



LETTERS AND PAPERS
FROM PRISON
DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Session-three on May 7, 2024
Theologians who Collaborated

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER WORKS — READER'S EDITION

Gerhard Kittel



Born	23 September 1888 Breslau, Prussia , German Empire
Died	11 July 1948 (aged 59) Tübingen , Germany
Political party	Nazi Party

Wrote the multi-volume *Textual Notes on the New Testament* is still the standard reference work for biblical Greek. The Tübingen professor prepared for that masterwork with a career of befriending Jews and learning their literature, as his Hebrew-scholar father had before him. He later clarified (or changed his mind): his love was for *biblical* Judaism, from which secular contemporary Jews had long since fallen away.

Kittel approached the “Jewish Question” by

accepting virtually all of the Nazi antisemitic stereotypes, taking as truth the view that Jews represented a particularly important danger for Germany. He fully accepted the idea of a “Jewish problem,” even though Jews constituted less than 1% of the German population.

Kittel went on to admit that outsiders might scream of brutality if Germany introduced such policies. In particular, Christians might be just the sort of people who would sympathize with seemingly unfair hardships faced by Jews, many of whom would seem upstanding and individually blameless. However, “God does not require that we be sentimental, but that we see the facts and give them their due,” Kittel said. He then underlined his point: “But we may also not become soft ... If the battle is correct in its object, the Christian also has his place at the front.”

Paul Althaus



Gotthard Jasper

Paul Althaus (1888–1966)

Professor, Prediger und Patriot
in seiner Zeit

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

Lutheran theologian of great stature in twentieth-century Germany. In 1925 he was named Professor of Systematic Theology at Erlangen, and there he remained the rest of his life. Althaus is perhaps best remembered as a Luther scholar.

A strong advocate for the existence of a “unique spiritual vitality” among the German people. As a young military chaplain during World War I, Althaus had become convinced of the **special calling of the German Volk (people/nation)**.

He saw the Treaty of Versailles as a deep national humiliation, and he had nothing but scorn for the Weimar Republic, the first democracy in Germany.

Althaus

“Our *Volk* have had to endure the deepest questions of humanity more painfully and more profoundly than any other people,” Althaus wrote in 1927.

“Our people have testified to God throughout history, in which God has entrusted it with something unique.” Althaus was construing Germans as an ethnically distinct group endowed with a divine mission. It is no surprise that he would soon embrace Hitler’s rise to power.

For Althaus, God’s work revealed itself in human history, and Adolf Hitler, although an imperfect human being, was a vessel to make Germany again a great Christian nation.

Althaus

- Paul Althaus was not a radical Nazi, but his theology was thoroughly infected by *völkisch* ideology: **the belief in the purity and unity of a peoplehood.**
- Althaus defined this imagined peoplehood not by blood (as Nazi racial laws did) but by a shared history, soul-spirit, customs, values, and ethnicity—similar to the way some Americans speak today of Whiteness as a heritage of pride.
- Althaus fervently spoke in favor of God’s mission for a German nation in which Jews had no place. He did not argue for the elimination of Jews. Rather, he wanted them to live in isolated enclaves in Germany, separate from ethnic Germans.

Björn Krondorfer

Emanuel Hirsch (1888-1973)



German Protestant theologian and, also a member of the Nazi Party.

Taught at Gottingen University. Emanuel Hirsch (1888-1973) as a very important theologian, a friend and peer to major figures such as Paul Tillich and Karl Barth. At the outset of the Third Reich, Emanuel Hirsch had just published a major study of Kierkegaard, which became a landmark of his career along with his Luther and Biblical scholarship.

Hirsch

Emanuel Hirsch (1888-1972) was a close friend of Paul Althaus and a contemporary of both Althaus and Gerhard Kittel. He too supported National Socialism. But he is distinct from Althaus and Kittel in several ways.

His support was less moderate than that of Althaus; in fact, radicalism denotes his character as much as moderation denotes Althaus'. **He escaped denazification at the end of the war by quitting his professorship**, allegedly for health reasons, losing the pension from his University.

Hirsch

- At a time when every professor of theology in Germany was pressured to join the Nazi party, **Hirsch brought Christian teaching into full alignment with the Nazi agenda.** This is apparent in Hirsch's 1934 manifesto, *Deutsches Volkstum und Evangelischer Glaube* or *German Folk and Evangelical Faith*. Hirsch, (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlag, 1934).
- He signed the 1933 statement “Loyalty Oath of German Professors to Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist State,” joined the Nazi Party in 1937, and became a Patron Member of the SS. Hirsch traced the roots of his nationalism and anti-Semitism back to Martin Luther, who wore two hats as Protestant reformer and precursor of modern German identity for Hirsch.
- Hirsch and his fellow Nazi theologians had the “grim distinction of making extermination of the Jews theologically respectable.” William F. Albright, *History, Archaeology and Christian Humanism* (NY: McGraw Hill, 1964), 229.

Hirsch

Evangelical Christianity is a manly belief, and the surrender that it demands is like that of a knight or vassal who puts himself in the service of a feudal lord. Martial values render subordination honorable.

In being open to everyone who accepts the Gospel, doesn't Christianity necessarily end up admitting degenerate peoples? This would appear to be an especially vexing problem for a Nazi. Hirsch solves it much as Ernst Troeltsch did twenty years earlier. **On the one hand, differences in human worth that are so important to humans mean nothing to God. On the other hand, however, God himself is the author of inequality, giving some the talents to be kings or mayors and calling others to be servants.** This provides justification for Hirsch to dismiss individualism and democracy. **Rather than a community of social equals, the *Volk* community and Christian society, are comprised of leaders and followers.**

Hirsch

Hirsch construes suffering as a form of discipline and sacrifice, a way to develop manliness, toughness and qualities of heroism. To illustrate authentic Christian suffering, he touts men of the National Socialist movement who endured crises, social contempt and physical danger in their struggle for ascendancy.

As suffering is misunderstood, so also is Christian love. It should not be confused with charity and welfare or relegated to men [*Männer*] who are unpolitical and unfit for combat duty and to women [*Frauen*]. Again, invoking feudal values, **Hirsch argues that authentic Christian love possesses a royal character** [*koniglichen Charakter*]. His model is the **noble warrior or knight whose love for the Volk is constitutive of the national community**.

Through love, the Lord of History confers His honor and glory upon His chosen people. For Hirsch the love of God sanctifies the German *Volk*. In His love, God once again brought alive the ancient mode of the Prussian kings in our Führer's nation [*Führungsstaat*]. Hirsch's tone, which began the section on a discursive note, ends in a rhapsody to his divinely beloved *Volk*.

Propaganda Poster



This propaganda poster from 1933 reads, "Hitler's fight and Luther's teaching are the best defense for the German people."

Segments from articles related to Robert P. Ericksen's
“Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany”

Bjorn Krondorfer

CHRISTIAN COMPLICITY? Changing Views on German Churches and the Holocaust Robert P. Ericksen

Björn Krondorfer

Björn Krondorfer is director of the Martin-Springer Institute and professor of religious studies at Northern Arizona University. His books include Male Confessions: Intimate Revelations and the Religious Imagination.

erhard Kittel, one of the German scholars who had done so much to restore Jesus to his Jewish context, also viewed post-Biblical Judaism as degenerate and became a leading Nazi theologian. Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 51