



LETTERS AND PAPERS
FROM PRISON
DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER WORKS — READER'S EDITION

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The Jewish Question

Beginning in the 19th century—long before the Nazis took power in 1933—some German and other European writers, philosophers, and theologians claimed that the presence of a Jewish minority in society was a problem that needed to be solved. Known as the “Jewish Question,” the status of European Jews became the subject of heated debate in an era when they were gradually being granted civil rights and equality.

Nazis and the Jewish Question

- First, they initiated policies and laws that transformed German Jews into second-class citizens.
- Then, they expelled Jews from Germany or forced them to emigrate. During World War II, Nazi Germany and its collaborators expanded this goal. They aimed to cleanse all of Europe of Jews through their forced “resettlement” in occupied Poland, the French island of Madagascar, or later occupied Soviet territory.
- In 1941, Nazi Germany embarked upon a path of systematic mass murder—the so-called “Final Solution of the Jewish Question.”

New and Intensified Laws to Oppress

Reich Citizenship Law

This law defined who the German government considered “German” and who was a “Jew.”

- The law defined Jews as a race identified by blood and genealogy. It did not identify Judaism as a religion or culture.
- Under this law, Jews lost their citizenship and became “subjects of the state.”
- This law and the “Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor” are called the “Nuremberg Race Laws.”

Jewish Name

- The “Law on the Alteration of Family and Personal Names” required Jews who did not have “Jewish first names” to take the middle names “Israel” (for men) or “Sara” (for women).
- By January 1, 1939, all Jews needed to obtain new passports or identity cards listing their new names. These documents were marked with the letter “J.”

Protection of Marriage:

- The German government banned the marriage between Jews and non-Jews.
- It also made sexual relations between these “mixed race” couples illegal. This crime was called Rassenschande [race defilement].

Laws cont.

Anti-Jewish Economy:

- The “Decree on the Exclusion of Jews from Economic Life” prohibited Jews from owning businesses or engaging in trade.
- Jewish-owned businesses had already faced pressure to “Aryanize,” which meant that the Jewish owner would be forced to sell his or her business at a steep discount to a non-Jewish employee or Nazi supporter.
- This photo was taken at Arthur Lewy’s cigar shop in Berlin in the 1930s. After this decree, Arthur was forced to “Aryanize” his shop and could no longer work.

Nuremberg Laws Extended

- The Reich Minister of the Interior, Wilhelm Frick, announced an expansion of the September 15, 1935 Reich Citizenship Law.
- Frick stated that the citizenship law also applied to Roma and Sinti (so-called “gypsies”) and to Afro-Germans, who also lost their citizenship and were not permitted to marry “Aryan” Germans.

Laws cont.

Civil Service Law: The law removed Jews and political opponents of the Nazis from civil service positions, including school, university, and government jobs. People were exempt only if they had been in that job before August 1914, had fought in World War I, or had lost a father or son in the war.

Education Law: The German government issued the “Law Against Overcrowding in Schools and Universities.”

- The law stated that Jewish students could be no more than 5 percent of the student population of any public school or university.
- Many Jewish students had to leave public school and start attending private school.
- German schools taught Nazi racial ideas about the superiority of “Aryans” and the inferiority of Jews.

Laws cont.

Sterilization Law: The German government passed the “Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases.”

- The law allowed the government to forcibly sterilize people with physical or mental disabilities so they could not have children.
- Under the law, 400,000 Germans were sterilized from January 1934 to May 1945.
- The caption of this propaganda slide reads “Life only as a Burden.”

Laws cont.

Press Censorship Law: The “Editors’ Law” forbade Jews from working in journalism.

- The German Propaganda Ministry kept registries of “racially pure” editors and journalists. New reporters had to register and show they were not Jewish.
- Newspapers could not publish any information that would “weaken the strength of the Reich abroad or at home.”
- Journalists who broke this law could be sent to concentration camps.
- “Lügenpresse” was used to describe media that criticized the Reich.

1935 Mandatory Military Service: The German government enacted a conscription law, which applied to all men between 18 and 45.

- After May 1935, drafted soldiers had to show evidence that they were “Aryan.” Jews were forbidden to serve, and Jehovah’s Witnesses refused to join the military.
- Hitler also officially announced that Germany would begin rebuilding its military (which it was already secretly doing). This was a violation of the Treaty of Versailles, which had limited the size of Germany’s military after World War I.

Laws cont.

Jehovah's Witnesses

- The German government banned the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, a Jehovah's Witness publishing house. Local laws had already banned the Jehovah's Witness organization entirely. Many Witnesses violated laws against practicing their religion and distributing religious literature.
- Jehovah's Witnesses also refused to swear allegiance to Hitler or Nazi Germany or to serve in the military.
- Witnesses faced persecution and arrest. To be released from imprisonment, they could sign a form like this one, swearing allegiance to Nazi Germany. Few did so. Organization was banned.

Revision of Paragraph 175: The German government revised an existing law that already outlawed male homosexuality.

- The revision expanded what activities qualified as sexual contact and increased the punishments for those acts.
- Gay men were persecuted because they were seen as corrupting "German values" and not adding to the population. Because lesbians could still have biological children, they were usually not targeted.



The former **Benedictine abbot, the Rev. Albanus Schachleiter**, a staunch supporter of Nazism and friend of Adolf Hitler, and **Reich Bishop Ludwig Muller**, **Lutheran pastor** and leading member of the Nazi party.

6 September 1934
Hitler greets Reich Bishop Ludwig Muller and Abbott Albanus Schachleitner as Honorary guests at the Reich party rally for Unity and Strength

Bishop Ludwig Muller and Nazifying the Protestant Church



Rev. Ludwig Muller was a founder and regional leader of the German Christian movement or German Evangelical Church. Hitler invested Mueller with full independent power in Protestant Church matters. He was appointed Reich Bishop on September 27, 1933. As the Third Reich's highest-ranking Protestant dignitary, he pursued the institutional and doctrinal “coordination” [*Gleichschaltung*] of the church from within.

The German Evangelical Church tried to synthesize Christianity and German citizenship and racial purity, which Muller promoted. The Nazi regime pursued their goals by means of the newly-founded Ministry of the Church under the direction of Hanns Kerri, who began a campaign of persecution and oppression against theologians and clergy who resisted. Muller almost lost all influence on Nazi ecclesiastical policy; he committed suicide shortly after the war ended.

The Confessing Church

The Barmen Declaration includes six theses:

1. The only source of revelation is the Word of God — Jesus Christ. Any other possible sources (earthly powers, for example) will not be accepted.
2. Jesus Christ is the only Lord of all aspects of personal life. There should be no other authority.
3. The message and order of the church should not be influenced by the current political convictions.
4. The church should not be ruled by a leader ("Führer"). There is no hierarchy in the church (Mt 20, 25f).
5. The state should not fulfill the task of the church and vice versa. State and church are both limited to their own business.
6. Therefore, the Barmen Declaration rejects (i) the subordination of the Church to the state (8.22–3) and (ii) the subordination of the Word and Spirit to the Church.

Karl Barth was one of the main authors. This was the church

New York Times Article from October 3, 1934

BERLIN, Oct. 3. — “Reich Bishop Ludwig Muller appears to be galvanizing his church into action for a finish fight with the stubbornly independent confessional church which now stands half in and half out of the State institution known as the German Evangelical Church, which Bishop Muller heads.”

REICH BISHOP MOVES AGAINST HIS ENEMIES

**Church Leaders of Lower Saxony
Take Oath to Hitler—Mueller
Stresses Nazis' Aid.**

Wireless to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

BERLIN, Oct. 3.—Reich Bishop Ludwig Muller appears to be galvanizing his church into action for a finish fight with the stubbornly independent confessional church which now stands half in and half out of the State institution known as the German Evangelical Church, which Bishop Muller heads.

One of his most loyal lieutenants, the extreme Nazi Bishop Peters of Lower Saxony, assembled his superintendents today in Magdeburg and made them take an oath of allegiance to Chancellor Hitler.

The Reich Bishop yesterday went to Stuttgart, seat of the once-independent Wuerttemberg regional church, in which 90 per cent of the pastors voted to support Bishop Theophil Wurm, whom Bishop Muller expelled from his office. He spoke before 8,000 members of the German Christians Society in the municipal auditorium, asserting that when the Nazi movement ignores the German Evangelical Church it means the end of German Protestantism and vice versa.

“It is essential,” declared the Reich Bishop, “to bring Nazi experience into the church.”

The assembled delegates greeted the Nazi Bishop with the customary shouts of “Heil!”

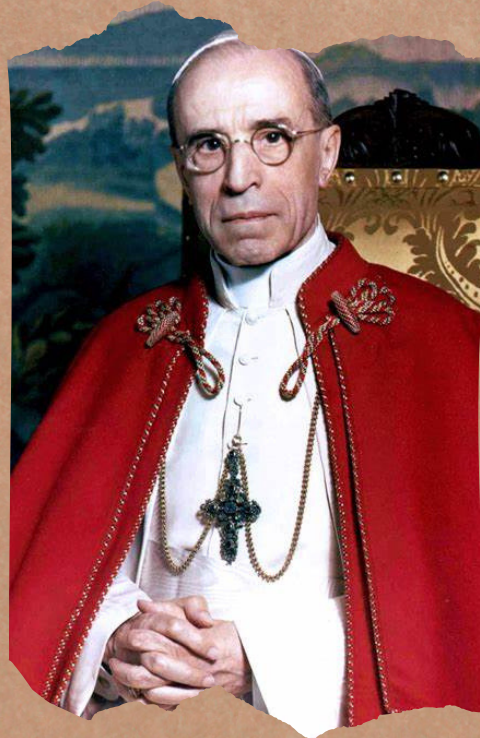
The Wuerttemberg church administration has been reorganized so as to destroy the independence of the diocesan synod elected by the church members, replacing it with a body made up chiefly of appointees submissive to the will of Dr. Krause, the swastika church commissioner.

Nazi Germany and the Roman Catholic Church



- Demographics: A third of Nazi Germany was Roman Catholic comprising a large population in the South of Germany.
- On average, Catholic Germans voted for the Nazi Party less than their Protestant counterparts.
 - Catholics often opted to support Christian Democratic parties instead such as the Centre Party.
- Agreements such as the 1933 Reichskonkordat Treaty gave Catholics freedom to worship in Nazi Germany in theory.
 - In practice, Nazi Germany persecuted many Catholics who were not compliant, sending many to concentration camps and eliminating the independence of their institutions.





Important Catholic Figures

Pope Pius XI (Pontificate: 1922-1939)

- The 1933 Vatican treaty with the Nazis has come under immense scrutiny with the Nazis due to many historians seeing it as an example of Catholic complicity with the Nazis
- (1937) His Encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (“with deep anxiety”) criticized Nazi breaches of treaty, refuted Nazi ideology, in particular, race science, and defended the Old Testament.
 - The letter was smuggled into German churches to be read on Palm Sunday and was immediately confiscated by Nazi officials the following day.

Pope Pius XII (Pontificate: 1939-1958)

- (1943) His encyclical *Mystici corporis* (“Mystical Body”) denounced the murder of disabled people through involuntary euthanasia.
- The Church rescued thousands of Jews by issuing false documents to them, lobbying the Axis powers, hiding Jews including at the Vatican and papal residence Castel Gandolfo in Italy.
- His legacy also has come under scrutiny by historians for his continued interactions with the Nazis and the participation by Catholics in helping Nazis to escape after the war.



Important Catholic Figures

Father Charles Coughlin

- Dubbed “The Radio Priest”, he had 30 million listeners in 1930s U.S. (U.S. population was 120 million) supporting the far-right Christian front movement
- He spread conspiracy theories such as the Jewish Bolshevism theory and advocated for overthrow of the U.S. government.

St. Maximilian Kolbe (martyred 1941 in Auschwitz)

- Franciscan priest and missionary who died in the place of Franciszek Gajowniczek, a Polish Catholic.
- He sheltered 2,000 Jews in his Polish monastery prior to his imprisonment.