to enlist in the Navy was simply proof of this.

If the American public was troubled by Niemöller's "latest adventure," as Karl Barth put it, it didn't seem to dampen their overall enthusiasm for him. On December 23, 1940, Niemöller's image appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine with the headline: "Martyr of 1940: In Germany only the cross has not bowed to the swastika." The accompanying article quoted Niemöller's famous challenge to Hitler, "Not you, Herr Hitler, but God is my Führer."

A flurry of books on Niemöller appeared in U.S. bookstores in the early 1940s. Popular biographies such as Basil Miller's *Martin Niemoeller: Hero of the Concentration Camp* (1942) and Leo Stein's fabrication *I Was in Hell with Martin Niemoeller* (1942) exalted his piety and courage. "Hitler may break his body, but never his soul," Miller proclaimed to her enthusiastic readers. Ads appeared in newspapers proclaiming: "He Wouldn't 'Heil Hitler' so Rev. Martin Niemoeller begins his 7<sup>th</sup> year in a German Prison Camp – Remember Martin Niemoeller!!" Films, such as *Pastor Hall*, and plays, such as *God is my Fuehrer* depicted his heroic struggle.

Churches across America breathed a collective sigh of relief when they learned that Niemöller had survived Dachau and had been taken into American custody after nearly being executed by the SS in northern Italy. *The Washington Post* reported that "When Americans read that their own troops . . . had found the celebrated Pastor Martin Niemöller, it was as though a grave had opened." The Post predicted Niemöller would become "the advocate of his people in their hour of disillusion and despair, a witness to the world that, if German human nature is capable of the most bestial evil, it is also capable of great moral heroism."<sup>[5]</sup>

On June 5, 1945 Niemöller granted an interview to dozens of British and American war correspondents gathered at a hotel in Naples, Italy, where Niemöller was awaiting authorization by the Americans to return to his family in Germany. In the interview he acknowledged that prior to the Nazis coming to power he "had nourished the hope that National Socialism, if it had gone the right way, might have developed into a system for creating good for the German people."<sup>[6]</sup> He told the reporters that Hitler had deceived him. He insisted that most Germans, including himself, were ignorant of the scale of the atrocities that the Nazis had carried out and shocked by what they saw when the Allies liberated the camps. And because most Germans were ignorant of the atrocities, Niemöller explained, they don't feel guilty. He declared that his own objections to Nazism were religious and not political. He claimed that he was not interested in politics but opposed the state's encroachment in the affairs of the church. He

admitted that from his cell in Dachau he offered his services to the German Navy when the war began. “If there is a war,” Niemöller declared, “a German doesn’t ask is it just or unjust, but he feels bound to join the ranks.” He claimed that the German people were ill suited to live under a Western form of democracy and even suggested that Germans preferred authoritarian rule. And finally, he said that what Germans needed now was help, not punishment, and that he hoped to visit England and the United States to enlist Brits and Americans in his efforts to secure food and proper clothing for Germans. He concluded, “The world will be astonished when it sees how many good people are left in Germany.”<sup>71</sup>

Although many of Niemöller’s devotees remained faithful to him despite the interview, the new Niemöller had his share of critics now, and some in very influential positions. Marshall Knappen, Director of the Education & Religious Affairs Branch of the American Occupation Forces, had a sit down with Niemöller on June 18 and concluded that “Niemöller, the religious leader and Confessional martyr is to be clearly distinguished from Niemöller the politically-minded retired naval officer. The one is to be accorded the freedom and respect which is due. The other . . . is to be watched carefully.”<sup>78</sup> Sylvester C. Michelfelder, President of the Council of Lutheran Churches in the United States, recorded in his diary on July 26, 1945, “Niemöller has come into disfavor pretty much because of his unfortunate interview with the Press in Italy. There he said, ‘My Soul belongs to God but my body to the State.’ This in America and Britain has caused much offense.”<sup>79</sup> General Lucius Clay, the American military governor, expressed reservations in September 1945 about Niemöller’s politics, stating: “While permitting Niemöller to take active leadership in religious affairs, we have not felt it is advisable to utilize his services in other fields as yet. While his anti-Nazi stand was demonstrated fully by his own actions, it is still too early to predict as to his wholehearted rejection of the militaristic and nationalistic concepts of the former German state.”<sup>101</sup>

Ewart E. Turner, an American Methodist pastor who had served as minister of the American Church in Berlin from 1930-34, visited the Niemöllers in Germany after the interview and found him to be deeply depressed. His wife, Else, said that “He sees everything black.”<sup>111</sup> There were several reasons for his despair, including the harsh treatment of the U.S. Occupational Forces, the unrepentant nature of the clergy and the German population in general, the death of one son and the unknown status of another in a Soviet POW camp.

The reaction of the American was scathing. The debacle of Naples interview severely tarnished Niemöller’s reputation and led some to conclude, along with the *New York Times*, that he was not suited “to be a leader in the moral reconstruction of his country.”<sup>121</sup> His assertion that Germany was unsuited for democracy caused the greatest concern. “If a democratic system cannot be erected in Germany Europe will be right back where it started from, and Germany must be continuously policed or periodically chastened by war.”<sup>131</sup> He was, as the *New York Times* article concluded, a hero but “a hero with limitations.”<sup>141</sup> *Time* magazine opened its article on the interview with the following: “Pastor Martin Niemöller, the one German whom Christians everywhere *had* respected, shocked a lot of people last week” (emphasis added). The editors of the *San Jose News* concluded, “We think that Rev. Niemöller is correct in saying that the Germans are not repentant and have learned little or nothing from their defeat. He may be correct in saying they are incapable of democracy. If they are thus unrepentant and incapable of democracy, then

it is up to the Allies to provide them for a long time with the authority and leadership for which Rev. Niemöller says they yearn-an authority and leadership that will keep them out of further mischief.”<sup>[15]</sup> Niemöller’s disastrous interview led many Americans to conclude that if Niemöller was the best that Germany had to offer then a long and severe occupation of the country would be necessary.

Eleanor Roosevelt went so far as to describe Niemöller’s statements as “almost like a speech by Mr. Hitler.” And she went on to say, “Pastor Niemöller sounds to me like a gentleman who believes in the German doctrine of the superiority of race.”<sup>[16]</sup>

Amid the controversy over the interview, Niemöller and his wife accepted an invitation to visit the United States in late 1946 and early 1947 under the auspices of the Federal Council of Churches. During the lecture tour the Niemöllers spoke to enraptured church groups in more than a dozen states from the Northwest to the Southeast. Ewart E. Turner accompanied the Niemöllers on their American tour and described the Niemöller’s visit as “a spiritual atomic eruption.” Turner advised local church leaders scheduled to host a Niemöller visit, “Don’t let this spirit of Pentecost take you by surprise. Prepare for it with all the traditional ingenuity and foresight of American church life at its best.”<sup>[17]</sup>

Although the Federal Council of Churches received hundreds of requests for Niemöller to speak in various cities and churches across the United States, the visit was laden with controversy. Even before he arrived, opinion about his impending visit was polarized. Despite the flood of protests received by the Secretary of State, the Niemöllers were the first German civilians to be allowed entrance into the U.S. under auspices other than U.S. Armed Forces. Niemöller came to the United States as the vice-president of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany and the head of its department for relations with foreign churches. The stated purpose was to thank American churches for their support and assistance during Hitler’s reign and in the immediate postwar years. But attacks by such prominent figures as Eleanor Roosevelt resulted in a widely publicized debate over Niemöller and the purpose of his trip. On the day of Niemöller’s first public address in the U.S. Mrs. Roosevelt again raised her voice in protest. “One may applaud his bravery and his devotion to his church, but one can hardly applaud his attitude on the Nazi politics, and I cannot quite see why we should be asked to listen to his lectures. I am sure he is a good man according to his lights, but his lights are not those of the people of the United States who did not like the Hitler political doctrines.”<sup>[18]</sup>

Abundantly aware of the need to win over the American people, Niemöller did his best to avoid the mistakes he made in Naples. First, he refused to partake in any impromptu interviews where he might go off message. Second, all of his lectures and sermons were written down in advance and read virtually verbatim rather than ad-libbed. And finally, in the dozens of lectures, speeches, and sermons he gave in cities across the United States he continually returned to several themes that American churchgoers would likely find reassuring. That is not to say that his addresses lacked any fire or controversy, but rather that he tried to steer clear of any overtly political message that might offend his audience.

So what did Niemöller say to his American audiences? From his very first address at the biennial meeting of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America in early December 1946 to his last in May 1947, he typically began by thanking Americans for their prayers of support during his period of imprisonment and thanking the FCC for inviting him to United States. He emphasized that it was a combination of the prayers from abroad and his faith in God that sustained him during his years of imprisonment. He described how Hitler's persecution of the German churches sparked an opposition movement within the churches and a new sense of faith in the Word of God. He highlighted the resistance mounted by the Confessing Church against the Nazi state while acknowledging that it was a minority of pastors and congregations that took part in the opposition; he drew attention to the 1934 Barmen Declaration and its proclamation of the absolute sovereignty of Christ as the backbone of the Confessing Church. He often told audiences of his own personal acts of defiance like preaching the Word of God to fellow inmates in the concentration camps or how he directly confronted Hitler at a 1934 meeting, telling him, "Mr. Chancellor, God himself has entrusted us with the responsibility for our nation, and no power and no authority in the world is entitled to take it from us."<sup>[19]</sup> To his audience in Davenport Iowa he declared that despite Hitler's attempt to destroy the churches, "the Word of God can't be bound and can't be murdered."<sup>[20]</sup>

Although he devoted greater space to the Church opposition than to its complicity in Nazism, he frequently acknowledged his share of guilt and the guilt of his church and the German nation for the devastation in Europe; he pointed to the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt of October 1945 as evidence that the leaders of the Protestant Church recognized their share of guilt. He emphasized the importance of reconciliation between God and man, between nations that had recently been at war, and between German and foreign churches. One important reason for his trip to the United States was to demonstrate that "God's plan for Christian brotherhood doesn't stop short at the boundaries of nations nor at the borders of continents."<sup>[21]</sup> In addition to the ecumenical vitality of the universal church, he commended the non-denominational character of the Confessing Church and criticized the barriers set up that divide denominations.

When he met with groups of pastors or other churchmen and women, a prominent message was the need for the church to play a role in public affairs. Over and over he lamented that since the French Revolution religion had become a private affair resulting in an absence of moral and ethical responsibility in public matters. The absence of the commandments in public life, Niemöller explained, left people without any sense of direction leading them to embrace demagogues, who seemed to have all the answers. In his address to pastors in Rochester, N.Y. on February 25, 1947, he exclaimed that, "Because the commandments, the moral commandments and ethical commandments of God, were no longer acknowledged as valid for public life, humanity tried in a last decisive step to establish a new moral basis for public life in installing one person, Adolph Hitler." The church, he went on, was particularly to blame for allowing this state of affairs to develop. Christianity, he insisted, was responsible for the disaster in central Europe because it did not carry out its duties to remind the world about the commandments.<sup>[22]</sup>

Niemöller tried to reassure his audiences that the German churches – at least those associated with the Confessing Church – had learned this lesson but he was worried about whether or not the average German was really learning

any lessons from the past. The reason for this concern was that Germans were suffering horribly and that the danger existed that in their wretchedness they might easily fall pray to this or that ideology or person who claimed to have easy solutions to their problems. Or they may simply lose all hope and fall into despair. They wanted food on their plates and coal to heat their apartment. The church, however, could not offer easy solutions to their empty cupboards and unheated homes and so he worried about the appeal of the churches over time. He urged his American audiences to help mitigate this situation and to show Germans that Christians abroad cared about their plight by sending relief packages. And he urged American pastors to consider travelling to Germany to see for themselves the situation and to preach in a German church.<sup>[23]</sup>

On some occasions Niemöller would briefly address Nazi racial persecution and the state sponsored mass murder of Jews. He usually presented the church (and sometimes the German people) as opposed to the Nazis' racial program. For instance, in a radio address over WMCA in New York in January 1947, he said, "When Hitler tried to extinguish the Jews, the Church had to pronounce and proclaim, 'Thou shalt not Kill.'" In a speech delivered in New York, Niemöller reassured his audience that antisemitism was at its end in Germany and would never recur. On another occasion he described German suffering in the immediate postwar years as revenge for Jewish suffering. In his address to the FCC he exclaimed, "We saw guilt accumulate through twelve years [of Nazi rule] and culminate in the planned murder of millions of Jews – a guilt now being revenged according to the rule of human punishment "eye for eye, tooth for tooth."

So how did Americans, especially his critics, respond to his speaking tour and his multi-faceted message? The outgoing president of the FCC, Bishop Oxnam, with the unanimous and enthusiastic support of the FCC, sent a telegram to Mrs. Roosevelt the day after Niemöller's first address. The telegram stated that the FCC deeply regretted her remarks that Niemöller's opposition to the Nazis was not political. "The record clearly shows," the telegram read, "that he repeatedly spoke against political aims of the Nazis as early as 1933. He was forbidden to preach as [a] result of his speaking against Hitler's racialistic program."<sup>[24]</sup> The FCC went on to urge Mrs. Roosevelt to correct the erroneous impression of Niemöller she had created. The telegram as well as a subsequent letter from Bishop Oxnam did not sway Mrs. Roosevelt. She wrote back that bringing Niemöller to the United States and allowing him to speak to huge audiences would only create sympathy for Germany and mask the threat that Germany poses to world peace. She concluded her letter to Oxnam stating, "I want us to be vividly aware of the fact that the German people are to blame, that they committed horrible crimes. Therefore, I think you are doing something which is stupid beyond words in bringing this gentleman here and having him touring the country, no matter how much you like him."<sup>[25]</sup>

Mrs. Roosevelt was not alone in holding these views. Several prominent rabbis voiced similar concerns. Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver of The Temple in Cleveland, Ohio, and a key figure in the mobilization of American support for the founding of the State of Israel, called Niemöller unfit to lead postwar Germany because he did not oppose Nazi racism but only the Nazi persecution of the church. He agreed with Mrs. Roosevelt that Niemöller's speaking tour



“may be used to allay the fears held by many American people that Germany will be rebuilt without a real moral regeneration of the German people.”<sup>[26]</sup>

Rabbi Stephen Wise, president of the American Jewish Congress, told the FCC that he deplored its sponsorship of Niemöller’s speaking tour and considered it a great disservice to the country. Rabbi Wise criticized Niemöller’s “lamentable past of unequivocal support of Hitler until his own church was hurt. . . . The record is that neither before nor during his incarceration in a concentration camp did Niemöller speak one word of protest against one of the foulest crimes in history.” He expressed concern that Niemöller’s visit would only lead to a further softening of American occupation policy and that Germans would regard this as a sign of forgiveness and acceptance of their anti-democratic and antisemitic outlook.<sup>[27]</sup>

Responses to these and similar criticisms by leading representatives of the FCC such as Dr. Samuel McCrea Cavert, Dr. Henry Smith Leiper, Bishop Oxnam and others did not always fall on deaf ears. Estelle Sternberger, a well-known radio commentator in NYC and outspoken critic of the Niemöller visit, changed her mind about Niemöller after she was inundated with materials from the FCC providing “proof” of Niemöller’s anti-Nazi credentials. She went on the airwaves to tell her listeners about the abundant evidence “that the German pastor did do whatever he could to mobilize public opinion against the racial policies of the Nazis.”<sup>[28]</sup>

Although there most certainly were others like Sternberger who changed their minds, Niemöller’s visit seems to have done very little to overcome the disputed memories of complicity and righteousness. Both sides in this dispute inflated and distorted their evidence. Niemöller’s support for the Nazis in the 1924 and 1933 elections was inflated by his critics to the accusation that he had been a member of the Nazi Party and an unequivocal supporter of Hitler and his racial policy. Likewise, that Niemöller defied Hitler, opposed the introduction of the Aryan paragraph into the Church, and was imprisoned by Hitler was inflated by his supporters to suggest that Niemöller opposed not just Hitler’s church policy but also his political and racial policies from day one. These misconceptions and misrepresentations of Niemöller can be traced to the dual legacy of the Church Struggle – a legacy that included both courageous opposition to the Nazi assault on the churches and the attempt to Nazify all facets of German society, and at the same time an acceptance of aspects of the Nazi political and racial program.

Niemöller’s subsequent visits to the United States were less fraught with controversy. But Niemöller still managed to stimulate lively debate through his criticisms of American occupation policy in Germany and the rearmament of West Germany under the pro-American Adenauer government. Charges and counter-charges were made that he was an unrepentant ultra-nationalist on the one hand and a communist sympathizer on the other. His advocacy of a “third way” during the Cold War led the U.S. State Department to consider him a man to be watched. Later he would support the civil rights movement in the U.S. and would meet with Ho Chi Minh in North Vietnam to express his opposition to the war and Western imperialism. In the 1970s and 80s he was a leading voice in the nuclear disarmament movement. Long after Niemöller died, his name and, in particular, his poetic confession “First they

came for” has been appropriated by American activists of every political persuasion for just about every political cause.

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[1] This is the version insisted upon by Sybil Niemöller von Sell, Martin Niemöller’s wife.

[2] “Niemoeller of I,” *Time* (July 10, 1939).

[3] “For Niemoeller,” *Time* (March 20, 1939).

[4] “Letters,” *The Christian Century* (March 15, 1939), 355.

[5] “Niemoeller,” *The Washington Post* (May 13, 1945), B4.

[6] George Palmer, “Niemoeller Tried to Join the Navy in 1939,” *The Lewiston Daily Sun* (June 6, 1945), 9.

[7] “For What I am,” *Time* (June 18, 1945).

[8] Clemens Vollnhals, *Die evangelische Kirche nach dem Zusammenbruch: Berichte ausländischer Beobachter aus dem Jahre 1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 21.

[9] Vollnhals, XXV.

[10] Vollnhals, XXVI.

[11] Ewart Turner, *Christian Century* (April 25, 1984), 445.

[12] “A Hero with Limitations,” *New York Times* (June 7, 1945), 18.

[13] “A Hero with Limitations,” *New York Times* (June 7, 1945), 18.

[14] “A Hero with Limitations,” *New York Times* (June 7, 1945), 18.

[15] *San Jose Times* (June 11, 1945), 12.

[16] Eleanor Roosevelt, “My Day” (August 7, 1945).

[17] Ewart Turner, WCC Archives WWII Era.

[18] Eleanor Roosevelt, “My Day” (December 4, 1946).

[19] Martin Niemöller, radio address, Seattle, (Dec. 5, 1946) WCC Archives WWII Era.

[20] Martin Niemöller, address in Davenport, Iowa, (Dec. 22, 1946) WCC Archives WWII Era.

[21] Martin Niemöller, address to FCC in Seattle (Dec. 5, 1946) WCC Archives WWII Era.

[22] Martin Niemöller, address in Rochester (Feb. 25, 1947) WCC Archives WWII Era.

[23] Martin Niemöller, address in Rochester (Feb. 25, 1947) WCC Archives WWII Era.

[24] “Message Sent on Niemoeller,” *New York Times* (Dec. 6, 1946).

[25] Eleanor Roosevelt to Bishop Oxnam in *The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers* edited by Allida M. Black (Detroit: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2006), 419.

[26] “Niemoeller Called ‘Unfit’ as a Leader,” *New York Times* (Feb, 3, 1947).

[27] “Rabbi Wise Deplores Niemoeller Favor,” *New York Post* (Jan. 25, 1947).

[28] “Sternberger Reverses Position on Niemoeller in Light of Evidence” in WCC Archives WWII Era.

Tags: [First they came for the Socialists](#), [Martin Niemöller](#), [Matthew D. Hockenos](#)

## Conference Report: 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scholars’ Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches, May 12-14, 2012.

By Matthew D. Hockenos, Skidmore College

The 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Scholars’ Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches (ASC) was held in Rochester, NY, this year on the beautiful campus of Monroe Community College (MCC) from May 12-14. The ASC is an interfaith,

interdisciplinary, and international organization founded by Franklin Littell and Hubert Locke, both professors and clergymen, in 1970. Littell, who died in 2009, founded the first doctoral studies program on the Holocaust in 1976 at Temple University, where he taught for many years and where his extensive papers, correspondence, and books are now housed in Paley Library. His wife, Professor Marcia Sachs Littell, a Holocaust scholar at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and the Executive Director Emerita of ASC, was present at the conference and chaired a thought-provoking panel on “Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women in the Holocaust.” Hubert Locke, Professor and Dean Emeritus of Public Affairs at the University of Washington, opened the conference with a greeting and encouraged participants and Holocaust scholars to think more broadly about the role of racial, religious, and national intolerance and prejudice.

Professor of Psychology Charles Clarke, the 2012 ASC Conference Chair and Director of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Project at MCC, did a superlative job organizing this year’s conference, which consisted of nearly 20 panels of scholars.

In line with this year’s conference theme, “70 Years Later: The Lingering Shadow of Wannsee,” the first plenary session included a presentation by Dr. Wolf Kaiser, Deputy-Director of The House of the Wannsee Conference, as well as a breakout session on “Genocidal Decision-Making and its Implications for Contemporary Genocide.” In addition to the panels on the churches and religion, there were a number of excellent presentations on Holocaust education, arts and literature, reparations, antisemitism, torture, and genocide.

The panels that addressed the churches and religion included a fascinating and troubling set of papers by John Pawlikowski of Catholic Theological University and Marvin Wilson of Gordon College, on the challenge of intractable supersessionary thinking. Willi Graf’s resistance and Emanuel Hirsch’s complicity were the topic of two papers by Stephani Richards-Wilson of University of Wisconsin-Madison and Jeremy Koop of York University respectively. There was a panel devoted entirely to Catholics and the Shoah with two papers addressing Pius XII and one by Joseph G. Kelly, professor emeritus of Nazareth College, on the Rochester Agreement, a joint Catholic-Jewish statement issued in 1996 that encouraged dialogue, respect, and combating religious intolerance. And finally, a plenary session, chaired by Hubert Locke, on “Disputed Memories of Complicity and Righteousness,” which included papers on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Niemöller, and Rolf Hochhuth by Vicki Barnett, Matthew Hockenos, and Mark Ruff respectively.

The conference closed with a tribute to Richard Rubenstein, a long-time participant in the ASC and acclaimed author and theologian, and a keynote address, “Is the Shoah the Perfect Storm of Genocide?,” by Michael Berenbaum, director of the Sigi Ziering Institute at the American Jewish University.

Tags: [Matthew D. Hockenos](#), [Scholars’ Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches](#)

# Memorial Speech: Friedrich Weissler (1891-1937) and the Confessing Church. Remembrance and Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the Death of Friedrich Weissler. Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum, February 19, 2012.

By Manfred Gailus, Technische Universität, Berlin

*Seventy-five years ago, in February 1937, Friedrich Weissler died in Sachsenhausen concentration camp as a result of mistreatment by the prison guards. He is widely regarded as the first Confessing Church member to be murdered as a victim of the Nazi persecution of the churches. Recently, at a commemorative ceremony held in the camp, Professor Manfred Gailus of Berlin's Technical University honoured him with a fine tribute, which is here translated in abbreviated form by John S. Conway.*

Friedrich Weissler came of a Jewish family, but, as a child, was baptized into the Protestant Church. He completed his studies in law just before the outbreak of war in 1914, when he served his country loyally and with true German patriotism. In the 1920s he resumed his legal career and by 1932 had been appointed a judge in Magdeburg. However, the rise of the National Socialists to power rapidly brought his career to an end. Already in April 1933 he was one of the 600 so-called "non-aryan" judges suspended from office, and in July he was dismissed. Despite his war service and distinguished record, the Nazis regarded him as "politically unreliable". Thereafter there was little or no likelihood of his being employed in any branch of the public service.

Later he moved to Berlin and began to look for work in the private sphere. Due to his connections with the Protestant Church, he obtained a post as legal advisor to the incipient Confessing Church, first under Bishop Marahrens of Hannover, but subsequently with the more uncompromising wing led by Martin Niemöller and Martin Albertz. These men gave a strong lead to the Confessing Church's rebuttal of the so-called "German Christians" efforts to infiltrate Nazi ideologies and practices into church life. But there were also divisions in the Confessing Church's ranks. The more moderate members were prepared to compromise on some issues, while the more radical wing, led by Niemöller, refused any such accommodations. They courageously adhered to the views outlined in the 1934 Barmen Declaration and resisted all attempts to limit or weaken the Church's autonomy. Weissler joined this latter was a dangerous step, all the more because he had been branded since 1933 as a "non-aryan". But he maintained his beliefs and served as a legal advisor for this wing of the Confessing Church.

In 1936, the increasing harassment of individual Confessing Church pastors and laity led this group's leaders to draw up a petition calling for an end to such stressful persecution by the Gestapo or local Nazi agencies. Politely but unflinchingly the memorandum opposed the regime's on-going attempts to "de-Christianize" Germany. The Nazi interpretation of "positive Christianity" was criticized. The document also called for an end to the measures limiting the church's outreach in the schools, the press or public media. Finally the church leaders roundly declared their

opposition to the Nazi antisemitic campaign, since such an ideology was against the Christian commandment to love one's neighbour. Weissler was closely associated in drawing up this document to ensure that it was fully in compliance with the existing law. This forceful protest was to be presented in June 1936 to Hitler personally and in private, in the hope that he would then issue restraining orders to his underlings. But it was a sign of the Confessing Church's political naivety that they entirely miscalculated the Nazis' response. The scandal was made worse by the fact that somehow or other a copy was made available to the foreign press, where it was hailed as a significant challenge to Hitler's regime. (Later researches have never been able to discover exactly how this happened.) The Gestapo immediately launched investigations into this act of national treason, and suspicion fell on Weissler – as a “Jew” – as well on two young curates, Werner Koch and Ernst Tillich. The Confessing Church leaders hastily sought to dissociate themselves from any accusation of political treachery and left Weissler to his fate. In October 1936 he was arrested and in February 1937 taken off to Sachsenhausen. Within a few days he was brutally done to death. The fact that Weissler was left in the lurch by his former employers and by the anti-Nazi champions in the Confessing Church was long suppressed. Only recently have attempts been made for some form of appropriate recognition. In Magdeburg a street has been named after him, and since 2008 one of the law courts bears his name. In 2005 the then chairman of the Evangelical Church's Governing Council, Bishop Wolfgang Huber, said this: “We in the Evangelical Church have to acknowledge our guilt in not standing up for our co-worker Friedrich Weissler. Our history is not always one of heroic resistance to tyranny.” It is to be hoped that in the near future a suitable church building in Berlin will carry his name, as a token of remembrance of this intrepid Confessing Church member during those dark times.

Tags: [Friedrich Weissler](#), [Manfred Gailus](#), [Sachsenhausen](#)

## Conference Report: Betrayal of the Humanities: The University during the Third Reich, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, April 15-16, 2012.

By Bernard M. Levinson, University of Minnesota, and  
Melissa Kelley, University of Minnesota

On April 15-16, 2012, the University of Minnesota hosted “Betrayal of the Humanities: The University during the Third Reich,” a multi-discipline symposium organized by Bernard M. Levinson, Berman Family Chair of Jewish Studies and Hebrew Bible, and Bruno Chaouat, Director of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. The symposium examined transformations in the academy and disciplines of the humanities during and after the Third Reich in Germany, Italy and North America. The symposium consisted of three main sessions, “Nazi Germany and the Humanities in International Perspective,” “Disciplinary History,” and “Broader Implications.”

Alan Steinweis, Professor of History and Director of the Center for Holocaust Studies at the University of Vermont, opened the symposium with a talk entitled “New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Impact on the Humanities.”

Steinweis provided a chronological overview of scholarly attempts to investigate the relationship between faculties within the arts and humanities and the Nazi regime. Steinweis also posed questions that proved key throughout the symposium: was there a fundamental incompatibility between the largely conservative professoriate and the Nazi state in 1933? What were “academic values” in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and were those values “betrayed”?

Stephen H. Norwood, Professor of History at Louisiana State University, then turned attention to the United States with “Appeasing Nazis: American Universities and the Hitler Regime, 1933-1939.” Detailing examples of tacit and direct support of Nazi policies and officials at elite academic institutions in the U.S. (including the Seven Sisters and Columbia University), Norwood emphasized the often-sharp distinction between what might be deemed the more “grassroots” elements of the university community and administrations. Many students and community members protested the invitation of Nazi officials and sympathizers to campus.

Anti-Nazi demonstrations outside the academy, too, suggested a high level of knowledge about the extent of anti-Semitic measures in the Third Reich within and around university settings. Bringing the focus back to Germany, Robert Ericksen, the Kurt Meyer Chair of Holocaust Studies at Pacific Lutheran University, provided a case study of a specific university: “Göttingen: A ‘Political University’ in the Mirror of Denazification.” Ericksen demonstrated that, while the process of *Entnazifizierung* [denazification] at Göttingen failed to rid the university of Nazi collaborators, it nonetheless provided later scholars with essential documentation on the politicization of the university during and after the Nazi regime. Professors claiming to take on the appearance of being a Nazi or a Nazi collaborator in order to “work from the inside” is one dynamic Ericksen has found in his work.

The next session on “Disciplinary History” examined individual fields of study and emphasized again the international context of the academy under National Socialism. Johannes Renger, Professor Emeritus of Ancient Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the Freie Universität Berlin, in “German Assyriology 1933-1945: A Discipline in Troubled Waters between Emigration and Compliance with the Regime,” discussed the effects of the Nazi regime on the field of Assyriology, focusing on the loss of scholars due to Nazi pressures. The following talk from Anders Germar, Associate Professor of Theology at Uppsala University, entitled “Theology in German Academia under the Swastika – the Case of Tübingen” showed how the confluence of a particular social milieu, the cultural and political environment, and an established research tradition made Tübingen’s theology faculty the site of a scholarly justification of antisemitism. Fascination with the ancient world was the subject of Suzanne L. Marchand’s talk, entitled “On Nazism and the Ancient World.” Professor of History at Louisiana State University, Marchand argued that scholars have underestimated how important the classical and biblical worlds were to historical and self-understandings in the 1920s and 1930s. Notions of the “ancient” were bound up in debates about what and who was “German.” Despite Nazi interest in so-called “German antiquity,” however, the field of German *Altertumswissenschaft* did not make much headway within the academy. Eric Weitz, Arsham and Charlotte Ohanessian Chair in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota, in “The Complicity of the Academic Professions with the Third Reich,” emphasized the atmosphere of “crisis” within the universities preceding the Nazi seizure of power. A lack of jobs and mobility for those trained for the academic professions

made Nazi supported programs such as *Ostforschung* compelling to those in the “crisis generation.” The session concluded with Franklin Adler, G. Theodore Mitau Professor of Political Science at Macalester College, who presented “The Italian Fascist Racial Laws of 1938 and the Expulsion of Jewish Professors,” an examination of the treatment of Jewish scholars in fascist Italy. The day closed with a public lecture given by Alvin Rosenfeld, Professor of Jewish Studies and English and Director of the Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism at Indiana University, entitled “Is There an Anti-Jewish Bias in Today’s University?”

The second day of the symposium was devoted to a session on “Broader Implications.” It opened with Michael Cherlin, Professor of Music at the University of Minnesota, speaking on “Schoenberg, Creation and Catastrophe.” Cherlin presented Schoenberg’s distinctive musical creativity as drawing extensively upon the significance of catastrophe and exile in the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah. Emmanuel Faye, Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Rouen, in “National Socialism and Totalitarianism in the Interpretations of Hannah Arendt and Aurel Kolnai,” connected Hannah Arendt’s defense of Martin Heidegger’s Nazism to her similar use of Nazi thinkers, such as Carl Schmitt, in her approach to totalitarianism. Faye maintained that Arendt whitewashed Schmitt and others by using them as sources rather than objects of critique. In the final presentation, “Hitler’s Willing Lawyers,” Oren Gross, Irving Younger Professor of Law at the University of Minnesota, examined the “philosophical cloak for the Nazis’ arbitrary acts and crimes” provided by Carl Schmitt.

A session with all the participants closed the symposium. The discussion highlighted the benefits of interdisciplinary inquiry on the concepts of “betrayal,” “the humanities,” the Humboldtian *Bildung* ideal of the university, and “academic freedom.” An edited volume is in preparation to continue this exploration of the mutation of academic disciplines under National Socialism. Further information on the symposium is available at the website: <https://sites.google.com/a/umn.edu/both/>

Tags: [Bernard M. Levinson](#), [Betrayal of the Humanities](#), [Melissa Kelley](#)

**Article Note: Manuel Borutta, “Genealogie der Säkularisierungstheorie. Zur Historisierung einer großen Erzählung der Moderne,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 36 (2010): 347-76.**

**By Heath Spencer, Seattle University**

Many assume that secularization is a fundamental aspect of modernity and that religion is – or at least should be – a private matter, best kept separate from other spheres like politics, economics, and scientific inquiry. Manuel Borutta is among a growing number of scholars who raise questions about such assumptions and explore their origins. Borutta, of Ruhr-Universität Bochum, specializes in anti-Catholicism, culture wars, and secularization theory and is



the author of *Antikatholizismus. Deutschland und Italien im Zeitalter der Europäischen Kulturkämpfe* (2010) and *Religion und Zivilgesellschaft. Zur Theorie und Geschichte ihrer Beziehung* (2005). His recent article in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* historicizes secularization theory, arguing that it was invented by European liberals in the midst of the culture wars of the nineteenth-century. Liberals of this era demanded “eine Differenzierung von Politik und Religion, eine Privatisierung der Religion, eine Unterordnung der Kirche unter den Staat” (351), and they asserted that their own vision of the proper role of religion in society was nothing less than a fundamental law of modernity.

Borutta analyzes the writings of politicians and academics like Johann Caspar Bluntschli, Heinrich von Sybel, and Heinrich von Treitschke as well as images and articles in *Berliner Wespen*, *Kladderadatsch*, and *Die Gartenlaube*. In these sources, religious institutions and expressions of popular piety (especially Catholic) were often represented as relics of an age that had passed, or as brief flare-ups of medievalism in the midst of otherwise modern cultures. Anything that elevated faith above science or challenged the notion of autonomous spheres for religion and civil society was incompatible with the modern world and therefore illegitimate. Borutta also draws attention to the gendering of church and state that was common in liberal discourse. It was essential for the state to be “Herr im eigenen Hause” (359). However, rather than a separation of church and state, most liberals imagined a properly ordered marriage of church and state, one that was both complementary and hierarchical. The church (feminine, nurturing, emotional, partial) was to be confined to the private, domestic sphere, whereas the state (masculine, rational, scientific, universal) would oversee both the public and private spheres. In the end, liberal culture-warriors fashioned a master narrative in which modernity conformed to their own ideals. Beginning with Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, this model was institutionalized in the sociology of religion, and only recently has it faced serious challenge.

Although Borutta takes note of the transnational and transconfessional character of Europe’s culture wars, most of his examples are drawn from Germany and Switzerland. However, within this limited scope, his article raises awareness of the extent to which current conceptions of ‘modern Western society’ draw their inspiration from the conflicts of this era. It also makes an important contribution to recent scholarship that explores how narratives about religion and even definitions of ‘religion’ can privilege certain cultural preferences and configurations of power, as in works like William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (2009).

Tags: [Genealogie der Säkularisierungstheorie](#), [Heath Spencer](#), [Manuel Borutta](#)

## Call for Papers: *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, 2012 Volume.

The editorial board of *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, a peer-reviewed electronic journal, invites submissions for its 2012 volume. *SCJR* publishes scholarship on the history, theology, and contemporary realities of

Jewish-Christian relations and reviews new materials in the field, providing a vehicle for exchange of information, cooperation, and mutual enrichment in the field of Christian-Jewish studies and relations.

Interested authors are encouraged to contact the editors in advance. For publication in the 2012 volume, papers should be submitted by September 1, 2012 through the journal's website. Papers submitted after September 1, 2012 may be considered for publication in a future volume. All papers will be subject to peer-review before acceptance for publication.

Ruth Langer, Co-Editor of SCJR, Professor of Jewish Studies and Associate Director of the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning, Boston College

Kevin Spicer, CSC, Co-Editor of SCJR, Professor of History, Stonehill College

For more information, please see [www.bc.edu/scjr](http://www.bc.edu/scjr).

Tags: [Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations](#)