

FAITH AND DEMOCRACY:
POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS AT THE GERMAN PROTESTANT
KIRCHENTAG, 1949-1969

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ABSTRACT

BENJAMIN CARL PEARSON: Faith and Democracy: Political Transformations at the German Protestant *Kirchentag*, 1949-1969
(Under the direction of Konrad H. Jarausch)

In the decades following World War II, German Protestants worked to transform their religious tradition. While this tradition had been previously characterized by rigidly hierarchical institutional structures, strong nationalist leanings, and authoritarian political tendencies, the experiences of dictatorship and defeat caused many Protestants to question their earlier beliefs. Motivated by the desire to overcome the burden of the Nazi past and by the opportunity to play a major role in postwar rebuilding efforts, several groups within the churches worked to reform Protestant social and political attitudes. As a result of their efforts, the churches came to play an important role in the ultimate success and stability of West German democracy.

This study examines this transformation at the meetings of the German Protestant *Kirchentag*, one of the largest and most diverse postwar gatherings of Protestant laity. After situating the *Kirchentag* within the theological and political debates of the immediate postwar years, it focuses on changing understandings of the role of the church in society, the pluralization of Protestant political attitudes, and the shift from national to international self-understandings within the churches. It closes with the challenges posed to this new consensus by the youth revolt and the rise of New Left politics in the late 1960s.

By examining the important role of the Kirchentag and of the Protestant churches in the democratization and political transformation of West Germany, this study asserts the continued relevance of religious categories of analysis in the Federal Republic. Focusing on the churches' landmark contributions—including the promotion of democratic political activity, work toward East-West reconciliation, and the peace movement—it also argues for a broader, more complex conceptualization of postwar political transformations. In particular, rather than focusing on the work of any one faction or movement within the churches, it highlights the constructive roles played by different groups with different priorities and motivations.

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INTRODUCTION

In July 1951 the city of Berlin was transformed into a massive celebration of Christian faith and Christian “brotherhood.” As many as 200,000 Protestants—from both sides of the divided German nation—gathered in the city for the third annual German Protestant Kirchentag. Defying Cold War division with the motto “We are still brothers!” they raised the cross above stadiums, parks, and playing fields on both sides of Berlin. Tens of thousands of people assembled in hundreds of churches, while loudspeakers broadcast speeches and sermons to overflowing crowds in the streets outside. In an unprecedented development, the resources of the communist youth movement, the Free German Youth (FDJ), were put at the temporary disposal of the churches. And, looking anxious and uncomfortable, even important communist leaders like Wilhelm Pieck attended the meeting’s major religious services. Leaving the meeting halls at night, groups of teenagers dispersed throughout the city, singing loudly as they went. In the train stations and on the commuter trains one cluster would begin with the first verse of “Now Thank We All Our God” or “Praise the Lord” and another would pick up the words until it seemed that the whole city had been united in song.¹

Eighteen years later, German Protestants continued to gather for the Kirchentag. Meeting in Stuttgart in 1969 they could not match the massive crowds of 1951. But their numbers were still substantial, and the atmosphere was just as lively. Student protesters

¹ K. W. “Das Kreuz in Ost- und Westberlin,” *Die Zeit*, 19 July 1951; Reinhard Henkys, “Das Ereignis Kirchentag,” in *Zwanzig Jahre Kirchentag*, ed. Carola Wolf (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1969), 36.

mobbed the meeting halls carrying red flags and signs with revolutionary slogans. Forums debated the meaning of democracy and the urgent need for further democratization in West German society. Young Marxists condemned the church as a tool of the capitalist system, while other equally earnest young Marxists professed their hope that the church would lead the coming revolution. Progressive and traditional theologians engaged in heated arguments on the bible and the historical Jesus. And politicians from every major party tried to present their programs over the shouts, catcalls, and rhythmic clapping of unruly crowds. In one session, the radical psychoanalyst Alexander Mitscherlich denounced the “guilt culture” of the Christian West. And in another, student activists voted to disband the session altogether, dispensing with the planned program in favor of a political protest at the North-Rhine Westphalian *Landtag*. After one particularly tumultuous session on the historical Jesus, a small crowd of two-hundred older church members gathered in the center of the hall, singing “Jesus Lives” in an act of persistent, even defiant faith. The rest of the session’s attendees paid them little notice as they filed out of the room.²

In many ways the Kirchentag meetings of 1951 and 1969 could hardly have been more different from one another. Separated by nearly two decades, they expressed widely divergent cultural, political, and religious values. Each strongly reflected the assumptions and ideals, crises and controversies of its own time. But each of these meetings was also a response to many of the same underlying questions. What did Christian faith and the German Protestant tradition have to offer the German people after

² Rolf Zundel, “Der Gott der Alten und Jungen,” *Die Zeit*, 29 July 1969; see also Ottmar Hall, “Gehversuche am Saalmikrofon: Schwierigkeiten beim Sagen der Wahrheit,” *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*, 27 July 1969; and Martin Bernstorff, “Durst nach Geschäftsordnung,” *Christ und Welt*, 25 July 1969.

two devastating world wars? How were Germans to make sense of the unspeakable atrocities that their own people had carried out? How were postwar Germans, as a people who had been led astray by dangerous political and national illusions, ever to overcome the burden of their past? And what contributions could they make to construction of a new, more durable political system in the democratic Federal Republic?

Before 1945, the German Protestant churches had been characterized by a rigidly hierarchical—even authoritarian—organizational structure. The heirs of a longstanding alliance between church and state, they had preached almost-unquestioning obedience to state authority. Deeply conservative in their political values, they had rejected the democratic system of the Weimar Republic as a foreign imposition, working to undermine its legitimacy. And, taking a reactionary stance against social and political change, they had thrown in their lot with authoritarian leaders like Adolf Hitler, who promised to bring back the traditional social order. Caught up in the nationalist frenzy of the two world wars, they had also embraced virulently nationalist theological and political positions, proclaiming a unique God-given mission for the German nation. And they had used this National Protestant tradition to justify both foreign policy aggression and domestic racial discrimination and terror. Only during the Second World War did these pillars of Protestant thought begin to crumble. Protestants began to realize that Church hierarchies could be used by Nazis and other radical movements to steer the church away from the historical Christian faith. In the hands of a man like Hitler, the state could act unlawfully and with impunity, persecuting the churches themselves and committing horrible crimes and atrocities. And nationalist hopes and dreams, when shattered, could give way to the trauma of national defeat and national division.

In the decades after World War II, German Protestants struggled to make sense of these lessons, beginning the long, slow process of rethinking their traditional religious, national, and political assumptions. As the events at the Kirchentag gatherings of 1951 and 1969 clearly demonstrate, they succeeded to a great extent in transforming their attitudes, ideas, and values. The Protestant churches had been bastions of social and political reaction in the late German Empire. In the 1920s their teachings had helped to delegitimize the democratic Weimar Republic, contributing to its collapse. But after 1945, the churches not only came to embrace the new, democratic system of the Federal Republic, they became an important force for political and cultural change. This was not a direct one-sided process, however, or a simple immediate reversal. The German Protestant churches did not become proponents of democratization and political change overnight. Instead, their transformation involved a great deal of soul searching and self-criticism. At forums like the Kirchentag, postwar Protestants worked to re-interpret their tradition. They debated the meaning and the relevance of Christian faith to their present-day circumstances and to the conditions of modern life. And, in the process, they came to quite divergent conclusions. The story of the postwar transformation of West German Protestantism is not a straightforward triumphalistic narrative. It is the story of real people working together—and sometimes working against each other—to take their religious faith seriously, to apply its teachings to their lives, and to make a difference in the world.

Recent studies of the postwar modernization, liberalization, and democratization of West German culture offer some insights into how to make sense of this process. Since the early 1990s, these studies have shifted their emphasis away from the mechanics

of West German social and political life, beginning to look at the transformation of political and cultural values more broadly. Recent studies by Axel Schildt, Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, Ulrich Herbert, and Konrad Jarausch, in particular, offer useful multi-level models for thinking about the postwar transformation of West Germany. Schildt has focused on the interplay of broad social and economic developments (which he characterizes as modernization), changes in everyday life (such as the gradual passive acceptance of democracy by ordinary Germans and the integration of former Nazis into democratic society), and more ideological and intellectual transformations.³ Doering-Manteuffel has emphasized the development of a “western orientation” among political and cultural elites, focusing on their acceptance of “Western” and “American” values in the 1950s. And he has looked at Germany’s subsequent participation alongside other western nations in the social upheaval and student protests of the later 1960s.⁴ Herbert has looked at intellectual engagement with the German past, the challenges posed by personal continuities with the Nazi period and the need to reintegrate former Nazis into society, the changing structures of West German politics (patterns of political participation, communication, etc.), and the broad transformation of mentalities and culture.⁵ Finally, Jarausch has looked broadly at the process of “re-civilizing” the Germans. Emphasizing key moments in this process, he has focused on the gradual

³ Axel Schildt, *Ankunft im Westen: Ein Essay zur Erfolgsgeschichte der Bundesrepublik* (Frankfurt a/M: Fischer, 1999); see also Axel Schildt and Arnold Sywottek, eds., *Modernisierung und Wiederaufbau. Die Westdeutsche Gesellschaft der 50er Jahren* (Bonn: Dietz, 1998) and Axel Schildt, Detlef Siegfried, and Karl Christian, eds., *Dynamische Zeite. Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften* (Hamburg: Hans Christian, 2001).

⁴ Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Wie westlich sind die Deutschen? Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

⁵ Ulrich Herbert, ed. *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland. Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung, 1945-1980* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002)

break with the Nazi past accepted by most Germans in the immediate postwar years, the cultural challenges posed by the New Left in the late 1960s, and the debates that surrounded reunification after 1989/90.⁶

These studies all suggest the need for complex interpretations of West Germany's postwar transformation. Changes in the attitudes of individuals were gradual, supported by increasing material prosperity, the prospects of renewed sovereignty within a more united Western European and Atlantic framework, and by the fear of communism. They progressed in part through the painful process of confronting the Nazi past and through increasingly explicit debates about the nature of democratic society. In many ways, these changes came to head in the generational conflicts of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Nevertheless, they were still being worked out as late as the 1990s as German grappled with the legacy of East German communism.

In comparison to these sophisticated arguments, studies of the churches in postwar West Germany have lagged behind. Contemporary Church history in Germany has been dominated by studies of the Protestant churches under National Socialism and, more recently, under the communist dictatorship of the German Democratic Republic. While some of this work has extended into the early postwar period in West Germany, little goes much beyond the first years of the 1950s. Most work on West German Protestantism—especially in the late 1950s and 1960s—has consisted of popular accounts by participants or examinations of the development of particular theological

⁶ Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing the Germans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); see also the German original, *Die Umkehr. Deutsche Wandlungen 1945-1995* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2004).

schools.⁷ These accounts have tended to either adopt a hagiographic tone, celebrating the churches' supposed resistance to Nazism and their heroic role in postwar reconstruction, or, more recently, to emphasize the "restorative" tendencies that supposedly dominated the Protestant churches in the 1950s and 1960s, only giving way in the late 1960s and 1970s to new progressive, self-critical movements. Until quite recently, the immediate postwar era has been viewed primarily as a lost opportunity in which the goals of reformist minorities, such as the circle surrounding Martin Niemöller were thwarted by the conservatism and defensiveness of those with a stake in the churches' institutional power.

Only in the last several years have scholars begun to seriously challenge this perspective. As Martin Greschat has compellingly argued, the situation in the 1950s was really much more complex than conventional narratives have suggested, "neither a new beginning, nor a restoration."⁸ Within the Protestant churches, both "conservatives" and "progressives" struggled to find homes in the new postwar constellation of German society. As Matthew Hockenos has recently reminded, groups rooted in the radical

⁷ For an overview of the historiography on the Protestant churches in West Germany, see Thomas Sauer, "Die geschichte der evangelischen Kirchen in der Bundesrepublik – Schwerpunkte und Perspektiven der Forschung" in *Evangelische Kirche im geteilten Deutschland (1945-1989/90)*, ed. Claudia Lepp and Kurt Nowak (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2001), 295-309; also see the introduction to Thomas Sauer, *Westorientierung im deutschen Protestantismus? Vorstellungen und Tätigkeit des Kronberger Kreises* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1999); for examples of these historiographic tendencies, see Werner Jochmann, "Evangelische Kirche und Politische Neuorientierung in Deutschland 1945," in *Deutschland in der Weltpolitik des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts. Fritz Fischer zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Imanuel Geis and Bernd Jürgen Wendt (Düsseldorf: Bertelsman Universitätsverlag, 1973), and more recently, Wolfgang Huber, "Protestantismus und Demokratie" in *Protestanten in der Demokratie. Positionen und Profile im Nachkriegsdeutschland*, ed. Wolfgang Huber (Munich: Kaiser, 1990) and Karl Herbert, *Kirche zwischen Aufbruch und Tradition. Entscheidungsjahre nach 1945* (Stuttgart: Radius Verlag, 1989).

⁸ Martin Greschat, "Weder Neuanfang noch Restauration" in *Protestanten in der Zeit*, ed. Jochen-Christoph Kaiser (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1994); see also Martin Greschat, *Die evangelische Christenheit und die deutsche Geschichte nach 1945. Weichenstellungen in der Nachkriegszeit* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2002).

“Dahlemite,” or Barthian, faction of the Confessing Church, including such well-known figures as Martin Niemöller, Gustav Heinemann, and Helmut Gollwitzer, were at the vanguard in grappling with the church’s own guilt for the crimes of the Third Reich.⁹ This focus led them to emphasize the defects within the German Protestant tradition and to desire a radical break with the past. But more traditional, conservative groups also underwent changes, as Thomas Sauer has shown in his perceptive study of the influence of American and Western European ideas of democracy on the thought of the Kronberg Circle of conservative Protestant intellectuals.¹⁰ Indeed, given the influence of the latter group in the churches and in West German political life, it would be highly misleading to focus only on more radical critics such as Niemöller.

Both progressives and conservatives—along with the many Protestants between these extremes—were forced to grapple with the changing circumstances of the postwar period. And they did not do so in isolation from one another. Instead Protestant representatives of a variety of ideological, theological, and political perspectives attempted in various forums and through various institutions to diagnose the problems of their society and to mobilize the forces of German Protestantism to resolve them. Neither side was entirely realistic in its diagnoses. Neither side was entirely successful in implementing solutions. Both were thoroughly entrenched in the debates and concerns of their own time, rather than the debates that their successors might have wished them to be engaged in. But this process of engagement with society and its problems led both groups, by their own paths, away from the ideas of the past, toward new, self-critical,

⁹ Matthew D. Hockenos, *A Church Divided: German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).

¹⁰ Thomas Sauer, *Westorientierung im deutschen Protestantismus?*

ecumenical and international, and liberal democratic understandings of themselves, their institutions, and their place in modern German society.

One major forum for this process was the German Protestant Kirchentag. This massive Protestant convention was founded in 1949, the same year as the two German states. It was devoted to strengthening the spiritual lives of German Protestants, serving as a forum of their self-expression, as a place to strategize and coordinate the church's role in society, and as a platform for political and social transformation. The Kirchentag founder and president, Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff, fell in the middle ground between the radical progressive and traditional conservative wings of postwar Protestantism. Sympathetic to many of the progressives' concerns, but unwilling to sacrifice the church's unity and spiritual mission to damaging internecine warfare, Thadden conceived of the Kirchentag as a neutral forum where Protestant laity from all of the various church factions could come together for discussion and practical cooperation, maximizing their influence on parish life and German society as a whole.

As a neutral forum for all Protestant laity, the Kirchentag attracted an unusually broad segment of the Protestant population to its gatherings. Officially independent from the Protestant state churches, it also enjoyed unusual freedom to approach contemporary problems in innovative new ways. By the early 1950s the Kirchentag was drawing crowds in the hundreds of thousands to its massive opening and closing assemblies, and tens of thousands to its several-day-long programs of workgroup sessions, cultural activities, and religious services. Covered extensively in the religious and secular press, on the radio, and on television, its influence was even wider than these attendance numbers indicate. Within two years of its foundation, the Kirchentag had gone from

being one among many, to being *the* principal visible public forum for German Protestants. As church leaders sometimes complained, the public—including church members—sometimes seemed unable to differentiate between the Kirchentag and the institutional Protestant church itself.¹¹

The Kirchentag was an enormously diverse and multifaceted phenomenon. It drew Protestants from a wide variety of theological and political persuasions. And its meetings operated on many different levels. Gathering massive crowds to its major services and assemblies, the Kirchentag was one of the most visible public symbols of postwar German Protestantism. Like any large public gathering, its influence went far beyond its formal program. Every Kirchentag was shaped by the spontaneous reactions of the crowds it gathered together, by the questions posed after planned speeches and lectures, by the conversations that it generated between attendees, the atmosphere that it created in the city where it met, and by the responses that it generated in the press and in local congregations even after its formal sessions were over. Indeed, the Kirchentag, as a subjective experience, could resonate very differently with its attendees and observers than was intended by its organizers. This was especially apparent when German Protestants from the East and West met together, in Berlin in 1951 and 1961 and in Leipzig in 1954. At times like these, the drama of inter-German and Cold War politics, rather than the formal intellectual program, dominated headlines and conversations. The same was often true of protest actions at the Kirchentag gatherings of the late 1960s.

However, even in the midst of these dramatic experiences, the Kirchentag also remained an important intellectual forum where Protestants could gather to exchange

¹¹ This was the impression of Eberhard Müller, among others. See the “Protokoll der Präsidialausschuss-Sitzung des deutsche evangelische Kirchentages, Bad Nauheim, Vorgespräch am Nachmittag und Abend des 2. Dezember 1952” EZA 71/86/22

ideas or to argue about the church, the world, and the relationship between the two. This aspect of the Kirchentag, which persisted beneath the surface even when other more dramatic events drew headlines, had tremendous significance for the transformation of German Protestantism in the decades after World War II. It was here that Protestant identity and the German Protestant tradition were repeatedly called into question, renegotiated, and reformulated by leading figures in the churches. And while the results of these discussions and debates may not have always had the dramatic, immediate impact of other Kirchentag events, they generated a persistent ripple effect that spread through other Protestant organizations, local congregations, and West German society more broadly.

Several recent studies have addressed the changes in the organizational and structural dynamics of the Kirchentag over the course of its existence. In one recent article, Traugott Jähnichen has outlined the development of a culture of “permanent self-reflection” at the Kirchentag and in the Protestant Academies. And a recent book by Harald Schroeter has examined the Kirchentag as the source of a new “practical theology,” a new way of mediating between the church and the “world.”¹² Several specific issues and debates at the Kirchentag have also received recent scholarly attentions, most notably in Dirk Palm’s account of East-West relations at the Kirchentag

¹² Traugott Jähnichen, “Kirchentage und Akademien. Der Protestantismus auf dem Weg zur Institutionalisierung der Dauerreflexion” in *Gesellschaftspolitische Neuorientierung des Protestantismus in der Nachkriegszeit*, ed. Norbert Friedrich and Traugott Jähnichen. Bochumer Forum zur Geschichte des sozialen Protestantismus 3 (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2002), 127-44; Harald Schroeter, *Kirchentag als vorläufige Kirche. Der Kirchentag als eine besondere Gestalt des Christseins zwischen Kirche und Welt*, *Praktische Theologie heute* 13 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1993).

between 1949 and 1961.¹³ However, scholars have not yet looked systematically at the broader changes in Protestant attitudes, ideas, and values that took place gradually at the Kirchentag meetings over the course of the 1950s and 1960s.

It is this larger transformation that lies at the center of this study. How did German Protestant attitudes and ideas change so dramatically in the decades following World War II? What factors influenced and shaped these developments? And how did Protestants—and the broader German public—respond to this transformation? The programs and planning documents for the Kirchentag provide a tremendously rich source base for answering these questions. Due to constraints of time and space, this study has only been able to scratch the surface of much of this material, referring only tangentially to ongoing discussions of gender and the family, social policy, ecumenical relations, and modern theology, among other topics. It focuses instead on three specific areas of transformation within West German Protestantism. First, it looks at changing Protestant attitudes toward the public role of the churches and the relevance of Christian faith in the modern world. What, in short, did it mean to be a Protestant Christian in postwar German society? Second, it examines changes in national attitudes and national identity. What did it mean to be a German after the events of the Nazi dictatorship, Second World War, and Holocaust? And, finally, it addresses foundational changes in Protestant political attitudes and political culture. What did it mean to be a politically active citizen in the democratic Federal Republic of Germany?

This study is also divided into three chronological sections, each correlating loosely with a different phase in the development of postwar Protestant attitudes. The

¹³ Dirk Palm, “*Wir sind doch Brüder!*” *Der evangelische Kirchentag und die deutsche Frage 1949-1961*, Arbeiten zur Kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte, Series B, Vol. 36 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002).

first of these, characterized by the dominance of Christian Democracy and overtly religious politics, extends from roughly 1945 to 1954. The second, from roughly 1955 to 1961, is marked by the breakdown of this religious-political consensus and the gradual pluralization and liberalization of Protestant attitudes. Finally, the period from roughly 1961 to 1969, represents the consolidation of this left-liberal Protestant consensus and the rise of new, more radical challenges from both the Right and Left.

PART ONE

1945-1954

CHAPTER 1

RECONSTRUCTING GERMAN PROTESTANTISM, 1945-1949

Traveling through Germany in August 1945, the American Protestant minister Stewart Herman was greeted by scenes of shocking devastation. In Bremen, “Buildings which formerly shouldered the starlight out of the narrow streets survived as nothing more than a very low and jagged silhouette.” In the capital, where he had served as minister of the American church until 1939, he described “dunes of powdered brick and shattered stone inertly sprawled on the sandy soil where Berlin’s massive apartment houses and commercial enterprises once stood.” “Out of 187 evangelical churches in Berlin,” he reflected, “not one is left intact.” For those who had survived the war, he continued, life was marked by a desperate scarcity of food and the daily hardships of rebuilding and survival. It was also marked by psychological trauma. “The world has heard about the fires which raced through Hamburg sucking all oxygen out of the air,” Stewart related, “but relatively few reporters have talked with men who heard hundreds of people screaming in the sea of flames as long as there was air to breathe, and later walked among the mummified bodies of those who perished in open parks of heat which reduced to fine ashes even the records housed in fireproof safes.”¹

Yet even more than this physical, social, and psychological ruin, Herman was concerned with the spiritual ruin of the German people in the wake of National

¹ Stewart W. Herman, *The Rebirth of the German Church* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), 1-10.

Socialism. Just as the city of Hamburg had been destroyed by bombs, its Protestant church had been destroyed by the Nazis in the German Christian movement, who had seized control in order to “reform” the church according to racial and national principles. The same was true for most other regional *Landeskirchen*. With the German surrender, most of these German Christian leaders had faded to the background, their place taken by those they had persecuted in the church resistance. But the task of reconstruction was enormous. These men from the Confessing Church—“shrunk frames—ill-clad from broken shoes to ragged collars much too large for scrawny necks—and sunken cheeks under eyes doubly haunted by the memory of brethren murdered by the Gestapo and the vision of a cross that would not let them go”—how would they be able to undo the damage of the preceding twelve years?²

Rebuilding German Protestantism from the spiritual rubble of the Third Reich proved to be a complex task, further complicated by deeply rooted divisions over the nature and structure of the Protestant churches themselves, new questions about the relationship between the churches and the German nation, and changing conceptions of the Christian as a politically involved state citizen. It would take decades for German Protestants to work through all of the issues raised by the Nazi dictatorship, the Second World War, and the devastating German defeat. But they began to grapple with them already in the first few months following the German surrender, working out very different answers over the next several years. Two factors had an especially dominant influence on the development of these answers. First, the experiences of the churches under National Socialism, especially the “church struggle” against the pro-Nazi German Christian movement, became a filter through which all earlier points of view were re-

² Ibid., 4-5, 11.

interpreted and transformed. Second, the experiences of the churches in the immediate postwar period of reconstruction and rebuilding shaped the application of these lessons. The way forward would be beset by burdens from the past, but also bolstered by newly strengthened convictions. It would be buoyed by the tremendous opportunities of postwar rebuilding and renewal, but also marred by the temptations of self-justification and opportunism.

THE MULTIPLE LEGACIES OF THE CHURCH STRUGGLE

The lessons that German Protestants learned from the “church struggle” were as diverse as German Protestantism itself. Divided into twenty-eight separate state churches, into three distinct theological confessions, and into numerous theological and church-political schools of thought, German Protestantism was far from internally united before the rise of Hitler. Since different church-political factions experienced the Third Reich differently, it is hardly surprising that they drew different lessons from their experiences. The term “church struggle,” or *Kirchenkampf*, can be interpreted more or less broadly to encompass a wide range of experiences under the Third Reich. At its narrowest, the term refers to the formal struggle for power between the *völkisch* German Christian movement and their various opponents in the *Landeskirchen*, a struggle that peaked from 1933 to 1934, and was largely over by 1936. However, it can also be used more broadly to refer to other experiences of suffering and other claims to victimhood.

German Protestantism in the Weimar Republic was divided into four major church-political camps, all of which were transformed by the experiences of the Third Reich. Two of these camps had roots that went back to the Second Empire of the late nineteenth century, while two others gained prominence in the 1920s. The first of these

camps saw the individual Landeskirchen, with their separate authority and theological autonomy, as the basic structures of German Protestantism. These state churches had their roots in the wars of religion that followed the Reformation. With the implementation of the Weimar constitution, they lost their historic ties to deposed dynastic rulers, but they retained their control over local religious life. Especially in Lutheran territories, they also retained their traditional authoritarian and hierarchical structure, which was seen as a necessary defense of Lutheran confessional distinctives against the Calvinist tendencies in Germany's small Reformed and confessionally-mixed Union Churches.³

A second group of Protestants hoped to build a People's Church, or *Volkskirche*. Advocates of the *Volkskirche* idea ranged from political liberals and socialists to relatively conservative populists. Liberals, such as Martin Rade, entertained hopes of fully democratizing the Landeskirchen by shifting power to elected councils. Small groups of religious socialists held similar views. This movement had its greatest success in the small Reformed Landeskirchen in the Rhineland and Westphalia, where elected Synods had always enjoyed greater power than in the Lutheran regions. Other more traditional leaders, such as the influential Prussian churchman Otto Dibelius, hoped to combine traditional hierarchical structures with greater popular involvement. They hoped this would make the church relevant again in the lives of the people and, potentially, in the political life of the nation.⁴

³ See Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, Vol. 1, *Preliminary History and the Time of Illusions 1918-1934*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1987), 21-100.

⁴ *Ibid.*

A third group took these ideas much further, arguing that the principles of the Volk (a racially tinged nationalist concept) were central to any present-day understanding of the meaning of Christianity. These *völkisch* Christians argued that God had created each nation or people with a unique and individual destiny. The German churches had the task of promoting a specific German mission. In its moderate forms, this viewpoint went only a small step beyond the patriotic preaching that emanated from the pulpits of all participants during the First World War, proclaiming that God was on the nations' side, leading them to triumph over their enemies. At its extremes it blended into the popular neo-paganism of the broader *völkisch* movement, radically reinterpreting the Christian faith to make it more German with little regard for traditional orthodoxy.⁵

Finally, a relatively small group of theologians following Karl Barth entirely rejected the political pretensions of the other three groups, arguing that the church had a purely spiritual, rather than political function. The church existed, according to Barth, to proclaim the revelation of God, as manifested in the scriptures and the person of Jesus Christ. To Barthians, the ethical and political preoccupations of other church-political factions were idolatrous distractions from the church's true mission. It was not the church that transformed society, but the experience of Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel's teachings that transformed the individual.⁶

This theological and church-political diversity was not mirrored in German Protestants' outward political stances. Nearly all of the adherents of all four of these church political factions shared a strong sense of patriotism and nationalism and a strong

⁵ Ibid; see also Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁶ Ibid.

traditional conservatism. Nearly all were similarly united in some form of cultural or religious anti-Semitism. One notable exception was Karl Barth, himself, whose Swiss citizenship made him a little more cautious and ambivalent about the destiny of the German nation and whose personal politics were Social Democratic. In the 1920s and 1930s, however, Barth was quite unique in this respect. Even most adherents of his dialectical theology—which remained decidedly anti-political until it was transformed by the experiences of the Third Reich—remained steadfast German nationalists.

With very few exceptions German Protestants celebrated the rise of Hitler and the National Socialists. Some had reservations about the Nazi's proclivity for violence and vulgarity. However, Protestants shed few tears for the end of the Weimar Republic, which they had generally disliked. Instead, most were caught up in the excitement of national renewal that accompanied the Nazi's rise. This attitude can be seen in the 1933 Easter message that was read in the churches of the large Prussian Landeskirche:

This year the Easter message of the risen Christ goes forth in Germany to a people to whom God has spoken by means of a great turning point in history.

We know that we are at one with all Protestant fellow believers in joy at the awakening of the deepest powers of our nation to a patriotic consciousness, to a true community of the Volk, and to a religious renewal. . . . The church knows itself bound in gratitude to the leadership of the new Germany. It is joyfully prepared to co-operate in the national and moral renewal of our people.⁷

Disillusionment set in only gradually. When Hitler lent his support to the *völkisch* German Christian movement in their struggle to gain control of the individual Landeskirchen, uniting them into a more centralized Reich church, Protestant leaders from a variety of backgrounds resisted. When the state and Reich governments intervened in their affairs, they protested to the *Führer*, reminding him of their loyalty. And when the SA or the Gestapo persecuted individual pastors or church leaders, they

⁷ Quoted in Scholder, *The Churches*, Vol. 1, 236.

began to rethink their excitement of the first months of Nazi rule. But their old beliefs were slow to fade. As late as 1939, Martin Niemöller, who had been in concentration camps for nearly two years already, would patriotically volunteer his services at the outbreak of the Second World War.⁸

Different groups of Protestants experienced this disillusionment at different times and in different ways. Leaders in the churches where the German Christian movement operated most heavy-handedly were among the most thoroughly disillusioned and embittered. In these so-called “destroyed churches” whose leaders were often forcibly and illegally removed—particularly in the churches under Prussian administration—the church struggle moved through at least three progressive phases. At first church leaders sought to oppose the German Christians politically in church elections. Failing to gain enough support in these endeavors and faced with increased persecution, they sought legal and administrative solutions. But when it became clear that the German Christians’ illegal seizures of power would not be rolled back, and, indeed, enjoyed the tacit support of the Nazi state, they were forced to turn to more radical measures. At the end of May 1934, meeting in the city of Barmen, representatives of the confessing church, as these opponents called themselves, declared that the true basis of the church was not administrative or legal but theological and spiritual. In a statement drafted primarily by Karl Barth and reflecting his distinct theology, they proclaimed scripture and the person of Jesus Christ as the only true foundation of the church, questioning the legitimacy of any church authority that did not share this foundation. They also explicitly rejected the influence of any political ideology on the content of their faith. A few months later in Dahlem, they went further, declaring in a series of church emergency laws that only those

⁸ James Bentley, *Martin Niemöller* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 146-147.

who stood on this foundation could claim to lead the church. Although they were slightly more cautious in their wording, this amounted to a tacit excommunication of the German Christian and Reich Church leadership, and the claim that the confessing church (consisting of about one-third of the Protestant ministers) had the only legitimate leadership claim.⁹

In the three large Lutheran Landeskirchen of Hanover, Württemberg, and Bavaria matters were very different. In these so-called “intact churches” with their popular, conservative bishops and their centuries-old tradition of defending a narrow form of orthodox Lutheranism, the German Christians were never able to fully take control. Even when the Reich Bishop and his Allies in the government attempted to intervene, the bishops’ popular support (even among committed Nazis) made their removal impossible, and they retained a great deal of autonomy. But this freedom came at a price. Bishops August Marahrens of Hanover, Theophil Wurm of Württemberg, and Hans Meiser of Bavaria were all forced to cooperate with local German Christians to secure their authority. And they were required to make numerous concessions to the centralizing leadership of the Reich Church. When they were most heavily persecuted these bishops cooperated with the Confessing Churches of the destroyed Landeskirchen, signing both the Barmen and Dahlem declarations. But they did so with reservations, never accepting their separatist implications or their radically anti-hierarchical ecclesiology. When the intense persecution subsided, they were willing—even eager—to work once again with moderate German Christians and state authorities. The Confessing

⁹ For more on Barmen and Dahlem, see Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, Vol. 2, *The Year of Disillusionment: 1934. Barmen and Rome*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1988), 89-121, 244-82.

Church members saw this as a betrayal, which they never fully forgave, and these personal animosities continued into the postwar period.¹⁰

Between 1937 and 1939, when Nazi church politics turned from co-optation to more overt persecution, the “church struggle” extended to encompass an extraordinarily broad segment within the churches, even many moderate German Christians.¹¹ Many who wanted no trouble with the Nazis found that trouble could still come to them. In a sense, anyone who was persecuted by these measures, or who even felt intimidated by them, could lay some claim to resistance and suffering on behalf of the church. In a similar way, one could argue that the conservative, nationalist resistance circles that grew up during the war years, whose activity culminated in the July 1944 Officers Plot on Hitler’s life, were broadly part of the “church struggle,” though they were motivated only indirectly by religious concerns.¹² Finally, one could potentially broaden the church struggle to refer to the courageous actions of those few individuals whose personal faith or religious responsibility led them to rescue Jews or to speak out against Nazi euthanasia and racial killing.¹³

All postwar efforts to restore church unity and order would have to grapple with these divisions. Of the four major church-political factions of the 1920s, only three remained in 1945. The German Christian movement had been thoroughly discredited by

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See John S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933-45* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 209.

¹² See Shelly Baranowski, *The Confessing Church Conservative Elites, and the Nazi State* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1986), 89-103 and Martin Greschat, “Kirche und Öffentlichkeit in der deutschen Nachkriegszeit (1945-1949)” in *Kirchen in der Nachkriegszeit. Vier zeitgeschichtliche Beiträge*, ed. Armin Boyens, Martin Greschat, Rudolf von Thadden, and Paolo Pombeni, *Arbeiten zur Kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte*, Series B, Vol. 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 101-106.

¹³ Conway, *The Nazi Persecution*, 267-290.

the excesses of the Nazis and the disaster of military defeat. The *Landeskirche* model remained institutionally strong—for it was their reliance on local autonomy, confessional distinctness, and traditional hierarchical government that had seen the three intact Lutheran churches through the Third Reich. The Barthian model, a minority view in the 1920s, gained enormous influence in Confessing Church circles. At its foundation, the Confessing Church owed its theological legitimacy to the Barthian conception of the true church, founded on the teaching and confession of the Word. Indeed, even Lutherans such as Martin Niemöller were deeply influenced by Barth’s Reformed theology. Finally, the *Volkskirche* idea was not dead, although its abuse by the German Christians had made it suspect in some circles. While many church leaders came out of the war with a renewed fear of the masses, other leaders, such as Otto Dibelius, saw the defeat of the Nazis as a new opportunity to strengthen the church’s national influence.

These church-political divisions were not the only legacy of the church struggle. German Protestantism came out of the Second World War marked by much less unanimity in national and political matters. Most members of both the “intact churches” and the confessing church had engaged very little with national and political questions, focusing primarily on the defense of their own religious autonomy. This tendency was even more pronounced for the majority of German Protestants who had not actively resisted in this way. Yet the persecution of church leaders, the crimes of the Nazis, and the disillusionment of German defeat had begun to break down the automatic ties between Protestantism, German nationalism, and political conservatism. A few leaders, such as Martin Niemöller on the confessing church side, and Bishop Theophil Wurm of the intact Württemberg *Landeskirche* had been more courageous, raising objections to

Nazi racial or euthanasia policies. Their courage lent these figures, and others like them, enormous moral authority after the war. But this authority could be channeled in very different political directions.

THE HOUR OF THE CHURCHES

It was with good reason that the months following the German surrender were known in religious circles as “the hour of the churches.” Both the Catholic and Protestant Churches in Germany would play a major role in reconstructing German society from the total collapse that accompanied the end of the war. The task they faced was enormous. Millions of soldiers had been killed. Those who survived were interned in POW camps or Soviet labor gulags. Cities lay in utter ruin. Citizens lived in a state of fear as foreign armies occupied their towns and cities. Especially in those territories occupied by the Soviet Red Army—but sometimes elsewhere as well—harsh reprisals were the order of the day. Murder, looting, and rape were common. The suicide rate skyrocketed as many found themselves unable to face the horrors of the present and the unknown future. Germans in territories that were to become Polish or Russian were herded into cattle cars and forcefully deported in much the same way that they had deported Jews and others. Centralized government lay in a state of virtual collapse. Local government, too, underwent tremendous upheaval as Nazi party members and other collaborationists were removed or discretely disappeared from public life. The occupational authorities, whose attention had to suddenly shift from destruction of the German war machine to the bare survival of the German people, found themselves overwhelmed. They struggled with meeting peoples’ basic needs, with knowing whom they could trust, and even on a

fundamental level, with a language barrier that divided victorious rulers from vanquished citizenry.¹⁴

In these circumstances, the Allied authorities welcomed the cooperation of the German churches. They rationalized that whatever their conservatism and nationalism had been, the churches had never fully succumbed to Nazi control. Moreover, the churches remained among the few institutions capable of organizing badly needed relief. And the German people, undergoing a profound psychological and spiritual crisis, were returning to the churches at a rate that had not been seen for years.¹⁵ Cooperation between the Allies and the German churches was not just based on immediate practical needs. Particularly in the calculations of the Americans and British, the churches would play a fundamental role in the democratization of German society. As General Lucius Clay, the military governor of the American zone, suggested, “Lasting reform in Germany, must come from within. It must be spiritual and moral. . . . Religious institutions are major elements in the German social structure which must participate in any program directed to the building of a peaceful and democratic Germany if it is to have hope of success.”¹⁶

The churches were quick to seize this opportunity. Parish houses became centers for organizing humanitarian relief. Pastors became trusted advisors to occupation officers, guides to the complexities of the local community, and respected arbiters of who could be trusted and who could not. Church contacts—though attenuated by the

¹⁴ See Greschat, *Die evangelische Christenheit*, 15-19; 53-73.

¹⁵ See Christoph Kleßmann, “Kontinuitäten und Veränderungen im protestantischen Milieu,” in *Modernisierung und Wiederaufbau. Die Westdeutsche Gesellschaft der 50er Jahren*, ed. Axel Schildt and Arnold Sywottek (Bonn: Dietz, 1998), 403-404 and Martin Greschat, *Die evangelische Christenheit*, 71-73.

¹⁶ Lucius D. Clay, *Decision in Germany* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1950), 305.

breakdown of society and the churches' own internal disorder—remained a rare source of news of the world outside the local community. Eventually, as communication and transportation became possible again, regional churches began to rebuild themselves. Their leaders also renewed their contact with the churches outside of Germany, particularly in the United States and Western Europe. Individually and through the Geneva-based World Council of Churches, these churches provided food and other vital supplies, and hoped to offer spiritual council and guidance as well.¹⁷

When church leaders finally had time to think about how to restructure their churches or to reassess their theology and politics, they did so in the context of this renewed relevance and importance. The opportunities of the postwar era came to play as fundamental a role as the lessons of the church struggle in the ways that they re-defined their religious, national, and political identities after 1945.

RECONSTRUCTING CHURCH LIFE

Church life was reconstructed first in the local Landeskirchen. Following the German surrender—even earlier in some cases—the German Christian leaders who had dominated church life began to quietly step aside, hoping to fade into obscurity. New church councils were formed from the ranks of neutrals, who had taken no side in the church struggle, and members of the local confessing churches. Leaders who had been deposed by the German Christians often returned to their old posts, their authority greatly strengthened by the persecution they had endured. Otto Dibelius, for example, had served as General Superintendent in the Berlin-Brandenburg region of the Old Prussian

¹⁷ Greschat, *Die evangelische Christenheit*, 63-73.

church administration. Returning after the war, he accepted the title Bishop in the hope that it would strengthen his position as a negotiating partner with the Allied authorities.¹⁸

The churches were given a great deal of autonomy to purge themselves of former Nazis as they thought appropriate. This policy had mixed results. While active German Christians were removed from the ministry, church leaders were reluctant to deal with former Nazis too harshly. Especially in the intact Landeskirchen, the process of denazification proceeded very unevenly. This was typified by the case of Bishop Marahrens of Hanover. While no more guilty of complicity with the German Christians than Wurm or Meiser, Marahrens' public comments in 1939 in favor of a "total war devoid of any sentimentality" were deeply embarrassing to other postwar church leaders.¹⁹ Yet despite calls to step down from Wurm and Niemöller, among others, Marahrens managed to retain his position with local support until 1947. In Württemberg and Bavaria there were also conflicts over denazification, as the bishops who had retained their authority even under Nazi persecution resolved to surrender as little as possible to the new Allied occupiers. While the denazification of these churches was punctuated by occasional conflicts, most of the work was accomplished through negotiation, and the worst offenders were removed. The retention of former Nazis, primarily in minor positions, served as a continual irritation to those who had suffered under the Third Reich. But there was little threat of any relapse into Nazism. Disillusioned by the

¹⁸ Ibid., 90.

¹⁹ Quoted in Annemarie Smith-von Osten, *Von Treysa 1945 bis Eisenach 1948. Zur Geschichte der Grundordnung der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland*, Arbeiten zur Kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte, Series B, Vol. 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 34.

outcome of the Second World War, most former Nazis were content to withdraw from the world, making little trouble.²⁰

The *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (DEK), through which the Nazis and German Christians had sought to unify the various Landeskirchen into a national church, continued to exist as a legal entity. But its administration had essentially ceased to function and its use by the German Christians had discredited it thoroughly in eyes of the Confessing Churches. Although some church leaders, such as Marahrens, hoped to simply reconstruct the DEK as though nothing had changed, most had very different ideas for the reconstruction of church life in 1945.²¹

His moral authority burnished by his condemnation of the Nazi euthanasia program, Bishop Theophil Wurm of Württemberg had come to be seen as the de-facto leader of German Protestantism. Supported by the American military authorities, he began to travel throughout Germany in the summer of 1945, gaining support among church leaders for his plan (begun already during the war) to unify the Landeskirchen in a looser, more federal structure. His efforts culminated in the end of August 1945 in a meeting of the leaders of the Landeskirchen and the Confessing Church in the city of Treysa, where the provisional government of a new *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (EKD) was formed. Yet Wurm's plans were forced from the very beginning to compete with two other models for the reconstruction of German church life.²²

²⁰ See Clemens Vollnhalls, ed., *Entnazifizierung und Selbstreinigung im Urteil der evangelischen Kirche. Dokumente und Reflexionen 1945-1949* (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1989); Vollnhalls, *Evangelische Kirche und Entnazifizierung 1945-1949. Die Last der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit, Studien zur Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 36 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1989) and Frederic Spotts, *The Churches and Politics in Germany* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 109-112.

²¹ Smith-von Osten, *Von Treysa*, 28-30.

²² *Ibid.*, 30-36, 102-130.

Martin Niemöller—only recently released from Dachau—still hoped to radically reform the German church structure to bring it into line with the anti-hierarchical principles of the Barmen and Dahlem declarations. His ideas involved the dissolution of the entire historical structure of Landeskirchen. These would be replaced by a central church structure built and governed from below by the members of individual congregations. Niemöller and other representatives of the Reich Brethren Council that had governed the confessing church gathered in Frankfurt a few weeks before the Treysa meeting to consider their options. Ultimately, they decided to support Wurm’s plans for the EKD, but they continued to hope that their influence would bring about a radical break with the trappings of the past. The major concession they gained was the acceptance by the assembled church leaders of the legitimate church authority of the Reich Brethren Council. The council continued to meet in the years following the war, but it was given no real place in the hierarchy of the postwar church. Its authority remained largely indirect, limited to advice and admonition.²³ Yet, despite this lack of institutional authority, the Reich Brethren Council did play a significant role in shaping the ideological debates that raged within German Protestantism after the war, particularly relating to issues such as German guilt and East-West relations. Despite these gains, however, many of the more radical Barthians in the confessing church were quite disappointed by the failure to reform the basic organization and structures of German Protestantism. Of the postwar situation, Karl Barth lamented, “To my astonishment, I found in the official church much the same structure, grouping and dominant tendencies in which I had seen it hastening to its ruin in 1933. The progressive elements . . . were

²³ Ibid., 37-69; 102-130.

still on the scene and at work but they were still a minority compared with the really dominant groups and authorities.”²⁴

On the other extreme, Bishop Meiser of Bavaria saw the end of the war as an opportunity to achieve his longstanding goal: the unification of all of the Lutheran Landeskirchen. Meiser hoped that this unification would re-assert the importance of the confessional Lutheran churches in Germany. Serving as a counterweight to the Reformed and Union churches, it would help to draw the entirety of German Protestantism back in a Lutheran direction. Meiser ultimately succeeded in bringing about greater unity between the Lutheran Landeskirchen, but only within, and not against, the structure of the new EKD.²⁵ Meiser’s concerns about the corruption of the Lutheran Landeskirchen remained, however, as a major factor influencing the course of German Protestantism throughout the 1950s.

GUILT AND NATIONAL SELF ASSERTION

Already in 1945 their experiences in the church struggle, in the Second World War, and in the aftermath of Germany’s defeat, had caused many Protestants to begin to rethink their attitudes toward the German nation. Both persecuted victims of the Nazis and disillusioned collaborators were forced to question the largely unthinking patriotism and nationalism that had contributed to their present distress. This process of rethinking their national identity progressed gradually through several postwar discussions in the churches. On the one hand, when considering their guilt for the crimes of the Nazis, church leaders were forced to re-examine the attitudes that had led them astray. On the

²⁴ Quoted in John S. Conway, “How Shall the Nations Repent? The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt, October 1945,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38, 4 (October 1987): 601.

²⁵ Smith-von Osten, *Von Treysa*, 92-101.

other hand, many found it easy to remain satisfied with their own status as victims of Nazism, refusing to look at the ways in which they were also collaborators, and adopting a defensive posture toward those who sought punishment or redress.

More radical members of the confessing church, who had adopted Karl Barth's theology during the church struggle, took a broad view of German guilt and its implications for the German nation. Barth himself, who had lived out the war in his native Switzerland after being expelled from the Third Reich, argued along these lines in his 1945 essay "How Can the Germans Be Cured." He asserted that the fundamental sickness of German society had not begun with Hitler and the Nazis, but went back to Bismarck, to Frederick the Great, and the entire Prussian tradition of authoritarianism and militarism. And he believed that only a fundamental break from this tradition would provide a healthy foundation for rebuilding the church and for rebuilding German society. To break with this tradition, he argued, Germans would have to recognize their own guilt for the crimes of the Nazis. "The only pertinent and constructive question concerns the guilt in which all groups were involved. . . .," he argued, "All Germans failed to a certain extent—not only some of them, not only this one or that one, because they allowed things to go as far as they have gone."²⁶ Leaders of the intact churches and less-radical confessing church members took a narrower view, seeking to balance considerations of German guilt with the defense of the defeated and suffering German people.

These issues came to a head in October 1945 when the provisional council of the EKD held its second meeting in Stuttgart. Here it was not just confessing church leaders

²⁶ Karl Barth, "How Can the Germans Be Cured," trans. Marta K. Neufeld, in *The Only Way: How Can the German's Be Cured?* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 14.

like Niemöller who pushed for recognition of German guilt. The meeting was also attended by several Protestant leaders from outside of Germany, led by Willem Visser't Hooft, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. These leaders, too, communicated to their German colleagues the importance of confession to the restoration of ecumenical ties. At the opening meeting of the Stuttgart assembly, Niemöller directly confronted the feelings of victimization that prevented many Protestant leaders from thinking about their guilt:

Who is guilty for our misery, the Nazis, the militarists, the English, the Americans? . . . One thing is completely certain, if we criticize ourselves and, as a Christian community, as a church, bow to God's Word, then we will see our guilt, and then we will realize that our people would never have been able to follow this path to its end if we had lived in its midst as a Christianity that fulfilled its obligations.²⁷

But other leaders, like Bishop Wurm, had misgivings about the effects of any statement of guilt. Wurm did not think the German people, preoccupied with their own suffering, were ready for such a statement. Instead, he feared they would turn their backs on the churches. They would conclude: "There is nothing to be accomplished through Christianity. It has no influence on politics. We will be treated exactly the same way that our people handled the Jews, the Poles, etc."²⁸

Despite these misgivings, the council proceeded to draft a statement of guilt, declaring, in part:

With great pain do we say: through us endless suffering has been brought to many people and nations. What we have often borne witness to before our congregations, we now declare in the name of the whole church. We have for many years struggled in the name of Jesus Christ against the spirit which found its terrible expression in the National Socialist regime of tyranny, but we accuse

²⁷ Carsten Nicolaisen and Nora Andrea Schulze, eds., *Die Protokolle des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland*, Vol. 1, 1945/46 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 99-100.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

ourselves for not witnessing more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously and for not loving more ardently.²⁹

This statement was carefully worded. It recognized that the German churches shared in the solidarity of their people's guilt, but it made it clear that their guilt was passive rather than active. More than their initial enthusiasm for National Socialism and their collaboration during the Third Reich, the church leaders accused themselves of wavering in their faith under the persecution that they too had endured at the hands of the Nazis. This was no wholehearted repudiation of the German national tradition, but it was, at least, a recognition that Christian responsibility placed limits on national loyalty. As modest and carefully worded as it was, however, the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt generated a firestorm of controversy when it was published. As angry letters and public denunciations demonstrated, most ordinary Protestants were not yet willing to even think about questions of guilt.³⁰

The public was much more welcoming when Protestant church leaders attacked the injustices of Allied war crimes tribunals and harsh denazification measures. Enthralled by the public enthusiasm for their remarks, Protestant leaders became some of the most vocal critics of the Allied occupational authorities and defenders of the German people. The specific criticisms of church leaders were motivated by a variety of factors. Many German Protestants, especially those of more conservative leanings, seem to have genuinely feared the complete destruction of the German nation, people, and culture at

²⁹ Ibid., 60-61; see also John S. Conway, "How Shall the Nations Repent? The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt, October 1945," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38, 4 (October 1987): 621-22; Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 210.

³⁰ See Martin Greschat and Christiane Bastert, eds., *Die Schuld der Kirche. Dokumente und Reflexionen zur Stuttgarter Schulderklärung vom 18./19. Oktober 1945*, Studienbücher zur kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte, Vol. 4 (Munich: Kaiser, 1982).

the hands of the victorious Allies. Indeed, these fears were only reinforced by early Allied plans for Germany. As members of the privileged social elite, many Protestants also feared the implications of Allied policies for the organization of German social life and norms. In practice, many felt that denazification was removing loyal Protestants from positions of social and political influence and replacing them with socialists, communists, and other dangerous subversives. In the hunger and physical need of the early occupation years, compassion for the suffering of former Nazis and their families was another major motivation. Finally, the problems, flaws, and contradictions within the Allied policies themselves provided plenty of fodder for church critics, some of whom were genuinely concerned that such policies be carried out efficiently, successfully, and fairly.

Bishops Wurm and Meiser took the early lead in criticizing these policies, but even radical Barthians like Niemöller contributed at times to the effort. Already in his first meeting with American officials, just weeks after the end of the war, Wurm was pleading for the release of imprisoned Nazis, whose pastors vouched for their trustworthiness. In the following months he continued to inundate the Allied authorities with letters calling for Nazi Party members to be judged according to their individual actions only, and not their party membership. Meiser was just as active, collaborating with the Catholic Cardinal Faulhaber, to plead on behalf of mid-level party functionaries as well as certain SS and Gestapo members, who, they asserted, had not committed any “serious crimes.”³¹

Later, when the American military government adopted a new denazification law based on the principles of individual guilt and accountability, the leaders of the EKD

³¹ Clemens Vollnhals, *Entnazifizierung und Selbstreinigung*, 26-31.

rejected this as well. They argued that it was incompatible with the principles of rule of law since it punished attitudes and not actions and since the actions it punished had not been illegal when they were committed. They also attacked the physical hardship that the law was inflicting on relatively “innocent” pre-1937 Party members, high business leaders, and members of the *Waffen-SS*.³² Even Niemöller was critical, viewing the law as an impediment to the Christian tasks of reconciliation and forgiveness. In February 1945 in his capacity as the superintendent of the church of Hessen-Nassau, he demanded of his parishioners, “No longer cooperate in these things that have brought so much injustice in their wake, neither as public plaintiffs, nor as willing prosecution witnesses! Or you will be in danger of betraying the call to reconciliation that has been placed upon you.”³³

Protestant leaders did not just object to the punishment of minor Nazi functionaries. They also took the lead in opposing the trials of war criminals. While the initial Nuremberg trials of the highest Nazi leaders were relatively uncontroversial, even these early trials were met with some misgivings. The third meeting of the EKD council in December 1945 gave vent to many of these concerns. Bishop Meiser, for example, argued: “It needs to be made clear that we have nothing to do with this court, in which the accusers and the judges are the same people.” And Bishop Dibelius complained that the presence of the Russians as accusers undermined the authority of the tribunal. The council also agreed that it was inappropriate for church leaders to serve as prosecution

³² Ibid., 101-102.

³³ Ibid., 197, 202-203.

witnesses in these trials.³⁴ As Hans Asmussen, the president of the Church chancellery later explained: “Because we are their spiritual counselors, we are neither their confederates against the Allies, nor the confederates of the Allies against them.”³⁵

In fact, Protestant leaders such as Wurm and Meiser went far beyond this position of neutrality in their objections to subsequent trials, including those of leading industrialists and diplomats, concentration camp guards, and military officers.³⁶ Like their criticisms of denazification, their criticisms of these trials began with objections on relatively narrow legal grounds and with warnings that such trials would give the German people the wrong idea about the nature of justice. These modest objections, however, became progressively more hysterical and one-sided as time progressed. One major criticism of the war crimes tribunals had to do with the perception that they were nothing more than victor’s justice. As Hans Asmussen wrote to George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester, in February 1948:

No rational person, let alone a Christian can doubt that crimes committed in war ought to be expiated through courts and punishment. But we now have to confront the undeniable fact that public opinion, not only in Germany, but also in other countries, says, ‘Today the generals are on the dock; with a shift in power balance it would be the generals of the former victorious nations.’ No power in the world can presently pass equal judgment on *all* those who have committed crimes against humanity in recent years.³⁷

³⁴ Nicolaisen, *Protokolle*, Vol. I, 211.

³⁵ Quoted in Clemens Vollnhals, “Die Hypothek des Nationalprotestantismus: Entnazifizierung und Strafverfolgung von NS-Verbrechen nach 1945,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 18 (1992): 58.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁷ Quoted in Norbert Frei, *Adenauer’s Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration*, trans. Joel Gold (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 100; italics in original.

This complaint was frequently coupled with criticisms about the fairness of the trial procedures and questions about the basic viability of the international law upon which the trial proceedings were based. For example, in a May 1948 petition of EKD leaders to Lucius Clay, the military governor of the U.S. zone, Bishop Wurm complained of unfair trial procedures, such as the detention and undue influencing of witnesses, of the use of “international law, until now lacking in all normative status,” and of the “exclusive application of such law to the defeated.” He concluded that the trials demonstrated “less justice than the exercise of power and use of a political instrument.”³⁸ In the trials of leading military officers, many of whom belonged to prominent Protestant circles, Wurm even compared the tactics of the prosecution to those of the Nazis, specifically condemning the trial of military officials as civilians in civilian courts.³⁹

Drawing on the misgivings of many Americans about the nature of these trials and especially about the aggressive interrogation tactics of a handful of prosecutors, Wurm was soon seeking to discredit the entire process. Engaging in substantial hyperbole, he publicly complained: “In trial preparations in those cases thus far ending in death sentences, criminal methods and repellent tortures have been applied in order to extort statements and confessions.”⁴⁰ Referring to the treatment of war criminals themselves as “crimes against humanity,” he also began to assert definite knowledge of entirely innocent men being sentenced for war crimes. Indeed, in press statements, he began to refer to “war criminals” only in scare quotes and to refer to the American

³⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 104-105.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, 108.

investigators as “executioners.” Speaking of the American prosecutors, he even went as far as to suggest: “Their deeds do not lag behind those of the Nazis in sadism.”⁴¹ Wurm was not speaking here just for himself. Although few defenders of war criminals were as vehement and persistent, there were few voices in the church or in German society at large that were willing to publicly disagree.

PROTESTANTS AND POSTWAR POLITICS

The crimes and defeat of the National Socialists had a profoundly disillusioning effect on the political views of many Protestants. If the ideals they had so fervently supported were now seen as wrong, what could guarantee that new ideals, such as democratic self-government, were really any better? Most church leaders quickly overcame these suspicions, realizing that the democratic political ideals of the Western Allies offered new opportunities to exert their influence in public life. Western democratic ideals were, at the very least, more attractive than Soviet communism, with its atheist and materialist worldview. By 1946, the experiences of Otto Dibelius under Soviet occupation, had led him to conclude: “The dictatorship of a totalitarian state is inconsistent with the will of God. For the sake of the Gospel we need a democratic state system.”⁴² Ordinary Protestant church members were slower to come to these conclusions. Especially among those who had actively served in the Third Reich there remained a certain revulsion toward the very idea of politics and a lack of interest in democratic participation. Church leaders were nearly unanimous on the need to combat

⁴¹ Ibid., 108, 113, 118-119.

⁴² Quoted in Kurt Nowak, “Protestantismus und Demokratie in Deutschland: Aspekte der politischen Modern,” in Martin Greschat and Jochen-Christoph Kaiser, *Christentum und Demokratie im 20. Jahrhundert*, Konfession und Gesellschaft, Vol. 4 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1992), 11.

this view, enticing the disillusioned with the prospect of a thoroughly Christian postwar political order created through the active participation of Christian voters.

In the area of party politics Protestant leaders were more divided, although these divisions were not initially as severe as they were in theological or national matters. Most leaders accepted the idea that Nazism had arisen from the materialism and secularism of Weimar society, and that some sort of spiritual renewal offered the only hope for the future. Without any strong, unified Protestant political tradition to fall back on, they found themselves attracted to the ideas of the conservative, Catholic-dominated Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU). Even many radical Barthians, such as Gustav Heinemann, the mayor of Essen from 1946 to 1949 and later a member of Adenauer's cabinet, began their careers as CDU politicians. Gradually, however, their emphasis on German guilt, on the punishment of former Nazis, and on the total repudiation of militarism, led them to break with the party of Adenauer, whose priorities were rather different. This process was gradual, culminating in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the entrance of many prominent Protestant leaders into the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

While the Treysa gathering of the EKD council in 1945 was marked by disagreements over the nature and structure of the church, its attendees shared a relatively unified political perspective. In statements drafted for circulation among the local church congregations and the clergy, the Treysa delegates blamed the rise of National Socialism on the depersonalizing forces of modern mass society and the German people's rejection of Christian principles. The confessing church, which had stood for Christian truth,

became a model for the political role that the churches should adopt.⁴³ However, members of the different church factions interpreted this model differently. Radical Barthians, in particular, emphasized the role of the confessing church in resisting the idolatry of Nazism. Others like Wurm, Dibelius, and Meiser envisioned more active church participation in the rebuilding of political life.

Conservative Protestants from the resistance circles of the 1940s were among the most emphatic about the need for a new Christian politics. This perspective is apparent in the “Word on the Responsibility of the Church for Public Life,” whose primary authors included former members of the *Kreisau* resistance circle such as Theodor Steltzer and Gerhard Ritter. This document, circulated by the church chancellery, began by reviewing the lessons of the Third Reich. “The terrible outcome of the past twelve years,” it asserted, “has opened the eyes of wide circles inside and outside the church to the fact that political community is safe from demonic degeneration only where the principles of Christian order make themselves felt in public life.”⁴⁴ Although the document went on to concede that the church was not a political party, and should not take sides in strictly political matters, it affirmed that “this does not preclude welcoming with goodwill the creation of a political party that is itself committed to Christian principles.” And it went on to endorse early efforts toward the creation of the CDU, expressing a hope that

⁴³ See for example the “Wort an die Gemeinden. Treysa, 30. August 1945” and “Wort an die Pfarrer” in Nicolaisen, *Protokolle*, Vol. 1, 5-11.

⁴⁴ “Ein Wort zur Verantwortung der Kirche für das öffentliche Leben” in Fritz Söhlmann, ed., *Treysa 1945. Die Konferenz der evangelischen Kirchenführer 27.-31. August 1945* (Lüneburg: Im Heiland-Verlag, 1946), 102.

Protestant-Catholic cooperation would “make possible a political association of both confessions on the grounds of Christian Union.”⁴⁵

Large numbers of Protestants from all church-political parties heeded this call. Although the CDU received much of its initial impetus from Catholics, many Protestant leaders were also active in its creation. In Protestant regions such as Hanover, church leaders like Bishop Marahrens played major roles in founding local groupings. And in Catholic Bavaria, Bishop Meiser took an active interest in the creation of the CSU, sending an aide to formally assist in the process.⁴⁶ Protestant support for the CDU was not limited to the more conservative wings of the church. Early Protestant CDU members ran the gamut from former members of the conservative German National People’s Party (DNVP) such as Robert Lehr and Hans Schlange-Schöningh, through Weimar liberals, like Ernst Lemmer, Christian Socialists, such as Wilhelm Simpendoerfer and Paul Bausch, and younger Protestant figures such as Hermann Ehlers and Eugen Gerstenmaier, who had come of political age during the Third Reich, and whose formative experiences were in the Confessing Church.⁴⁷ Even members of the Barthian faction, such as Emmi Bonhoeffer (the widow of Dietrich Bonhoeffer) and Martin Schröter, a former Confessing Church minister in Baden, joined the CDU at first, although both left in disillusionment within a few years.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid., 103-104.

⁴⁶ Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 225.

⁴⁷ Torsten Oppelland, “Politik aus Christlicher Verantwortung. Der Evangelische Arbeitskreis der CDU/CSU in der Ära Adenauer” in *Katholiken und Protestanten in den Aufbaujahren der Bundesrepublik*, ed. Thomas Sauer (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2000), 35.

⁴⁸ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 228-229.

Soon members of the church's more radical Barthian faction developed misgivings about this informal alliance of the Protestant churches and the CDU. In part these misgivings were rooted in their greater distrust of Catholicism, which Barth considered a "natural theology" no different at its theological core than the beliefs of the German Christians. And in part they were rooted in the fear that political and social influence was leading the churches away from their spiritual duties, especially discouraging them from looking self-critically at themselves and at the German past.

These currents of discontent found early expression in the 1947 *Darmstadt Wort*. In the shadow of the developing Cold War and the increasing Western integration of Germany's western zones, the members of the Brethren Council of the EKD met in Darmstadt to discuss recent German political developments. During the course of this meeting, more radical members of the group expanded on the ideas of the Barmen declaration, especially its criticism of the influence of politics on the churches. The Barthian theologian Hans Joachim Iwand took these ideas to their extreme, arguing that the proper role of the church and of Christians in society was one of constant opposition to every party, system, and government.⁴⁹ With reference to the impending Cold War division of Germany, the radical Barthians in the council also rejected the CDU's equation of Christian values with the social and political system of Western Europe. At the same time rejecting the atheistic foundations of socialism and communism, they called for a vaguely-defined Christian third way between East and West. The church,

⁴⁹ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 224; Matthew D. Hockenos, *A Church Divided: German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 126-130.

they believed, should take upon itself the task of reconciling Germans in both parts of the country to one another.⁵⁰

In 1947, however, this was the position of only a small minority of Protestant leaders. The *Darmstadt Wort* had only twelve signers, three of whom were not even members of the Brethren Council. East German Protestants reacted especially harshly to the proclamation, claiming in numerous letters and articles that it betrayed a great deal of ignorance and naïveté about the actual conditions of East German life under the Soviet occupiers. As Kurt Scharf, the leader of the Brandenburg consistory, proclaimed: “It seems...the Protestant churches in the German West and in the German East speak completely different languages. . . . One can only speak this way if one fully misjudges the prevailing situation among us, or if one can not, or will not see the truth.”⁵¹ Indeed, it was not until the controversy over West German rearmament in the early 1950s that large numbers of West German Protestants began to move closer to the radical Barthian perspective on inter-German relations.

⁵⁰ Greschat, “Vorgeschichte,” 27-29.

⁵¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 31.

CHAPTER 2

THE LAY APOSTOLATE

In a circular letter from June 1949, Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff explained his plans for the upcoming German Protestant *Woche* in Hanover—and for the larger Kirchentag movement that would grow out of this meeting. Looking at the postwar crisis in Germany, he lamented the “total destruction” of the German nation, the “wholesale disappearance” of the middle classes, the loss of traditional leadership, and the “unimaginable numbers” of uprooted refugees and expellees desperately seeking a new homeland. Yet this, he argued, was not the full extent of the crisis. Alongside of this social and material breakdown, postwar Germans also suffered from an “inner disorientation of undeniable consequence.” Even during the darkest days of the Nazi dictatorship, the German people had sought solace in the churches and in their religious and spiritual tradition. Yet, now in the aftermath of war and defeat, he argued, “the old national church [*volkskirchliche*] world of our fathers is dissolving.” Even in the middle classes, the traditional core of the Protestant churches, the religious enthusiasm of the immediate postwar period was beginning to fade. People were abandoning their ties to the churches and falling into “indifference and skepticism, even downright nihilism.”¹

To Thadden, the extent of this disillusionment was profound, and its consequences were dire.

¹ Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff [RvTT], “Deutsche Evangelische Woche 1949 in Hannover,” 22 June 1949, EZA 71/86/1, 1; reprinted in DEKT 1949, 1.

Whether intellectual or worker, city-dweller or farmer, whether romantic, Nazi, or communist, none of us are the same as we once were. We are people wholly thrown off course, whose earlier ideals have been shipwrecked, whose political hopes have been destroyed, and now we are seeing the last foundations of our lives called into question. If this great vacuum—that arose in the souls of young Germans in 1945, and that largely remains today—is not filled with Christian faith, then there is no way to know where this intellectual, and ultimately social and political development could once again lead.²

Yet all was not lost. “In this situation,” Thadden argued, “German Protestant Christendom is called to responsibility, to witness, and to service.” It was not enough to simply rely on pastors and church leaders to address the present-day crisis. Instead, he argued, “The seriousness of the situation can only be addressed through the complete commitment of the laity as well.” Indeed, the “intellectual and spiritual” future of the German people was the responsibility of every Protestant Christian in every walk of life. In the past, German Protestants had failed to take this duty seriously. In their passivity and self-absorption they had made little difference in the surrounding society. But now, Thadden concluded, “in the middle of a world alienated from God, we must realize the lay-apostolate of the church.”³

This was the central idea behind the Kirchentag movement. The church was no longer the reserve of the clergy or a small stratum of lay-administrators. It belonged to all German Protestants, regardless of their social background or their theological and political convictions. It was, furthermore, a part of the larger worldwide Christian community that spanned the borders of continents and nations. Because they had forgotten these fundamental truths about the nature of the church, German Protestants had been unable to mount a serious resistance to the threat of Nazism. The

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 2.

disempowered laity had simply gone along with the national and racial idolatry of the German Christian movement. And the confessing church clergy had been isolated from their parishioners, unable to transform their resistance into any kind of broad-based movement. Yet, the postwar crisis offered the opportunity for a new beginning. If they were to move forward, postwar Germans needed to renew their personal faith, return to active involvement in the life and governance of the churches, and take up the call to faith-inspired public responsibility.

At the German Protestant *Woche* in 1949, and at Kirchentag meetings throughout the 1950s, this comprehensive vision of the church served as a rallying point for Protestants from every theological and political faction. Like the arguments of prominent Barthians and confessing church veterans, Thadden's call for the realization of the "lay apostolate" acknowledged the historical failings of German Protestant churches, their subordination to political authority, and their distance from the congregations. Like the Barthians, he also offered an implicit criticism of the postwar restoration of the church's traditional hierarchical structures, promoting the Kirchentag movement as a way to counterbalance this development. Yet Thadden's vision also shared many points of contact with the ideas of more conservative Protestant leaders. Like the Christian Democratic ideology of the Protestant Right, Thadden's vision promoted Christian faith as the only alternative to the nihilism of the Nazi past. And it emphasized the positive responsibility of all Protestant Christians to take an active role in rebuilding postwar social and political life. With its unique appeal to Protestants in every major faction, it was this vision of the "lay apostolate"—of the central importance of a mature and active

laity—that made the Kirchentag a central forum for the postwar transformation of German Protestantism.

REINOLD VON THADDEN-TRIEGLAFF

Reinold von Thadden-Triglaff's vision of the "lay apostolate" was born out of the experiences of the immediate postwar years. It was rooted in the social breakdown in Germany and the suffering of the German people, but also in the experiences of genuine faith and Christian solidarity that emerged to fill this void. It was also deeply shaped by Thadden's own earlier life and character, by his activities and experiences in the years leading up to the "German catastrophe." Indeed, the success of the Kirchentag movement would not have been possible apart from the convictions and personal contacts that Thadden developed before 1945.

Thadden was born in 1891 into a prominent family of Pomeranian Junkers. His great-grandfather Adolf Ferdinand von Thadden-Trieglaff had been a leader in the Pomeranian pietist movement of the early nineteenth century, a close friend of Otto von Bismarck, and an important figure in conservative Prussian politics. In later years, the family remained rooted in this heritage, maintaining close ties to both pietism and the imperial court. Thadden's upbringing was largely typical for a member of the Prussian nobility. It was expected that he would serve as an officer in the military and then retire to manage his family's estates. After attending an elite military academy, he took up the study of law in Paris, eventually moving to the University of Greifswald. It was there, under the mentorship of an old family friend, the future chancellor Georg Michaelis, that Thadden began to take his family's religious heritage more seriously. In the winter semester of 1911/1912, Thadden joined the German Christian Student Association

(*Deutsche Christliche Studenten-Vereinigung*, or DCSV), a small Christian organization under the leadership of Michaelis. The DCSV was a highly atypical student association for the time. While most student clubs and fraternities were caught up in the militaristic and nationalist frenzy that preceded World War I, the DCSV focused almost exclusively on bible study and Christian fellowship. Unlike most other student organizations—even within the Protestant churches—the DCSV was also explicitly ecumenical in character. Modeled on the YMCA, the DCSV enjoyed close institutional ties with the World Student Christian Federation, which united Christian student organizations from across Western Europe and the United States.⁴

It was also around this time that Thadden’s religious convictions first came into serious conflict with his duty as a Prussian noble. In 1912, another university student challenged Thadden to a duel, and he created a minor scandal when he refused to fight on the grounds of Christian conscience. This act of “cowardice” continued to haunt him, especially during the military career that followed his graduation. Indeed, it was only through the personal intervention of Kaiser Wilhelm II that Thadden was able to secure a commission as a cavalry officer, and he was consistently promoted behind the other officers in his cohort.⁵

With the outbreak of World War I, Thadden fought on the eastern front. After the war, he returned to his family’s estates. Here his curiosity led him into contact with local members of the revolutionary “Baltic Soldier’s Council.” Impressed by their portrayal of

⁴ Werner Hühne, *Thadden-Trieglaff. Ein Leben unter Uns* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1959), 15-45; also see the abridged English translation, Werner Hühne, *A Man to be Reckoned with: The Story of Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff*, ed. Mark Gibbs, trans. Robert W. Fenn (London: SCM Press, 1962); Karl Kupisch, *Studenten entdecken die Bibel. Die Geschichte der Deutschen Christlichen Studenten-Vereinigung* (Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1964); see also Thomas Sauer, *Westorientierung im deutschen Protestantismus? Vorstellung und Tätigkeit des Kronberger Kreuzes* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999), 51-52.

⁵ Hühne, *Thadden-Trieglaff*, 46-54.

the social injustice in Germany, he began to reconsider his political convictions. Describing himself as a “passionate conservative social revolutionary,” Thadden spent 1919 and 1920 in Berlin, working with Friedrich Siegemund-Schultze’s Social Work Association. Married in 1921 to Elisabeth von Thüngen, the daughter of a baron from southwest Germany, he returned to work on his family’s Pomeranian estates. During the 1920s, he became active in the local and state politics of the conservative German National People’s Party (DNVP). Although his views were more in line with the party’s Christian Social wing than with the radical faction that emerged under Alfred Hugenberg, he remained a loyal party member, and a deputy in the Prussian *Landrat*, into the 1930s.⁶

More important for his future development, in 1924 Thadden also became a member of the governing board of the DCSV, replacing Michaelis as president in 1928. The contacts he made in this capacity served him well throughout his life. Indeed, the Kirchentag would hardly have been possible without the help he received from his old DCSV comrades. Among the most important of these were Hanns Lilje, the group’s General Secretary and the future Bishop of Hanover, Eberhard Müller, who would later found the Protestant Academy in Bad Boll, and Heinrich Giesen, who would serve as the Kirchentag General Secretary throughout the 1950s. A great many of the other early Kirchentag leaders first made their acquaintance with Thadden through this work. In this capacity he also developed close contacts with Christian leaders in Western Europe and the United States. Among the ecumenical luminaries he met in this way were George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester, William Temple, the future Archbishop of Canterbury, and Willem Visser’t Hooft, who would later found the World Council of Churches.

⁶ Ibid., 55-84, 111-120.

Thadden maintained many of these ecumenical ties throughout the 1930s, and several of these contacts would later vouch for his early (if largely passive) opposition Nazism.⁷

After the Nazi seizure of power, the DCSV came under severe pressure to “coordinate” its work with that of the Nazi student movement. This pressure was especially intense due to the lobbying of the Tübingen chapter of the organization, which was dominated by the German Christian movement. After several abortive attempts at compromise, Thadden suspended the organization’s board in 1933, and the movement fragmented. As the Nazi persecution of the churches continued during the 1930s, however, the DCSV grew in numbers, and became an unofficial student organ of the confessing church. It retained these ties until it was banned in 1938.⁸

Thadden himself was also active in the leadership of the Pomeranian and Prussian branches of the confessing church. Between 1935 and 1937, he served as one of the major coordinators of the German Protestant *Woche*, a periodic gathering of confessing church members who saw spiritual renewal and evangelism as a response to Nazi persecution. These gatherings brought together leaders from every branch of the fragmented confessing church, as well as prominent ecumenical guests such as Visser’t Hooft. After these gatherings were shut down, Thadden returned to Pomerania, where he served as chair of the local confessing church and as a member of the Prussian and Reich Brethren Councils. During this period, his work for the confessing church led to several

⁷ Ibid., 85-110.

⁸ Ibid., 121-43.

periods of arrest and imprisonment, although he was never held for more than a few weeks.⁹

With the outbreak of the war, he was called up to active military service. After a number of staff positions in France and Norway, he was appointed the military commandant of the Louvain district in Belgium. Here he distinguished himself in the eyes of the local population for the humanness of his regime and his efforts to thwart the work of the SS. In particular, he played an active role in aiding the escape of the rector of the Catholic University of Louvain. Countermanding direct orders, he also prevented his soldiers from burning the city upon the German army's retreat. After the war, the city of Louvain recognized these actions, formally commending him for the conduct of his administration. Shortly after the retreat from Louvain, he was badly injured in a car accident. Discharged from duty, he returned to his Pomeranian estates to recuperate. He arrived just in time to experience the advance of the Red Army. Arrested under suspicion of being a Nazi, he was shipped to a prisoner of war camp in the Arctic Circle, where he spent most of 1945.¹⁰

It was here that the idea of the Kirchentag first really crystallized in Thadden's mind. The conditions in the camp were horrible. The mortality rate among prisoners was exceedingly high. And Thadden, still recovering from his injuries, became extremely ill. However, as he later recounted, he had never before experienced such intense and sincere Christian devotion as he did among the men of the camp. Organizing religious services for the prisoners when he was allowed, and smaller devotional gatherings when he was not, Thadden came to directly experience Christian faith as a source of hope in even the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 144-76.

direst of circumstances. In these gatherings of men from a variety of different confessions and denominations, without any church buildings, any pastors, or even any hymnbooks or bibles, he saw a model for the future of the church. The church, he realized, was not rooted not in theology or institutional trappings, but in the sincere faith and the active commitment of the laity.¹¹

Released from the camp in poor health, in December 1945, Thadden found himself in Berlin. Here he survived only with the help of his old church contact, Bishop Otto Dibelius, who provided him with food and medical attention. In Berlin he was also reunited with his wife and youngest son. In addition, Dibelius arranged for Thadden to meet with Francis Pickens Miller, another of his ecumenical contacts from the 1920s, now serving as a major in the American army. Taking pity on his old friend, Miller helped to smuggle the Thadden family out of Berlin to the estates of his wife's family in southwest Germany. In desperate need of a throat operation unavailable in Germany, Thadden was once again rescued by his ecumenical contacts. With help from Miller and Visser't Hooft, Thadden was offered a position at the World Council of Churches headquarters in Geneva. And thanks to further help from contacts in the French church, he was able to attain an exit visa from the French Military Government. After his operation—the first of many over the course of the next several decades—he took up his position on the staff of the WCC.¹²

As a representative of the World Council of Churches, Thadden spent much the period between 1946 and 1948 traveling to prisoner of war camps in France, Italy, and North Africa. Here his job was to offer spiritual comfort to the prisoners, and to convince

¹¹ Ibid., 167-76.

¹² Ibid., 179-90.

them to reject Nazism and nationalism and to accept the postwar order. In speeches to these prisoners, Thadden began to lay out his vision of the “Lay Apostolate.” He would typically describe the horrible conditions in Germany, and he would relate his own terrible experiences as a POW in Russia. But then he would turn to the question of the future. Germany was rebuilding. Things were getting better. And Christian faith and Christian service lay at the foundation of these efforts. Germany only had a future, he would argue, if Germans repented, returned to the Christian faith, and if they were inspired by this faith to take an active role in the postwar rebuilding efforts.¹³

During his time in Geneva, Thadden also became active in a variety of church leadership positions. At the first conference of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1946, he was elected as a German delegate to the organization’s central committee. He also served on the board of directors of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, coming into contact with the future Kirchentag General Secretary Hans Hermann Walz. Upon returning to Germany in 1948, his position in Geneva having been eliminated, he also became the chair of the Protestant Student Congregations, and joined the leadership boards of the Christian *Akademikerschaft* and the Protestant Academies. At the behest of Heinrich Rendtorff, another old DCSV contact and a theology professor at Kiel, he was awarded an honorary doctorate in theology in 1948. And he was given another vaguely-defined church leadership position, as the representative of the church chancellery assigned with coordinating the lay-work, evangelism, and *Volksmision*

¹³ Ibid., 190-202; see also RvTT, *Auf verlorenem Posten? Ein Laie erlebt den evangelischen Kirchenkampf in Hinterdeutschland* (Tübingen: Furche Verlag, 1948).

efforts taking place in the Student Congregations, the Protestant Academies, the Men's and Women's organizations, and the rest of the "non-diaconal" church associations.¹⁴

Thadden's first major task in this capacity was to organize a new German Protestant *Woche*, set to meet in Frankfurt in 1949. The Protestant *Woche* of the 1930s had already been revived in 1948 by Hans Kallenbach, the director of the Protestant Academy in Nassau-Hessen, as an evangelistic gathering devoted to personal spiritual renewal. Yet Thadden's vision for the gathering was much broader. The German churches, he believed, did not just need more coordination among the various church works and associations. They needed a wholesale revival of lay-involvement and lay activity. As he began the work of coordinating the 1949 *Woche*, Thadden started to see the meeting as a step toward realizing his plans for a German Protestant Kirchentag, a permanent lay-assembly devoted not just to bible study and evangelism, but to more fully empowering the laity to take up leadership in the churches and in society.¹⁵

THE KIRCHENTAG IDEA

On February 3, 1949, Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff met with a small circle of Protestant leaders to formulate their plans for the 1949 *Woche*. Besides Thadden himself, the meeting included Ernst zur Nieden, the leader of the Protestant Men's Work, Eberhard Müller, the chair of the leadership board of the Protestant Academies, Erwin Krämer, a representative of the leadership of the Student Congregations, Hans Kallenbach, the director of the Academy in Nassau-Hessen, and Heinz Flink, the secretary of the Protestant Men's Work. Reporting on their separate organizational

¹⁴ Ibid., 179-202.

¹⁵ Ibid., 203-13.

efforts, the meeting's participants discussed the rapidly changing social and intellectual environment in Germany and the enthusiastic, but disorganized efforts of the churches to keep up. Reflecting on their common task in the meeting's minutes, these leaders agreed:

In these circumstances, amid the varied efforts to renew church life, to awaken personal Christian conviction in the congregations, and to embolden wide circles of the laity to participate willingly and gladly in the congregational life of the churches, it is vitally important that the leaders of the EKD offer intellectual and organizational coordination, bringing these movements into ongoing contact with the entire leadership of the EKD.¹⁶

When it was his turn to speak, Thadden offered an even broader and bolder vision for the upcoming gathering:

If we revive the Protestant *Woche* today, this is not just a matter of pressing ahead *as usual*, but of the church's mission "*today*" in the midst of the terrible after-effects of a lost war and in view of a dark present full of apocalyptic portents. We are talking about a meeting of German Protestant Christendom of unusually broad proportions over an extended period of time. Even apart from the immediate propagandistic effects of such a gathering, this kind of witness to the existence and missionary vigor of the Protestant life of faith cannot fail to make an impression on the consciousness of our present-day world, alienated from the church. This is especially true if this outward manifestation can be brought into contact with a genuinely awakened commitment to the cause of Christ. The Protestant Christian is called in the present day to demonstrate, against every countervailing worldview, that he is willing to stand on the side of the cross. Insofar as he is serious in this commitment, he will realize that he does not stand alone in this struggle.¹⁷

The rest of the meeting was spent making plans for this gathering, setting up a provisional leadership committee, and preparing a report for Martin Niemöller, the president of the local Church of Hessen-Nassau.

These plans ran into difficulty in mid-March. Unhappy with the choice of speakers and with the intellectual and theological content of the gathering, Niemöller rejected the committee's plans, refusing to allow the gathering to meet in Frankfurt.

¹⁶ Meeting Minutes, 3 February 1949, EZA 71/86/7, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5; emphasis in original.

Their work was only salvaged when Thadden's old friend Hanns Lilje, now the Bishop of Hanover, agreed to serve as a new host and sponsor. Meeting again in early April, the planning committee for the Protestant *Woche* continued to expand its membership, including representatives of the Hanoverian *Landeskirche* and delegates from an even wider selection of Protestant works and associations. In order to appease Niemöller, whose support was still vital to the ultimate success of the gathering, the planning committee chose the politician Gustav Heinemann, one of Niemöller's close associates, to be the meeting's president. To balance the influence of Niemöller's Barthian faction, the state counselor Hans Meinzolt, a Bavarian Lutheran, was selected as the vice president for the meeting. At this point, plans for the 1949 *Woche* were still dominated by the various Protestant works and associations that had called it into existence. A significant portion of the meeting time was set aside for individual gatherings sponsored by these organizations.¹⁸

Over the next few weeks, however, Thadden became bolder in his efforts to use the Protestant *Woche* as the springboard for a new, permanent lay movement within the church. At the committee's next planning meeting in mid-April, Thadden announced that he was no longer working as a representative of the church chancellery, but working independently—with the chancellery's support—to create a new lay organization called the German Protestant Kirchentag. This new organization, which he hoped would grow out of the plans for the 1949 *Woche*, would be “an expression of the public responsibility

¹⁸ Meeting Minutes, 4 April 1949, EZA 71/86/7, 2; Those chosen for the planning committee included Dr. Krapp, the business director for the Protestant Academies, Dr. Dellbrück, of the Protestant Academy in Hanover, Landessuperintendent Laasch of Hanover, Herr Plog from the Hanoverian church chancellery, Oberkirchenrat Cillein, Vikarin Daasch, a representative of the women's work, Pastor Boeker for the student congregations, and Dipl. Ing. Müller; for more on the reasons for the change in venue, see RvTT to Otto Dibelius, 6 April 1949 and RvTT to Karl Eugen Dellenbusch, 7 April 1949, EZA 71/86/5.

of our church and a meeting of the broadest spectrum of Protestant Christendom, prepared and carried out in cooperation with the works and associations of the EKD.” This kind of broad lay gathering was vital, he believed, if the German church was to survive. “Without the activation of the laity,” he argued, “the Protestant church in Germany has no future. The lay person of today is no longer at home in the church, he has nothing to do there, nothing to say, and, thus, nothing for which to take responsibility.” However, Thadden continued, if the church would “engage in serious dialogue with the laity,” creating an organization like the Kirchentag, this organization could hold the church together, and it could provide a common platform for the various Protestant organizations.¹⁹

In order to gain support for these plans, Thadden once again appealed to the Barthian faction of the church. As he complained to Willem Visser’t Hooft in early April, he was especially frustrated by Niemöller’s opposition to his plans. To Thadden, the Kirchentag perfectly embodied the ideals of the Barthians. It was a positive attempt to address their criticism of the postwar “restoration,” and to empower the laity. Moreover, his plans for the bible study meetings at the 1949 *Woche* were thoroughly Barthian in their approach. And he had gone out of his way to select prominent Barthians such as Gustav Heinemann and Oskar Hammelsbeck as speakers.²⁰ Throughout the month of April, Thadden engaged in personal diplomacy with many of Niemöller’s close

¹⁹ Meeting Minutes, 12 April 1949, EZA 71/86/7, 2.

²⁰ RvTT to Willem Visser’t Hooft, 8 April 1949, EZA 71/86/5.

associates and allies, hoping that they would be able to convince him to rethink his opposition.²¹

These efforts culminated in a presentation to the Reich Brethren Council on April 27, 1949. Speaking to this group of former confessing church leaders, Thadden emphasized the revolutionary nature of the Kirchentag. The name “Kirchentag,” he explained, had been chosen as a direct reference to the Kirchentag organization of the late nineteenth century, called into existence by the social pastor Johann Hinrich Wichern to coordinate the work of the various German *Landeskirchen*. Although he did not explicitly state as much, this name, taken from an official leadership organ of the Protestant churches, expressed a bold—even revolutionary—claim about the Kirchentag’s symbolic (if not actual) authority. The Kirchentag was also, he explained, a direct outgrowth of the experiences of the church struggle during the Third Reich, a renewal of the earlier Protestant *Woche* that had served the confessing church.²²

The need for a new lay-movement, he continued, had become clear to him during his time as a prisoner of war and in his visits to POW camps throughout Europe and North Africa. In these camps he had seen the spiritual vacuum in the souls of postwar Germans, and he had realized that only Christian faith had the power to prevent a relapse into the destructive ideologies of the past. Furthermore, he had recognized the growing alienation of ordinary Germans from traditional church structures. Instead of looking to the churches, the German people were embracing a variety of mystical and occult

²¹ RvTT, Letter to the Chairs of the Präsidialausschuss: “Deutsche Evangelische Woche 1949 in Hannover,” 29 April 1949, EZA 71/86/5.

²² RvTT, “Auf dem Wege zu einem allgemeinen ‘Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentag,’” undated typescript [c. 27 April 1949], 71/86/7, 1-2; this interview with Thadden was published in *Der Christliche Student* 14, July 1949: 14-15, 21-27.

philosophies. Even earnest Protestants, seeking spiritual belonging, were being drawn toward the Catholic Church. This, he concluded, was a result of the lack of any real lay-movement in the Protestant churches. The laity had not been given any important role in the church, and they no longer felt at home there.²³ The Kirchentag, he continued, would help to fill this void.

The German Protestant Kirchentag will call on the *laity* of the Protestant churches to take their Christian vocation in the Protestant church seriously, to confess their Protestant faith and to take the active role in building up the congregations to which they have been called according to apostolic teachings. . . . In view of the distress of millions of refugees and in view of the masses of humanity pushed together in the industrial regions of Germany, this cannot remain a matter of small evangelistic efforts. We need a new kind of practical activity, and a widely visible sign of this basic self-reflection in the Protestant churches.²⁴

In particular, he continued, the churches needed to reach out to the masses of Germans expelled from their lands in the East, feeling isolated and homeless in the aftermath of the war. The Kirchentag, he argued, had a responsibility to draw these isolated individuals back into a sense of community and to assure them of their “right to a homeland in the church.”²⁵

Yet Thadden was also careful to explain that this new lay movement was not a threat to the authority of pastors and theologians. Instead, it was an outgrowth of the most basic lesson of the church struggle: “Pastor and congregation belong together; together they carry the burdens and concerns, hardships and agonies of the church.” The Kirchentag, he went on, was not an “absurd claim for the authority of non-theologians,”

²³ Ibid., 2-4.

²⁴ Ibid., 4.

²⁵ Ibid.

nor was it a “liberal debate club.” Instead, it was a way of creating and preserving Christian community in the churches.

What we need in the churches is the *freedom* of personal conviction and, at the same time, a deep *connection* to the *facts* [*Sachen*]. In this way the laity, and above all the young people in the church, can have an opportunity to *authenticate* their faith and to offer their gifts in service to the body of Christ. Then the pastor will have a comrade in arms like he has not had for four-hundred years.²⁶

Thadden went on to allay any fears that the Kirchentag might try to usurp the authority of the Church Synod, the existing organ for lay government. Nothing, he argued, could be further from his intent. However, the Kirchentag did have real public authority of a different kind. “A living Protestant Christianity,” he argued, “has a need for other ways to express its communal desires and its public function, besides those which a synod can take on.”²⁷

Addressing the structure of the Kirchentag, Thadden conceded that he had borrowed heavily from the *Katholikentag*, a Catholic lay-gathering with roots going back to the nineteenth century. However, the Protestant Kirchentag would naturally reflect the different, unique concerns and styles of the Protestant churches. Its relationship to the *Katholikentag* would be one of friendly, peaceful competition in the common task of proclaiming Christ in the modern world. The Kirchentag would be organized and run by the various Protestant works and associations devoted to the laity. Its permanence and continuity would be assured by the creation of a Präsidial Committee, to be formed by expanding on the membership of the original leadership committee of the Protestant *Woche* of the 1930s. This committee, consisting of both laity and theologians, would be elected at the 1949 meeting in Hanover. Each meeting would also have its own Steering

²⁶ Ibid., 5; emphasis in original.

²⁷ Ibid., 5-6.

Committee, or *Präsidium*, also directly elected by the participants. And practical organization matters would be handled by a specially assembled Host Committee of people from the city where each meeting would take place.²⁸

After addressing these preliminary matters, Thadden launched into an extended description of his plans for the first Kirchentag meeting in Hanover. Meeting from July 28 to August 1, 1949, the Kirchentag in Hanover would offer attendees a rich program full of bible study gatherings, speeches, church music, and open discussion. The opening worship service would feature Bishop Otto Dibelius, the President of the EKD council. The Hanoverian bishop Hanns Lilje would offer a series of presentations geared toward the lay-Protestant. And the gathering would reach its crescendo on Sunday, August 31, when Martin Niemöller and Willem Visser't Hooft would speak to the entire assembly on the topic of "The Christian between the Nations." Over the course of the meeting, the assembled Protestants would also get to hear from other prominent figures in the ecumenical church and from public officials.²⁹

Thadden hoped that this broad program would allow the church to better communicate in the "language of modern man," to draw in people from the outside or on the margins of the church, especially industrial workers and youth. It would give them a place to ask their own questions and to have their own concerns addressed. It would offer them an experience of community and "Christian 'brotherhood.'" It would help to overcome their disillusionment with the church's own internal divisions, serving as a meeting place for Protestants from every church faction. It would celebrate the church's ecumenical nature. And it would equip the laity to take on an active role in the church,

²⁸ Ibid., 6-8.

²⁹ Ibid., 8.

the “worldly’ sphere,” “in their vocation as citizens,” and in “personal witness” to their co-workers and families.³⁰

Thadden’s efforts to appease Niemöller were finally successful. At the meeting of the Reich Brethren Council he found enthusiastic support for his idea of a permanent lay-gathering within the church, and for his plans to transform the 1949 Hanover *Woche* into the first annual German Protestant Kirchentag. At the urging of a range of other church leaders, including Otto Dibelius, the Barthian theology professor Hans Joachim Iwand, and leading members of the Brethren council, such as Joachim Beckmann, Niemöller was persuaded to support Thadden’s plans. In a typical reversal, he not only agreed to deliver the keynote speech at the Kirchentag’s main Sunday assembly, he also proclaimed his willingness to serve as the new organization’s “patron” in the church leadership. In keeping with earlier plans, Thadden agreed to make Niemöller’s ally Gustav Heinemann the chair of the meeting’s Präsidium. And he began to make plans for the creation of a series of State Kirchentag Committees to coordinate the organization’s work in the individual *Landeskirchen*. Writing to his fellow meeting coordinators, an enthusiastic Thadden relayed his hopes that the Kirchentag might not only succeed in coordinating the lay-organizations of the church, but in actually saving the EKD from its internal divisions, serving as a bridge between increasingly hostile church-political factions.³¹

Others were less enthusiastic about Niemöller’s support, particularly his plans to serve as the organization’s “patron.” In a letter to Thadden, Ernst zur Nieden expressed his happiness that Thadden’s negotiations with the Brethren Council had gone well. And

³⁰ Ibid., 9-10.

³¹ RvTT, Letter to the Chairs of the Präsidialausschuss: “Deutsche Evangelische Woche 1949 in Hannover,” 29 April 1949, EZA 71/86/5.

he approved Thadden's plans for moving forward with the organization. But he warned Thadden about the difficulty of working with Niemöller, and he worried that Niemöller's opponents might now withdraw from the gathering. The Württemberg *Oberkirchenrat* Manfred Müller expressed similar concerns, warning that Niemöller would try to dominate the Kirchentag organization, making it an appendage of the Brethren Council. Perhaps, Müller continued, it would be best to have two patrons: both Martin Niemöller and Otto Dibelius.³²

These fears were well-founded. Thadden quickly ran into new opposition from Otto Dibelius, who had thus far been supportive, and from Hans Meiser, the Bishop of Bavaria. Thadden continued to court Niemöller and his associates. In a letter to Gustav Heinemann, for example, Thadden explained that the Kirchentag was a response to the forces of "restoration" in the church, a way of renewing church life from below.³³ But these kinds of arguments made more conservative churchmen nervous. At the late May meeting of the EKD council, Dibelius objected to the Kirchentag name. Taking the title of the nineteenth-century body that had coordinated the policies of the various *Landeskirchen*, he argued, created the false impression that the new lay organization was actually some kind of official governing body. Meiser, whose priority remained the defense of orthodox Lutheranism against all other theological tendencies, worried that the Kirchentag would promote "unionism," undermining the purity of the Lutheran *Landeskirchen*. In order to appease Dibelius, and retain the moral and financial support of the EKD council, Thadden was forced to rein in his plans, retaining the name "German

³² Ernst zur Nieden to RvTT, 7 May 1949, EZA 71/86/5; Manfred Müller to RvTT, 6 May 1949, EZA 71/86/5.

³³ RvTT to Gustav Heinemann, 16 May 1949, EZA 71/86/5.

Protestant *Woche*.” Meiser was much more difficult to appease, although Thadden succeeded in allaying his fears somewhat. After a long personal discussion, Meiser eventually dropped his objections to 1949 *Woche*, but he remained suspicious of Thadden’s plans.³⁴

Having secured the support of the EKD council, Thadden began the work of publicizing the 1949 Protestant *Woche*. In the public invitation to the gathering, issued in the names of Thadden, Lilje, Dibelius, and Niemöller, Thadden once again emphasized the importance of revitalizing the Protestant laity. This was not a matter, he argued, of serving the institutional church or any one theological confession. Instead, the Protestant *Woche* would bring together Protestants from “every German zone” to serve the mission of the universal, ecumenical church of Jesus Christ. Thadden also announced that the meeting would be the beginning of a new, permanent lay-movement within the Protestant churches. The response to this invitation far exceeded his expectations. While Thadden had hoped to draw as many as 2,000 attendees, the actual meeting attracted as many as 7,000 fully registered guests. As many as 35,000 people attended the larger main assemblies.³⁵

THE 1949 GERMAN PROTESTANT *WOCHE*

The program of 1949 Protestant *Woche* attempted to maintain a tenuous balance between the conservative and radical factions in the church. The overall focus was

³⁴ Minutes of the Meeting of the EKD Council on 31 May 1949, EZA 71/86/7; RvTT to Hermann Dietzfelbinger, 30 June 1949, EZA 71/86/5; see also Harald Schoeter, *Kirchentag als vor-läufige Kirche. Der Kirchentag als eine besondere Gestalt des Christseins zwischen Kirche und Welt*, Praktische Theologie heute 13 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1993), 61.

³⁵ “Aus der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands,” *Junge Kirche* 1949: 366-367; RvTT, Invitation Draft, undated [1949], EZA 71/86/7; for attendance numbers, see Rüdiger Runge and Margot Käßmann, eds, *Kirche in Bewegung. 50. Jahre Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1999), 47.

clearly on the areas where all Protestants could agree: the need to return to the church and to actively participate in Christian service to society. However, individual speakers approached this common theme in very different ways. In his opening sermon—the most unapologetically nationalist of the gathering—Otto Dibelius praised the achievements of the German nation, portraying the period between 1871 and 1900 as the pinnacle of German civilization. This civilization, he argued, had been characterized by the unprecedented inward and outward freedom of the German people. This freedom was deeply rooted in the German national character as the people of the reformation, a people committed to truth above all else, unwilling to accept delusion or falsehood. Now, in the postwar period, Germans had lost their outward freedom. In the west, they had become “slaves of capitalism, slaves of Truman.” In the East, they were “slaves of the Russians.” All Germans were experiencing bitter suffering, especially the refugees and expellees who had lost their homes. As members of the confessing church and the conservative resistance, they had suffered as martyrs under the Nazis. And they continued to suffer the hatred and condemnation of the rest of the world. Yet in the midst of all of these difficulties, they still had the truth of Jesus Christ. And if they embraced this truth, Dibelius argued, it would once again make them free.³⁶

In his Sunday sermon, Martin Niemöller also began by looking at the present-day state of affairs in Germany: the helplessness of the people, their disappointment, their material suffering, and their spiritual confusion. The German people, he proclaimed, had “lost their way;” they had been “scattered like sheep without a shepherd.” Niemöller, too, promoted Christian faith and Christian service as the only way out of this crisis.

³⁶ *Kirche in Bewegung. Deutsche Evangelische Woche Hannover 1949* [DEKT 1949] (Hanover: Lutherhaus Verlag, 1949), 7-14.

Unlike Dibelius, however, he presented the present-day breakdown as a hidden blessing, proclaiming: “Beloved Protestant sisters and brothers! I believe it was necessary for us to experience these disappointments.” The German people, he explained, had forgotten that God was not there to serve them, that they were instead in the world to serve God. Now, they needed to return to the true life of faith, overcoming their personal and national pride to embrace the work of Jesus Christ. Here Niemöller argued: “We can say Jesus Christ a thousand times and nothing happens, the word that comes out of our mouths remains dead.” But where Christians turned to God in humility and submission, “there everything is made different and made new.” “There,” he continued, “we Christian people, we church Christians will no longer dream expectantly, in the middle of the suffering all around us, of the triumph of the Christian congregations; instead, for the first time, this suffering will truly break our hearts.” Only then, he went on, would the church move beyond its political and social formulas, its pride and self-satisfaction, its desire for outward importance. Only then would the church truly submit itself to doing God’s work in the present-day world.³⁷

Most other presentations fell somewhere in between these two extremes. In a series of bible study lessons, the conservative theology professor Heinrich Rendtorff, preached a straightforward evangelistic message, calling on his listeners to repent from their sins and return to faith.³⁸ In another series of speeches on the Christian response to the present-day crisis, Hanns Lilje offered a middle position between Dibelius and Niemöller. Warning his audience against the sin of resignation, he called them to active Christian service in the world. Yet he also cautioned them against the dangers of

³⁷ Ibid., 15-20.

³⁸ Ibid., 21-28.

forgetting the past or minimizing their own guilt. Drawing on the work of the Swiss philosopher Max Picard, Lilje argued that Nazism had been an expression of the fragmentation and incoherence of modern life. At its foundation, he continued, this was the result of a deeper spiritual crisis. All of the problems of the present-day world pointed to the urgent need for God. Yet Christian activity needed to go beyond mere missions and evangelism. It needed to take more worldly matters seriously. In another speech, on “The Value of the Human Being,” Lilje elaborated on the contributions of the Christian faith to public life. Christian activity in the world, he argued, was not romantic or utopian; it was grounded in sober realism. It began with the recognition of the value and worth of every human being, and it took the concrete, tangible needs of the individual seriously.³⁹

Speaking on “The Foundation of Protestant Activity,” Heinrich Held, a veteran of the confessing church and a superintendent in the church of the Rhineland, made the Barthian case for the church’s public responsibility. Christians were called, he proclaimed, to a new form of public activity in the present-day crisis. Protestants could not just retreat inward, into a new form of pietism. Instead, having been saved by God, they needed to work for the salvation of the world. This required public activity in every area of life. Yet this activity needed to begin, as Niemöller had suggested, with self-criticism and self-reflection. The true foundation for postwar Protestant activity was to be found in the experiences of the confessing church and in the Stuttgart declaration of guilt. The lesson of the church struggle during the Third Reich was that the true church was founded on the word of God and the activity of Jesus Christ. Everything else was an idol. Protestant social activity needed to start with repentance and submission to God’s

³⁹ Ibid., 82-108; see also Max Picard, *Hitler in uns Selbst* (Erlenbach-Zurich: E. Rentsch, 1946).

will. Only then could it begin to carry out his work in the world. This meant, in particular, that Christians could not blindly follow the teachings of socialism or of democracy, the idols of the Christian West, or Christian culture. The church would not bring about the kingdom of God on earth. But Christ was actively working to transform the world, and Christians had a duty to participate in this work.⁴⁰

Following Held's speech, Paul Seeger, a member of the CDU and a leader in the Protestant worker's movement, also called on Protestants to embrace political activity. In particular, he urged the churches to overcome their bourgeois character, reaching out to the working classes. And he called for Protestants to unite in defense of the "Christian West" against the threat of communism. Next, Gustav Heinemann—still a CDU politician at the time—also called on his audience to embrace democratic political activity. This, he argued, meant working to democratize the churches themselves. But it also meant overcoming the traditional Protestant deference to state authority, embracing their personal responsibility as Christians and as citizens, and participating actively in the democratic process. Heinrich Albertz, an SPD politician and another member of the Protestant Left, called on his listeners to reject the Cold War division of Germany, working to build social solidarity within the Federal Republic. This social solidarity, he argued, would do far more than remilitarization to re-unite Germany and to overcome the division of Europe. Following Albertz, the venerable pietist leader Friedrich von Bodelschwingh called on all Christians to make hard sacrifices for the good of their neighbor. The Swiss medical doctor Theodor Bovet and Elisabeth Stehfen spoke on the crisis of the single woman in postwar society. And Hans Keller, Hanns Lilje, and

⁴⁰ Ibid., 29-41.

Willem Visser't Hooft called on German Protestants to rethink their national attitudes, substituting Christian ecumenicalism for the aggressive nationalism of the past.⁴¹

Finally, on the last day of the gathering, the Protestant *Woche* hosted a series of meetings for Protestant professionals. Speaking to a gathering of lawyers and judges, the state prosecutor Adolf Dombois recalled the breakdown of justice in Nazi Germany. Responding to this breakdown, he reminded his listeners that God's laws—including the injunction against murder—superseded the laws of any human state. In much the same way, the medical doctor Wilhelm Giesen reminded doctors of the centrality of the ten commandments to their profession, highlighting the commandment against murder that so many doctor's had violated during the Third Reich. Speaking to teachers, the pedagogue Oskar Hammelsbeck defended the educational rights and privileges of the churches, focusing on the importance of religious education to the renewal of the Christian West. Martin Donath, a Protestant economist, called on business leaders—whether socialists or free market capitalists—to work for greater economic justice. And the engineer Hugo Krueger warned a gathering of technical workers against the danger posed to individual human worth by the misuse of technology.⁴²

Most important for the future, however, was the meeting's main assembly on Sunday, July 31. There, before a crowd of 6,000 people, Gustav Heinemann—speaking in his capacity as the meeting's president—declared the foundation of the German Protestant Kirchentag as a permanent lay-gathering within the Protestant churches. This decision was affirmed by the acclamation of the assembly, and the Kirchentag was formally called into existence. During the final days of the 1949 *Woche*, Thadden was

⁴¹ Ibid., 42-81, 109-132.

⁴² Ibid., 147-222.

given the task of organizing a provisional leadership for this new organization, and he was elected to be its president. He was also given the difficult task of persuading the reluctant council of the EKD to offer its support.⁴³

FROM THE PROTESTANT WOCHEN TO THE KIRCHENTAG

The formal constitution of the new Kirchentag organization, drafted during the 1949 *Woche*, was brief and to the point. In its entirety, it read:

I. The members of Protestant Christendom in Germany, assembled in Hanover from July 28 to August 1, 1949, have resolved to create an annual GERMAN PROTESTANT KIRCHENTAG. This will serve to equip the Protestant laity for their service in the world and in the Christian congregations. It will also work to promote community and cooperation with the laity in the constituent churches of the World Council of Churches.

The Präsidial Committee, under the leadership of Dr. von Thadden-Trieglaff, shall have the task of carrying out this decision.

The assembled call upon the Protestant laity in all parts of Germany to arrange PROTESTANT TAGE AND WOCHEN as a foundation for the Kirchentag, in coordination with the Präsidial Committee.

II. This decision shall be relayed to the council of the EKD. The Präsidial Committee shall have the task of arranging with the council of the EKD for the execution of this decision.⁴⁴

As the president of the newly created provisional Präsidial Committee, it fell to Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff to expand on this formal foundation.

In a report written shortly after the end of the 1949 *Woche*, Thadden elaborated on these plans. He began by looking more closely at the historical significance and present-day function of the Kirchentag. The founding of the Kirchentag, he argued, was a “church-historical event of the first rank.” In response to the postwar breakdown of

⁴³ See Schroeter, *Kirchentag*, 51; see also RvTT, “Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag in Hannover. Rückblick und Ausblick,” undated, EZA 71/86/7.

⁴⁴ RvTT, “Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag in Hannover. Rückblick und Ausblick,” undated, EZA 71/86/7; see also Karl Kupisch, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte des deutschen Protestantismus von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, vol. 1 (Hamburg: Siebenstern Taschenbuch Verlag, 1971), 102-103.

German society, the disillusionment of postwar Germans, and the “spectacular consolidation of the Roman Catholic church in our day,” German Protestants had finally overcome their tendency toward passivity and resignation. Reflecting on their own “spiritual and intellectual inheritance,” they had “announced their bold desire to participate in the present-day conflict of worldviews.”⁴⁵

The foundation of this activity, he continued, was to be found in the basic Christian message of salvation. Apart from this foundation, the organization could not hope to have any outward effect. However, this faith did not consist merely of “pious phrases,” or religious “sentimentality.” It was, he argued, a faith directed toward “the living people of our day in the middle of the actual circumstances of their lives.” And it called on these people to make a “personal and substantive decision” to take their Christian calling seriously. This was a matter of taking active responsibility in the churches and of constantly professing their Christian witness in the world. Building on this foundation, the Kirchentag would work for the realization of true Christian community in Germany. It would be thoroughly ecumenical in its perspective, drawing people from all of the Protestant churches. And it would work in close cooperation with the Protestant lay-works and associations. It would address the concrete crises of postwar life, speaking to expellees, refugees, and all other “victims of the war and its catastrophic end.” And it would call on all people to recognize their personal responsibility for “the intellectual, the social and the political events of our time.” The Kirchentag, he made clear, did not claim the right to intervene directly in the affairs of the state or the church leadership. However, its purpose was public and political insofar as it existed to

⁴⁵ RvTT, “Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag in Hannover. Rückblick und Ausblick,” undated, EZA 71/86/7.

encourage the Protestant laity—as church members and citizens—to take a more active role in both church and national politics.⁴⁶

Thadden next proceeded to lay out his plans for the Kirchentag’s own organizational structure. Individual Kirchentag gatherings, he explained, would be organized and carried out by local planning committees. This work would be overseen and coordinated by the Kirchentag’s permanent leadership organ, the Präsidial Committee, which would be led by Thadden, in his capacity as Kirchentag president. This committee, in turn, would be divided into two parts, the Präsidium and the *Beirat*. The first of these would consist of selected members of the local planning committee for the upcoming Kirchentag gathering, representatives of new press and cultural committees created at Hanover, and delegates from State Kirchentag Committees that would be set up in every German *Landeskirche*. The Präsidium would also include the chair of the previous Kirchentag meeting, in this case Gustav Heinemann. The *Beirat* would be made up of representatives from all of the various “non-diaconal” church works and associations, including the Men’s Work, Women’s Work, student organizations, Protestant Academies, and *Volksmission* organizations. It would also include delegates from the Reich Brethren Council and the Free Churches. The Kirchentag organization would be rounded out with a smaller executive committee, a finance committee to secure funds for the annual meetings, and a press committee to handle publicity. Finally, Thadden would have the task of setting up a permanent Kirchentag office to assist him in the day-to-day task of running the organization.⁴⁷ In actual practice during the early

⁴⁶ Ibid., 2-4.

⁴⁷ RvTT, “Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag in Hannover. Rückblick und Ausblick,” undated, EZA 71/86/7, 5-7, 12-13; the provisional Präsidial Committee set up in 1949 included Thadden; Christine

1950s, most leadership decisions were made by Thadden and the members of the Präsidium. The role of the *Beirat* remained largely consultative. The Präsidium, along with various smaller theme selection committees, took on the task of selecting the topics and setting the overall tone for each gathering. But until the adoption of a new constitution in 1955, local planning committees and *ad hoc* Kirchentag workgroups remained responsible for most of the actual content.

During the final months of 1949, Thadden worked to build support for the new organization. His first task was to gain the formal approval of the EKD council for the *fait accompli* with which he had presented them at the end of the Hanover *Woche*. At the council's next meeting, in September 1949, he reported on the *Woche* and on the plans for a permanent Kirchentag. Most council members responded positively to these developments. However, Thadden's plans foundered on opposition from the Bavarian bishop Hans Meiser, who continued to see the organization as a threat to the authority of the individual *Landeskirchen*. Ultimately, Thadden left the meeting disappointed, unable to secure the formal endorsement of the EKD. He did, however, convince the council's chair, Otto Dibelius, of the Kirchentag's potential usefulness. Willing to give the idea time to develop, Dibelius prevented the council's negative decision from being recorded in the minutes for their September meeting. This gave Thadden the freedom to proceed with his plans without the endorsement or the direct opposition of the institutional church

Bourbeck, a vicar from Berlin; Deacon Herbert Dost from Leipzig; a railroad worker named Hermann from Warmensteinach; Ludwig Metzger, the mayor of Darmstadt; Dr. Antoine Nopitsch, the leader of the Bavarian *Mütterdienst*; Paul Seeger, a Christian worker's movement leader from Recklingshausen; Paul Tschirner, an expellee farmer; Rudolf Wolkenhaar, the church superintendent in the city of Hanover; Eberhard Müller, the director of the Protestant Academy in Bad Boll; and Gustav Heinemann. The *Beirat* included Ernst zur Nieden of the Men's Work, Dr. Elisabeth Schwarzhaupt of the Women's Work, the Stuttgart youth worker Manfred Müller, Horst Bannach of the Student Congregations, Adolf Wischmann for the Protestant Academies, Heinrich Rendtorff for *Volksmission* work, Herbert Mochalski from the *Reich Brethren Council*, Hermann Schöpferwinkel of the *Gnadauer Verband*, Dr. Wunderlich for the Free Churches, and Lotte Marschner for the Protestant works in the Eastern zone.

leadership. As a fortuitous and unintended consequence of this development, the Kirchentag remained formally independent of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD). Over the next several decades, this institutional autonomy—in conjunction with a close working relationship with the EKD—would allow the Kirchentag unusual freedom for experimentation and the development of new ideas.⁴⁸

With the formal recognition of the Kirchentag still a remote possibility, Thadden continued to fight for support from the institutional church hierarchy. In December 1949 he met again with Meiser and the Bavarian church leadership. Trying to allay their fears, he assured them that the Kirchentag sought cooperation between the different confessional *Landeskirchen* in Germany, but it did not seek any kind of political or theological “union.” He also worked to overcome their suspicion that the Kirchentag was a tool of the Barthian faction, designed as a critical alternative to the existing church hierarchy. “My personal plans and efforts,” he explained, “do not arise out of criticism of the church. The church of the Reformation practices its own self-criticism.” Instead, he continued, the Kirchentag’s task was to build stronger ties between the laity and the church leadership so that they could work together for the growth of the church. Finally, he assured them: “I have explained to the Reich Brethren Council in all clarity that the Kirchentag cannot be only their concern.” The Kirchentag was not on the side of Niemöller and the other Barthians against the Lutheran *Landeskirchen*. It existed to unite and serve all Protestants in Germany.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Schroeter, *Kirchentag*, 62-63.

⁴⁹ “Besprechung über die Frage des ‘Ev. Kirchentages’ am 21.12.1949 im Evang. Luth. Landeskirchenrat in München,” 21 December 1949, EZA 71/86/1, 2.

On the other end of the church political spectrum, the Kirchentag had enjoyed strong support from the Barthian faction ever since Niemöller had declared himself its “patron.” However this support came at a cost. Barthians in the Kirchentag leadership continually agitated for the organization to adopt a more radical political program. In a letter from August 1949, for example, Oskar Hammelsbeck urged Thadden to commit the organization more strongly to political change, moving beyond mere talk to action. Along with several others, Hammelsbeck also encouraged the Thadden to make greater efforts to include members of the working class and the SPD in the Kirchentag leadership.⁵⁰ And Niemöller himself hoped to use the Kirchentag as a means of combating the dominance of the Catholic Church and Catholic-dominated CDU in postwar West Germany. In a letter written to Thadden in January 1950, Niemöller complained about the “propaganda” of the Catholic politicians and their Protestant allies. He went on to suggest that the Kirchentag needed to take a stance against these efforts. “It seems to me,” he argued, “that the Kirchentag in August cannot avoid the questions that are breaking out everywhere: ‘Why don’t we Protestants go back into the Catholic church?’ and ‘What is the duty of the church of the Gospel over against Roman Catholic Christendom?’”⁵¹

Writing to Gustav Heinemann shortly thereafter, Thadden complained that Niemöller’s efforts were likely to do more harm than good. By politicizing the Kirchentag, Niemöller would limit its effectiveness, ultimately weakening an

⁵⁰ Oskar Hammelsbeck to RvTT, 13 August 1949, EZA 71/86/7; Oskar Hammelsbeck to RvTT, 6 October 1949, EZA 71/86/5; Christoph Frhr. von Imhoff, “Erfahrungs-Bericht über die D E Woche 1949 in Hannover,” EZA 71/86/1; Resolution of the Press Committee, 12 February 1950, EZA 71/86/11.

⁵¹ Martin Niemöller to RvTT, 27 January 1950, excerpted in RvTT to Gustav Heinemann, 1 February 1950, EZA 71/86/5.

organization that actually sought (positively rather than negatively) to strengthen the political involvement of the Protestant laity. “If we can succeed over the next several years,” he explained, “to awaken community consciousness and a sense of confessional responsibility in our Protestant laity . . . we will have done more for the strengthening of the Protestant side than any theological declaration could do.”⁵² In a letter to Willem Visser’t Hooft, Thadden was more explicit about his frustration:

Niemöller’s sudden, strongly awakened interest in the German Protestant Kirchentag has caused me a bit of trouble recently. He is, you know, caught up at the moment in a strong stream of anti-Catholicism, and he is pressuring me to make the Protestant Kirchentag available as a platform for an aggressive anti-Catholic attitude. I have no desire to do this, since I am of the opinion that that is not what we are there for. . . . Every attack (even with blunt weapons) against Roman influence in central Europe will have disastrous consequences, weakening rather than strengthening our cause.⁵³

Despite these difficulties, however, Thadden concluded his letter by reporting that the Kirchentag continued to garner interest and attention, and he remained hopeful about the prospects for the next Kirchentag meeting.

In preparation for the next Kirchentag meeting in the city of Essen, Thadden spent the first several months of 1950 working to consolidate the Kirchentag’s institutional structure. This task was made more complicated by refusal of the EKD council to formally endorse the Kirchentag as an official church institution. In order to provide the organization with an official legal status, the “Association for the Promotion of the German Protestant Kirchentag” was founded as a public corporation in January 1950. The following month Thadden hired Otto-Heinrich Ehlers as the Kirchentag’s first General Secretary. Thadden and Ehlers proceeded to set up a small, temporary office in

⁵² RvTT to Gustav Heinemann, 1 February 1950, EZA 71/86/5.

⁵³ RvTT to Willem Visser’t Hooft, 18 March 1950, EZA 71/86/5.

Essen, from which they could coordinate the work of the local planning committee. The first State Kirchentag Committees were founded around the same time, although these never really developed into the broad democratic base that Thadden had initially envisioned. The most pressing problem that Thadden faced at this time, however, was not organizational but financial. Without the official backing of the EKD, Thadden had to find other sources to fund the Kirchentag's work. Once again, his ecumenical and personal contacts served him well. The Evangelical and Reformed Church in the United States, the same body that had funded Thadden's ecumenical work in Geneva, provided him with a starting sum of 10,000 marks. And this was supplemented by major donations from Thadden's contacts in the business community, principally from the Essen industrialists Oskar Söhngen and Hans Broche and from the banker Gotthard Freiherr von Falkenhausen.⁵⁴

The choice of Essen, an industrial city in the Ruhr basin, as the host city for the 1950 Kirchentag was not accidental. To the members of the Kirchentag leadership, one of the greatest weaknesses of the prewar churches had been their predominantly middle-class character. In the postwar period, even conservative Protestants like Otto Dibelius hoped to overcome this history, creating a broad-based *Volkskirche*. To these conservatives, this was a matter of evangelization and *Volksmision*, of bringing the alienated working classes back into the church. More radical church leaders, especially in the Barthian faction, went a step further, pushing the church to promote Christian socialist policies. By holding their 1950 gathering in Essen, the Kirchentag leadership sent a clear signal about their willingness to reach out beyond the traditional base of the churches. And they declared their interest in present-day social and political issues.

⁵⁴ Schroeter, *Kirchentag*, 70; Sauer, *Westorientierung*, 65.

Meeting in late October, the full Präsidial Committee began to work out the program for this gathering. Every member of the committee could agree that *Volksmission* and evangelism were the foundation of the Essen Kirchentag's work. As Heinrich Held pointed out, the *Katholikentag*, on which the Kirchentag was based, might focus broadly on social and political issues. But Protestants—as people of the Gospel—would have to have Christ at the front and center of their program. All of the committee members also hoped that the gathering in Essen would help to draw industrial workers and other alienated Germans back into the church. Beyond this agreement, numerous divisions emerged. Some members of the committee envisioned the task of *Volksmission* in largely traditional terms, with evangelistic sermons calling on the assembled people to return to the churches. Others, such as the Barthian pastor Herbert Mochalski, urged a more open and critical approach, in which workers would be given the opportunity to vent their frustrations with the existing church structure. Committee members also disagreed on the question of whether the Kirchentag ought to adopt public resolutions on contemporary social and political issues. The 1949 *Woche* had adopted resolutions on a variety of topics, including the upcoming West German elections and the postwar suffering of the German people. However, the conservative theology professor Heinrich Rendtorff complained about the populist tone of these resolutions and their lack of political realism.⁵⁵

Every committee member could also agree on the centrality of the so-called “social question” to the Essen Kirchentag's work. Meeting in the industrial heartland of West Germany, it was expected that the Kirchentag would look closely at worker's issues. Another major point of emphasis was the plight of refugees and expellees who

⁵⁵ Report on the Meeting of the Präsidium and Beirat, 25 October 1949, EZA 71/86/3, 1-5.

had been driven from their homes during and after the war. Several meeting attendees suggested broad thematic interpretations that would bring these topics together. Heinrich Held, for example, proposed a focus on “the renewal of community.” More provocatively, another meeting attendee named Oldag, suggested that the Kirchentag focus on the refugee crisis under the rubric of “Christ against the loss of homeland.” Finally, Heinrich Rendtorff took the entirety of the postwar social crisis as his starting point, arguing: “The ground out of which the topics need to grow is the common, deep distress, the loss of homeland, the uprootedness, of the people of our time.” Rendtorff went on to suggest a three-part schema for addressing this topic. First, the Kirchentag could examine the effect of this crisis on the “uprooted person.” Next, it could look at the practical steps necessary for the “renewal of community.” And, finally, it could address the centrality of Christian faith to any solution to the postwar crisis, pointing out that “final solutions are only possible where one is guided by Christ in the middle of one’s life.”⁵⁶

These ideas were further refined over the next several months by the members of a smaller Theme Selection Committee. Meeting in late October, this committee reflected on their twofold task for the upcoming Kirchentag. First, they needed to work to spread the Gospel message. But, second, they also needed to develop Protestant answers to the most pressing questions of contemporary life. The work on the first of these tasks, they reflected, was well underway. The second, however, posed more difficulty. Warning against an overly theological program, Ernst zur Nieden complained: “We have to move more quickly to the practical, substantive questions that arise out of the encounter between the church and the world today. Nothing is worse than when every presentation

⁵⁶ Ibid.

recapitulates the entire theological course of the meeting. We need to speak concretely to concrete topics.” Several others disagreed vehemently, reminding Nieden that Christ was the foundation of all Protestant activity. In the end, however, this argument was resolved by Eberhard Müller and Klaus von Bismarck, both of whom argued against seeing such stark opposition between the Kirchentag’s two major tasks. “The discussion of practical problems is necessary;” Müller argued, “the important thing is how we do this. This can be an important evangelistic task.” For his part, Bismarck added: “Concrete questions must be answered concretely, but in connection with and as part of a coherent theological framework.”⁵⁷

Combining their two tasks into just such a framework, the committee selected the bold injunction “Save Humanity!” as the motto for the Essen Kirchentag. On the one hand, this was a clear allusion to the world’s need for Christ, for Christian salvation. As Thadden wrote in the Kirchentag’s formal invitation:

We humans cannot save humanity. Not our best judgment, not our best intentions, not our sense of responsibility, not even the demonstration of thousands of Christian activists can bring about any change. This can only be accomplished through the humble, common reflection on what God has done—the living, almighty and merciful God. He has already, long ago saved the world in Christ.⁵⁸

On the other hand, however, this motto tied into the urgent social and material crises of postwar German society. The Protestant churches would not just offer spiritual salvation, or “long culture-critical analyses and diagnoses.” Instead, with Christ’s help, working

⁵⁷ Theme-Selection Committee Meeting, 28 April 1949, EZA 71/86/314; no full list of committee members is given; at a minimum, the meeting included Heinrich Rendtorff, Ernst zur Nieden, Eberhard Müller, and Klaus von Bismarck.

⁵⁸ *Rettet den Menschen. Vorbereitungsheft für den Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentag 1950 in Essen* (Essen: Essener Druckerei Gemeinwohl, 1950), 3.

from a solid Christian foundation, the Kirchentag leaders hoped to offer tangible help and concrete solutions to the pressing problems of the present-day.⁵⁹

Over the course of the 1950 Kirchentag meeting, from August 23 to August 27 1950, speakers continued to promote this kind of concrete engagement with “the world”. In a series of sermons throughout the Kirchentag, Heinrich Rendtorff called on his listeners to “Follow the Lord,” urging them to return to the churches and to Christian faith. Yet he argued that this task was not antithetical to involvement in the world; it was the necessary foundation for true service to humanity. “Jesus Christ,” he argued, “calls out for followers. . . . But being a follower means, at the same time, being sent by Christ into the world to serve others.” This was not a matter of endorsing any one worldview or political ideology, but of being ready and willing to sacrifice oneself for the good of one’s neighbor.⁶⁰

Speakers elaborated on this theme in the Kirchentag workgroup entitled “Save your Faith.” Looking at the church’s loss of influence and credibility in postwar Germany, the author Willy Kramp argued that the churches had lost the public-minded spirit of the Reformation, withdrawing into themselves and their own tradition. In order to again have a visible presence in the world, he argued, the churches needed to broaden their social base beyond the middle class. They also needed to encourage the lively and active participation of the laity, not just the pastors and theologians. And, finally, they needed to find answers to the challenges posed to Christian faith by the Enlightenment

⁵⁹ Meeting of the Expanded Theme-Selection Committee, 11-12 November 1949, EZA 71/86/1; Meeting of the Expanded Theme-Selection Committee, 5 December 1949, EZA 71/86/1; the core of this committee consisted of Klaus von Bismarck, the director of the new Social Office of the Westphalian Church, Heinrich Giesen, a student pastor in Cologne, the pedagogy professor Oskar Hammelsbeck, and the Frankfurt *Oberkonsistorialratin* Elisabeth Schwarzhaupt.

⁶⁰ *Kreuz auf den Trümmern. Zweiter Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag Essen 1950* [DEKT 1950] (Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1950), 15.

and by modern Marxist philosophy.⁶¹ In another speech, the minister Dieter Andersen argued that the churches' declining influence was a result of Protestants' own behavior. Instead of living pious Christian lives within the world, they were too often hypocritical, arrogant, or legalistic in their attitudes. The doctor, Wilhelm Giesen continued by arguing that the churches focused too much on their own institutional well-being, ignoring the needs of the individual. Sermons, for example, were too academic and intellectual. And church leaders—on both the Left and Right—were too engaged in byzantine political infighting to address issues of importance to the public. Finally, Gustav Heinemann concluded that the churches had been too concerned with narrowly-defined piety and their own political agendas to involve themselves in God's work in the world. Pushing for the church to broaden its social base, Heinemann argued: "Christ has come to seek and save the lost; this is our salvation, for both respectable members of our middle class society and for those rejected by it."⁶²

Meeting in other workgroups, under slogans such as "Save the Family," "Save your Homeland," and "Save your Freedom," Kirchentag speakers were even more direct in addressing the concrete problems of "the world." The prescriptions offered in the workgroups remained largely conservative and traditional. Speakers affirmed traditional social and family structures as the antidote the social crises of modern life. They argued for Christian faith and Christian community as a solution to the loss of homeland. And they emphasized paternalism and Christian social values as solutions to the tensions in

⁶¹ Ibid., 20-24.

⁶² Ibid., 36.

modern industrial life.⁶³ Despite this traditional and conservative focus, however, the Kirchentag in Essen did represent an important new beginning for the Protestant churches. Protestant social and political thought remained firmly rooted in older ways of thinking. But by critically examining their own past and opening the door to engagement with the outside world, Protestants at the Essen Kirchentag were taking the first tentative steps toward change.

SUCCESS AND CONSOLIDATION

The Protestant Kirchentag in Essen was a major success. With roughly 35,000 fully-registered guests attending the multi-day Kirchentag program, the gathering was four to five times as large as Hanover. The numbers at the meeting's massive main assembly were even more impressive. While Thadden had expected a crowd of only 35,000, the main assembly attracted somewhere in the vicinity of 180,000 people.⁶⁴ This tremendous success guaranteed the future of the Kirchentag, but it also posed new challenges. A few church leaders, such as Bishop Meiser, remained skeptical about the organization's goals. However, the massive public resonance of the Essen Kirchentag finally convinced the majority of Protestant leaders of the meeting's potential. Although the Kirchentag remained formally independent from the Protestant Church in Germany, after Essen it enjoyed a huge degree of unofficial support.

The success of the Essen gathering also made it clear, however, that the Kirchentag organization needed to expand to meet the unexpected interest it had generated. In the month before the Essen Kirchentag, Thadden's old DSCV contact

⁶³ Ibid., 37-86.

⁶⁴ Runge and Käßman, *Kirche in Bewegung*, 47-48.

Heinrich Giesen had able to secure a temporary leave from his position as a youth pastor to assist with the final Kirchentag logistics. In September, after the meeting's success, Thadden was able to convince him to join the staff full time, as a second General Secretary. From this point on, the first General Secretary, Otto-Heinrich Ehlers, focused on the business and logistical aspects of the Kirchentag, while Giesen took charge of its theological and intellectual program. In October 1950, the Kirchentag also established a permanent office in the city of Fulda, a central location not far from the estates of Thadden's wife. Since Fulda belonged to the territory of one of the smallest German *Landeskirchen*, the Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck, this location ensured that the organization would not be unduly dominated by the influence of any one *Landeskirche*. The location also had great symbolic resonance, since Fulda was the headquarters of Germany's Catholic Bishop's Conference. As a result, the choice of Fulda both guaranteed the Kirchentag's autonomy and re-asserted its claim to speak on behalf of all of the Protestant Christians in Germany.⁶⁵

Its organizational and institutional bases covered, the Kirchentag stood poised to transform the dynamics of postwar German Protestantism. As a massive public celebration of Christian faith and spiritual life, the Kirchentag would serve as a rallying point for postwar Protestants, drawing them back into active involvement in the churches. As a major public forum for all of the competing theological and political factions in the church, it would also serve as a focal point for the transformation of Protestant ideas and attitudes. Finally, as an organization dedicated to the active responsibility of Protestant Christians in public life, the Kirchentag would play a major role in the political and social transformation of postwar Germany.

⁶⁵ Schroeter, *Kirchentag*, 71.

CHAPTER 3

“WE ARE STILL BROTHERS!”

In July 1951 the third annual German Protestant Kirchentag met in the city of Berlin. For five days German Protestants from both sides of the divided city—and from both sides of the divided German nation—gathered together to celebrate their common faith. Tens of thousands of Protestants from the “eastern zone” flooded into the city. Stadiums and churches were filled to their capacity, and crowds overflowed into the streets as the East German *Volkspolizei* struggled to maintain order. The slogan for the gathering was “We are still brothers!” And, although Kirchentag leaders were careful to explain that their real emphasis was ecumenical Christian brotherhood not national unity, the gathering could not avoid taking on a major national political resonance. Kirchentag leaders were drawn into complex negotiations with the governments of both German states, as both tried to turn the gathering to their advantage. Newspaper and magazine writers commented on the meeting’s national symbolism. And Germans inside and outside of the churches could not help speculating on its geo-political significance. If the popular success of the 1950 gathering in Essen had consolidated the Kirchentag’s place within the Protestant churches, the 1951 Kirchentag in Berlin played a similar role with

the German public at large. For the next decade, until the construction of the Berlin wall, the Kirchentag would be at the center of inter-German politics.¹

Kirchentag meetings in the “eastern zone”—in Berlin in 1951 and Leipzig in 1954—were, unquestionably, the most visible signs of German Protestant national identity after the Second World War. But these gatherings, with their massive public celebrations of “brotherhood,” were not the only places where Kirchentag visitors considered such issues. After 1951, the Kirchentag took up the task of promoting German Protestant unity. But it did not abandon its original mission. The Kirchentag program remained devoted to filling the spiritual vacuum of the postwar period, to strengthening the faith and public responsibility of the Protestant laity. And, as part of this larger overarching task, numerous workgroups and speeches at the Kirchentag meetings of the 1950s addressed important underlying questions related to German national identity. To what extent were the churches, with their longstanding National Protestant tradition, responsible for the catastrophe of World War II? How could they overcome this dangerous tradition? What could fill the vacuum of national identity for postwar Germans who had lost their homes and livelihoods in the aftermath of the war? How could the churches foster a sense of community spirit and belonging without falling into national idolatry? And what did it mean to be a German Protestant in a land divided down the middle by the politics of the escalating Cold War?

On one thing, they could agree. The German catastrophe—the Nazi dictatorship, war, and defeat—had only been possible because the German people had fallen away from God. Without a return to the churches and the life of faith, it would be impossible

¹ K. W. “Das Kreuz in Ost- und Westberlin,” *Die Zeit*, 19 July 1951; Dirk Palm, ‘*Wir sind doch Brüder!*’ *Der evangelische Kirchentag und die deutsche Frage 1949-1961*, *Arbeiten zur Kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte*, Series B, Vol. 36 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 77-138.

to move forward as a nation. But if the Germans rejected the idols of blood and soil, nation and race, if they created a new sense of community founded on faith in Jesus Christ, then there was hope for the future. Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff expressed these sentiments quite clearly in an early report on plans for the 1950 Kirchentag in Essen. After the surveying all of the problems that plagued postwar German society, he argued:

We are convinced that the German inclination toward “self-centeredness,” isolation, and passivity can only be overcome through a new experience of community life. This can only come about through active contact with the life of the Christian churches, where the power to fill the great vacuum of the present and to stifle the present day crisis-atmosphere can be found. Perhaps it is only by these means that Germany can again find its place in the community of nations, contributing to the religious, economic, social, and international reconstruction of the world.²

At Kirchentag meetings throughout the 1950s, Protestant leaders pursued this task, offering Christian faith and Christian community as substitutes for the dangerous nationalism of the past.

Beyond this basic agreement, however, church leaders were deeply divided on questions of national identity. More conservative Protestants, like Otto Dibelius, the Bishop of Berlin, continued to operate within the old National Protestant framework. To Dibelius and others who shared his perspective, the churches did not stand against the nation; they stood for a different, better national tradition. Adherents of this conservative perspective were further divided over the question of Cold War division. Some like Dibelius embraced vehement anti-communism, seeing the West German state as the true heir to the German nation and hoping for reunification on West German terms. Others, however, denied that either German state was a true heir to the German nation. Many of

² Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff, Report, 25 February 1950, EZA 71/86/7, 5.

those who argued this way prioritized reunification over the ideological debate between communism and western liberal democracy. And they sought a neutralist “third way” between the opposing sides of the Cold War.

On the opposite side of the political spectrum, members of the church’s radical Barthian faction—in keeping with Karl Barth’s own perspective—argued that the Prussian national tradition had set the stage for the Nazis. To the adherents of this viewpoint, the National Protestant tradition was a form of idolatry antithetical to true Christian faith. Yet members of the Barthian faction also tended strongly toward Cold War neutralism. This position grew out of a combination of naiveté toward communism and high-minded opposition to the assertive policies of the West German government. To many Barthians, the western integration and rearmament policies of the West German state demonstrated a refusal to learn the lessons of the Second World War.

Many other church leaders fell between these extremes. And ordinary members of the Protestant churches—while clearly more nationalist than their leaders—reflected the same diversity of opinion. Members of all of these groups might participate in the massive all-German rallies sponsored by the Kirchentag. But they did so for different reasons, promoting very different concepts of the church, the nation, and the relationship in between.

THE SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF THE NATION

Questions of Christian brotherhood and national community were already present at the first Kirchentag gathering, the *Evangelische Woche* of 1949. At this early gathering, discussions of these issues took on a primarily spiritual and religious focus and were characterized by a large degree of agreement between speakers representing a

variety of political viewpoints. All could agree on some level with Heinrich Held, the president of the Church of the Rhineland, when he argued that the foundation of Protestant public activity was the work of Christ, referencing the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt as a warning against abandoning God's truth for the idols of national politics. And no one could really disagree when the elderly pietist Friedrich von Bodelschwingh called on his listeners to embrace self-sacrifice and Christian charity.³ Other speakers were somewhat more provocative. Paul Seeger, a veteran of the Protestant worker's movement, made clear in a speech on social responsibility that reconciliation in the social sphere required German Protestants to overcome their middle-class character, concerning themselves with the circumstances of workers and other social outsiders. And Gustav Heinemann argued that Christians were called to build bridges between the conflicting parties in international politics.⁴

Heinrich Albertz, the refugee minister of Lower Saxony, and one of very few Protestants in the Social Democrat (SPD) leadership, was more provocative in his arguments. Albertz combined these social and international understandings of reconciliation in a thinly veiled appeal for Christian brotherhood against the hypocritical actions of the CDU. To Albertz, the war and its aftermath posed two major problems for German society. First, it had led to greater social inequality. Sharp differences had emerged between those who had lost their property and those who had not, between the impoverished refugees flooding into West German states and those who were already comfortably settled. The war had also divided the German people into two opposing Cold War camps. The churches, and all Protestant Christians, were called to overcome

³ DEKT 1949, 29-41, 58-66.

⁴ Ibid., 42-52.

their own disappointment and bitterness, taking responsibility to resolve these problems. To Albertz the solutions to both of these problems were linked. The sooner the Federal Republic could integrate refugees into society, offering generous social help, the easier it would be for them to renounce violent programs for the restoration of their former lands. This, in turn, would alleviate tensions between the East and the West, making reunification more likely. Here Albertz engaged in direct political polemic, attacking the CDU and its leaders, whose “Christian Party” or “Christian Program” did not lead to truly Christian actions.⁵

Most other Protestant leaders avoided such direct politicization, emphasizing the spiritual side of reconciliation and working to overturn existing nationalist attitudes. Here the Dutch minister Willem Visser’t Hooft, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, made it clear that—other than the people of Israel—God had not chosen any special people. Instead all people were brothers in Christ, members of a church that transcended national boundaries. But this, he argued, did not mean that Christians had policy solutions to all of the world’s problems. There were no easy answers to the divisions between the nations of the world, but Christians could do their part by adopting the role of humble servants, rather than self-interested aggressors. Adolf Keller and Hanns Lilje, the Bishop of Hanover, took similar stances, emphasizing the unity of Christians in every nation and their common calling to live out Christian principles in their individual lives.⁶

Many of the same ideas appeared in the public resolutions adopted at the 1949 *Woche*. But these ideas were combined with the much more defensive, national concerns

⁵ DEKT 1949, 53-57.

⁶ DEKT 1949, 109-131.

of ordinary Protestant attendees. Since the final text of these resolutions was prepared by a carefully chosen committee, chaired by Heinrich Held, it is likely that their ultimate wording was far more temperate and moderate than the views of the average Protestant, balancing national concerns with Christian principles of brotherhood and community. But these statements still have a rather different emphasis than the speeches of the formal program, focusing on German unity and German suffering. In a relatively mild resolution on the upcoming West German *Bundestag* elections, for example, they drew attention to the painful division of the German people, calling on Protestants to vote for candidates concerned with the circumstances of the “entire Volk.” These candidates would be concerned with justice and peace “for the afflicted, those who have lost their homeland and existence, and for all of the despairing.” In another resolution, a “Request for a Just Peace Settlement,” they were much less equivocal. Here they complained of the millions of Germans driven from their homes in the East, prisoners of war laboring in prison camps far from home, and the policy of disassembling German industrial plants, which made any economic recovery impossible. Most of all, they complained: “A dividing line runs through the middle of the heart of our Volk, which yearns in its brokenness for a common order of justice and freedom.”⁷

The multifaceted question of community—with its spiritual, social, and international components—took center stage in the planning of the 1950 Kirchentag in Essen. Yet the “German Question” was also not entirely absent. Numerous committee members emphasized that the Kirchentag also had an important role to play in maintaining relations between Protestants in the East and West. Herbert Dost, a Leipzig

⁷ Documentary Appendix to RvTT, “Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag in Hannover. Rückblick und Ausblick.,” 28 July-1 August 1949, EZA 71/86/7.

deacon, called for the greatest possible inclusion of participants from the “Soviet Zone,” “if it really to be a Kirchentag for the entirety of German Protestantism.” And at the suggestion of Heinrich Held, a leader in the Church of the Rhineland, it was resolved that the Kirchentag gathering of the following year would be held somewhere in the East.⁸ But the focus was distinctly on the domestic, social aspects of Christian and national community.

Workgroup discussions on how to rescue the German “Homeland” [*Heimat*] emphasized the substitution of Christian charity for revanchist politics. Here Heinrich Albertz again took the most political tone, repeating his charges from the preceding year in a complex mixture of pacifist politics and national stridency. In this workgroup devoted to saving the homeland, Albertz stated unequivocally that the German homeland was not limited to the Federal Republic, but extended into the “Soviet zone” and beyond to the territories taken away after the Second World War. Albertz strongly condemned the injustice of this situation. But he argued that military force would not restore these territories to Germany. “Germany can in no way be defended by a security budget, rearmament, or similar measures,” he claimed, “on the contrary, it can only be defended through social justice.” Only by creating an attractive, socially just society could West Germans prepare the way for eventual unity with the communist East.⁹

While Albertz saw the domestic and inter-German sides of community as closely related, other speakers focused on the concrete problems of social integration in the West. Many sought to spiritualize these problems. Dr. Elisabeth Pfeil, for example, spoke of the psychological trauma of the uprooted refugees and the difficulties they had in

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ DEKT 1950, 52-53.

responding to the uncertainty of their new lives. Recognizing that full integration of these refugees would be difficult and would take time, she called upon her listeners to help create a “community that reaches beyond the bonds of human society.” “Here,” she continued, “I am speaking of our community before God, about our community in Jesus Christ.” Elisabeth Stehfen, too, spoke of isolation felt by so many in postwar Germany. “At its foundation,” she asked, “behind all of their complaints and demands, is there not a profound desire for homeland, for love, for security in a community or with people who are ready to really help carry their burdens?” In the bigger picture, she continued, all humans were refugees from paradise, but Christ had offered access to humanity’s “ultimate homeland [*Urheimat*], to security, to genuine community.” The solution here was not entirely otherworldly, however. The church had a concrete role to play. German Christians needed to overcome the sentimentality and middle-class moralizing of the past, becoming active in the practical everyday life of their communities and recognizing their call to missions.¹⁰

In another speech, Klaus von Bismarck tried to move these ideas beyond the purely spiritual realm without engaging in the symbolic pacifism and neutralism of the Barthians. Christians in postwar Germany had a duty, he argued, to direct the vision of their suffering fellow humans to the cross of Christ. And they had charitable responsibilities. But beyond these, they were also called to involvement in the complex workings of West German social policy. Like Albertz, Bismarck argued that social justice was a precondition for peace, and he encouraged his listeners to work for a just social order. But he also made clear: “I personally distrust all overly categorical resolutions, including those for peace. I am personally convinced that we Christians—if

¹⁰ Ibid., 57-60.

we soberly contemplate our situation—have no reason to speak fearfully of the threat of the coming German rearmament.” Instead of focusing on the fight against rearmament, Christians needed to work in co-responsibility with their non-Christian colleagues to create a better society.¹¹

Otto Dibelius, the conservative bishop of Berlin, concluded this workgroup with a sermon that emphasized the same themes of social integration and peace that had dominated the earlier speeches. He began by arguing that the very idea of homeland was threatened by the upheavals and displacements, the “injustice and violence” of the preceding years. But homeland was a gift from God, something that all people were supposed to have. To rob someone of his or her homeland was a sin, and the churches had a duty to confront this evil. But the answer was not violence or war. Instead, he argued: “God’s mercy requires that we provide a homeland for those who have lost theirs.” The church needed to oppose revenge and to support social welfare measures like the “Equalization of Burdens law” of the Adenauer government. Instead of agitating for lost territories, German Protestants needed to let refugees know that they were “citizens with equal rights and beloved cohabiters with God and man everywhere in the German Fatherland.”¹²

CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD AND POLITICAL SYMBOLISM

Discussions of brotherhood and community changed their focus with the first truly all-German Kirchentag in Berlin. This gathering marked a shift away from spiritual and practical discussions of social integration in the FRG, toward sweeping national and

¹¹ Ibid., 60-64.

¹² Ibid., 65-67.

religious symbolism. Although the Kirchentag leadership had previously resolved to try to hold the 1951 gathering somewhere in the GDR, it is clear that many leaders such as Reinold von Thadden and General Secretary Heinrich Giesen had mixed feelings about this prospect. Instead, they pushed strongly for a 1951 gathering in Stuttgart, where it would be possible to continue their critical discussion of West German political and social issues. Apart from the enormous physical and financial burdens of carrying out a Kirchentag in Berlin, they feared that any Kirchentag in the East would lose its ability to deal concretely with policy problems, becoming dangerously politicized by the charged Cold War environment. On the other side stood Protestants of both Barthian and conservative nationalist persuasions and a great deal of the leadership of the Protestant Church (EKD). Each of these groups supported an East-West Kirchentag for different reasons, but all emphasized the gathering's symbolic importance more than its intellectual content. To Barthians and other Cold War neutralists, a Berlin gathering would signify that Germans in the West had not forgotten or abandoned their brothers in the East. It would also be an opportunity to contrast Christian brotherhood and reconciliation with military rearmament and Cold War division. To anti-communists in the Federal Republic, it provided an opportunity to embarrass the Socialist Unity Party (SED) that governed the East. To church leaders, it was a chance to rally the Protestant youth in the Eastern zone, strengthening their faith in the face of communist persecution.¹³

With the decision to hold the 1951 Kirchentag in Berlin, the Präsidium was unwillingly dragged into the complexities of Cold War geopolitics. Negotiating with the

¹³ See "Kirchentag 1951. Sitzung im Reichsbahnhotel am 7. Nov. 1950," 7 November 1950, EZA 71/86/14; RvTT to Klaus von Bismarck, 23 October 1950, EZA 71/86/14; Bessert, et al to the Kirchentag leadership, 25 September 1950, EZA 71/86/14. See also Dirk Palm, "*Wir sind doch Brüder!*", 82-89.

leaders of the German Democratic Republic, they were only able to gain permission for a gathering in both sides of Berlin if Barthians such as Niemöller and Heinemann, who had spoken out prominently against West German rearmament, were given key positions on the Kirchentag program. Beyond such specific agreements, there also loomed the threat of last minute harassment or cancellation if the tone became too critical of the East German regime. Fearing that the Kirchentag might wholly capitulate to East German demands, becoming a mouthpiece for communist peace propaganda, the government of the FRG also became involved, offering secret financial support for the gathering in return for political balance.¹⁴

The divide on national questions between ordinary Protestant opinion and that of the Kirchentag leadership was apparent once again in 1951. The formal program placed an emphasis first and foremost on the religious concept of Christian brotherhood, not on national unity. Leaders repeatedly reminded the public that the Kirchentag was not a political gathering. When questions of nationalism arose in the various speeches and sermons it was usually so the speaker could reject the extremes of the past or suggest a better Christian vision for the present. Only occasionally, in the larger gatherings, did speakers walk a fine line between Christian and national expressions of brotherhood. In the question and answer periods after the formal speeches, however, it was an entirely different matter. Here the full breadth of Protestant opinion becomes apparent, ranging from radical Barthian pacifism and even pro-Communist sentiment, on one side, through the angry nationalist rejection of German division, to strident anti-communist attacks on Niemöller and Heinemann as shills for the SED.

¹⁴ Dirk Palm, "Wir sind doch Brüder!", 96ff.

In their first venture into the geopolitical arena, most Kirchentag and church leaders remained cautious. At a press reception before the Kirchentag, Thadden acknowledged that the 1951 gathering was something of a “political sensation.” But he also issued a word of caution: “We are also clear that the Kirchentag will bring us into dangerous proximity with various propagandistic tendencies and that, perhaps, there will be attempts here and there to see political direction in words and thought processes that are intended to be understood in decidedly Christian terms.”¹⁵ Against those who were tempted to look for such meaning, Thadden argued that the real “sensation” of the Kirchentag was to be found in its meaning for German Protestantism, holding its first all-German meeting since the end of the war, and in the ways that German Protestants were reforming themselves and rethinking their place in the postwar world.¹⁶

Thadden’s warning was repeated by Otto Dibelius, who stated: “We will be sorry if this Kirchentag is forced too much into the political sphere.” Yet, in a subtle jab at the SED, Dibelius also emphasized the spontaneous character of the gathering and the atmosphere of intellectual freedom that would predominate. Eberhard Stammer, of the Kirchentag publicity committee, informed the press that they would soon witness an opening worship service that would include leaders of both German states, but he cautioned against reading too much political significance into this contact. The Kirchentag was not making a statement about international politics, but about “Christian

¹⁵ DEKT 1951, 21-22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

obedience.” It was being held in Berlin as a symbol of the religious unity of German Protestants, but it was not a political gesture.¹⁷

Thadden reemphasized this clear rejection of political symbolism at the Kirchentag’s opening assembly, drawing attention instead to the brotherhood of all Christians and the importance of brotherhood in developing a strong community of Christian laity. Other speakers, however, walked a fine line between the spiritual and the political. Otto Dibelius, for example, argued that German Protestants had a duty to build bridges between different classes, political groups, religious confessions, and also, between the people of the East and West. He went on to simultaneously affirm that Germans were members of one nation, with a common inheritance, while also emphasizing that Christian love, not national feeling, compelled them to come together.

We build these bridges because we know that we must get across from one shore to the other, not just because we are members of one nation and bearers of its inheritance, from which we cannot be separated without being made wholly rootless. We build them because the distress of the world can no longer bear that people stand in opposition—in ugly antagonism—to one other.¹⁸

The former privy councilor Reinhold Quaatz, a lawyer who had been instrumental in the behind the scenes work of drawing the Kirchentag to Berlin, also spoke of the importance of the city as “the center of the German Reich,” now “a shadow, a memory, . . . a city without future.” But he argued that the real importance of a Kirchentag in Berlin was that this was the location of the greatest hardship and distress in Germany. Quaatz claimed that he was referring here to “social distress,” but national division—the “distress of the German Volk”—was the theme to which he continually returned. In a typical passage, he argued: “We see before us a Volk in confusion, a Volk in perplexity, a

¹⁷ Ibid., 21-28.

¹⁸ Ibid., 36.

Volk divided by the violence of its powerful masters. What is even worse, we fall into the danger that one brother will become the enemy of the other. We fall into the danger that the settled borders run through the middle of our hearts.” Here Quaatz brought together the religious and political elements of his thought. Repentance and submission to God, he argued, were the only ways to truly reconstruct the German nation, and only this reconstruction of Germany would allow the reconstruction of a new Europe.¹⁹

This opening gathering also presented several symbolic challenges to older nationalist ideas. Guest speakers included representatives of German Catholicism and the German free churches, an industrial worker, and a “negro pastor” from the Ivory Coast, who emphasized Christian brotherhood across traditional lines of division. Provost Heinrich Grüber of Berlin’s *Marienkirche*, a former inmate of Sachsenhausen and Dachau, also reminded his listeners of German war guilt and the need to seek reconciliation with the peoples of the world. Looking back to 1945, he reminded:

After a war whose guilt lies heavily upon us and whose horrors continue to tremble within us, our Christian brothers from abroad came to us. People whose nations had just been at war stood together before God in common adoration. . . . We were conscious of God’s name, kingdom, and will, and therefore were aware of the brotherly solidarity of those who break bread, who forgive and help to carry one another’s burdens, and who struggle against evil.

In the same way that Christian brothers had gathered to offer solidarity and forgiveness after the war, the Kirchentag was to symbolize the solidarity of German Protestants, of Berliners, of Germans, and of all humanity.²⁰

The bible lessons for the week, led by the theology professor Martin Fischer, emphasized the importance of Christian brotherhood and reconciliation in a divided

¹⁹ Ibid., 42-43.

²⁰ Ibid., 43-44.

world. Here Fischer warned Germany's "lost sheep" to await the salvation offered by the good shepherd. Only this would keep them safe against "wolves" like the Nazis who had argued "You are nothing, the Volk is everything" or the communists, who argued "You are nothing, the production process is everything."²¹ But Christians were not called to take sides in the ideological conflicts of the world. Rather than engaging in anti-communist activities, they had a duty to offer Christian love as an alternative to war, propaganda, and self-justification.

The church has to remain on the fence between all sides, as long as all sides are led by a self-justification that can no longer receive or offer forgiveness. Long before the world wars began, the world had already opted for war in the newspapers. Long before the world murdered with weapons, it murdered with words, since dishonor sets the stage for murder.²²

Rather than letting themselves be dragged into this cycle of evil, Christians were called to live according to different ideals of brotherhood and mutual service.

Even at the Kirchentag men's gathering, which brought together Hermann Ehlers, the CDU *Bundestag* president, and such prominent Barthian critics of the CDU as Gustav Heinemann, Martin Niemöller, and Heinrich Grüber, the emphasis was firmly upon the Christian principles both sides could endorse. While Heinemann and the other Barthians called for Christian unity between the East and West, rejecting the antagonistic pattern of the world, Ehlers defended foreign policy realism. But Ehlers also agreed on the need to take the other side seriously, without resorting to propagandistic slogans. And, although

²¹ Ibid., 92.

²² Ibid., 113.

he defended both Cold War antagonists' rights to have and promote their own positions, he was careful to renounce violence as a means of settling such disputes.²³

In the formal speeches of the workgroups, too, the emphasis remained primarily spiritual, frustrating those who wanted greater political confrontation. Some planners had hoped that the Kirchentag would emphasize national themes. As one member of the church workgroup complained: "In the presentations, 'Volk and Fatherland' are too little emphasized. Brotherhood for the salvation of Volk and Fatherland; the masses will respond to that." But this was a minority viewpoint among the Kirchentag leadership. In response to this suggestion, Heinrich Giesen retorted sharply: "We want to be careful in our use of political formulations. It is not Jesus' promise that he will bring back the Fatherland with its old borders from Lorraine to Königsberg. The bible says nothing about that."²⁴

If anything the formal presentations of the church workgroup were critical of this "Volk and Fatherland" way of thinking. Gustav Heinemann's speech, in particular, on various misunderstandings of the church, sharply criticized the church's past role in Germany, especially its "state and conservative middle-class ties."²⁵ This speech received a generally positive reception in the spiritually focused church workgroup. Commenters praised Heinemann's words as an indication of how far the church had come in the last twenty years, re-emphasized the brotherhood of believers from all nations, and, frequently, endorsed the Barthian call for German unity and peace. Another

²³ Ibid., 194-202.

²⁴ "Protokoll. Besprechung Arbeitsgruppe I – Wir sind doch Brüder IN DER KIRCHE," 17 June 1951, EZA 71/86/91.

²⁵ DEKT 1951, 292.

speaker, the Hamburg missions director Walter Freytag, endorsed the centrality of German national identity, but only to promote the idea of collective guilt. Declaring that the nation would be judged by God for its sins, Freytag argued: “The church must not exhaust itself in the negative prevention of anti-Christian nationalism, instead it must defeat it inside and out through the power of Christ’s spirit, pointing our Volk in a new direction toward renewal through human worth.”²⁶

The formal presentations in the workgroup devoted to politics and brotherhood in the Volk dealt mainly with questions of Christian political life in the two Germanys, especially questions of state power and resistance. Only one speech in this workgroup—given by the popular author Willy Kramp—touched directly on questions of the German nation. Substituting Christian faith for nationalism, Kramp argued that the German people had been seduced away from God by the “idols of blood, soil, and national egotism,” which had led to the terrible catastrophe of the preceding years. The churches had also been too middle-class, ignoring the needs of many Germans and uncritically accepting the traditional alliance of throne and altar. But after the war, he continued, God had given them “the grace of a new beginning.” Rather than serving any earthly power or force, they were now called to serve God, experiencing freedom and transformation through the power of Christ.²⁷

Yet the comments of workgroup attendees make it clear that questions of nationalism and national community were on peoples’ minds. Martin Richter, a member of the CDU-East and the mayor of Dresden, suggested that distress and evil in Germany

²⁶ Ibid., 305-318, 322.

²⁷ Ibid., 489-510.

were not just matters of state power, as most of the speakers had implied, but were closely tied to the question of what would become of the German Volk.²⁸ Julius Nimpte from Brandenburg, spoke against West German rearmament on nationalist grounds, arguing: “I know only one fatherland, and that is Germany. My heart can only be devoted to the whole state, not just one part of it.”²⁹ Theodor Winzer, a town councilman from Happenheim, argued that the lesson to be learned from the two world wars was that “against Christ every people will tear itself apart.” He went on to argue that the only way to prevent the self-destructive tendencies of the nations of the world from ending in catastrophe was to embrace Christian political involvement, supporting Christian parties like the CDU.³⁰ Many others sought to spiritualize the problem, promoting Christian love as a sort of Third Way in international politics.³¹ And Pastor Johannes Müller of Berlin-Friedenau presented a formal declaration on the international situation, calling on the Allies to allow Germans to work out their own problems without interference, rejecting propaganda and violence, and calling on Germans to work for the brotherhood of all peoples.³² Hermann Ehlers, the CDU Bundestag president, responded to these comments by emphasizing the complexity of geopolitics, endorsing calls for Christian intercession through prayer, and warning against Christian arrogance in the face of the problems of the world.³³

²⁸ Ibid., 467-68.

²⁹ Ibid., 473-74.

³⁰ Ibid., 469-71.

³¹ Ibid., 471, 474-75, 477-79

³² Ibid., 482-84.

³³ Ibid., 520-21.

A SELF-CRITICAL TURN

The 1952 Kirchentag was held in Stuttgart in an atmosphere of national disappointment. While the Berlin Kirchentag of the preceding year had been a massive celebration of German Protestant unity, the crowds at Stuttgart would consist primarily of West Germans. Adding to the bitterness of this renewed separation was the fact that the GDR regime had invalidated the travel permits of 20,000 East German Protestants—including several speakers—only weeks before the Kirchentag was to meet. Previously skeptical of East-West symbolism at the Kirchentag, Thadden responded to these circumstances—and the vicious press attacks of leading Barthians, who claimed the Kirchentag leadership had unnecessarily antagonized the GDR regime—by calling for political realism.³⁴ At the same time, he began to accept the Kirchentag's role as a symbolic island of East-West unity and reconciliation. Pointing to the threat of self-destruction posed by the East-West tensions in Europe, he argued that this necessitated close cooperation with the “eastern world” “This,” he explained, “is the apostolic function of the German Protestant Kirchentag in the middle of our divided land; we must suffer together, fight together, and believe together across these tensions.”³⁵ Still, to Thadden, this duty was primarily spiritual, not political. As he clarified during the later main assembly, the Kirchentag existed to empower Christian laity to spread God's

³⁴ See Palm, “*Wir sind doch Brüder!*”, 148-53

³⁵ DEKT 1952, 31.

message of salvation. They could not refuse this duty with respect to the entire Eastern portion of the Volk, for “withholding this message of life would be fratricide.”³⁶

Held in the city where the 1945 Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt had been adopted, the 1952 Kirchentag dealt extensively with national questions, focusing primarily on the burdens of German guilt and the difficult road forward. At the main assembly, which drew over 200,000 people and was carried on all of the major radio stations, Hendrik Kraemer, a Dutch representative of the World Council of Churches, argued that “radical self-criticism” was a Christian duty. Here he pointed to the work of the Stuttgart

Declaration of Guilt:

It was an ecumenical act of guilt-confession, of forgiving one another before God and the world. It was, thus, a healing act. Has it been granted to the German churches and the Kirchentag, to today think, live, and act out of this healing unity of confession, forgiveness, and the praise of God? This is God’s will!³⁷

Gustav Heinemann followed this appeal with his own call to take the lessons of Stuttgart seriously. Here he clarified that the Stuttgart Declaration had not been an admission of guilt on behalf of the German nation. Instead it had been recognition that German Protestants bore guilt for their sins of omission in “the years before the attacks on other peoples and during the eradication of political opponents, Jews, and the so-called lives unworthy of life.” This had been a powerful act of ecumenical reconciliation at the time, but it didn’t settle the issue of guilt once and for all. Rather than continuing to justify themselves and calculating the war guilt of both sides, German Protestants needed to take concrete actions to promote peace in the present day. For Heinemann, this meant a clear denunciation of West German rearmament. And while he acknowledged

³⁶ Ibid., 63.

³⁷ Ibid., 67.

that Protestants were too divided to speak with one voice on this issue, he urged his listeners to renounce propaganda and hate and to work for peace between the nations.³⁸

While Heinemann called Protestants to take a political stance against the nationalism of the past, Thadden, Lilje, and Heinrich Giesen promoted a spiritual understanding of the Volk, wherein Christian brotherhood served as a sort of replacement for nationalism. Otto Dibelius once again stretched this spiritual notion almost to the breaking point, moving freely in his closing prayer between spiritual and national conceptions of homeland. Thanking God for the unity that he had given German Christians in the East and West in “a community . . . that nothing can tear apart,” Dibelius pleaded that German prisoners of war might be allowed “to return in this hour to a renewed Fatherland” and that refugees, who had lost their land when driven out of the former Eastern territories, might “attain the object of their longing.”³⁹

In the workgroup on the church, the main focus was again on the idea of the church as a spiritual “homeland.” Here Helmut Küppers of Magdeburg, recalled the role the church had played during the postwar breakdown of German society. In a world full of despair and hatred, the church had become a place of acceptance and forgiveness. Several former soldiers complained in the discussion period that this ideal had not been fully realized in their own experiences. They had returned and found themselves unwelcome reminders of a war that people wanted to forget.⁴⁰ But Gisela Pfeiffer of Göttingen expressed the workgroup’s ideal vision of the church, when she argued: “For

³⁸ Ibid., 67-68.

³⁹ Ibid., 69-70.

⁴⁰ For more on the churches and returning POWs, see Frank Biess, “Survivors of Totalitarianism: Returning POWs and the Reconstruction of Masculine Citizenship in West Germany, 1945-1955” in Hannah Schissler, ed., *The Miracle Years*, 65-67.

us, church became a homeland, where we moved from the total solidarity of guilt into the community of forgiveness.”⁴¹

Guilt was also a major focus of the political workgroup, where the question of German-Jewish relations was directly addressed for the first time at the Kirchentag. Ever since plans had been announced for the *Evangelische Woche* in 1949, Adolf Freudenberg, a founder of the German Protestant Committee for Service to Israel, had been lobbying the Kirchentag leadership for a more direct consideration of German Protestant guilt and responsibility for the Nazi treatment of Jews.⁴² Freudenberg had hoped that the 1949 *Woche* might adopt a resolution on this topic and Thadden, agreeing that such a statement was long overdue, had encouraged him to draft one for consideration. But it appears that time constraints and different priorities prevented this resolution from ever being discussed or voted upon.⁴³ Over the next several years Freudenberg and several of his co-workers remained in contact with Thadden and Heinrich Giesen, providing them with advice on the contents of the church and political workgroups. By late 1951 Freudenberg and Karl Heinrich Rengstorf were strategizing with Giesen on how to fit the Jewish question into the existing Kirchentag program.⁴⁴

Their opportunity arrived in 1952 when Otto Küster, a lawyer representing the West German government in international negotiations on the topic of restitution to

⁴¹ Ibid., 147, 157-176.

⁴² See also Hockenos, *A Church Divided*, 163-67.

⁴³ Letter from Adolf Freudenberg to RvTT, 22 June 1949, EZA 71/86/7; Letter from RvTT to Adolf Freudenberg, 4 July 1949, EZA 71/86/7; the draft resolution is included alongside other proposals and drafts in the Kirchentag document file “Evangel. Woche Hannover und Schriftwechsel 1949-1959,” EZA 71/86/7.

⁴⁴ Letter from Heinrich Giesen to Adolf Freudenberg, 20 April 1951, EZA 71/86/93; Letter from Heinrich Giesen to Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, 11 April 1951, EZA 71/86/93; Letter from H. Giesen to Pfarrer Maeckler, 12 April 1951, EZA 71/86/93; letter from Pfarrer Maeckler to Superintendent Sudrow, 16 March 51, EZA 71/86/93.

Israel, created a public controversy, resigning his position and condemning the government's position. Küster argued that economic factors were being weighted too heavily in the government's thinking, while moral considerations were being ignored. As the debate grew more vehement, he also accused the government of harboring anti-Semites, who failed to understand the importance of restitution. Eberhard Müller and Heinrich Giesen collected the documents related to this controversy, forwarding them to the members of the church and political workgroups, who were asked to try to integrate them into the program.⁴⁵

They do not appear to have succeeded with regard to the church workgroup. But matters were different in the workgroup on politics, where the Barthian theologian Helmut Gollwitzer spoke on foundations of Christian political involvement. Gollwitzer began by reminding his listeners of the horrible events of the preceding years, of the war, of forced labor camps, the boycott and gassing of Jews, the expulsion of Poles, and the postwar retribution against Germans. The main question here for the church, he argued, was not the question of passivity raised in the Stuttgart Declaration. Instead it was the question of the churches own direct guilt in these events. "Did they participate in this," he asked, "or did they act completely differently?" The same question was posed for Christians in the present day: would they go along with the world, or follow a different plan?⁴⁶

Gollwitzer continued by declaring that God was a God of peace, of justice, and of forgiveness. Because God was a God of peace, Christians were called to promote peace

⁴⁵ Letter with attachments from Eberhard Müller to Heinrich Giesen, 7 July 1952, EZA 71/86/95; memo from Heinrich Giesen to the leaders of Workgroups 1 and 3, 13 June 1952, EZA 71/86/95.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 267-68.

in the world. With regard to West German rearmament, he therefore questioned: “Shouldn’t we be concerned that with uniforms and weapons our Volk, still deeply sick, will once again be vulnerable to the lurking dangers of revenge, megalomania, the lust for power, the violation of peoples, bondage, and inhumanity?” And he argued that rather than obsessing over their own suffering, they should concern themselves with the needs of other peoples.⁴⁷ Because God was a God of justice, German Christians also needed “to learn to listen again to the voice of Justice,” creating a German *Rechtsstaat*. Finally, because God was a God of forgiveness, Germans needed to seek forgiveness for all of their past crimes. They had to seek forgiveness, specifically, from all of the other nations that they had wronged, and particularly from Israel. “Our attitude toward the question of guilt,” he concluded, “will determine whether we enter the future as a people that has learned its lesson, or as one that has not.”⁴⁸

CDU *Bundestag* president Hermann Ehlers, speaking later in the same workgroup, took a surprisingly similar view of German guilt, although he differed on its political implications for the present. He argued here that Germans did not realize the full implications of the unjust system of the Nazis, which had infected statesmen, generals, judges, policemen, and other officials, causing them to fully dispense with any normative standards of justice. “If we really understood this,” he argued, “we would not try so cheaply and superficially to cleanse ourselves what has happened.”⁴⁹ Ehlers proceeded to caution against self-justification, reminding his listeners of German crimes

⁴⁷ Ibid., 270-71.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 272-75.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 317.

against the Jews, and calling for practical efforts to seek forgiveness.⁵⁰ Yet he also offered hope that God, in his grace, had provided the Germans with a chance for a new beginning, a chance to create a new Volk and a new state that would avoid the errors of the past.⁵¹

These speeches provoked heated reactions from the gathered crowds. Many endorsed Gollwitzer's anti-rearmament stance, some because Germany was too sick to responsibly remilitarize and some, like the housewife Margarete Redlich, because she would rather starve than endure another night of bombing raids.⁵² Some recalled their own experiences as passive observers of Nazi crimes, including the transport of Jews to their deaths.⁵³ Many CDU members called for political realism, defending the need for West German rearmament.⁵⁴ Finally, some listeners responded defensively. As Dr. Helene von Watter of Cologne complained:

It would be unjust only to look now at certain guilty parties. Earlier it was several ruling families who were supposed to be the guilty, and now, above all else, it is supposed to be those who carried arms. Don't forget the victims of the war. They are the ones in every country who were just doing their duty. . . . Let's also not forget the camaraderie of the bomb shelters and the bunkers! We need Christian fidelity to our brothers, but also to our Volk and its past!⁵⁵

The question of German responsibility for crimes against the Jews was dealt with even more directly in a relatively poorly attended meeting of the Committee for Service

⁵⁰ Ibid., 324.

⁵¹ Ibid., 321.

⁵² Ibid., 295.

⁵³ Ibid., 329-30.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 292-93, 297, 328.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 290.

to Israel, held concurrently with the Kirchentag program. Here Deacon Hermann Maas of Heidelberg supported generous restitution, arguing: “We Germans have to turn around, to do penance! The church has long overlooked this. Repentance is not the same as restitution—before God and man, there is much that cannot be made right. But humble help and sacrifice is possible.”⁵⁶ Following up on this, Pastor Vogt, from Switzerland, also spoke on the need for repentance, arguing for the need to root out anti-Semitism not only in the surrounding society, but also in the churches themselves.⁵⁷

POLITICAL DIVISION

The Kirchentag gatherings of 1953 and 1954 took place in a rapidly changing political context. In 1953, the Barthian politician Gustav Heinemann, who had resigned in 1950 from Adenauer’s cabinet over the issue of rearmament, formed a new All-German People’s Party (GVP), which campaigned for election almost exclusively on the anti-rearmament platform. Since Heinemann had been heavily involved in the Kirchentage of the preceding years and, since German Protestants dissatisfied with the CDU formed the bulk of Heinemann’s support, the Kirchentag of 1953 met in an environment of considerable political tension. On a more general level, Protestants were beginning by the mid-1950s to more clearly articulate their political differences and to gravitate more clearly to one political perspective or another.⁵⁸ This made it harder than ever to maintain the veneer of rhetorical agreement that Protestants had relied upon to assert unity at the Kirchentag. The emphasis was less and less on the spiritual principles

⁵⁶ Ibid., 573.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 574.

⁵⁸ See chapters 4 and 6.

upon which all could agree, and more and more on the practical policy differences that bitterly divided them. On the international level, the 1953 workers' uprising in East Berlin further complicated the East-West mediation attempts of Protestants at the Kirchentag, causing the anti-communist Right and the neutralist Left to cling ever more strongly to their beliefs. The "Word" of the 1953 Kirchentag might remind Protestants: "We may not write off the other as the representative of a foreign interest or follower of a hostile ideology."⁵⁹ But ever-widening division characterized the Protestant political reality.

These divisions came to fore in 1953 in a portion of the political workgroup's program devoted to the question of "Our Nation among the Nations." Martin Niemöller, who opened this panel, began by contrasting the ever-present complaints of Germans about their treatment at the end of World War II with the German's own crimes that were no longer spoken about. These crimes had powerful implications for the place of Germans in the world today. Germany could not just seek reconciliation with the nations of Western Europe, for they had sinned against the people of the west and the people of the east. Instead, he argued: "We are always caught between the millstones, because we owe a debt to both sides and somehow need to make it good to both."⁶⁰

Niemöller turned here to a more detailed explication of this guilt, considering its implications for German national identity. The existence of nations, he argued, was a simple fact of history. But nations were not permanent groupings. Nations could be born and nations could die out. And they would no longer separate people in the future Kingdom of God. Instead, people were divided into nations as a result of sin. Yet

⁵⁹ DEKT 1953, 5.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 219.

despite these divisions, people remained ultimately dependant upon each other. The Germans had lost sight of this fact long before the rise of Hitler. They had been raised in a nationalistic climate, “And this nationalism has long been decorated with a religious gloriole: were we not the people of Luther, did the world not have us, our religious struggles and sufferings, to thank for the Gospel?” Hitler had not added anything new; he had only brought to the surface that which was already there in the hearts of Germans, including German Christians.⁶¹ Germans had been seduced and had committed horrible crimes and now they were living in the disillusionment that followed.

Yet their past sins gave Germans in the present a special responsibility. God had called them to a special task of international reconciliation.

It is [God’s] doing—and not ours—that our nation resides in that very part of the earth where both people groups oppose each other, where they cannot come to any understanding with their irreconcilable positions, and where they threaten the peace of the whole world. That we—only we—completely apart from our own designs, live on this border between ‘East’ and ‘West,’ shows us our task. We must endeavor to come to an understanding with both sides, and thereby to also create an understanding between them, for without such an understanding there can be no peaceful coexistence between the nations. We need to work to make our nation a bridge where the peoples of the East and West can meet. If our nation has any task today, it can only be this.⁶²

Ulrich Scheuner, a law professor at the University of Bonn, followed Niemöller’s moral appeal with a more academic discussion of the same issues. Scheuner, like Niemöller, argued that the existence of nations was a basic fact of life. But he added that no nation—other than Israel—had been specially chosen by God. Problems arose when the nation became an idol, leading to alienation from God. As an alternative to this temptation, Scheuner argued that the nations of Europe needed to work together for peace

⁶¹ Ibid., 221-22.

⁶² Ibid., 224.

and mutual benefit. This did not mean giving up one's own national perspective or becoming a "world citizen," but it did require practical cooperation and the building of trust.⁶³ Finally, Walter Freytag advocated an involvement in world missions as a way of transcending the narrow perspective of the Volk. The task of missions, he argued, was not rooted in some European superiority over the people of Asia or Africa, but was instead the manifestation of their Christian duty to love their neighbor.⁶⁴

These speeches—and particularly that of Niemöller—provoked a firestorm of controversy. Anti-communists argued that West Germany had a duty to defend itself against Bolshevik expansion and territorial aggression and that negotiation with an unjust state [*Unrechtsstaat*] was futile. One speaker from Kassel went even further, accusing Niemöller of engaging Goebbels-like propaganda in his efforts to sell Cold War neutralism as an essential Christian teaching. While Kurt Scharf, the discussion moderator, struggled to restore order in the chaos that followed this charge, similar objections dominated the remainder of the discussion period. The workgroup ended in a renewed state of uproar when another attendee, Gustav Landau, shifted the focus from German guilt to German victimhood. Taking issue with calls for Germany to make restitution for the crimes of the Nazis, Landau suggested it was only fair that the Americans make similar restitutions to Germany for the war damage they had done.⁶⁵

In his final defense, Niemöller fully retreated from the political into the spiritual realm. It was not his job, he insisted, to give his listeners political advice, or to make

⁶³ Ibid., 228-231.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 232-36.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 230-249, for W. von Schenk's accusations against Niemöller, see pp. 240-41.

political arguments. He was speaking of Christian principles, of basic Christian obedience to the word of God.⁶⁶ In the workgroup's concluding panel discussion the following day—which Niemöller did not attend—Helmut Gollwitzer continued this defense. Niemöller's critics, he argued, were acting out of base political motives, betraying their Christian beliefs in their treatment of Niemöller. Niemöller, on the other hand, was making the basic spiritual argument that no absolute ideal, whether nationalism or socialism could take the place of God.⁶⁷

If anything, the atmosphere surrounding the 1954 Kirchentag in Leipzig—the only Kirchentag ever held entirely within the GDR—was even more politically charged. While its formal program was far more inwardly oriented and spiritual than those of the preceding years—marked by an almost conspicuous avoidance of hot political issues—this Kirchentag, merely by virtue of its location, could not avoid politicization. When the largest crowds that the Kirchentag had yet experienced—more than 650,000 people, almost all from the GDR—gathered in the pouring rain for the meeting's main assembly, they were clearly making a statement. Less triumphal than Berlin, with its confident proclamation of Christian brotherhood across the iron curtain, the Leipzig Kirchentag, called on these gathered crowds to “Be Joyful in Hope,” even in the face of continual setbacks. As citizens of the GDR, this meant persisting in their faith, even when persecuted by the regime. As Germans, this meant maintaining hope that unification might still be possible. As Heinrich Giesen proclaimed in the “Word” of the Kirchentag: “No one knows whether we in the East and West will soon be united. Perhaps a long,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 248-49.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 257-59.

hard way lies ahead. There is the danger that the one side will collapse in exhaustion, while the other will seek only its own security. We do not want this, we will not allow it. We will hold fast to each other.”⁶⁸

Both the church and political discussions of this Kirchentag sought to combat the utopianism of communism with an increased emphasis on Christian apocalyptic teachings. Hope and salvation—they argued again and again—were not to be found in technology or social organization, but only in Christ’s return. And this knowledge was to be the source of courage and steadfastness, whatever persecution or difficulties they might face.

Yet one workgroup discussion, in the normally apolitical workgroup on country and village life, generated enormous controversy in both German states. Speaking on property rights, with reference to the collectivization of agriculture in the GDR, Klaus von Bismarck managed to offend both sides of the political spectrum. On the one hand, his critical stance toward the GDR’s treatment of its citizens earned him a scorching rebuke in *Neues Deutschland*, the East German state newspaper. It was his call for Christian love and forgiveness, rather than vengeance and revanchism toward Germany’s eastern neighbors that created a firestorm in the West.

Bismarck introduced himself to his audience as an East Elbian Junker and as an expellee, driven from his family lands in the East. Like other refugees, he could be tempted to see those now living on his estates as his enemies. But Christians were not compelled to feel this way. They had the freedom to operate according to a different set of principles, seeing all property as God’s, not their own to dispose of as they wished.

⁶⁸ DEKT 1954., 7.

Yes, beloved brothers and sisters, I am speaking here of private property as though it was a concept to be written on the blackboard and explained.

But at this very moment my heart longs for the meadows, the fields, and the trees of my now-Polish-administered homeland in Pomerania. Speaking openly and soberly, I see no way to return without a war and new terrible horrors. I will not go back for this price. It is my personal opinion—that some of you, perhaps, can never adopt—that we have no right before God to have or to take back that which God has taken away, even if the law of nations or civil law offer us a claim.⁶⁹

In a gathering of people more concerned with East German agricultural policy than with the refugee issue, Bismarck's speech evoked only positive responses during the comments period. After it was carried in the West German press, however, the reaction was quite different. Both Bismarck himself and the Kirchentag leadership were deluged with letters from expellee lobbyist groups, attacking his position as an inappropriate mixture of theology and politics, presented in an inappropriate forum, and providing propaganda fodder for the East German regime. In a long letter to the Kirchentag leaders and to his leading critics, Bismarck responded to these charges. Like Niemöller, when he was attacked for his views on the German place in the world, Bismarck stressed the Christian principles that underlay his position. But unlike Niemöller, Bismarck tried to differentiate between spiritual principles on which all Christians should agree and the policy implications of those principles, on which there might be significant differences.

On the purely spiritual level, Bismarck made it clear that he had only argued that Christians must learn to live in the tensions between their desires, on the one hand, and God's designs on the other. Given the events that led to the expulsion of Germans from the East, he added, it was important for Christians to consider not only their rights, but

⁶⁹ Ibid., 433-38.

the Nazi aggression that was truly to blame for their plight.⁷⁰ Furthermore, he argued that it was the refugee groups, not himself, who were guilty of confusing spiritual and political principles. Too often these groups acted as though Christianity lent support to nationalist stances, as though God was simply on their side. They never considered the implications of their beliefs for others like the Poles.⁷¹ Naturally, Christians were free to disagree politically, but they were not free to ignore Christian teachings. “The freedom of the Protestant Christian in politics,” he continued, “lies directly in the tension between belonging to a Volk, with its interests, and affirming the obligations of Christian conscience.”⁷²

CONCLUSION

At the Kirchentage of the early 1950s, German Protestants continued the process of rethinking their national identity that they had begun during the church struggle of the Third Reich and carried further in debates over German guilt and German suffering in the late 1940s. When it came to national questions, most Protestant leaders shared similar basic goals. They hoped to restore the positive elements of national community in Germany, fostering social integration, charity work, community-mindedness, and national belonging, while simultaneously overcoming the more chauvinistic and exclusionary tendencies of earlier German nationalism. They hoped to both heal and restore the German nation, not to supersede or do away with it.

⁷⁰ Klaus von Bismarck, Letter, 19 November 1954, EZA 71/86/129, 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 8.

At the Kirchentag, Protestants adopted three major overlapping strategies for this task. First and foremost, they sought to substitute religious and spiritual categories of belonging—Christian brotherhood, the church as homeland, Christians as a Volk—for the “idolatrous,” anti-Christian nationalism of the Nazis. Nearly all Kirchentag speakers and leaders could agree on the importance of this task, which applied their postwar evangelistic zeal to “worldly” problems in the hope that Christian faith would renew society. As a result the Kirchentag programs were full of attacks on Nazism as a form of spiritual hubris, contrasted with humble Christian obedience to the commands of God. On a symbolic level, too, the whole Kirchentag phenomenon was a bold assertion of a Christian unity and community that transcended the nation. Unlike the *Volksgemeinschaft* of the Nazis, this Christian community included all classes, all races, and Christian brothers and sister from all nations. This vision was politically flexible, compatible with the views of less extreme nationalists, of moderate conservatives in the CDU, and of Barthians who rejected the CDU’s inter-German and foreign policy programs. Its most consistent defenders were moderate conservatives like Eberhard Müller, Reinold von Thadden, and Hanns Lilje, who argued that this position was politically neutral, but who personally endorsed the “realistic” foreign policy of the CDU. This was also the position of major CDU leaders like Hermann Ehlers when the agitation of Barthians put them on the defensive, since it implied that Christian principles were compatible with a variety of concrete policy programs. The advocates of other national views also saw this as a starting point. When they found themselves on the defensive, they could always fall back on this position, claiming that they were dealing in spiritual not political terms.

A second strategy for dealing with questions of national identity saw the church not only as a substitute for older concepts of nationalism, but as the leading force in the creation of a new better national community. At its most modest this strategy blended into the approach described above, but its adherents were often adept at wringing as much national meaning as possible out of ostensibly spiritual proclamations. Few, if any, Kirchentag speakers endorsed the extreme nationalism of the refugee and expellee groups, whose primary political goal was the return of their former lands in the East. Many more harbored strong anti-communist views, but these were modified by their desire to operate as freely as possible in the GDR, waxing and waning with the vicissitudes of SED church policy. However, ordinary Kirchentag attendees seem to have been somewhat more nationalist than the major church leaders. As seen in their resolutions and in Kirchentag discussion periods, they remained quite concerned about the “unfair” policies of the Allies toward Germany, the need to overcome an externally imposed German division, and the rights of expellees to return to their lands. Speakers at the Kirchentag rarely endorsed these goals directly, but they allowed their “spiritual” statements to indirectly embrace these positions in their conflation of religious and national-political principles. Old national conservatives like Otto Dibelius and Rheinhold Quaatz might have embraced very different Cold War politics—anti-communism for Dibelius and neutralism for Quaatz—but both were guilty of this approach. Indirectly, speeches like theirs held out hope to their listeners that the churches would take the lead in defending German national values against the changing world order.

Finally, members of the Barthian faction, particularly in the circle surrounding Martin Niemöller, took the substitution of spiritual for national principles one step

further. They argued that the only way to overcome the idols of the nation, which had led the German people into rebellion against God, was to embrace wholesale national contrition for their past misdeeds. It was not enough to get rid of older nationalist concepts; Germans had to embrace their new special role as a people devoted to making up for their past, assuming a leading role in the reconciliation of all peoples and nations. As a result, they emphasized German guilt for the crimes of the Nazis, at times even accusing the churches and their members of complicity. This view of special German guilt is also what led them to spearhead the anti-rearmament campaign in West Germany. And it played a major role in their rejection of conservative West German anti-communism, since the communists, while imperfect, were carrying out God's punishment of the German people. Ironically, these beliefs could themselves border on nationalism at times, since they asserted a special German place in the world and a special German mission. In many ways, this was simply the mirror image of earlier national Protestant views, a sort of negative nationalism. According to this way of thinking, if Germans wanted their nation back, they needed to atone for their sins. Then God might return what they had lost. This message allowed Barthians to tap into the same nationalist tendencies they claimed to oppose—national pride, a German-centered view of world politics, the desire for reunification—when they sought support for their own political positions.

As the 1950s progressed the political disagreements between these groups became more and more difficult to ignore. The desire to present a common spiritual front had made overt political conflict less common at the first several Kirchentage, but the Kirchentag's entrance into Cold War politics with the 1951 gathering in Berlin opened

the door to greater politicization. In addition to the politicization of the Kirchentag itself, Protestant political beliefs, thrown into disarray by the experiences of dictatorship, war, and defeat, had begun to restabilize by the mid-1950s. No longer as disillusioned and confused by the postwar political landscape, Protestant Kirchentag attendees increasingly identified themselves with the fixed political programs and agendas of existing political parties. Rather than just Protestants, they were Christian Democrats, members of the All-German Peoples' Party, even, in a few instances, Social Democrats. They could often still agree on basic religious principles, but their focus was shifting from these agreements to the areas where their political views diverged. The question was no longer how to avoid the politicization of their religious beliefs. Instead they would have to learn to manage and live with such political conflict.

CHAPTER 4

PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY AND PROTESTANT POLITICS

From its first meeting in 1949, one of the major tasks of the Kirchentag was to encourage German Protestants to embrace “public responsibility,” taking an active role in addressing the social and political problems of postwar German life. This had been one of the primary reasons that Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff had called the Kirchentag into existence. And it remained at the center of his thought throughout the 1950s. Addressing this task at the opening of the Stuttgart Kirchentag in 1952, Thadden reminded his audience of the urgent need for Protestant political activity. In the middle of “the most difficult economic, social, political, and international questions,” he argued, it was not enough to offer only spiritual and charitable help. Above and beyond these vital tasks, Protestants also had a duty to take their faith seriously in the political sphere.

If we Protestant congregations can succeed in slowly becoming more mature, in freeing ourselves from our usual state of dependence, in courageously formulating and standing behind our own statements of faith, then the civic community, that is, the city and state, will doubtless benefit. Then we will gradually overcome the fatal weakness in our postwar rebuilding efforts, the lack of inwardly independent persons endowed with their own judgment and with faith-inspired civil courage....For genuine, selfless, and courageous service to our people and to the nations can only be truly learned by following Christ.¹

The renewal of faith, in other words, was a necessary foundation for the renewal of public life. And the postwar political system could only succeed if Christians embraced the call to faith-inspired political activity.

¹ DEKT 1952, 48-49.

Thadden was not alone in these views. Many Germans had reacted to the experiences of the Nazi dictatorship, the war, and defeat with profound political disillusionment, greeting postwar rebuilding efforts with indifference and resignation. But the leaders of both the Catholic and Protestant churches worked hard to combat this perspective. Particularly in the Federal Republic, they saw the postwar reconstruction as a new opportunity for the churches to take a leading role in public life. And they promoted “public responsibility” and faith-inspired political activity as important Christian duties. At the Kirchentag, Protestant leaders were nearly unanimous in these convictions. Indeed, many went even further, seeing the “public responsibility” of Protestant Christians as a potential foundation for the creation of a unified Protestant political ideology. By mobilizing members of the Protestant churches under a common political banner, they hoped to actively transform postwar German society in accordance with Christian principles. And they often viewed political differences within the churches as dangerous signs of political weakness.

At the same time, however, postwar Protestants found themselves deeply divided over many political issues. All could agree on the need for a new form of faith-inspired political activity. But they disagreed sharply about what this meant in practice. To many more conservative Protestants, especially those in the CDU/CSU, Christian political activity was a matter of defending the rights and privileges of the institutional churches. It involved the promotion of Christian social and moral teachings. And, with the escalation of the Cold War, it came to include the task of defending the “Christian West” against the forces of “godless Bolshevism.” To others, especially members of the Barthian faction, Christian political activity was much more personal and much more

limited in scope. Drawing on their experiences in church struggle, many Barthians argued that Christian political activity was primarily a matter of standing firm in one's religious convictions against the claims of every political ideology. The Christian had a political duty to resist every political idol: the idols of Nazism and communism, but also the idol of capitalism and even the ideology of the "Christian West" itself. Many other Protestants found themselves somewhere between the extremes of Christian Democratic self-assertion and Barthian self-criticism. And even within each of these camps, Protestants were still divided by a variety of other political questions. What economic and social policies should the churches promote? What was the right attitude toward social modernization? What would Christian politics look like under a communist dictatorship? And how would they be different in a modern liberal democracy?

Political discussions at the Kirchentag meetings of the early 1950s were marked by tensions between the desire for political unanimity and unavoidable fact of political difference. At the earliest Kirchentag gatherings differences remained muted. Speakers focused on areas where everyone could agree, emphasizing general principles and working together to combat political disillusionment. Over time, however, as political opinions within the churches became more fragmented, and as political differences became more entrenched, these disagreements became harder to ignore. By the middle of the 1950s, Protestants at the Kirchentag were forced to shift their focus away from forging a unified political program, acknowledging and learning to live with some degree of political pluralism.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

As we have already seen, the topic of “public activity” had a central place on the program of the 1949 Protestant *Woche*. Nearly every speaker at this gathering encouraged German Protestants to take an active part in the political and social problems of the day. Political differences between members of the Barthian faction and more conservative Protestants remained relatively muted, more differences in emphasis than real political substance. And most political discussions included the keys ideas from both of these perspectives, combining calls for public responsibility with warnings against the danger of political idols.

Speaking on the “Foundations of Protestant Activity,” for example, the Barthian church leader Heinrich Held called on his listeners to embrace active political involvement, rejecting the “pious” tendency to withdraw from the public life. As Held explained: “[Christ] is not just Lord of the church, but also Lord of the world.” This meant that Christians had a responsibility to carry out God’s work in every area of public life, and they had a duty to hold the state to God’s higher law. “This,” he explained, “is why the church needs to remember the state, and it is why church members need to enter into the political parties.” Yet Held also argued against politicizing the churches, or committing them uncritically to any one political ideology.

We must model our activity after God’s activity. We cannot uncritically affirm politics or economics, democracy or socialism, culture or the Christian West, or accept them as the ultimate good. . . . Ideas, programs, and worldviews cannot and must not serve as the catalyst for Protestant activity. They are opinions and interpretations that deserve their due. But Protestant activity begins by taking God’s activity seriously.²

² DEKT 1949, 36-40.

In another speech, Paul Seeger, a CDU member and a leader in the Protestant worker's movement, made a similar appeal for "public responsibility." He began by detailing the history and importance of the Protestant worker's movement, urging the churches to overcome their historical middle class character. And he went on to call on his listeners to take an active role in politics. "To us and to our people," he argued, "it is not a matter of indifference who leads our political parties, who is active as a deputy on the state and federal levels, who is on the boards of the unions, or on the factory councils." Instead, he continued: "In all of these divisions of public service, we need Protestant men and women of conviction, people who have a clear social and economic foundation rooted in Christian responsibility." This did not mean, he conceded, that Protestants needed to all belong to the same political party. But, promoting Christian Democratic anti-communism, Seeger strongly encouraged cooperation between Protestant and Catholic workers, who needed to unite in defense of the "culture of the Christian West" against the common threat of "Bolshevism."³

Following Seeger, Gustav Heinemann, the mayor of Essen and a member of the church's Barthian faction, offered a more self-critical version of Christian Democratic politics. Like Seeger, Heinemann called for his listeners to take an active role in political life. But he rooted this call in a much more direct and principled defense of democracy. He began with a basic assertion: the time of the alliance of throne and altar was past. The churches were no longer subject to the rule of the state; but Protestants had been slow to recognize this fact. "Are we clear," he argued, "that our state has become a democratic state? It is up to us what happens next! Or do we have doubts that our generation has been charged to take up the tasks that lie at our feet?" The German people, he continued,

³ Ibid., 42-47.

had been given the “grace of a zero hour,” a new beginning, but now they had to decide how to move forward. God had equipped them for democratic politics, given them many gifts that could be put to the service of a new democratic state. Protestants understood the true value and worth of the individual human being. They had been given the capacity for political and social responsibility. They had special religious insight into the human character. They enjoyed true Christian hope. They had a special God-given capacity for justice and for love. And they had a proper understanding of the limits of state authority. And all of these things put them in a unique position with regard to the state. Their task was not simply to support the existing political authorities, but to hold them accountable to God’s higher law. Rather than serving as automatic supporters of the state, as they had in the past, Protestants needed to be a democratic “counterweight” to overreaching political authority.⁴

The 1950 Kirchentag in Essen was less overtly political than 1949. It was also far more conservative in tone. No one workgroup was devoted specifically to the issues of politics or public responsibility. However, the need for Protestants to take an active public role ran through the entire Kirchentag program. In a gathering devoted to the problems of community and social life, speakers addressed the crises of the churches, the family, the German “homeland,” and modern industry. And, in all of these discussions, speakers defended traditional values in the face of social change. Yet this traditionalism and conservatism was not entirely backward looking. This is clear in discussions of the family and the modern industrial economy. Speakers in these workgroups promoted a traditional social agenda. But, to varying degrees, they also acknowledged the need to adapt their ideas to the modern world. Just as important, without exception they accepted

⁴ Ibid., 47-52.

the need to work out their ideas within the framework of West Germany's democratic political system.

The workgroup on the family was unquestionably the most conservative gathering at the 1950 Kirchentag. In the workgroup's first presentation, the businessman Günther Koch addressed the dangers that modern industrial life posed to the family, calling on Christian political activity to remedy these problems. Koch began by painting an idyllic portrait of traditional social life. In earlier times, he argued, when husbands and wives had worked side by side in agriculture, there had been no tension between career and family. But the specialization and mechanization of modern industrial life had separated both man and wife from their traditional family roles. Men who were unemployed—an unfortunate result of the vicissitudes of modern industry—lost their identity as providers, becoming a burden on their families. Yet overwork, whether forced or voluntary, was an equal danger to happy family life. Separated from their wives and surrounded by female co-workers, men were tempted to marital infidelity. Women working in offices and factories had little time for domestic chores. And, away from their homes, working long hours to support consumer lifestyles, both men and women neglected the tasks of the domestic sphere, especially the task of raising children. Happy family life, Koch continued, required a balanced approach to work. And Christians had a duty to create a social system that would make this balance possible. Christians might disagree strongly on the specific social and economic policies they endorsed, on what was a fair wage, on how to achieve full employment, on the heated question of industrial co-determination, and on the details of the unemployment insurance system. But all were called to

seriously engage themselves in these debates, rejecting an economic order based on “egotism” in order to take responsibility for postwar social conditions.⁵

Speaking on education and child rearing, Johanna Stöffler also called for Christian solutions to the dangers posed by modern life. Taking the postwar social breakdown as her starting point, Stöffler examined the material deprivation of refugees, expellees, and others displaced by the war. In these difficult circumstances, she argued, it was the children who suffered most, going without money, apprenticeships, and homes. Concerned with their own material circumstances, however, society had forgotten the plight of these children, who were “living personalities,” blessed with precious individuality and worth in the eyes of God. Motivated by “the crassest materialism” parents practiced abortion, infanticide, and basic neglect. Yet children needed true parental affection, a loving family and community. And, in order to grow into mature adults, they needed rules and authority figures, and traditional moral values. The solution to this crisis, she continued, would not be found in any human program or plan. It would only come about through an individual and communal return to Christ. Parents needed to have the courage, she concluded, to uncompromisingly “choose the way of the Gospel.”⁶

Speakers in the workgroup on the economy and industry held took a similar view of the ills of modern society. Addressing contemporary economic debates, such as industrial co-determination, changes to the social insurance system, and unemployment, Otto Klein, also lamented the development of modern “mass society” [*Vermassung*]. Klein blamed this dangerous development on an over reliance on heartless economic rationalism. Like speakers in the family workgroup, he went on to promote a fairly

⁵ DEKT 1950, 37-40.

⁶Ibid., 40-44.

traditional social agenda, emphasizing individual worth and social cooperation. But he also made several concessions to modern economic realities, endorsing economic principles such as private property and calling for further debate and cooperative discussion of the technical details of social organization.⁷

Eberhard Müller also advanced traditional conservative economic ideas. He began by addressing the opposing dangers of collectivism and individualism, of all systems of economic organization—whether communist or capitalist—that failed to properly understand the importance of individual personality [*Persönlichkeit*]. The danger of communism was clear in this regard. But even nineteenth century liberalism, with its ideals of human freedom, had been complicit in the economic enslavement of industrial workers. Real freedom, he argued, did not mean absolute individualism, but existence within “organic” social structures such as the family, church, and community. Yet Müller was clear that this traditional social vision needed to be achieved through democratic political activity. To guard against the dangers of individualism and collectivism in the postwar world, he argued, the churches needed to promote greater political involvement. They needed to work against the “*ohne mich*” philosophy of resignation that characterized the attitudes of many postwar Germans. Protestant Christians also needed to recognize that Social Democracy was not their enemy, but their ally in this fight. Working with both conservatives and Social Democrats they needed to cooperate to find mutually acceptable solutions to the complex technical problems of

⁷ Ibid., 68-86.

modern economic life. Indeed, he continued, real solutions would only come about through ongoing discussion and debate.⁸

POWERS AND AUTHORITIES

Shortly after the 1950 Kirchentag, political divisions in the churches became much more heated. Objecting to early plans for West German rearmament, Gustav Heinemann, the highest ranking Protestant politician in West Germany, resigned on August 31, 1950 from his position as Interior Minister in Adenauer's cabinet. Although he remained a member of the CDU until 1952, Heinemann began to move toward the political Left. Along with other politicians and pastors from the church's Barthian faction, Heinemann allied himself with the SPD, taking a leading role in the populist campaign against rearmament.⁹ Other more conservative and moderate Protestants, including Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff, Eberhard Müller, and Hanns Lilje responded by organizing their own informal circle to foster Protestant support for the government's rearmament plans.¹⁰

The disagreement over rearmament transformed the Protestant political landscape. Up to this point, political disagreements between Barthians and more conservative Protestants had remained relatively muted. They had largely revolved around differences of theological emphasis, rather than concrete policy prescriptions. But now they began to grow into full-blown political opposition. Members of both political factions continued

⁸ Ibid., 71-76, 79.

⁹ Johanna Vogel, *Kirche und Wiederbewaffnung. Die Haltung der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland in den Auseinandersetzungen um die Wiederbewaffnung der Bundesrepublik 1949-1956*, Arbeiten zur Kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte, series B, vol. 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978).

¹⁰ This was the Kronberg Circle, examined by Thomas Sauer in *Westorientierung im deutschen Protestantismus. Vorstellungen und Tätigkeit des Kronberger Kreises* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1999).

to promote greater political involvement among the Protestant public. But the prospects for political unity within the Protestant churches became much more distant. Writing to Klaus von Bismarck on October 23, 1950, Reinold von Thadden worried about the long-term implications of these developments. He argued that Protestants needed to respond to Heinemann's maneuvers with "extensive foundational deliberations" about church and national politics. And he expressed his concern that ordinary church members would become politically confused without a unified leadership, ultimately choosing to withdraw from the political sphere altogether.¹¹

As an organization devoted to Protestant unity, the Kirchentag was slow to reflect these new divisions. As we have seen, Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff worried that public political disagreements between major Protestant leaders might drive the Protestant public away from political life, undoing much of the Kirchentag's past work. Other Protestant leaders seem to have been similarly uncomfortable with political disagreement, preferring to emphasize general principles on which everyone could agree. This tendency toward abstraction and generalization was given additional strength by the need to address the problems of both West and East German political life, especially after the first truly all-German Kirchentag in 1951. Most concrete policy disputes in the Federal Republic had little relevance to East German Protestants. While, at least on some level, the general principles of Christian political involvement seemed relevant to the circumstances in both German states.

At the 1951 Kirchentag in Berlin, members of both political factions continued to promote "public responsibility" and democratic political activity. Speaking to a group of students, for example, the theologian Hans-Joachim Iwand concisely expressed the

¹¹ RvTT to Klaus von Bismarck, 23 October 1950, EZA 71/86/14.

Barthian understanding of political activity. Teaching on the book of Romans, Iwand argued that the gospel made an existential claim upon all people, calling every individual to participate in God's work of transforming the world. The Gospel, he continued, was not just an ethical system, limited to the realm of ideas. It was a system of life. Christians were called to respond to the gospel's claim with concrete action, helping others in need regardless of the consequences for themselves. In a subtle jab at Protestants in the CDU—who prided themselves on their political realism, accusing the Barthians of “enthusiasm” [*Schwarmerei*—Iwand argued that such “enthusiasm” was preferable to a “cold realism” that ignored the suffering of others.¹² He also made it clear that this political perspective required a break with German Protestantism's apolitical past. When confronted with evil, Protestants were called to oppose it directly, not to withdraw from the world. As Iwand argued: “Christians do not abstain from politics. Christians should never say, ‘we have no political opinion.’ That is not Christian. It has only become this way because we have had no political opinions for so long. If this does not change we are lost. After Bismarck political thought in Germany ceased.”¹³ But Christian involvement also did not mean opposing evil with evil. It meant transforming the political world through the power of Christ.

The political workgroup of the 1951 Kirchentag—which drew a combined audience of 40,000 listeners across three days of meetings—also focused on defending politics and combating the tendency to withdraw from public life. While speakers in this workgroup were clearly most concerned to address political conditions in the GDR, they attempted to do so in a way that was also relevant to West German Protestants. This

¹² DEKT 1951, 238, 241.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 248-49.

resulted in speeches that focused very broadly on general political principles, rather than dealing more directly with specific issues and controversies. Interpreting and applying these principles was left largely to the listeners, whose comments indicate that they came to widely divergent conclusions.

In its first session, the political workgroup addressed the question “Does power lead to evil?” The Barthian theologian Heinrich Vogel, of the *Kirchliche Hochschule* in Berlin, opened this presentation by recognizing the many atrocities and injustices that had resulted from the misuse of power in the twentieth century. But he argued that it was not power itself that was evil. Rather, evil arose when the people in power concluded that their political ends justified any means. Given this history of misuse, however, power needed to be approached with caution. Here Vogel posed two foundational questions. First, after the experiences of the twentieth century, how could anyone ever trust power again? Second, how could people avoid its abuse? To answer these questions he shifted from political considerations to the level of spiritual principles. God was the ultimate source of all power; but, in the person of Jesus Christ, God had also become the ultimate victim of power’s misuse. In doing so, he had set the ultimate example for Christians in the present world. Power existed for serving God and serving others, not for gaining mastery over them. This was also true on the level of state politics. Governments had authority from God to resist and hinder evil, not, as so many twentieth century ideologies had sought, to control and dominate.¹⁴

In the following speech Otto Heinrich von der Gablentz, a member of the conservative Kreisau resistance circle during World War II, defended political activity in even stronger terms. While he acknowledged that his listeners had a negative view of

¹⁴ Ibid., 449-458.

state power after their experiences under a totalitarian regime, Gablentz argued that power was a simple fact of life. It was not something that one could ever escape or avoid coming into contact with. Instead, his listeners needed to be willing to “dirty their hands” in political activity. Recognizing that his listeners from the West and East had very different needs and problems, Gablentz divided his message into two parts. The first looked at the temptation to misuse power. The second examined at the equal and opposite temptation towards political resignation. The key to avoiding both of these difficulties lay in properly understanding power from a Christian perspective. There were two important principles to understand. First, humans were sinful whether or not they had any power. This was a fundamental aspect of human nature. Second, God had the ability to make anything good, even something that humans had misused as badly as politics. When people truly understood that their political power came from God and was under his authority, they would learn to see their fellow humans as brothers. Then the powerful would avoid the selfishness or idolatry that led to power’s misuse. And those who were inclined toward the “*ohne mich*” perspective, would avoid the temptations of bitterness and hatred, because they knew that God was truly in control.¹⁵

In the discussion period that followed these speeches, a few listeners argued directly against these calls to political involvement. Dr. Hermann Kühn of Nienburg, for example, took issue with the attacks that both speakers had made against the “*ohne mich*” perspective of political withdrawal. He argued that the bible neither endorsed nor condemned political involvement. Jesus had not engaged in overt political activity. And ordinary Christians also had the right to avoid political matters. Other listeners advocated various forms of assertive Christian politics. The teacher Anna Ritter, for example, drew

¹⁵ Ibid., 459-467.

attention to the example provided by King Frederick William I of Prussia, who, she argued, had embodied Christian principles in his treatment of his subjects. And Theodor Winzer, a city councilman from Happenheim, explicitly called on his listeners to join the CDU, supporting its Christian political program.¹⁶

The majority of audience members, however, were more interested in working out the implications of Christian principles for politics in the East. One anonymous engineer from Leipzig, for example, argued that East Germans needed the courage to express their convictions publicly, especially in defense of individual personality [*Persönlichkeit*]. Several others argued more or less explicitly that the GDR was a state that actively opposed Christianity, a state that Christians could not support in good conscience. As Dr. Schapitz of Reichenhall explained, the state operated under God's authority insofar as it followed God's laws. But if the state went against God's commands, then Christians' first responsibility was to God and not the state. Count Paul Yorck von Wartenburg, whose brother had been a leader in the July 1944 officer's plot against Hitler, also counseled that even an evil state had authority from God. It should not be directly opposed; but Christians did have a duty to counter its lies with the truth. Others, like Martin Richter a politician in the CDU-East and mayor of Dresden, defended the GDR regime, arguing that many of the injustices in the East were not the fault of the state, but of the incompleteness of its policy programs. Christians, he suggested, needed to help those who were suffering by working alongside the state in these endeavors.¹⁷ Finally, several discussion participants, such as Pastor Junge from Hamburg, argued that neither German state stood fully behind Christian principles. According to Junge, the

¹⁶ Ibid., 467-488.

¹⁷ Ibid, 468.

“Manchesterism” of the Western world was as great a potential threat to human freedom as the communism of the East.¹⁸

In its second session, entitled “A Slave to Two Masters,” the political workgroup focused more explicitly on the conflicting claims made by God and the political authorities on every individual. Johannes Anz, the *Oberkonsistorialrat* of Magdeburg, began by comparing the circumstances of Christians in the GDR to the difficulties of early Christians. Christians in the early church—like those in the present—were called to obey God’s commandments, including the Great Commission to make disciples in all nations. In both the late Roman Empire and in present day East Germany, however, the political authorities sought to restrict these activities. Christians in the GDR were faced with a dilemma. Should they respect the God-given authority of the state, obeying the bible’s injunction to political obedience? Or should they follow God’s commandment to actively engage in evangelism? To a lesser extent, this dilemma was also present for Christians in the West, who might be tempted to obey the dictates of modern mass society, rather than God’s word. Anz answered this dilemma by pointing out that all earthly authorities were still under the authority of God. They were limited in their scope and had no right to oppose God’s will. Even when Christians faced persecution, obedience to God had to be their priority. This did not justify political resistance to the state, but it did mean that they needed to continue to confess and bear witness to God’s message, regardless of the persecution they might endure.¹⁹

The author Willy Kramp made the same basic point in the workgroup’s next presentation, applying it more broadly to the citizens of both German states. All

¹⁸ Ibid., 467-488.

¹⁹ Ibid., 488-98.

Christians in all parts of the world, he argued, were torn between the demands of political authority and the demands of God. This tension did not just exist under totalitarian systems such as Nazism or Communism. Indeed middle class Germans had had their own idols of “materialism” and “culture” long before the rise of the Nazis. Rather than defending their own class interests, German Christians were called to be transformed by the truth of Christ’s death and resurrection and to devote their lives to discipleship. Then they would no longer be the slaves of any master, but free servants of Christ, bearing witness to his truth in whatever circumstances they found themselves.²⁰

After these presentations, many listeners from the West responded by expressing solidarity with their persecuted brothers in the East. And many from the East took advantage of the discussion period to speak directly about the dilemmas they faced in their daily lives. Still others tried to draw more general political conclusions. Annelise Paradowski of Hamburg, for example, drew on the preceding speeches to defend the importance of “Christian civilization,” which she believed was under threat in the modern world. Many others expanded on the speakers’ less emphasized criticisms of the West German system. Hermann Lutze, a pastor from Barmen, argued that West Germans also had totalitarian temptations. Christians could only affirm the western political system if they did so critically. In particular, he argued, “We do not affirm the forces of capitalist exploitation or Americanization.”²¹ Lucie Lehman, a farmer from Mecklenburg, also pointed out the complicity of many West German pastors in spreading the political propaganda of the West German government. And, another listener, August Wilhelm Lagen argued that the church needed to adopt a critical stance toward all political

²⁰ Ibid., 498-510.

²¹ Ibid., 512.

systems. Yet, despite these criticisms of the West, the focal point of the meeting remained firmly fixed on the dilemma of Protestant Christians in the East.²²

THE DIFFICULTIES OF DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

Political discussions at the 1952 Kirchentag in Stuttgart and the 1953 Kirchentag in Hamburg, returned to the difficulties of establishing a democratic political system in the Federal Republic.²³ These discussions continued to place primary emphasis on the essential political unity of German Protestants, focusing on general areas of agreement rather than on emerging political differences. All speakers could agree on the importance of Christian principles to political life and on the need for German Protestants to become active citizens of the new democratic West German state. However, as time went on, it also became more difficult to hide the widening political gap between supporters of the CDU and the emerging Protestant Left.

As in previous years, speakers at the 1952 Kirchentag in Stuttgart repeatedly called their listeners to political involvement. At a reception for political guests before the opening worship service, for example, the Federal President Theodor Heuß addressed the obligations of his listeners as both Christians and as citizens. While he acknowledged that the limited freedom of Germans in the East made it more difficult to think along these lines, he argued that inward piety and outward political activity were not mutually exclusive. Drawing on the history of the pietist movement in Württemberg and on his own recollections of his political mentor Friedrich Naumann, a liberal politician of the Wilhelmine era, he argued that inner belief found its proper outward expression in

²² Ibid., 510-525.

²³ See, for example, "Vorläufiges Ergebnis für die Thematik des Kirchentages 1952 nach der Sitzung der Themenausschusses am 18./19.9.1951" 25 September 1951, EZA 71/86/97.

concern for the problems of the world—in politics.²⁴ During the opening worship service both Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff and Hans Meiser, the bishop of Bavaria, also reiterated the importance of Protestant political activity. Thadden emphasized the need for German Protestants to develop greater political self-confidence and maturity so that they could contribute solutions to the problems of the world. And Meiser went even further in endorsing conservative Christian politics, proclaiming: “Where Christ does not reign, things cannot help but fall apart.”²⁵

As in previous years, the workgroup on the family and education was home to the most traditionally conservative politics. Particularly in their discussions of education and raising children, speakers frequently contrasted the dangers and evils of the modern world with the virtues of earlier social structures. Dr. Johannes Thieler of East Berlin made this point particularly strongly when he starkly contrasted the materialist world of the present with an earlier “world of culture, where the beautiful, the true, and the good should reign.” Unfortunately, he argued, this world of culture, of mature individuality, was under constant attack. “All around,” he noted, “the beautiful is supplanted by the ugly, the truth with lies, and the good with the demonic.”²⁶ Protestants, he argued, had an obligation to engage in political activity in order to defend this tradition against the threats of “foreign culture,” of “kitsch, propaganda, and over-civilization.” Rather than embracing the resignation of the “*ohne mich*” movement, they needed to fight to save the world from its demonic impulses.²⁷ While Thieler’s anger was clearly directed, at least

²⁴ DEKT 1952, 37-41.

²⁵ DEKT 1952, 50.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 225-27.

in part, at the government of the GDR, this does not appear to have been his only target. It is clear, in any case, that his comments had a resonance among the West Germans who made up most of his audience. And the following speech, by Johanna Stöffler of Kirchheim, while not as dramatic, addressed the same general threat. If parents could not inculcate maturity in their children, she argued, they would leave them helpless to stand against the “slogans of the masses, the catchphrases of contemporary opinion.” Without a proper Christian upbringing, their children would lose their individuality to the anonymity of modern mass society.²⁸

The political workgroup in Stuttgart was again the best attended. Its major theme was German guilt: the question of how to come to terms with the recent past. But all of the speakers also considered the implications of German guilt for present-day politics. Here, in a speech directed against West German rearmament, Helmut Gollwitzer proclaimed that Christians had a duty to be involved in the political process. Like more conservative Protestants, such as Thadden and Lilje, Gollwitzer believed that political matters could not be removed from the religious realm. Instead he asked: “Can anything happen to people in the political sphere that is not immediately also an urgent question for the church?” But he also contrasted truly Christian politics with the idolatrous political activity of the Catholic CDU. Looking at the urgent questions of East-West relations and Cold War politics, he argued:

Many of us wish that we could answer these questions with clear directives from the church, issued by the holders of some leading position or another, and we look enviously at the Catholics who seem to have so much more unity. But it seems to me that we should not be looking to some church body, but should be asking God’s word itself.²⁹

²⁸ Ibid., 229-233.

²⁹ Ibid., 269.

If Protestants would look to the life and teachings of Christ for their political values, they would see that God had not called them to promote conflict and war, but to foster peace, justice, and forgiveness in the middle of the present-day crisis.³⁰

The workgroup's second speaker, Hans Puttfarcken, a councilor in the Hessian Justice Ministry, also defended Christian political activity. Like Gollwitzer, he emphasized the Christian responsibility to resist political idols and to promote reconciliation. But, unlike Gollwitzer, he did not direct these comments against the policies of the West German CDU. Defining politics as the "human effort to rightly order public life," Puttfarcken argued that it simply wasn't possible to avoid political entanglements. Everyone in a democratic state—even mere observers—had some degree of political responsibility. And they had to learn how to exercise this responsibility properly. This was a matter of avoiding selfish, one-sided politics in favor of service to one's fellow citizens. "We Christians," he argued, "do not bind ourselves to any ideology, no matter what side it comes from. Our activity is not guided by the principles of an ideology, but by God's will, by concrete, present-day responsibility for our fellow-man, for our brother."³¹ This political activity, he continued, had three proper manifestations: the love of one's neighbor, the need to fight against evil in the world, and, finally, the need to pursue reconciliation between opponents in the too-often fractious realm of politics.³²

The workgroup's second session, on the role of politics in the construction of a better future, was dominated by more conservative political voices. Franz Reinhold

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 269-275.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 287.

³² *Ibid.*, 277-87.

Hildebrand, the president of the *Evangelische Kirche der Union*, began this session by addressing the unique perspective that Christians had in politics. Modern man, he argued, was beset by two political temptations. On one side, there was the danger of believing there was no future, of giving oneself over completely to resignation. On the other side, was the opposite error of the “future-drunk,” who sacrificed everything for the sake of their utopian ideals. But Christian political activity inhabited the middle ground between these two extremes. Religious faith gave Christians hope, motivating them to pursue a political program. But it also offered sober view of what humanity could and could not accomplish by itself. The foundation of Christian politics was not self-assertion or the pursuit of one’s own narrow goals. Instead Christian activity was rooted in Christ’s love for all of humanity. Christians were called to a different political standard than people in the world. “A Christian politician or economist,” he argued, “is free, too, to give his opponent his due, to see the person, and not to insist on his own ideas as though they have eternal value.”³³

In the following speech, the CDU *Bundestag* president Hermann Ehlers offered a defense of Christian Democratic politics. He began by advocating political realism and concrete political activity against the “spiritual and Christian arrogance that degrades political responsibility.” Alongside their ultimate hope in the future return of Christ, he argued, Christians had a present-day duty to “address the tasks and problems of our daily lives, and to solve them as best we can.”³⁴ He went on to argue that the true principles of Christian public responsibility were firmly rooted in the commands of God. It was not a

³³ Ibid., 307-313.

³⁴ Ibid., 315.

matter of blindly submitting to authority, but of engaging in serving and sacrifice motivated by the love of one's neighbor.³⁵

Ehlers proceeded to lay out nine basic principles of realistic Christian politics. First, since all human endeavors were provisional, Christian politicians did not need to be reluctant to create provisional solutions to the problems they faced. They did not need to solve problems for all time. Second, their knowledge that all human ideas were fallible compelled them to consider alternative points of view, but also gave them the obligation hold steadfastly to those ideas that they had thoroughly scrutinized. To Ehlers this scrutiny and debate was essential to the proper functioning of democracy. Third, Christians were obligated, insofar as it was possible, to work to persuade their political opponents, not just to outvote them. Practical compromises were central to this process, as long as they did not go against fundamental Christian beliefs. Fourth, politicians had an obligation to make decisions as well as they could. They could not relinquish this responsibility by refusing to decide on complicated matters. Fifth, the state had an obligation to exercise force to defend the common good, even though Christians were aware that force alone could not solve the world's problems. Sixth, Christians should not elevate their own political and national goals to the level of spiritual principles. Seventh, Christians were called to recognize even the fine distinctions between ideologies and worldviews (such as communism and capitalism), not simply lumping them together as common manifestations of human weakness. Eighth, Christian politicians had a responsibility to defend the interests of individuals and groups, while balancing this task with concern for the common good. As long as they did not see party loyalty as the ultimate good, they did not need to be entirely above party politics. Finally, Christian

³⁵ Ibid., 316-17.

politicians needed to be willing to make unpopular decisions, not just blindly carrying out the will of the people.³⁶

In a sign of the growing politicization of the Protestant public, these speeches elicited a tremendous variety of commentary from the audience. Even more than in Berlin, the predominantly West German audience of the Stuttgart Kirchentag was interested in practical political debates, rather than just the general principles of Christian political activity. As in the previous year, several listeners rallied to the defense of the “*ohne mich*” perspective. Wolfgang Scheu, a pharmacist’s assistant from Tübingen, argued that he was staying out of politics because none of the existing sides reflected his interests.³⁷ And Reinhold Schönfield of Berlin-Buckow, claimed to speak for the youth when he complained of his disappointment with democracy and his frustration with parliamentarians who ignored the will of the people.³⁸ Nevertheless, voices calling for greater political involvement dominated the discussion periods. Most of these comments seem to reflect the “realism” of the CDU more than the Barthian perspective, but they also demonstrate a surprising degree of openness to the SPD. Arguing against Gollwitzer’s anti-rearmament stance, the retired colonel Reinhold Kiep called for political realism in international relations. And Bundestag members Emil Marx of Wuppertal and Annemarie Keiler of Marburg defended their own involvement in the CDU. Along with Dora Sater, a nurse from Mannheim, Keiler also called on women to become more active in politics. Others, however, like the writer Erwin Knipp, asked whether it was unchristian to celebrate the victory of one political party over another.

³⁶ Ibid., 317-24.

³⁷ Ibid., 295-96.

³⁸ Ibid., 340.

And several questioners, including many self-proclaimed CDU members like Wilfred Überschwer of Neuwied and Kurt Neumann of Berlin, called for greater cooperation with the SPD.³⁹ Emmi Welter, a city representative from Aachen, also called for Protestants to take an active role in all of the Federal Republic's political parties, not just the CDU.⁴⁰

The Hamburg Kirchentag in 1953 took place in an even more politically charged environment, meeting only two weeks before a heated West German election. This election had special significance to German Protestants, aggravating the already deep divisions within the church. In 1952 Gustav Heinemann, long at odds with the party's leadership, had finally resigned from the CDU. He went on to found the All-German People's Party (GVP), a new party devoted almost exclusively to the anti-rearmament cause. And in 1953, with the help of his supporters in the Protestant churches, he entered Bundestag elections as the new party's leader. Fearing that the heated emotions of this election campaign would eclipse the Kirchentag's larger message, Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff and the other members of the Kirchentag leadership worked to steer the Kirchentag away from direct political controversy. Hoping to prevent the complete politicization of the gathering, they refused to invite speakers such as Heinemann and Ehlers, who were contesting the election.⁴¹ But even so, they continued to fear that Heinemann's supporters, like Martin Niemöller, would take advantage of the Kirchentag

³⁹ Ibid., 292-301.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 339.

⁴¹ See "Sitzung der Arbeitsgruppenleitung-West II-VII am 28./29.1.1953 im 'Haus der Begegnung', Mülheim-Ruhr," and the comments of Pastor Witte, "Protokoll über die Themensitzung für den 5. Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentag – am 7.Nov.1952" 8 November 1952, EZA 71/86/106; see also the letter from Volkmar Hertrich to Heinrich Giesen, 5 February 1953, EZA 71/86/106.

platform to engage in direct political advocacy.⁴² In this environment of deep political division within the churches, however, an important new political topic emerged in the Kirchentag program. For the first time, at the suggestion of the Präsidium member Klaus von Bismarck, the Kirchentag political workgroup took up the complicated questions of democratic political pluralism.⁴³

This growing acceptance of pluralism was also apparent in other areas of the Kirchentag program. Speaking at the press reception at the beginning of the gathering, Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff emphasized the fact that German Protestants were not wedded to any one political party. But, whatever their political views, they did have a duty as citizens to take part in the upcoming elections.⁴⁴ A more pluralist perspective was also apparent in the prominent role given to Max Brauer, the SPD mayor of Hamburg, who spoke at both the Kirchentag reception for politicians and at the opening youth rally. Delivering his remarks to 19,000 young Protestants, Brauer advocated respectful relations between church and state, premised on the idea that they operated within separate spheres of life. But Brauer took care in his remarks to strongly differentiate his views from the East German church policy of the SED, warning that the state had no right to regulate religious worship and assembly.⁴⁵ The political reception also featured the reading of greetings from President Heuß, who could not be present, but who emphasized Protestants' unity in religious faith, whatever their disunity at the polls.

⁴² See the correspondence between Heinrich Giesen and Niemöller, including letters from Giesen on 4 and 5 August 1953, EZA 71/86/102.

⁴³ See Bismarck's comments, "Protokoll über die Themensitzung für den 5. Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentag – am 7. Nov. 1952", 8 November 1952, EZA 71/86/106.

⁴⁴ DEKT 1953, 9-10.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 17-19.

And the CDU interior minister Robert Lehr, a Catholic, spoke on the importance of Catholic-Protestant cooperation, especially in crafting social and family policy.⁴⁶

The most conservative workgroup in 1953 was, as usual, the workgroup on family and school policy. The atmosphere in this workgroup, later criticized by Kirchentag leaders for its overly strident tone, was strongly colored by ongoing bitter disputes in Hamburg over the city's elimination of church-taught confessional religious education in the schools. This was particularly apparent in speeches by Karl Witt, a professor from Hermannsburg, and Irmgard Feußner, a school principal from Gießen. In his presentation, Witt warned parents of the vital role played by teachers in the modern mass educational system in shaping their childrens' values and beliefs, and he warned that this instruction inevitably advanced some kind of ideological and religious agenda. Children in the current system were in danger of being misled or of becoming confused when confronted with the bewildering variety of worldviews that lay behind their education. And this was precisely why they needed confessional religious instruction, and not some watered-down ethics course, if they were to avoid the dangers of modern mass society.⁴⁷ Feußner bemoaned the loss of tradition apparent in modern mass education. Blaming Nazi ideology, Allied denazification efforts, and social modernization for the present crisis, she lamented: "As a result of the great catastrophes of the last 40 years, our people no longer possesses any tradition . . . no power to unify and shape, no unchallenged examples or symbols."⁴⁸ Without the aid of families and churches, the schools would not

⁴⁶ Ibid., 19-20.

⁴⁷ DEKT 1953, 154-158.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 160.

be able to reconstruct German society, guarding children against dangerous ideologies, while teaching them to become mature adults. For this reason, both private and public schools needed Protestant teachers, who could imbue their students with Christian values.⁴⁹

The most explicit political discussion at the Kirchentag took place in the political workgroup, in a session titled “What can decontaminate our communal life?”⁵⁰ Reflecting the struggle of German Protestants to come to terms with modern democratic politics, this discussion was marked by two very divergent approaches to political conflict and pluralism. Speaking first, Theodor Paul Pfizer, the mayor of Ulm, blamed the breakdown of the old middle class political tradition for the divisiveness of present-day politics. Unlike this older form of politics, carried out by educated elites, modern politics was being destroyed by the influence of mass parties and interest groups that only cared about the advancement of their own agendas. In a society that was no longer organically grown, he argued, “people thrown together by fate have increasingly little sense of what connects them, of their common responsibility.”⁵¹ Divided into these groups, they were no longer capable of making fine political distinctions, instead seeing the whole world in black and white. And this led them to prioritize the good of their own political party over the common good, opening the door to a whole array of lies, tricks, and political deception. Since parties thought of nothing except winning the next election, they abandoned any sense of civil courage in favor of pure political calculation, making real compromises and agreements impossible. Instead of this competitive

⁴⁹ Ibid., 160-162.

⁵⁰ “*Was kann unser Zusammenleben Entgiften?*”

⁵¹ Ibid., 195.

system, Pfizer argued that political problems could be solved if the representatives of different interest groups could only be made to sit down and rationally work out their differences together.⁵²

In the next presentation, the journalist and CDU politician Ernst Lemmer addressed many of the same issues, but instead of calling for a return to the elite politics of the past, he called upon his listeners to inwardly embrace modern democracy, with its liberal, pluralistic values. Lemmer began by defending democracy itself, arguing that although elections were unpleasant and messy, seemingly conducted to appeal to the lowest common denominator, they were the byproducts of valuable freedoms such as the freedom of speech and the freedom of thought. However unpleasant they might find some aspects of this system, he warned his listeners that it was better than the alternatives.⁵³

Lemmer went on to argue that the basic problem of all modern politics was intolerance toward other peoples' opinions. This intolerance, he continued, referencing the activities of the US Senator Joseph McCarthy, led to the politics of character assassination and defamation. Political intolerance also led to a breakdown in communication, as party members refused to listen to the representatives of other perspectives. And it caused party leaders to act more like functionaries than like democratic representatives of the people.⁵⁴ If they wanted to overcome these problems, Germans needed to mature politically. This would require them to fundamentally change

⁵² Ibid., 195-99.

⁵³ Ibid., 200.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 201-203.

their political attitudes, becoming active citizens who embraced the new democratic system. As Lemmer argued:

The state is no eternal thing-in-itself, and the parties even less so. Everything is in a state of constant flux; even totalitarian regimes cannot remain perfectly rigid, as we are almost amazed to experience. And this is even truer for a democracy, that draws its strength from the people. . . .

The time for this constricted slave-mentality is past; the comfortable, trite admonition ‘Trust your magistrate!’ is antiquated. . . . Even in a democracy, freedom and human rights are not just given out, picked up off the streets. They must be worked for at all times, and their realization must be vigilantly guarded.⁵⁵

In order to function, he continued, democracy required “inwardly free democrats,” who would not embrace mass politics, trampling minorities underfoot as conservatives had done during the 1920s, but would instead defend the rights of every citizen.⁵⁶

AN INWARD TURN

While the 1953 Kirchentag in Hamburg had begun to explicitly address the complexities and difficulties of democratic politics in the FRG, the 1954 Kirchentag in Leipzig went in a very different direction. Plans to restructure the Kirchentag organization in order to encourage more concrete and practical engagement with everyday problems were put on hold in 1954. And, to the apparent frustration of several members of Kirchentag leadership, the Leipzig gathering was instead characterized by the inwardly focused, spiritualization of politics that had prevailed at many earlier Kirchentag meetings.⁵⁷ Geared toward the circumstances of Protestants in the East, the

⁵⁵ Ibid., 203.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 204.

⁵⁷ Heinrich Giesen, notes on changes to the Kirchentag titled “*Allgemeine Deutung*,” “*Arbeitsgruppen*,” “*Neue Themen*,” “*Sondertreffen*,” and “*Kirchentag in Permanenz*,” 28 October 1953, EZA 71/86/480; see also “Protokoll der 20. Sitzung des Ostausschusses am 23.11.1953 im Haus der Kirche, Berlin-Weissensee,” 23 November 1953, EZA 71/86/127, particularly the comments of Heinrich Giesen and Eberhard Müller.

majority of the 1954 workgroups focused on the comparison of the Christian and communist worldviews. The church workgroup offered Christian hope in the ultimate return of Christ as an alternative to communist utopianism. In discussions of education and child rearing, Christ was offered as the exemplary model of human behavior in contrast to communist notions of the “new man.” And in the political workgroup, speakers addressed the meaning of God’s lordship over the entire world and the Christian commitment to justice.⁵⁸

In planning sessions for the Leipzig gathering, East German church leaders made it clear that they were not looking for concrete answers to practical political questions. Instead, in the words of Johannes Anz of Magdeburg, the Kirchentag should “deal with these problems working outward from the depths of the bible.” According to Reimer Mager, the president of the Saxon Landeskirche, this was not a retreat from confrontation with the SED, it was instead a bold engagement in the conflict of worldviews going on between communism and the churches.⁵⁹ But the Kirchentag’s focus was decidedly theological and spiritual, asserting Christian truth, but not addressing the question of how this should be lived out in daily life.

This was apparent throughout the Leipzig Kirchentag. In the church workgroup, the student pastor Johannes Hamel reminded his listeners that Jesus was the ultimate judge of humanity, whose return they should be expecting. But when it came to practical political questions, he simply asserted that neither liberal nor Marxist worldviews were Christian. Christianity was not itself political. Christians were free, instead, to work

⁵⁸ “Themenkonvent v. 11/12. März 54,” 11-12 March 1954, EZA 71/86/127; “Themenkonvent 3./4. Januar 1954 in Berlin,” 3-4 January 1954, EZA 71/86/127.

⁵⁹ “Themenkonvent. Plenum 3.1 Abends” 3 January 1954, EZA 71/86/127.

within any political system as long as they were careful to follow God's commands.⁶⁰ And in the workgroup on family and education, Heinrich Vogel argued that both East and West German society were—in their own ways—degrading the image of humanity. Indeed, all of human history consisted of the false images that people made of God and of themselves. But God always destroyed these images in order to remind humanity that the true image of perfection was to be found in Jesus Christ.⁶¹ While other workgroup members took issue with the starkness of this formulation, arguing that images, exemplars, and models of behavior could be useful, as long as they did not go against Christian teaching, the overall level of discussion in this workgroup remained on this abstract, theological level.⁶²

This abstract tone also prevailed in the formal presentations of the political workgroup, although audience members tried to push the discussion in a more pragmatic direction. Here the Hamburg Professor Kurt Dietrich Schmidt argued that Christians owed allegiance to the state, since God was ultimately behind all state power. Government was a gift that God had given to prevent the dissolution of human society into chaos. And even bad governments, so long as they fulfilled this function, needed to be respected. This had been true in the Third Reich and it remained true in the GDR. Individual Christians had only three political duties: to steadfastly bear witness to Christian truth when the state went against God's commands, to obey their conscience when it went against the state's demands, and to make sure that their own actions were just in the eyes of God. Active resistance to the state was not appropriate, but this

⁶⁰ DEKT 1954, 165, 182.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 235-254.

passive resistance was required.⁶³ Discussion of these ideas quickly divided between those who agreed with Schmidt's admonition to passivity and those who worried that passive resistance might not be enough. Here one attendee, Erich Lorenz, quoted from Bonhoeffer to argue that this passive witness to God's truth would someday change the world. On the other side, a discussion participant named Dr. Nockten expressed skepticism toward this approach, asking whether this wasn't just a way of looking the other way and allowing the state to continue abusing its power. But the perspective of most workgroup participants was less confrontational, emphasizing the need to pray for the authorities and to continue to place their hope and faith in Christ.⁶⁴

Following this discussion, Franz Reinhold Hildebrand, the president of the *Evangelische Kirche der Union*, spoke on the Christian conception of justice. Here he argued that, just as it had during the Third Reich, the church had a constant obligation to stand on the side of justice and to oppose injustice in society. But this duty did not involve active resistance. Instead, as the confessing church had shown, "The confession and defense of the Gospel is at the same time the defense of humanity, human rights, and human freedom."⁶⁵ God's higher law was the true measure of justice in the world and Christians needed to promote this higher standard. But when they found themselves in conflict with the government, they were not called to rebel. Instead the resistance they were called to was "spiritually active, but physically passive."⁶⁶ Finally, Gustav Heinemann took a much more activist approach to justice, but he directed his criticism at

⁶³ Ibid., 286-94.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 295-301.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 306.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 307-311.

colonial conflicts in the Third World, rather than life in the GDR. Heinemann argued that justice was a process rather than a static result. Humans, as imperfect as they were, were called by God to take justice seriously and to promote it around the world. And although they would never fully succeed in creating a perfectly just society, they had to devote themselves to this task.⁶⁷

CONCLUSION

Coming out of the experiences of the Nazi dictatorship and the Third Reich, leaders in both the Catholic and Protestant churches in Germany recognized the need for a new form of Christian politics. By presenting political involvement as a Christian duty, and working to promote the dominance of Christian teachings in political life, they hoped to overcome the disillusionment and resignation of ordinary church members, enlisting them in the work of postwar rebuilding. In the early Federal Republic, most Catholics and many Protestants channeled their political energy into the activities of the CDU/CSU. Indeed, even many Protestants who were unhappy with the dominant role of the Catholic church in West German society, were active the CDU/CDU in the late 1940s and early 1950s. And those who rejected the politics of the CDU/CSU generally still shared most of the basic assumptions and attitudes of Christian Democracy. Generally speaking, members of the CDU and of the nascent Protestant Left could both agree on the need to unite all Christians—or at least all Protestants—in a common political ideology. And members of both groups hoped to draw on this faith-inspired political activity for the transformation of postwar German society.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 312-316.

This desire for unity, however, was thwarted in practice by the emergence of significant political differences between more conservative Protestants and members of the Barthian faction. These differences were rooted in different interpretations of the legacy of Nazism and the experiences of the Third Reich. More conservative Protestants blamed these events on the breakdown of traditional social and religious values. Barthians often agreed with this assessment, as far as it went, but they also insisted on looking at the church's own guilt and the complicity of the German Protestant tradition. As a result, more conservative Protestants were much more likely to endorse the assertive Christian politics of the CDU as the solution to Germany's postwar political crisis. Barthians, by contrast, remained skeptical that any party or program could truly embody Christian principles. The rearmament debate of the early 1950s, along with Heinemann's exodus from the CDU, helped to move this disagreement from the level of political philosophy and political theology to the level of concrete political opposition. By the election of 1953, these divisions had become so pronounced that they could no longer be ignored.

Yet Kirchentag leaders were slow to acknowledge this division for a variety of reasons. In part, they saw political disunity as a sign of weakness, and they feared that disagreements within the Protestant churches would lead to renewed disillusionment. In part, they viewed the Kirchentag as a source of unity in the churches, an organization dedicated to holding the two political camps together. Finally, the Kirchentag's role as a forum for Protestants in both the FRG and the GDR necessitated a certain degree of generality and abstraction. Citizens of the two German states faced very different

concrete political problems, but general Christian principles could be easily applied
Protestants in both the East and West.

Kirchentag organizers only gradually overcame this emphasis on Protestant unity. At the 1953 Kirchentag in Hamburg, they took the first tentative steps toward acknowledging the positive role of difference and political pluralism in a democratic state. Yet, this perspective remained contested, as many Protestants continued to long for the “organic” unity of an older form of politics. And, as the 1954 Kirchentag in Leipzig clearly demonstrated, this way of thinking made little sense to Protestants living in the GDR, who remained a sizable portion of the Kirchentag constituency. These ideas could only be refined and developed at later Kirchentag meetings, as speakers began to pay more attention to the complexities of West German political life.

PART TWO

1955-1961

CHAPTER 5

“REALITY TODAY”

By most standards the 1954 Kirchentag in Leipzig was an unprecedented success. The only Kirchentag ever to take place entirely within the German Democratic Republic, it enjoyed extensive press coverage around the world. Meeting in the shadow of failing East-West diplomacy, as the prospects for eventual German reunification seemed increasingly remote, it demonstrated powerfully that German Protestants were committed to bridging the iron curtain, standing in solidarity with one another. It was unprecedented, too, from a standpoint of sheer size. Attracting 650,000 people to its main assembly, it demonstrated that the Christian churches were alive and well, even in the East where they suffered persecution. The Kirchentag has never since drawn such massive crowds.¹

Yet many members of the church and Kirchentag leadership responded to these successes with ambivalence. It was impossible to deny the public importance and the symbolic resonance of these massive Kirchentag demonstrations. But their phenomenal outward success was also seen as a threat to the meeting’s core spiritual and intellectual tasks. Traveling together to the United States for the second conference of the World Council of Churches in Evanston, Illinois, Gottfried Noth, the bishop of the host

¹ Only since the 1980s have any Kirchentag gatherings drawn larger numbers of fully registered attendees, and none has come close to the Leipzig in the size of the main assembly; for more on Kirchentag attendance numbers, see Rüdiger Runge and Margot Käßmann, *Kirche in Bewegung. 50 Jahre Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1999).

Landeskirche of Saxony, expressed these concerns to Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff. The meeting's message, he complained, had been universally misinterpreted "both politically and spiritually." And its large numbers threatened to pull the church into the dangerous realm of mass politics. Reporting these sentiments to the Präsidium, Thadden somberly concluded: "If this is the general opinion, then the Kirchentag has played itself out."²

Others shared these misgivings. While a few Präsidium members hoped that the Kirchentag would build on the political legacy of Leipzig, becoming an important factor in inter-German and Cold War diplomacy, most were uncomfortable with this role.³ The Hamburg theologian Hans Rudolf Müller-Schwefe acknowledged that God had done "extraordinary" and "astonishing" things at the Kirchentag meetings of the early 1950s. But he argued: "The danger grows ever greater that the ordinary things won't work." Responding to those who wanted another eastern Kirchentag in 1955 to follow-up on the successes of Leipzig, the Württemberg *Oberkirchenrat* Manfred Müller contrasted these "evangelistic and demonstrative" meetings with the more substantive leadership role the Kirchentag could play in the West. And he rejected the geo-political arguments in favor of another Eastern gathering, suggesting: "If political considerations are to play a role [in our decision], then the Kirchentag is near its end." Even Heinrich Giesen, who reveled in the all-German significance of Leipzig, acknowledged that the experiences of that gathering were unrepeatable. And Joachim Beckmann, a leading figure in the Church of the Rhineland, argued: "The time of these 'legendary Kirchentage' has ended with

² Präsidium Minutes, 12 October 1954, EZA 71/86/23.

³ *Ibid.*; *Präsidiums und Präsidialausschuss Sitzung*, 2-3 November 1954, EZA 71/86/23.

Leipzig. We will never again achieve these heights. This is why we need a moment of reflection: what do we want from the Kirchentag?”⁴

Different members of the leadership had very different answers to this question: evangelism and *Volksmission*, a demonstration of the importance of the churches in the Communist East, a spiritual gathering of committed church members, a forum where Protestant intellectuals could address the problems and crises of the present world, or a place where those who were alienated from the state churches could rediscover and explore their faith. All of these elements had been present in previous Kirchentag gatherings, but it was becoming difficult to hold them all together. The small full-time staff of the Kirchentag was overburdened. The Kirchentag organization was still operating under provisional by-laws adopted in 1951. And many important decisions about the annual content of the Kirchentag meetings were being made on an *ad hoc* basis, without much oversight or consistency from year to year. In short: the Kirchentage of the early 1950s were characterized more by enthusiasm and activity than by any concrete program or organizational structure.

Starting in 1955 with a much-needed break from the cycle of annual meetings, the Kirchentag leaders began to address this deficit. The meeting’s organizational structure was clarified and better defined. Previously informal planning processes were institutionalized. And questions about the relationship between the Kirchentag, the state churches, and a wide array of other Protestant organizations began to receive more attention. On a more fundamental level, Kirchentag leaders also began to address the fact that life in Germany had changed significantly since 1945 or 1949. In the West, material prosperity was replacing the devastation and hardship of the immediate postwar years. A

⁴ Ibid.

relatively stable parliamentary democracy was emerging out of earlier chaos and disillusionment. And within this new political and social system, new problems and questions were coming to the fore. Grand symbolic gestures of all-German unity might still attract considerable attention, but they also distracted the Kirchentag from the pressing need to address new West German realities. If they wanted their beliefs to be taken seriously, Kirchentag leaders realized, they would have to start asking difficult questions about the role of the Kirchentag itself, the church, and the Christian faith in an increasingly secular, modern world.

INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

The need for a thorough reform of the institutional side of the Kirchentag had long been clear to most *Präsidium* members, and especially to the Kirchentag staff. It was only in late 1950, after the first two Kirchentag meetings, that the organization had even established a permanent business office. And the two General Secretaries, Otto-Heinrich Ehlers and Heinrich Giesen, along with a small clerical support staff, had been constantly overwhelmed by the task of coordinating the massive gatherings of the early 1950s. In a similar fashion, the various organs of the Kirchentag leadership had been loosely organized in 1951. But many important questions remained about the make-up of these bodies and their relationship to each other. In actual practice, the governing *Präsidium* and the members of the full time staff might lay out major themes and key ideas for a given gathering (usually in extensive consultation with the leaders of the local state churches), but implementing this program required the extensive cooperation of outside individuals and organizations. This diminished the central control of the Kirchentag leadership and lessened the consistency of the message from year to year.

These problems were the subject of more or less continual discussion at the *Präsidium* meetings of the early 1950s, but little progress was made in solving them. Instead, they were subordinated to another of the Kirchentag's major goals, that of gathering Protestants together to demonstrate their unity despite geographical, political, and theological divisions. The desire to maintain momentum and to take advantage of opportunities to expand into the GDR always seemed to eclipse more concrete organizational and practical considerations.⁵ The Kirchentag in Leipzig epitomized this tendency. In a 1953 letter to members of all of the Kirchentag's leadership committees, Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff explained the thought process behind the Leipzig Kirchentag. He began by acknowledging the pressing need to address West German problems more concretely. And he admitted the difficulty of doing this in the East. But he continued: "On the other hand, the open political situation of the moment . . . obliges us to meet in the GDR as soon as possible."⁶

In the initial enthusiasm of these gatherings, practical problems and disagreements could often be ignored. But as the Kirchentag developed and became more successful, these problems persisted. The first attempt to address them in a systematic fashion occurred in 1953. After the Hamburg Kirchentag, Heinrich Giesen collected more than 300 criticisms and reform suggestions from church leaders, Kirchentag workers, and other attendees. Categorizing and systematizing these suggestions, he presented them to a special joint meeting of the *Präsidium* and the larger

⁵ A good example of this can be seen in the decision to hold the 1951 Kirchentag in Berlin, despite the misgivings of Heinrich Giesen, Eberhard Müller, and Reinold von Thadden, see the *Präsidialausschuss Sitzung*, 7 November 1950, EZA 71/86/14; also see the minutes of the *Präsidialausschuss* meetings of 13 December 1951, EZA 71/86/14 and 2 December 1952 and 17 August 1953, EZA 71/86/22.

⁶ RvTT, Circular Letter, 3 December 1953, EZA 71/86/22.

Präsidialausschuss in mid-November. Working in smaller sub-committees concerned with various problem areas, members of the Kirchentag leadership elaborated on these problems and they worked to develop solutions. Several common themes emerged in these meetings, and the Kirchentag leadership worked to address these issues over the course of the following year.

A large number of these criticisms grew out of the difficulty of trying to appeal simultaneously to Protestants in the East and the West. Topics that were germane to the experience of Protestants in the GDR, seemed vague and generic to Protestants in the West. And the complexities of West German political and social life seemed hopelessly abstract and irrelevant to Protestants in the East. No one wanted to dispense with these East-West gatherings, with their powerful all-German symbolism. However, Kirchentag leaders recognized that it was becoming difficult to generate real conversation and discussion between Protestants from the two German states. Thematic unity was only possible by avoiding details, but this watered down the Kirchentag message almost to the point of irrelevance. Members of the Kirchentag leadership considered a variety of solutions to this problem, including alternating between eastern and western themes on different days. Yet none of these proposals gained substantial support. In practice the problem was never really resolved. Instead, entirely separate groups became responsible for planning the meetings in the East and West. Some degree of superficial unity was maintained, but the content of discussions at the East and West German Kirchentag gatherings continued to diverge.⁷

⁷ “Von Pastor Giesen Nov. 1953 zusammengefasste Kritiken und Reformvorschläge für den nächsten Kirchentag als Unterlage für die Präsidiums- und Präsidialausschuss-Sitzung am 13-15 Nov. 1953,” undated, EZA 71/86/22.

Another frequent criticism involved the activities of the workgroup planning committees. These committees, it was argued, were too large, with too many inactive members and too much turnover of personnel. This made it difficult for them to really accomplish much real planning, and it led to a lack of continuity and thematic coherence from year to year, or even within a single Kirchentag. Most Kirchentag leaders could agree that the organization needed smaller, more dedicated planning committees that could meet several times a year to discuss their topics, to choose speakers, and to critique these speakers' contributions.⁸

Since many other Protestant organizations, including the Protestant Academies, Men's and Women's Works, and Student Congregations were engaged in similar tasks, this also raised larger issues of coordination. These lay-organizations had been actively involved in planning the first several Kirchentag meetings, but the phenomenal growth of the Kirchentag and the accompanying increase in last-minute planning, had made such cooperation difficult. Most members of the Präsidium and Präsidialausschuss agreed that it was necessary to restore these contacts, if the Kirchentag was to have an informed and coherent program. In particular, they hoped to find ways to work more closely with the Protestant Academies—Protestant think-tanks that addressed a wide variety of political and social issues.⁹ Eberhard Müller, a member of the *Präsidium* and the director of the Academy in Bad Boll, took the lead in encouraging and coordinating these efforts. He stressed, however, that these plans would only be successful if the Kirchentag abandoned

⁸ Ibid; Otto-Heinrich Ehlers, Aktenvermerk, 17 November 1953, EZA 71/86/22; "Präsidiums und Präsidialausschuss Sitzung. Berichterstattung der Gruppen vor dem Plenum," 14 November 1953, EZA 71/86/22. "Präsidiums und Präsidialausschuss Sitzung. Schlussberichte im Plenum," 14 November 1953, EZA 71/86/22.

⁹ Heinrich Giesen, "Aktenvermerk Gespraech mit Propst Dr. Boehm in Berlin am 22.10.1953," 26 October 1953, EZA 71/86/480.

its cycle of annual meetings, creating more time for planning and discussion.¹⁰ Tensions also arose between members of the Kirchentag leadership and other organizations that had been active in the earlier planning process. Leaders of the Protestant Men's Work, for example, were assured that they had a major role to play in organizing the Kirchentag. But as the Kirchentag's own thematic and workgroup leadership committees were strengthened, this practical involvement was largely reduced to publicity and follow-up work.¹¹ Many of these works and associations continued to hold their own sessions during the Kirchentag, but these became ever more distant from the official program.

Another common criticism was that the Kirchentag did not have enough influence on the Protestant churches, individual congregations, or German society as a whole. The workgroups, it was argued, needed to do more to popularize their ideas and insights beyond the scope of the Kirchentag meetings themselves. Members of the leadership had several suggestions for how this could be accomplished. Many German states already had Kirchentag State Committees [*Landesausschüsse*] that worked to promote the Kirchentag on a local and regional level. Some hoped to expand and further develop these committees, giving them the task of follow-up work within the local churches. Others suggested that the Kirchentag should become more active in publishing religious and academic materials. And, in order to exert more direct political influence, it was even suggested that the Kirchentag should establish an informal committee in the West

¹⁰ Hans Hermann Walz, "Vermerk. Betr. Besprechung mit Pfarrer Dr. Eberhard Müller," Bad Boll, 21 December 1954, EZA 71/86/131; Heinrich Giesen, Circular Letter, 24 November 1954, EZA 71/86/131.

¹¹ On tensions with the *Männerwerke* in particular, see RvTT to Klaus von Eickstedt, 1 August 1953, EZA 71/86/104; for more general discussion, see RvTT, *Kommuniqué*, 23 March 1955, EZA 71/86/132; and Hans Hermann Walz, Vermerk, 6 December 1954, EZA 71/86/132.

German *Bundestag*. Over the next several years, Kirchentag leaders pursued all of these ideas, with mixed success.¹²

Finally, the variety of these criticisms and the discussion they generated made it obvious that different groups within the churches (and within the Kirchentag leadership) had very different expectations and goals for the Kirchentag itself. Some wanted to focus more on evangelism, some on teaching and ministering to local church members. Some wanted to emphasize the topics of German division and East-West reconciliation, while others thought this was a distraction from examining the problems of West German society. For some, it was enough that the Kirchentag rally together believers in a public expression of their faith. Others—in thinly veiled allusions to the Nazi past—complained about the dangers of such mass gatherings.¹³

As they moved forward with their plans for the 1954 Kirchentag in Leipzig—entirely within the GDR—Kirchentag leaders did not entirely abandon their institutional reform efforts. The Leipzig Kirchentag would have a different focus from meetings in the West, and it would be planned and coordinated by a special Eastern Committee [*Ostausschuss*], made up of prominent East German church leaders.¹⁴ The West German workgroup leaders, in turn, would take advantage of this time to better organize and coordinate their work for the next Kirchentag in the west. With regard to the larger question of competing priorities, Reinold von Thadden continued his conciliatory efforts. In a meeting of the *Ostausschuss* in late 1953, he frankly acknowledged the tensions that

¹² Ibid; Heinrich Giesen, Aktenvermerk nach der Reise Hamburg und Berlin vom 20.-24. Okt 1953, 26 October 1953, EZA 71/86/480; Präsidiums und Präsidialausschuss Sitzung. 29-30 November 1955, EZA 71/86/23.

¹³ Präsidiums und Präsidialausschuss Sitzung. Besprechungsgruppe III, 14 November 1953, EZA 71/86/22; “Abschrift aus der “Junge Kirche” vom 15. Sept. 1953,” EZA 71/86/22.

¹⁴ RVTT, Circular Letter, 3 December 1953, EZA 71/86/22.

existed between the various functions of the Kirchentag. But he insisted it was best to remain open-minded and responsive to events, allowing God to set the organization's priorities.¹⁵

Even apart from the massive gathering in Leipzig, 1954 was an eventful year for the Kirchentag. In the middle of the year, Otto-Heinrich Ehlers, who had managed the day-to-day business of the Kirchentag operation since 1950, left for a job in private industry.¹⁶ He was replaced by Hans Hermann Walz, the deputy director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey and the leader of the World Council of Churches' Secretariat for Lay-Work.¹⁷ Walz had been involved with the planning for the *Evangelische Woche* of 1949, but he had not been active with the Kirchentag since that time. He brought to the position of General Secretary a broader, more ecumenical vision of the church and a more academic and policy-oriented mindset. Whereas Ehlers had worked strictly on the business side of the Kirchentag, leaving content-related issues to Heinrich Giesen, Walz would be actively involved in the process of setting the intellectual tone of future gatherings. In particular, he would be instrumental in forging contacts between the Kirchentag workgroups and policy experts in the universities.

The end of 1954 also saw the publication of the *Evangelisches Soziallexikon* by the Kirchentag's workgroup on the economy and society. Conceived as an extension of the basic work of the Kirchentag, this thousand-page reference work was intended to guide and inform German Protestant attitudes in all areas of social life. In doing so, it was also an attempt to demonstrate the essential unity of Protestant social thought despite

¹⁵ "Protokoll des 20.-Sitzung des Ostausschusses," 23 November 1953, EZA 71/86/127.

¹⁶ Otto-Heinrich Ehlers, Circular Letter, 7 May 1954, EZA 71/86/23.

¹⁷ "Präsidiums und Präsidialausschuss Sitzung," 25 January 1954, EZA 71/86/23.

the differences that existed between different factions in the church. As Friedrich Karrenberg, the volume's editor, argued:

The fact that such a high degree of consensus can be reached, despite all confessional and political differences that so often burden our life in the church and the state, shows that the frequently asserted disunity and lack of direction of German Protestantism does not exist, at least not in this area.

By creating the common ground for a discussion of Germany's social problems, Karrenberg further hoped to encourage Protestants to exercise "genuine responsibility in all essential areas of daily life."¹⁸

This was the first of many similar reference works published under the aegis of the Kirchentag, and it demonstrated a new commitment to disseminating and transmitting ideas from the Kirchentag workgroups to a wider audience. It was followed shortly thereafter a wide array of other guides, including Heinrich Giesen's devotional and instructional books, *Der mündige Christ* and *Wenn man dich fragt nach Glauben und Leben* and Hans Hermann Walz and Franklin Littell's ecumenical *Weltkirchenlexikon*. Starting in 1956, the Kirchentag also began to work with *Kreuz Verlag* in Stuttgart on the professional publication of the yearly Kirchentag proceedings.¹⁹

After Leipzig, the *Präsidium* further clarified its commitment to institutional reform, deciding not to hold any Kirchentag meeting in 1955. During this break, the first real time off since 1949, Kirchentag leaders worked to address major personnel changes, to continue to implement the reform ideas of 1953, and to rethink the content of the next meeting, set for 1956 in Frankfurt. This time was also used to reexamine basic questions

¹⁸ Friedrich Karrenberg, "Foreword," Friedrich Karrenberg, ed, *Evangelisches Soziallexikon* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1954).

¹⁹ Präsidiums und Präsidialausschuss Sitzung, 25 January 1954, EZA 71/86/23; Heinrich Giesen, *Der mündige Christ* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1956); Heinrich Giesen, *Wenn man dich fragt nach Glauben und Leben* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1958); and Hans Hermann Walz and Franklin Littell, eds. *Weltkirchenlexikon. Handbuch der Ökumene* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1960).

about the organization of the Kirchentag itself, a process that culminated in November 1955 in a new set of institutional by-laws. These new rules re-emphasized the independence of the Kirchentag from the EKD and the state churches (something that was originally an accident), reaffirming its position as a financially and legally separate entity. They also diminished the formal role of the bishops and other church officials in the Kirchentag leadership. And they worked to clarify the relationship between various offices and leadership committees.²⁰

The new by-laws of 1955 confirmed the position of the Präsidium as the Kirchentag's highest governing body. This committee was responsible for general oversight of the entire Kirchentag organization, and it retained final say over every important decision. Under the leadership of the President, the Präsidium also included two vice presidents, the chair and vice chair of the finance committee, and as many as eight additional members. Five of these were nominated by the Kirchentag officers and elected by the Präsidialversammlung—a larger committee directly beneath the Präsidium. The other three were chosen directly by the Präsidium members themselves. The Präsidialversammlung, or governing assembly, replaced the earlier Präsidialausschuss and Beirat. It included all of the members of the Präsidium and the finance committee, the chairs and as many as six other representatives of the Kirchentag State Committees, the two chairs of every workgroup, and both Kirchentag General Secretaries. It could also include as many as ten representatives from the various Protestant lay-works and associations, and as many as fifteen other individuals chosen by its membership. The

²⁰ Karl Kupisch, *Quellen zur Geschichte des deutschen Protestantismus von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, Vol. 1 (Hamburg: Siebenstern Taschenbuch Verlag, 1971), 103-110; see also Harald Schroeter, *Kirchentag als vor-läufige Kirche. Der Kirchentag als eine besondere Gestalt des Christseins zwischen Kirche und Welt* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1993), 172-76.

Präsidialversammlung provided the Kirchentag with something approximating a democratic basis. Its members elected the Kirchentag president, the vice presidents, and most of the other members of the Präsidium. Apart from this, however, its role was largely advisory. Beneath the Präsidialversammlung a new even larger group, known as the *Kuratorium*, was also formed. This group served as a sort of “friends of the Kirchentag” organization, promoting and publicizing its work.²¹

Under the new organizational by-laws, the Kirchentag president retained a great deal of power. As the public face of the entire organization, he was responsible for maintaining high-level relations between the Kirchentag, the state churches, and the two German states. The president also retained veto power over the decisions of all other Kirchentag committees. He was aided in his work by the *Präsidialrat*—an executive committee within the Präsidium—and by the General Secretaries, who were responsible to the president and the Präsidium alone. The General Secretaries, in turn, had the task of overseeing the day-to-day work of the Kirchentag organization and the thematic planning for each Kirchentag gathering. They were also responsible for coordinating the efforts of the individual workgroups, called into semi-permanent existence by the Präsidium in order to address specific topics and subject areas during the Kirchentag meetings. “It is the task of the workgroups,” the by-laws explained, “to take positions rooted in Christian responsibility on the major questions of our time, in the areas of the church, political, social, and cultural life. In particular, this is intended to help the lay-membership of the church . . . to take their tasks in the church and the world seriously.”²² In order to better

²¹ Ibid.

²² Karl Kupisch, *Quellen zur Geschichte des deutschen Protestantismus von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, Vol. 1 (Hamburg: Siebenstern Taschenbuch Verlag, 1971), 109.

coordinate these groups, the leaders of each workgroup would also meet together under the General Secretaries as part of a newly formed Workgroup Leadership Committee, working to ensure the intellectual coherence and thematic unity of each Kirchentag meeting. In this task, both the General Secretaries and the Workgroup Leaders were expected to work closely with the Protestant Academies and any other public groups whose knowledge could contribute to a better Kirchentag program.²³

While many aspects of this structure were similar to the provisional structure of the Kirchentag since 1951, the clearer designation of different levels of leadership and their respective responsibilities led to much smoother functioning in the future. The Workgroup Leadership Committee, in particular, brought together planning functions that had previously been widely dispersed across multiple levels of leadership, formalizing them in one place. This, in turn, led to far more coherence and continuity in the year-to-year messages and overall themes. Many open questions remained about the purpose and goals of the Kirchentag, especially in the disagreements between those who wanted to prioritize all-German gatherings and those who wanted to focus more on the circumstances in the West. But the concrete practical problems that had plagued the Kirchentag since the beginning were finally brought under control. This left the Kirchentag leadership with more time to devote to questions of content.

THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

Since its beginning in 1949, the Kirchentag had been dedicated to gathering German Protestants together to strengthen their faith and to equip them for service in the world. Yet the world in which German Protestants found themselves in 1955 was quite

²³ Ibid.

different from the world of 1949. In the middle of the “economic miracle” and the rapidly changing social structures that came in its wake, older models of the church seemed less relevant to everyday life.

Nearly every church-political faction of the early 1950s had shared the belief that society was urgently in need of a faith-based transformation. Barthians might frame this need in personal and existential terms while more conservative Protestants worked for a *Volkskirche* and a new CDU-led alliance of throne and altar. But all of these groups saw Christian faith as the only solution to the pressing problems of the postwar world. Yet, events had begun to frustrate these assumptions. This emphasis on the centrality of personal faith to the problems of the social and political world seemed relevant but impossible to implement in the communist East. In the complex and prosperous society of the West, on the other hand, faith often seemed increasingly unrelated to real world problems.

By the mid-1950s, many Kirchentag leaders had come to the conclusion that they would need to adapt to these new circumstances if they were to have any resonance at all outside of a narrow spectrum of active church members. They did not abandon their optimistic belief in the centrality and transforming power of faith, but they recognized that this was harder to see in the modern world. Over the next several years, they developed two responses to this challenge. First, they worked to promote a more vibrant, practical, everyday faith that was not limited by the conventions of the past. They hoped that by modeling this faith at the Kirchentag, they could also transform local congregations into something more in line with modern reality. Second, they worked to

better understand the workings of the modern world. Convinced that faith was still relevant, they sought to rediscover this in the concrete details of modern life.

This change in emphasis was gradual, starting in the mid-1950s and continuing into the middle of the following decade. The Kirchentag of 1956 in Frankfurt took place in the midst of these changes. Although it represented less of a departure from the past than many of its organizers had hoped, retaining the old workgroup divisions and many older themes, Frankfurt also saw the emergence of a new perspective on these perennial problems. These new approaches, as well as their limits, are clear in two programmatic speeches addressed to Kirchentag planners in early 1955.

In a sermon to the theme selection committee in January, the pastor Adolf Sommerauer spoke on the authority and the relevance of the church in the modern world.²⁴ Rather than simply asserting this relevance, as many speakers at earlier gatherings had done, Sommerauer began by questioning it. The slogan of the 1956 Kirchentag would be “Be Reconciled with God,” he pointed out; but what right did the church have to command this action? Wasn’t the man on the street right to greet this command with skepticism? What gave the church the authority to demand this kind of response?²⁵

According to Sommerauer, the church was not prepared to answer these questions. It had lost its ability to communicate with the common man. It was too focused on abstract and scholarly theological questions to concern itself with practical, useful theology. “I don’t think that one can comfort oneself,” he argued, “by saying: ‘But we know what theology is, it’s just that the others don’t believe what we are saying.’”

²⁴ Sommerauer would become a well-known television preacher in the 1960s and 1970s.

²⁵ “Themenausschuss der Arbeitsgruppen,” 24-26 January 1955, EZA 71/86/131.

The problem was deeper and more fundamental. The church had ceased to be a living organism. It had lost any connection to ordinary people, especially industrial workers and others heavily involved in modern economic and social structures. Indeed, many were so alienated, he argued, that they “no longer even feel friendship toward the church.” The church would only be able to reach these people, he concluded, through a new, practical theology that was not limited to sermons and theological propositions, but instead found its expression in the experience of belief and the consciousness of belonging to the body of Christ.²⁶

These ideas were not entirely new. The Kirchentag had always been home to evangelistic appeals that sought to connect with the everyday lives of ordinary people. But it did reinforce an important, though subtle, shift in emphasis. Even at the Kirchentag, many earlier sermons had started from the perspective of theological truth, assuming that this theology would work itself out more or less automatically in the real world. Sommerauer, by contrast, acknowledged the growing divide between the church and the people. De-emphasizing formal theology and dogmatic instruction, he sought to bridge this division through a more active, lively, and existential form of faith.

Two months later, in a speech to the workgroup leaders, Hans Hermann Walz also called for the Kirchentag to engage more concretely and more critically with the problems of the modern world. Walz had spent his first several months on the Kirchentag staff going over the transcripts and documents of the earlier Kirchentag gatherings. In this study, he found much to commend, but he also saw some very serious weaknesses. In particular, he praised the Kirchentag for its role in bringing together Protestant believers to celebrate their faith. And he identified several important ideas that

²⁶ Ibid.

had emerged in Kirchentag workgroups. These included the call to greater Christian responsibility in social and political life and the belief that the church should take a more active role in the world. But the workgroups, he argued, needed to go beyond this level of discussion. In the past, they had been content merely to meet together and to declare their interest in the world's problems. However: "Little new was said in them, they seldom arrived at a straightforward position in their discussions of the big, divisive questions of church and public life, and their content—in terms of the message of the Kirchentag—could not be seen building on itself from year to year."²⁷ Now, Walz argued, the workgroups needed to be more systematic and more matter of fact in their approach, striving for concrete and practical answers to the problems they addressed. To be sure, some of these answers would be found the spiritual elements of the Kirchentag program: "in penance and adoration before God." But Kirchentag planners also needed to look for answers "in life in the world, in wrestling with personal, social, political, and cultural problems."²⁸

In practice, Walz argued, this new direction had three implications for the practical work of the Kirchentag planners. First, the workgroup leaders needed to have "good antennas," "the ability to feel the pulse of the church, society, and the *Volk* in which we live." Rather than starting from a theological standpoint, they needed to start by observing the world around them. Second, they needed to be able to analyze and process these ideas, breaking them down into their component parts. This would allow them to offer their listeners "practical advice" and even "astonishing new realizations." And it would guide them in issuing "calls to common action." Finally, they needed to

²⁷ Hans Hermann Walz, "Die Aufgaben der Arbeitsgruppen," 28 March 1955, EZA 71/86/23.

²⁸ Ibid.

radiate these ideas outward, so that they could make a difference in the everyday lives of ordinary people.²⁹

Walz also identified several “submerged” themes that needed to be given more attention at future Kirchentag meetings. The first of these was the question of German guilt and the task of restitution. Kirchentag workgroups needed to address German-Jewish relations. But they also needed to look at other issues such as colonialism and Third World development. Second was the realization that the church in Germany was part of a larger, worldwide Christianity. Christian brotherhood was not just relevant to the problems of German division; it carried responsibilities toward the problems of the entire world.³⁰

These new ideas had an immediate impact on the content of the Kirchentag, but they also ran up against certain degree of institutional inertia. Already at the theme selection meeting in January, several Workgroup Leadership Committee members expressed dissatisfaction with the overarching theme of reconciliation, believing that it tied their hands and prevented them from exploring more thorough changes to the existing workgroup structure. But within this somewhat constricted framework, they also began to address more practical questions.³¹

These changes were most obvious in discussions of politics and life in the “world.” But there was also a somewhat subtler empirical and practical shift in the workgroup on the church. In preparing for their 1956 gathering, this workgroup did not

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Hans Hermann Walz, “Bericht über die Sitzung der Arbeitsgruppenleitungsvorsitzenden anlässlich des Themenausschuss in Arnoldshain vom 24.-26.1.1955,” 15 March 1955, EZA 71/86/134.

try to supplant the perspective of everyday life with a more spiritual or otherworldly perspective. Instead it worked to show that God was already present and active in human affairs. God had affirmed the world, both in its creation and its redemption, and he desired a relationship with humanity. Summarizing the group's ideas, the physicist Günther Howe wrote, "God says yes to modern man in his internal divisions, in his schizophrenia; yes, to the man who is so different from the one the pastor imagines sitting beneath his pulpit." But God's affirmation of the world did not stop with the individual person. "God also says yes to this world and its power groupings," Howe continued, "He makes these things right: nations, states, parties, economic groups and all the rest. . . . God also says yes to nature."³² This was not an affirmation of the status quo. The world still needed Christ on both an individual and systemic level. But God worked with and not against his creation, and Christians were called to do the same.

During the Kirchentag itself, this argument was advanced by Dr. Weber of Göttingen. Weber contrasted God's "yes" to the world, with humanity's self-destructive tendencies inherent the world's inhumane social structures and practices. These tendencies were especially apparent, he argued, in the atom bomb and other forms of mechanized destruction. But God's affirmation of the world, he continued, worked against these tendencies. God preserved the world, overruling humanity's attempts to destroy it. As God's people on Earth, Christians, too, were called to help work out this "yes," embracing human worth and creating a form of Christian humanism [*Humanität*], based on the work of Jesus Christ.³³ Following Weber's speech, the writer Rudolf Alexander Schröder elaborated on the same ideas. Schröder began by reminding his

³² Ibid.

³³ DEKT 1956, 136-144.

listeners of the historian Leopold von Ranke's famous dictum that all eras were immediate to God. This was not just true for history, he argued, but for every individual's separate world of experience. God desired to be in conversation and communion with every person in the world. And nothing humans could do would deflect this interest. This, he proclaimed, was reason to rejoice. But it also carried a lesson for human actions in the world. Human beings had a responsibility to view their own answers to the problems of the world—relations across the iron curtain, refugee and expellee politics, and questions of war and peace—in light of God's "yes." In all of these areas, it was not right to pursue their own interests; instead they were called to work to accomplish God's will.³⁴

This affirmation of the world and of modern reality characterized the entire 1956 Kirchentag, not just the workgroup on the church. Looking at the gathering in Frankfurt, the *Münchener Merkur* praised the "realistic impulse" and the "desire for rational compromises" that were apparent in the workgroups. And the *Mannheimer Morgen* praised the "factual," "passionate," and "comprehensive" scope of its themes in their engagement with everyday life. But other papers saw room for still more movement in this direction. As the *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* reported: "At the next Kirchentag, the increasing practicality [*Sachlichkeit*] of the listeners needs to be harmonized with the presentations. But the Kirchentag threatens to grow beyond its resources."³⁵

This shift toward the realistic and practical was temporarily interrupted in 1957 by the possibility of another Kirchentag wholly within the GDR. Hoping to take advantage

³⁴ Ibid., 145-151.

³⁵ "Der Frankfurter Kirchentag im Spiegel der Presse," EZA 71/86/723.

of Stalin's death and the short-lived thaw that followed, several church leaders, including Lothar Kreyssig and Martin Niemöller, began to test the waters for a possible Kirchentag in Thuringia or Saxony. With the approval of Otto Nuschke, the Deputy Minister President of the GDR and the leader of the CDU-East, these efforts culminated in an invitation from the GDR authorities to hold a decentralized Kirchentag simultaneously in Weimar, Erfurt, and Eisenach. But they soon became a casualty of the rapidly shifting political winds in post-Stalinist Eastern Europe. Already at the Frankfurt Kirchentag, these plans were dealt a setback, when the preferential treatment of West German politicians and the supposed snubbing of Nuschke enraged both the East German press and the organs of the neutralist church faction in the West. As East German hardliners worked to reassert their control, they also undermined Nuschke's apparently sincere efforts to work with the Kirchentag. In February 1957, the East German Politburo formally decided to halt the Kirchentag plans, hoping to do so in a way that would deflect any blame onto the Kirchentag leadership. From this point forward, planning activities for the Kirchentag were hindered, and severe demands were made to control the choice of speakers. By late spring it had become clear that the Kirchentag would not go forward, and the Präsidium members found themselves scrambling to fend off the attacks of Niemöller and other members of the Protestant Left.³⁶

These events reinforced the difficulty of trying to simultaneously serve the needs of Protestants in both German states. With the failure of their efforts in the East, the *Präsidium* turned with renewed vigor to the question of Kirchentag reform in the west.

³⁶ Dirk Palm, "Wir sind doch Brüder!," 247-253; see also "Protokoll: Arbeitstagung des Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentages am 24./25.9.1956 in Berlin," EZA 71/86/149, the various correspondence related to the collapse of the Thuringian Kirchentag in EZA 71/86/480 and the collected press reports in EZA 71/86/297 and EZA 71/86/282.

Friedrich Lahusen, the Bremen businessman who served as the Kirchentag's West German vice president, used this opportunity to call for greater clarity with regard to the Kirchentag's task. The fact that God had, in the past, given the Kirchentag a major role to play in East-West relations, he argued, did not mean that it was forever trapped in such a role. Instead, the Kirchentag needed to change with the changing times. Calling for greater independence from the state churches and from the Protestant Works and Associations, Lahusen argued that the Kirchentag should focus its efforts on reaching out to the nominal Protestants, for whom the Kirchentag was their only remaining contact with the church. He also argued that the Kirchentag should continue its engagement with the problems of the modern world.³⁷

In order to work through these issues, the *Präsidium* decided not to hold another major Kirchentag until 1959. In lieu of major Kirchentag gathering in 1958, they decided to instead sponsor a conference of Protestant academics and experts, where they could develop ideas and approaches for better integrating Christian faith with the realities of modern life. The theme of this "Kirchentag Congress" would be nothing less than "Reality Today," referring to "the need to draw up a balance sheet for the overall situation and to determine anew the tasks of German Protestantism, the church, and the Kirchentag."³⁸

In approaching this daunting task, Walz and the members of the Workgroup Leadership Committee continued the Kirchentag's shift toward a more empirical perspective. This shift was subtle but significant. Rather than viewing the church and

³⁷ "Bericht über die Sitzung der Präsidiums des DEKTs am 8. und 9. Juli 1957 in Fulda," EZA 71/86/160.

³⁸ "Bericht über die Sitzung des Präsidium des DEKTs am 26./27. Nov. 1957," EZA 71/86/21.

the world as entirely separate spheres, they saw them as interrelated. Rather than trying to wholly transform the world by the power of faith, they worked to discover the manifestations of faith already in the world—to identify those places where the world was already looking to the church for answers. Instead of asserting their relevance in the world, they posed this relevance as a question. Their task, in short, was to try to answer this question as concretely and specifically as possible.

They began this task in earnest in October 1957 at a major planning meeting in Arnoldshain. During the course of this meeting, speakers began to lay out the agenda for the upcoming congress and to set up new themes and topics for the Kirchentag as a whole. Speaking on “The Protestant Church at the End of the Modern Era,” the Hamburg theologian Hans Rudolf Müller-Schwefe argued that the church needed to wholly reconceptualize its self-understanding. The Protestant churches had perfectly embodied the general tendencies of the modern era: individualism, the fragmentation of perspectives and worldviews, and the opposition between man and nature, between theology and real life. But the church struggle of the Third Reich had shown the limitations of this model of the church, as many Christians had too readily identified the Kingdom of God with the Kingdom of the World. Now, however, the modern world was at its end, giving way to the age of the masses. And in this new era of history, the church, too, had a new set of tasks. It was not enough to simply adapt itself to the new era, embracing a new set of values in place of the old. The experiences of the confessing church taught that the church was not to be anchored in any one worldview. Instead, he argued: “The church is the experience of the Kingdom of God that is always moving

towards completion.”³⁹ The church’s task was to work this out in practice. For German Protestants this meant rethinking their historical nationalism and confessionalism as well as their traditional teachings on war. Living in an increasingly secular age, they also needed to renew the life of the churches themselves through the experiences of worship and the sacraments. And they needed to maintain their distinct identity by avoiding the materialism of the surrounding culture.⁴⁰

The doctor Wilhelm Kütemeyer and the physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker also addressed the relevance of the church to modern life, looking respectively at the social sciences and physics. Both argued that the church had an indispensable role in modern scholarship, offering theological and ethical guidance in a world that had lost sight of individuality and humanity. Since the time of Galileo, both argued, there had been an artificial division between faith and science. But now this era was at its end. According to Kütemeyer, the question was not whether humanity would rediscover religion, it was the form that this rediscovery would take. If Christians did not succeed in making people aware of the humanity of God and his presence in the world, then people would turn instead to other pseudo-religious systems.⁴¹ To Weizsäcker, Galileo had gone too far in claiming that science and mathematics were the ultimate measures of reality. Modern physics, he argued, had overcome this view. In a world where physicists had the power to destroy the world, they had recognized their need for theological and ethical

³⁹ Hans Rudolf Müller-Schwefe, “*Die evangelische Kirche am Ende der Neuzeit*,” EZA 71/86/81.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Wilhelm Kütemeyer, “*Die Krankheit Europas – die Krankheit der Zeit?*”, EZA 71/86/81.

guidance. Now the only question was whether the church would engage with them in dialogue.⁴²

In another address, the philosopher and educational reformer Georg Picht elaborated on the relationship between theology and philosophy, advocating a vibrant, existential faith in place of the rigid orthodoxy and institutional constraints of the past. He began his argument by blaming the church itself for the “sickness” of the world. The history of theology, he explained, demonstrated the ways in which God’s divine truth had been forced to conform to human philosophical categories. In the process it had lost its power to challenge and transform. The church had become a rigid institution that had little relevance to daily life. And the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual traditions of the church had been secularized, becoming detached from God’s transcendence. Now, in this secular world, people were searching for meaning and inspiration that could only come from God. But the churches were often too concerned with worldly power to offer this to them. Or, on the other extreme, they were too otherworldly and detached from life. Instead they needed to bridge this divide between ontology and eschatology, between lived reality and God’s unfolding history. This task, Picht asserted, would not be accomplished through theology, but through the concrete, everyday expression of the love of one’s neighbor.⁴³

Summarizing these ideas for his own notes, which were later circulated to members of the planning committee, the *Präsidium* member and physicist Günther Howe described the modern reality in which the church found itself. As Nietzsche had argued,

⁴² Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, “*Die Krankheit der Kirche?*,” EZA 71/86/81.

⁴³ Georg Picht, “*Die Heilung der Kirche als Heilung der Welt,*” EZA 71/86/81.

God was dead in the modern world, and it was the church itself that had killed him. Drawing on Heidegger and Karl Barth, Howe argued that Protestants had reduced their conception of God to mere “religious experience,” conforming themselves to the “spirit of modernity.” And by losing the concept of God, the Protestant churches had contributed to two further problems in modern society. First, without any concept of God, the world had also destroyed and debased the image of man. Second, it had lost its grounding in reality. Physics had become divorced from morality and ethics. The death of God—and the absence of the archetypal father figure—had led to a psychological crisis of authority. In both German states, politics had been reduced to an anti-humanist, valueless technocracy. Art had become unmoored from any religious or humanist tradition. Traditional understandings of society and social class had become obsolete, but had not been replaced by anything better. To Howe and the other Kirchentag leaders, the church alone could restore the world’s conception of reality, by pointing to its ultimate foundation in God.⁴⁴

Drawing together approximately 500 professors, scientists, and intellectuals, the Kirchentag Congress of April 1958 sought to concretely address these problems. Kirchentag leaders hoped that these discussions would rejuvenate the lay movement, bringing unrest and dynamism to the church. But they knew that this would require a willingness to think in new directions. The Congress began with several opening speeches on “Aspects of Reality.” These speeches addressed several areas of life that the Kirchentag had not previously explored. Besides looking at older Kirchentag themes, such as the church and political life, they addressed modern realities in anthropology, communication, art, and physics. After these opening speeches, attendees met in eight

⁴⁴ Günther Howe, “*Wirklichkeit Heute*,” EZA 71/86/81.

discussion groups (corresponding to the above themes but also including education, society, and the economy). Here they were encouraged to discuss the issues of modern reality as frankly and openly as possible. In order to ensure a wide ranging discussion, group leaders were instructed: “No boundaries should be imposed on the radicalism of the questioning, there should be no taboos with regards to content.”⁴⁵ Although few of these speeches or discussions were truly radical, they did help to push the Kirchentag in new directions. At the very least, they suggested new ways of thinking about the church and the world. And they made the Kirchentag leadership aware of new realities that could no longer be ignored.

In his opening speech on the church, for example, the Hamburg missions director Walter Freytag, questioned the church’s traditional role and traditional boundaries. Instead of focusing on the German *Volkskirche* of the past, he drew attention to the church outside of Germany, outside the walls of the church building, and outside of traditional theology. The church as whole, the worldwide community of all Christian believers, he argued, had spread across the world, taking hold in a vibrant way in Africa and Asia. But at the same time, the churches in Europe had shrunk. Rather than being the religion of the majority in one part of the world, Christianity was becoming a minority religion spread across the entire globe. This reality had implications for the church’s activities. “From a human perspective,” Freytag argued, “there is no hope of Christianizing the world in the way that our fathers considered self-evident.”⁴⁶ On the

⁴⁵ Otfried Horn, “Zusammenfassender Bericht. Vorbesprechung für den Hamburger Kirchentagskongress mit Referenten und Sektionsleitern am 1. Februar 1958 in Frankfurt/Main,” 7 February 1958, EZA 81/86/81.

⁴⁶ Hans Hermann Walz, ed., *Wirklichkeit Heute. Referate und Arbeitsberichte vom Kirchentagskongreß Hamburg* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1958), 59.

other hand, Christian ideas and Christian vocabulary had been appropriated by non-Christians in countless different areas. This created new opportunities for dialogue. As Freytag continued: “No newspaper in the world, no political propaganda manages without Christian vocabulary. Social justice, brotherhood, humanity, and peace are examples. They have been detached from their Christian roots and their meanings have changed. But one cannot do without them, if one wants to gain a following.”⁴⁷

According to Freytag, the boundaries that separated German Protestants from other parts of the body of Christ, from Catholics and Orthodox, Fundamentalists and Enthusiasts [*Schwärmer*] were also obsolete. All of these different denominations and confessions had their place in the body of Christ. All needed to be accepted. And even within German Protestantism itself, there were divisions to overcome. Christians in western society often found themselves divided into two major groups: those whose belief was rooted in personal faith and those who were rooted primarily in the outward trappings of Christian culture. In one sense, Freytag argued, only the former were the real church. But, he continued, perhaps this perspective was too narrow. Perhaps these groups were not so clearly separate from each other. Certainly in times of crisis—for instance during extreme moments of anti-religious persecution in the GDR—many cultural Christians had taken brave stands for faith. Rather than thinking of these people as second-class Christians, perhaps they should be seen as the church’s front courtyard or as a bridge to the rest of the world.⁴⁸ In conclusion, Freytag argued that the church could not be limited by human categories. There was no right model of the church for all

⁴⁷ Ibid., 59-60.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 61.

places and times. Instead of being judged by their location or organization or theology, churches needed to be judged by their effectiveness in proclaiming and embodying the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world.⁴⁹

Other speeches challenged the church to come to terms with other aspects of modern reality, including the insights of psychoanalysis, sociology, and anthropology. Yet it was the discussions that followed these speeches that had the greatest effect on the Kirchentag's self-understanding. As much as they pushed in new directions, the programmatic speeches that opened the Congress could be made to fit within the existing agenda of the Kirchentag planners. Their insights could be appropriated into older models of the church in society without requiring fundamental changes. Indeed on the most basic level, most assumed that the churches and the Kirchentag could maintain their position as the agenda-setters of Protestant culture. However, the open discussions that took place during the Kirchentag Congress presented a much more fundamental challenge to this model. In many discussion groups, there were no easy answers to be found. Instead, these discussions highlighted the complexity and stubbornness of the problems themselves.

Summarizing discussions in the "Anthropology section," for example, Hans Schomerus wrote: "The discussion . . . was, at first, disappointing overall." Speakers, he continued, seemed to completely misunderstand each other and to mischaracterize each other's arguments. There was little agreement between them. And they could not come up with a common program for solving society's problems. On the other hand, however, they had a very fruitful discussion when they turned from problem solving to diagnosis. Discussion participants could agree on the areas where the Protestant church had lost

⁴⁹ Ibid., 66.

touch with “reality.”⁵⁰ Other section reports were not quite as dramatic, but they, too, demonstrated that it was easier to discover problems than solutions. The Kirchetag Congress had generated a variety of new questions and new ways of thinking about the world, but it had not provided any easy answers.

Yet this was itself an important development, helping to push the Kirchentag in new directions both thematically and stylistically. In their assessments of the Congress, both Thadden and Walz emphasized the good that had come out of these discussions. As Thadden acknowledged in the Foreword to the Congress’s published proceedings:

The people who speak here from positions of academic and practical experience have not discovered the simple redemptive formula that many may have expected, but they have recognized and clearly articulated the fact that, precisely the diversity of modern experiences of reality, forces us to remain in close human contact and academic dialogue.⁵¹

Walz also praised the positive atmosphere of the congress, more than its specific findings and conclusions. “In our complicated world,” he argued, “even the simplest message often requires long and difficult preparation.” In the past, he continued, the Kirchentag had conducted this preparatory work within a small circle of planners and leaders. But the Kirchetag Congress represented a broadening of these planning circles, “an attempt to enlist a broader public in this work.” This task would be difficult, and the Kirchentag still needed to work out a proper balance.

We can only understand reality improperly, speaking in concepts, which encompass us more than we understand them. When we operate on different conceptual levels, the confusion is made complete. But on the other side, there is the danger of premature harmonization, of schematizing things according to a pre-

⁵⁰ Ibid., 109-111.

⁵¹ RvTT, “Foreword” in Ibid.

existing template. Perhaps, in order to avoid this danger, we went a little too far in the opposite direction.⁵²

Looking back a month later, Walz had drawn several lessons from this experience, coming to see the Congress as the model for a new type of Kirchentag. The sometimes-confusing plurality of perspectives at the Kirchentag Congress, he concluded, was not a problem to be avoided. Instead, it reflected the strength and diversity of Protestant thought. The Kirchentag was not simply a public expression of Protestant identity or a gathering devoted to *Volksmision*. It was a place of meeting where Protestants from all perspectives and walks of life could come together, in all of their disunity and diversity, to carry out a conversation with one another and to engage in dialogue with the world.⁵³ This shift in perspective—as much as the contents of any individual discussion—would set a new tone for the future of the Kirchentag.

CONCLUSION

The Kirchentag gatherings of the early 1950s emphasized the transformative power of faith, offering Christian salvation as the immediate solution to all of the world's problems. Yet, this universalizing narrative, which had enjoyed substantial public resonance in the immediate postwar period, and continued to enjoy resonance in the GDR, had lost much of its appeal to West Germans by the middle of the 1950s. The problems of society were simply too complex to be understood only as the manifestations of individual spiritual life. In order to maintain their relevance in these new circumstances, the leaders of the Kirchentag were forced to adapt. They did not abandon

⁵² Hans Hermann Walz “Der Kirchentag, der Kongress und die Wirklichkeit” in *Ibid*, 144.

⁵³ Hans Hermann Walz, “Bericht ueber die Sitzung der Praesidialversammlung a, 10. und 11. Juni 1958 im Evangelischen Johannesstift, Berlin-Spandau,” EZA 71/86/21.

their belief in the importance of personal salvation—which remained the central premise upon which all of their activity was based. But they looked for ways to better understand the world’s problems on their own terms. And they sought concrete expressions of faith that would speak directly to the circumstances in which people found themselves.

The institutional reforms that the Kirchentag adopted in the mid-1950s were an important first step in this transformation. As long as the Kirchentag lacked well-defined procedures and organizational structures, it was impossible for its workgroups to engage consistently in this kind of concrete, fact-based discussion. But with more time, better-delineated responsibilities, and increased cooperation with academics and subject-matter experts, workgroup leaders could plan a coherent program that developed and built upon the discussions of the preceding years.

The increased difficulty of holding Kirchentag gatherings in the East also contributed to this shift in emphasis. Prior to the collapse of plans for the 1957 Kirchentag in Thuringia, the Kirchentag leadership had been severely divided between those who wanted to prioritize Protestant All-German unity and those who wanted to develop a more sophisticated intellectual program. While this division was not fully overcome until the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the failure of the 1957 Kirchentag decidedly helped the case of those who wanted to focus on the circumstances in the West.

In their efforts to rediscover the relevance of faith in the modern world, Kirchentag leaders in the late 1950s did not abandon their earlier interest in *Volksmission* and evangelism. Instead, they worked to root these tasks more concretely in the realities of modern life. Rather than offering a one-size-fits-all program, they hoped to speak to

the individual circumstances of their audience. But this empirical turn had unintended consequences. This process of questioning their own theological assumptions and working to reconcile their theological assertions with everyday reality, did not lead to easy answers. Instead it offered a new, more flexible and more tentative model for the activity of the church in the world. As Walz observed after the 1958 Kirchentag Congress, there simply was no one Protestant worldview or one Protestant answer to the world's problems.⁵⁴ But this did not have to be seen as a problem. The Kirchentag did not need to be a source of simple answers. Instead it could be a place where ordinary Protestants could ask their questions, where they could discuss and argue with each other, where they could engage in dialogue with the world.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

POLITICAL PLURALISM

Between the middle of the 1950s and the middle of the 1960s, German Protestant political attitudes underwent a significant transformation. Most devout Protestants in the early 1950s found themselves in broad agreement with the basic idea of Christian democracy: the belief that Christian faith and Christian morality were the only solid foundations for a postwar political system. Because of this broad support for some form of Christian politics, most were drawn, at least at first, to the politics of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU). Indeed, the initial political division among Protestants was less between CDU/CSU and SPD voters, than between those who withdrew from politics altogether and those who embraced political activity as a Christian responsibility.

This began to change as bitter debates over West German rearmament and the western integration policies of the Adenauer government created sharp divisions in the Protestant churches. Many leading Protestants supported Adenauer's policies, despite occasional misgivings and criticisms. These supporters included prominent politicians, such as Hermann Ehlers and Eugen Gerstenmaier; leading churchmen, such as bishops Otto Dibelius, Hanns Lilje, and Hans Meiser; and Hans Asmussen, the former president of the EKD consistory. Important lay-leaders such as Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff and Eberhard Müller, were also generally supportive of the CDU's westernization and

rearmament policies. But these policies also had their fierce Protestant critics, including politicians such as Gustav Heinemann and churchmen such as Martin Niemöller and Helmut Gollwitzer. As the rearmament debates raged on throughout the first half of the 1950s, the Protestant church found itself increasingly divided.¹

These divisions and their long-term repercussions can be seen particularly clearly in the career of Gustav Heinemann. In the late 1940s, Heinemann was a leading Protestant politician as the CDU Mayor of Essen and as the Federal Interior Minister in Adenauer's first cabinet. He was also one of the most important lay-leaders in the Protestant church itself, serving as the president of the EKD synod. But in 1950 he resigned his cabinet position in protest over the early rearmament measures of the government, becoming one of rearmaments' most outspoken opponents. In 1952 he left the CDU entirely, founding the All-German Peoples' Party as a platform for the anti-rearmament agenda. For the next three years, he was a leading public figure in the grassroots anti-rearmament campaign, which ended in 1955 when the Federal Republic formally remilitarized under the aegis of NATO. The same year, amid much controversy, Heinemann's critics in the church stripped him of his leadership position, arguing that his actions had compromised the church's official neutrality on the rearmament issue. In 1957 he joined the SPD, quickly rising to a position of party leadership, serving as justice minister during the turbulent late 1960s and as federal president from 1969 to 1974.

Heinemann's political journey was certainly more dramatic than that of most German Protestants, but it was in keeping with the overall trend. While Protestant support for the CDU declined slightly between 1953 and 1969, support for the SPD grew

¹ See Johanna Vogel, *Kirche und Wiederbewaffnung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978) and David Clay Large, *Germans to the Front: West German Rearmament in the Adenauer Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 227-233.

continually at a regular pace over the same period. This was especially true among Protestants who were most actively involved in the churches. In 1953, 21 percent of regular Protestant churchgoers identified themselves as supporters of the SPD. This number rose to 29 percent by 1958 and 42 percent by 1965, peaking at 50 percent in 1969.²

This “social democratization” of German Protestantism was a complex process. Disillusionment with the politics of the CDU was not enough, in itself, to bring about this shift. Indeed there were substantial barriers to Protestant-SPD cooperation. The Protestant churches had a long history of hostility to the socialist worker’s movement. And, until 1959, the Social Democrats remained formally committed to Marxist ideology, with its atheistic worldview and anti-religious trappings. In order to move beyond disillusionment, into real cooperation, Protestants needed to do more than just reject the ideas of the CDU. They also needed to overcome their hostility toward the SPD.³ On an institutional level, this meant forging personal and professional contacts with leading socialists. On an intellectual level, it required the creation of a common set of ideas, attitudes, and policy goals. Finally, accepting the possibility of closer cooperation with the SPD required Protestants to rethink some of their fundamental assumptions about the nature of politics itself. Rather than taking their own basic agreement on important political issues for granted, Protestants were increasingly forced to deal with the reality of significant political differences. Only gradually did they shift from seeing these

² See Karl Schmitt, *Konfession und Wahlverhalten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1989), 134; see also Table A13a on p. 313.

³ Benjamin Pearson, “Between Two Worlds: Social Democracy, the Christian Social Movement, and Working-Class Religious Transformations in Germany, 1871-1914,” (MA Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003).

differences as a problem to be overcome, to recognizing the positive value of political pluralism.

TOWARD COEXISTENCE

By 1956 all of these issues were coming to the fore. Large numbers of Protestants were disillusioned by the bitter rearmament debates of the previous year and by the West German entry into NATO. And increasing numbers were alienated by the social conservatism of the Adenauer CDU. But Protestant relations with the SPD were still relatively cool. While some Kirchentag leaders had long sought greater engagement with the SPD, their efforts had been hampered by a lack of personal contact and the scarcity of Protestant SPD members. A few Protestant Social Democrats, such as Heinrich Albertz and Ludwig Metzger had played an active role in earlier Kirchentag meetings, but they were in the clear minority. This began to change in the mid-1950s as the barriers between the SPD and the churches became more permeable.

At the Frankfurt Kirchentag of 1956, contacts between Social Democratic and Protestant circles began to develop on both the popular and leadership levels. In a change from previous gatherings, the emphasis here was less on evangelizing the working class than on forging real connections. In a planning meeting for Frankfurt, leaders of the Hessian Landeskirche informed Hans-Hermann Walz of the importance of the SPD in local politics. While they warned that these socialists were often hostile to the churches, they made it clear that many would still attend the Kirchentag. The Kirchentag program would need to speak to these people.⁴ Communicating indirectly, through their contacts in the churches, members of the national SPD leadership, such as Wilhelm Mellies, also

⁴ Walz, Circular Letter, 6 December 1954, EZA 71.86/23.

expressed new interest in involvement at the Kirchentag, making it clear that they would welcome a formal invitation to attend.⁵

This improvement in relations between the churches and the SPD was especially clear in the speeches of the Frankfurt Kirchentag's political reception. While local SPD leaders had occasionally spoken at such gatherings in the past, these speeches had tended to be defensive in tone, focusing on the need for tolerance between the churches and the SPD. Speaking in Frankfurt, the SPD Minister President of Hessen, Georg August Zinn went much further in his attempts at rapprochement. He began his talk by lavishly praising the role of the churches in German political life. In particular, he lauded their active efforts on behalf of East-West reconciliation. He also made it clear that the SPD respected the churches and accepted their important political role. Even though it remained committed to religious tolerance for all, this was not based on indifference to the importance of religion. Instead, tolerance was intended to secure the freedom of all people. This idea of freedom, he continued, had its origins in Martin Luther, who defied the authority of church leaders, believing that every individual was directly responsible before God for his or her actions. This same freedom lay at the heart of German democracy. It was this freedom that gave Protestants at the Kirchentag the authority to work together with people from all segments of German society to solve their common problems. Calling for Protestant cooperation with the SPD, Zinn concluded:

We will work with each other, not against each other, as we attempt to solve our mutual problems in the areas of politics and society, economics and culture. When he returns home, every Kirchentag attendee should help in his own way in the construction of a united, free, and social Germany.⁶

⁵ Gottfried Kutzner to Heinrich Giesen, 22 June 1956; Giesen to Kutzner, 6 July 1956, EZA71/86/135.

⁶ DEKT 1956, 73-74.

Walter Kolb, the SPD mayor of Frankfurt, followed up on this call by highlighting some of the areas where Protestants and Socialists could work together. Praising the role of the Protestant churches in fostering German democracy, Kolb reminded his listeners of the 1848 Frankfurt Parliament in the *Paulskirche*, where the idea of German democracy had been born. He went on to talk of the threat that nuclear destruction posed to the world. Adopting the language of the Protestant Left and the Frankfurt Kirchentag's slogan, "Be Reconciled with God," Kolb acknowledged that only such reconciliation with God could avert the world's destruction in nuclear war. And he praised the efforts of German Protestants to work for this reconciliation between God and man and between the peoples of the East and West.⁷

Finally, Theodor Heuß, the FDP Federal President, spoke on the freedom of the Protestant churches to pursue new forms of politics. When Heuß' own mentor, the minister and liberal politician Friedrich Naumann had attended SPD meetings in the 1890s, he had been disciplined by the church authorities. Only a few Protestants, such as the pastor Theodor von Wächter, had let their consciences lead them toward socialism and they had been treated as outcasts. But now, in the Federal Republic, all Christian citizens had the freedom and the duty to follow their conscience in the political sphere.⁸

This new openness to the SPD could also be seen in the themes and discussions of the political workgroup. Here, German Protestants came to gradually embrace the value of political and social pluralism. And they began to take seriously the criticisms that younger, more realistic SPD and FDP members were leveling against the Cold War

⁷ Ibid., 74-75.

⁸ Ibid., 79-82.

politics of the CDU. Already in 1953, at the height of the West German rearmament debate, the Kirchentag's political workgroup had begun to address the issue of social and political division. This workgroup, on the forces that "poisoned" communal life, had given vent to the deep misgivings that most Protestants felt toward modern democratic politics. While the CDU politician Ernst Lemmer had defended the virtues of democratic pluralism, Theodor Paul Pfizer, the mayor of Ulm, was more in line with the majority when he complained about the nefarious influence of special interest groups and divisive politics, calling instead for a return to a more organic community, governed by mature and responsible natural leaders.⁹

Between 1953 and 1956, when the political workgroup returned to this theme, the divisions within German Protestantism had only become more extreme. The bitterness surrounding the rearmament debates of the previous year and treatment of Heinemann by his conservative opponents in the EKD were still fresh in the minds of many German Protestants. With the entry of the Federal Republic into NATO, the prospects for German unification also seemed increasingly distant. Yet the theme of the Frankfurt Kirchentag was reconciliation—between God and man—but also between enemies and opponents in politics, in society, and in international diplomacy. When they met in early 1955 to plan for the upcoming Kirchentag, leaders of the political workgroup faced a clear challenge: how to concretely bridge this gap between the political realities of the late 1950s and the religious call to reconciliation.

Several themes emerged out of this discussion: the question of just war, the role of groups and organizations "that stand between the state and the individual citizen," "the message of Christianity in conflict with the model of the western world." But above

⁹ DEKT 1953, 154-208.

these diverse problems, bringing them all together was the concept of “coexistence.” As the workgroup planners reported:

The substantive question is this: can people with fundamentally different approaches to the forces that shape public life live together in one world, in one Volk, in one state? And how is this life together to be constructed? This question plays a role in foreign and domestic politics. It also stretches into the realm of life together between Christians and non-Christians. The result of reconciliation with God cannot be some universal human stew [*Einheitsbrei*], but instead can only be the effort to work out existing antagonisms in such a way that one also sees the fellow humanity of one’s opponent.¹⁰

Since the term coexistence was politically explosive, especially in relation to inter-German politics, where it implied an acceptance of political realities such as division and East German communism, the workgroup leaders resolved to avoid using the term. But, meeting several times over the next few months, they were unable to agree on a more concrete and practical formulation of these ideas, beyond the fact that they wanted to apply their ideas to both foreign and domestic politics.¹¹

Eventually two topics emerged from their discussions. The first, relating back to earlier misgivings about modern mass politics, centered around questions of social and political organization, the role of interest groups, and individual freedom. The second, provocatively titled “How much should peace cost?”, dealt with the concrete ideological and political sacrifices that might be necessary to secure European peace and stability. This topic was later broadened to also look at relations between Christianity and other

¹⁰ Walz, “Bericht über die Sitzung der Arbeitsgruppenleitungsvorsitzenden anlässlich des Themenausschusses in Arnoldshain vom 24.-26.1.1955,” 15 March 1955, EZA 71/86/134, 4.

¹¹ Glaszinski, “Protokoll der Abendsitzung 30.3.55. 20 Uhr, Evang. Akademie. (Sitzung der Arbeitsgruppenleitungen),” 30 March 1955, EZA 71/86/134, 2.

religious and pseudo-religious worldviews, examining the question of whether (and how) they could get along.¹²

Each of these topics, as they were presented at the 1956 Kirchentag, represented a mixture of new ideas and older Kirchentag themes. The first, entitled “The Organized Person,” began with Günther Jacob, the church superintendent from Cottbus, who spoke of human existence within the atheistic system of the GDR as an attempt to hide from God. Jacob attempted to expose the utopian illusions of this system, arguing that true freedom could only be found when people arrested their flight from God, returning to the Christian community of faith.¹³ This message was little changed from those of the Leipzig Kirchentag of 1954.

Jacob was followed by the prominent liberal legal theorist Theodor Eschenburg, who spoke on the role of political organizations and interest groups in German society. While many previous Kirchentag speakers had focused primarily on the negative aspects of these organizations, Eschenburg presented a more nuanced view. He began by defending the importance of these groups. Without the freedom of association, the right to form such groups and parties, political freedom would not have developed in Germany. And these groups continued to have an important “protective function” against abuses of power in modern society. Eschenburg acknowledged that the explosion of self-serving and narrow interest groups could also cause problems. As he conceded: “This disorienting abundance of overlapping organizations, with their more or less one-sided demands, sometimes struggling against each other, sometimes working together in

¹² Ibid., see also the reports “3. Kommission über ‘Der organisierte Mensch’ and ‘4. Kommission: ‘Wieviel darf der Frieden kosten?’” from the working conference of the Evangelische Studentengemeinde, Berlin 20-25 April 1956, EZA 71/86/135.

¹³ DEKT 1956, 252-259.

constantly changing lines of battle, this causes great discomfort.” Indeed, this discomfort had been so great in 1933 that a large number of German had embraced the Nazis, with their promise of one *Führer*, above all party interests. But giving in to this discomfort had been disastrous. “They let their organizational freedom be taken away,” he argued, “and thereby lost their political and personal freedom as well.”¹⁴

The freedom to organize interest groups was, admittedly, open to abuse. Organizations could be misused and perverted in ways that also threatened individual freedom. In their “organizational egoism,” “tendencies to self-justification,” and rivalries with one another, interests groups often lost sight of the common good. And as the fronts between them hardened, real conversation and argument could become difficult. At the same time, as interest groups gained power, their members often lost their individual freedom. And this led to a division between the “organizers” and the “organized.” When they were part of a larger group, individuals could even be manipulated to do things they would never do on their own.¹⁵

The solution to these problems was not to be found in subordinating interest groups to state control, as was done in the Third Reich and the GDR. But liberal democratic social models also faced challenges in the changing circumstances of the modern world. “The liberal democracy of a relatively small upper-class, that limits itself to security and order,” Eschenburg argued, “functions differently than the democratic organization-state of our modern mass society.”¹⁶ Rather than complaining about the

¹⁴ DEKT 1956, 260.

¹⁵ Ibid., 261-263.

¹⁶ Ibid., 265.

problems of social and political organization, it would be necessary to work out a new system. Political and welfare organizations were necessary in the modern world. But Eschenburg believed that their place needed to be better delineated to guard against abuses. In particular, he called for clearer lines between non-government and government organizations, criticizing the practice of elevating interest group officials to positions in the government itself. He also argued that non-governmental organizations needed to exercise more self-restraint and respect for government leaders and that they needed to be subject to more oversight. Both members of the Bundestag and ordinary interest group members needed more critically examine the claims and demands that these groups were making.¹⁷

Several themes emerged in the discussion following these speeches. Many listeners continued to think of social interest groups in broad, theological terms, calling on Christians to stand against the idols that made total claims upon them. Others returned to debates about the respective places of passive and active resistance in the GDR. Rudolf von Thadden, the Göttingen historian and son of the Kirchentag president, argued for the need to apply these principles to the churches themselves, reorganizing them to meet the needs of modern society. And several CDU members criticized Eschenburg for minimizing the political role of ordinary citizens and their organizations. As the Bundestag member Elisabeth Schwarzhaupt argued, the existence of multiple interest groups was necessary “in a democracy, where the people are sovereign.” These groups occupied a “pre-political space, where discussion and opinion-forming are weighted more heavily than the representation of interests.” These groups needed to be encouraged, she

¹⁷ Ibid., 265-68.

continued, since they promoted individuality, not the subordination of the individual to the masses.¹⁸

The second topic of the 1956 political workgroup was the “cost of peace,” the sacrifices that might need to be made in order to coexist with others. In many ways, this was also a continuation of earlier Kirchentag themes, especially insofar as it focused on the need for Cold War reconciliation. But it represented a new approach to this topic in the Protestant churches. Protestants had previously been divided between so-called “realists” in the CDU and “enthusiasts” around Heinemann and Niemöller. By the mid-1950s, however, as more “realistic” foreign policy thinkers emerged in the SPD and FDP, this division began to break down. While CDU members had long promoted their Cold War ideology as the only alternative to complete pacifism and defenselessness, members of other parties now argued that it was the CDU that was being unrealistic in its foreign policy. These thinkers began to define “realism” as a recognition of the permanence of German division and the need to work out some form of coexistence with the GDR and the Soviet Union. In essence, they offered concrete policy ideas, rather than just theological principles, to those who wanted peace and reconciliation.

These ideas were still very controversial in 1956. Indeed, a correspondent for the right-leaning Protestant newspaper *Christ und Welt* proclaimed that the very question “What should peace cost?” was “treasonous.”¹⁹ Combining this topic with the question of Protestant relations with non-Christian religions was probably an attempt to diminish this scandal. Yet in their own way, each of these topics pointed to a new desire among

¹⁸ Ibid., 269-274.

¹⁹ Barbara Klie, *Christ und Welt*, August 23, 1956.

German Protestants for concrete, practical rapprochement with their various opponents and rivals.

The first speaker on this topic was Stephen Neill, an Anglican bishop in India. Neill began by laying out the fundamental problem for relations with non-Christian religions. Christians believed that the lordship of Christ needed to be the basic starting point for all of their thinking. How then could they get along with those who disagreed? Were they required to constantly oppose all of the ideas of eastern religions and western materialist ideologies? Or could they find some common ground? In response to these questions, Neill argued that every religious system contained some element of good. Hindus understood the nature of religious peace. Buddhists understood political peace. Muslims understood the principle of brotherhood. Marxists drew attention to real human suffering and need. And western secularism had given rise to advances such as modern medicine. All of these groups also stood opposed to Christians in various areas, but this should not rule out cooperation. Rather than opposing these groups, Christians had a duty to seek out common ground, to engage in discussion, and to respectfully present them with the truth of Christianity.²⁰

Neill was followed by Karl Georg Pfleiderer, an FDP politician, diplomat, and leading critic of Adenauer's foreign policy. Pfleiderer began his presentation by looking at the disasters of German foreign relations in the twentieth century. In one generation, he argued, Germany had gone from being a proud, efficiently-governed, scientifically-leading, economically-growing nation to a position of defeat and division. The Germans had committed terrible atrocities, turning the whole world against them. And, he

²⁰ DEKT 1956, 275-285.

concluded: “In the end, there stood our people defeated, broken, burdened with every kind of guilt.”²¹

Pfleiderer emphasized the fact that this was not an accident: “It would be false to speak of destiny and fate and to leave it at that. We will not speak of destiny and fate, but of our flaws, the mistakes that we made, the mistakes we must cast away and never again commit.” “The worst error,” he continued, “lies in the clear fact that we devoted ourselves too attentively to everything that has to do with the state, the army, administration, and economics and too little—far too little—to everything related to politics and relations with other ‘powers.’”²² Germans had been self-centered. They had ignored the interests of others and had denied that morality and ethics had any place in the world of foreign affairs. And the German churches, too, had contributed to this, passively acquiescing to the state, when they should have been promoting a different agenda.

The time for this, he argued, was past. Now the church needed to be involved in the question of the future of Germany. But it also needed to recognize that this was not just a German problem. German division was part of a larger European and world problem, tied up with questions of European security, armament and disarmament, border disputes, political differences, questions of Soviet and American power, and the ideological dispute between communism and capitalism. The citizens of other states, and not just Germans, had a stake in these issues. In light of all of these competing interests, he continued, there was little hope for any immediate German reunification. Negotiations between the East and West had broken down. If they wanted to avert war, then, Germans

²¹ Ibid., 287.

²² Ibid.

needed to recognize and accept this state of affairs. They needed to rethink their foreign policy from the ground up.²³

This was not just a matter of resolving economic and political disagreements, especially when one considered relations with Eastern Europe. Germans had carried out terrible atrocities on the eastern front. In doing so, they had given up any claim to being a people of law or justice. If they wanted to repair these relations, they needed to rebuild a foundation of trust with their eastern neighbors. This would require them to adopt a more nuanced and realistic perspective. Among other things, they needed to recognize that neither communism nor capitalism were monolithic systems. Each contained internal diversity and was capable of changing gradually over time. They also needed to recognize and accept the legitimate security needs of the Soviet Union. And, they needed to open their economy to the east, developing trade with the Soviet Union and providing foreign aid to the underdeveloped nations of Asia.²⁴

Pfleiderer's speech was intended to overcome East-West hostility, creating the basis for some kind of *détente*. Yet the reactions of his audience demonstrated the concrete difficulties inherent in this task. First and foremost among these, his audience was not willing to accept the status quo, especially when it came to German division. Instead, in an audience that included Otto Nuschke, the deputy minister president of the GDR and Hermann Kalb a CDU-East member of the GDR *Volkskammer*, most comments and questions focused on the unavoidable ideological opposition between Christianity and communism, the persecution of the East German churches, and the undemocratic practices of the GDR regime. When Theo Schliep, a pastor from Rögatz,

²³ Ibid., 290.

²⁴ Ibid., 290-293.

directly challenged Nuschke and Kalb to allow free elections and freedom of the press, the room erupted in a flurry of applause and angry shouting. Only after several minutes of trying to restore order was Nuschke able to respond to his critics. Playing to his audience, he insisted that the East German state was not locked in opposition to the churches, in fact it provided them with financial support. And he argued that the tension between East and West were wholly the result of the West's continual threats of nuclear war. In a round table discussion the following day, Kalb followed up on these ideas, defending the legitimacy of East German democracy and arguing that Walter Ulbricht would be more than willing to allow new, all-German elections if Adenauer would go along. Other members of the round table were understandably skeptical of these claims, pointing out the difference between a democratic constitution and democratic practice. But all remained fixated on the primacy of the inter-German question. On a popular level, at least, the ideal of coexistence had not yet supplanted the ideal of reunification.²⁵

The Frankfurt Kirchentag, however haltingly, had pointed in a new direction for Protestant politics. Especially in its political workgroups, it represented an attempt to overcome the bitter divisions between the Protestant Right and Left, forging a new realistic political consensus. But these attempts were not entirely successful. As the newspaper *Deutsche Woche* of Munich reported: "The Kirchentag has shown that disputed matters can be discussed more rigorously in its environs than elsewhere, but also that it cannot fully detoxify or solve these problems. Whoever came to Frankfurt with overly-high hopes will be disappointed. This is where the idea of the Kirchentag as

²⁵ Ibid., 294-313.

forward-looking public breaks down. Here are its boundaries. It is a bridge, nothing more.”²⁶

Coverage in the conservative Protestant newspaper *Christ und Welt*, normally very favorable to the Kirchentag, was even more critical, reflecting a sense of betrayal. In one Kirchentag report, Hans Schomerus argued that the gathering had largely missed the point of its message “Be reconciled with God.” Kirchentag attendees had been too caught up in their own political concerns, too superficial in their speeches and discussions, too self satisfied, too needlessly critical of the West and uncritical toward the East. They had failed to see that reconciliation could not be brought about by human beings, neither by politicians nor by theologians playing at politics. Instead, the reconciliation that German Protestants sought could only be found in God, in the reconciliation between God and man embodied in Jesus Christ.²⁷ Writing a few weeks later, Barbara Klie attacked the commercialization of the Kirchentag and the mass-political atmosphere that had driven away the community feeling of earlier meetings. Rather than offering solutions to the problems of modern life, the Kirchentag was in the process of embracing the very causes of those problems: modern technology, modern art, modern sociology, modern ideas of family and marriage. For anyone, she concluded, who really cared about the church and its tradition, the Kirchentag had opened its doors

²⁶ *Deutsche Woche München*, 22 August 1956 as recorded in “Der Frankfurter Kirchentag im Spiegel der Presse,” EZA 71/86/723.

²⁷ Hans Schomerus, “Zum Kirchentag in Frankfurt: Gottes Hand ist ausgestreckt,” *Christ und Welt*, 9 August 1956.

too wide. Yet this, she argued, was probably still not wide enough to satisfy those who wanted to drag the church wholly into the modern world.²⁸

OVERCOMING POLITICAL ILLUSIONS

Despite these attacks, the Kirchentag maintained its new course, continuing to look critically at the political status quo. In keeping with the overarching theme of “Reality Today,” the political section of the 1958 Kirchentag Congress devoted itself to the question of the “illusions” that dominated West German political life, preventing the consideration of hard political realities.²⁹ Current events lent a special resonance to this theme. In September 1957, the CDU had won an unprecedented election victory, attaining an absolute majority for the first time. Their slogan had been “no experiments,” their emphasis on the steady hand and experienced leadership of Konrad Adenauer. Yet this triumph for the CDU quickly gave way to renewed foreign policy crisis and debate. In early 1958, Adenauer’s cabinet began to pursue the possibility of arming the *Bundeswehr* with nuclear weapons. This controversial policy led to a replay of the mid-1950s rearmament debates, as SPD politicians, lacking the votes to prevent this development, turned to a grassroots anti-nuclear campaign. Once again, the Protestant churches were bitterly divided over rearmament issues. Yet the issue of nuclear armament, conjuring up images of nuclear war and the total destruction of humanity, resonated far differently than the issue of NATO membership. In comparison to the

²⁸ Barbara Klie, “Das Dach der Kirche ist zu eng: der Widerstreit von Andacht und Technik auf dem Frankfurter Kirchentag,” *Christ und Welt*, 23 August 1956.

²⁹ Otfried Horn, “Vorbesprechung für den Hamburger Kirchentagskongress mit Referenten und Sektionsleitern am 1. Februar 1958 in Frankfurt/Main” 7 February 1958, EZA 71/86/81.

debates of the mid-1950s, an increasingly large number of Protestant leaders found themselves harboring severe misgivings about the wisdom of the government's plans.

To address these concerns at the congress itself, Kirchentag leaders chose the SPD politician Adolf Arndt to speak, not on nuclear arms *per se*, but on the more fundamental dangers of political ideology. Arndt began his presentation by examining the twofold nature of politics. Politics was the process of making sense of one's surroundings and of acting on the basis of this understanding of reality. As such it was central to healthy human existence. But politics—in the form of negative political ideology—could also be a means of “self-justification” rather than understanding, a way of acting on the basis of false understandings of the world. “This is the politics of illusion,” he argued, “that begins from the standpoint of the unreal, aims for unrealizable goals, and thereby loses reality itself.” Alluding to recent German history, Arndt made it clear that this form of politics was dangerous, leading to “catastrophe.” But since all of history was a mixture of healthy and illusory politics, how could one discern the good from the bad? Where could one find political certainty?

Here Arndt made his case against the politics of the CDU. The present danger was that, having lived through the catastrophic consequences of one set of demonic illusions, people might be driven by fear into the arms of even greater illusions. In their desire to find absolutes, to find ahistorical certainty, they could fall victim to even more powerful falsehoods. In their desire to find God, they could actually lose sight of God's reality, even attempting to “master” God himself. Being aware of this problem did not mean embracing political relativism. But it did mean being circumspect and careful in any attempts to define reality. Above all, Germans needed to look for concrete answers

to present-day political problems, not to look for answers that would be true in every place and time. This had clear implications for Protestant politics:

If this discussion is to be helpful . . . it will not be enough for the theologians . . . to point out timeless truths. It will not be enough to explain this loss of reality through the loss of God, through secularization, as though the biblical view of humanity wasn't always a view of people who had fallen away from God, as though we could or should make the world less worldly.³⁰

Instead of appealing to unmediated theological concepts, it would be necessary to concretely examine and dispel the political illusions of the present day.

The first of these illusions, according to Arndt, was the idea that one could ever be completely illusion free. This was the illusion that underlay the Western idea of the “free world.” If they wanted to truly engage with political reality, Protestants needed to look very closely at this concept of freedom and its political implications. At the most basic level, they needed to ask themselves how this concept could be misused. “Is freedom a justification?” he asked, “And does it justify everything?” Taken to its extremes, even this ideal of freedom could be destructive, leading to a form of politics where every individual lived in his or her own reality. Or it could be used to justify war or to glorify death, blinding people to these sobering realities for the good of some abstract political end.³¹

The ideal of political responsibility could also serve as an illusion. In a world where politics had become a form of mass consumption, a matter of “show and noise,” the semblance of political involvement and political responsibility could actually prevent people from acting in a truly responsible manner. Truly responsible politics would begin by asking the right questions, by looking at real, fundamental problems. But modern

³⁰ *Wirklichkeit Heute*, 42.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

politicians substituted fidelity to a worldview in place of actual thinking. “Here,” he continued, “we must ask the church whether Christian faith has become such a worldview. What is the politics of Christian responsibility supposed to mean?” This label, he argued, was not based on anything Christian within the politics in question. Instead, it served to declare that the political policies and results of its proponents were Christian, whatever their concrete content.³²

Politicians, even politicians who proclaimed themselves to be acting out of “Christian responsibility,” could be led astray in a number of ways. For example, they could let their position as the representatives of others blind them to the teachings of Christian morality. Here Arndt directly addressed the debate over nuclear weapons. Christians as individuals were strictly forbidden from thinking of nuclear war as a legitimate means to their political ends. But when they thought of themselves as representatives of others, rather than as morally responsible individuals, they could find ways to justify even this kind of destruction.³³

“Christian politics” could also be led astray by failure to understand the perspective of others, leading to the caricature and misrepresentation of political opponents. According to Arndt, this failure to take another person’s perspective seriously was the fundamental problem of West German domestic and foreign policy. Healthy politics involved cooperation and understanding, not misrepresentation and attacks. “Politics,” he continued, “is only possible when one values and sets as one’s goal the

³² Ibid., 44.

³³ Ibid.

building of at least the foundations of some form of community; any other behavior is no longer politics, but unbelieving, pitiless preparation for annihilation.”³⁴

Healthy political activity was instead based on the recognition that one’s opponent was, in fact, the embodiment of “reality,” representing the natural limits on one’s own power. One did not have to agree with one’s opponent, but one had to recognize that cooperation and negotiation would be necessary to accomplish one’s own political goals. This kind of politics was not primarily about power [*Macht*], with its logic of inevitable mutual destruction, but was instead about the art of the possible [*Machbare*], about concrete possibilities for cooperation and negotiation.³⁵ Here Arndt issued his most direct challenge to the politics of the CDU, arguing that it was wrong to oppose one dangerous ideology with another, whether the idea of the “free world,” the Christian west, or even so-called foreign policy “realism.” Rather than responding in this way, Christians had the freedom and duty to avoid cynical political calculations, choosing grace and love over “the nothingness of murderous illusion.”³⁶

The discussion that followed Arndt’s speech demonstrated the growing complexity of Protestant political thought. Rather than breaking down along “pacifist” and “realist” lines, as had such debates in the early-1950s, this discussion focused on the many different reasons why one might oppose nuclear deployment in Germany. This might include opposition on the basis of a theologically-inspired, principled pacifism. But it also might be founded on any of a variety of more specific grounds: fear of the destruction of humanity in nuclear war, fear of the consequences of such a war in Europe,

³⁴ Ibid., 46, 44-46.

³⁵ Ibid., 47.

³⁶ Ibid., 48.

or other misgivings about the potential for these weapons' misuse. While the political section of the Kirchentag Congress was divided over the basic question of whether West German should obtain nuclear weapons, they could agree on many of the important underlying questions. No participant in the discussion adopted a principled, theological stance against nuclear weapons, although they urged respect for those who did. And none believed that the use of these weapons should be considered lightly. From a theological standpoint, all agreed that "*every* means should be used to prevent such a war." But not all agreed that the mere presence of nuclear arms would lead to such destruction.³⁷

There was much greater agreement on Arndt's more general political warnings. In particular, participants expressed concern over the seemingly "deterministic" nature of German politics, where decisions were made without real discussion and debate and where alternatives were not even taken seriously. In contrast to this determinism, they championed the idea of "Christian freedom," the ability of mature Christian individuals to make political decisions following the dictates of their own consciences. This was not something that could be defended in the abstract. To guarantee this freedom, political actors needed to abide by concrete standards that limited their actions for the good of the community. This was true for the churches and for Christian parties as well. As the discussion members concluded: "Even Christian faith may not be secured or defended by resort to arms."³⁸

³⁷ Ibid., 133.

³⁸ Ibid.

A NEW FOUNDATION

The Munich Kirchentag of 1959 was far more conservative in tone than the congress of 1958, reflecting the dominance of the conservative local *Landeskirche*. Traditional themes predominated, with no less than five of the expanded ten workgroups devoted to issues of primarily religious relevance. Although the planning process for the Kirchentag contained its share of political disputes, the political workgroup itself avoided contentious issues such as nuclear armament and East-West division. Rather than returning to the political positions of the past, however, the group used this as an opportunity to create a more systematic foundation for its new political orientation. Dealing with foundational issues of church-state relations and political pluralism within the church, the Munich Kirchentag laid the groundwork for an entirely different theoretical understanding of Protestant political involvement than that of the early 1950s.

In planning the themes of the upcoming Munich Kirchentag, members of the political workgroup focused more than ever before on the problems of West German society. Even very “western” Kirchentag meetings of the past, such as the 1953 gathering in Hamburg and the 1956 gathering in Frankfurt, had still been planned with the expectation of considerable East German involvement. 1959 was different. Although the leaders of the political workgroup wanted to avoid turning Munich into a “West German Kirchentag,” maintaining some degree of openness toward the sensibilities of Protestants in the East, they knew that very few East German Protestants would be in attendance, and they resolved to use this opportunity to deal more concretely with political issues in the West.³⁹

³⁹ “Protokoll der Arbeitsgruppe 6 ‘Der Staat’ der Sitzung am 12./13/ Januar 1959 in Fulda,” EZA 71/86/109B.

To the frustration of some workgroup members, including Hans Dombois, the chair, this did not lead to continued discussion of the politically charged questions, such as nuclear weapons and East-West relations, that had dominated in 1956 and 1958. In part, at least, this was due to the influence exerted on the workgroup by local CSU politicians, such as Roland-Friedrich Messner.⁴⁰ But the workgroup also rejected Messner's suggestion for a focus on Catholic-Protestant tolerance and cooperation. Instead, at the suggestion of the Bonn law professor Ulrich Schuener, they devoted themselves to a critical assessment of West German politics. Schuener hoped that a careful examination of the religious foundations of West German politics would serve to "lead the people of the west away from their self-assurance toward the realization of the questionableness of their political existence." At the suggestion of Joachim Beckmann, the president of the Church of the Rhineland, this topic was reworked so that it could be expressed in a more positive fashion. In the end, it was decided that the workgroup's first major theme would focus on the "foundations and limits of the church's political responsibility."⁴¹

Summarizing the workgroup's ideas, and connecting it to the theme of the 1958 congress, Hans Dombois argued that Protestants had a "plain duty to expose the truth." This included the truth of the gospel and its claims upon the individual and nation, but it also included the recognition of uncomfortable political realities. To many workgroup members, this topic was clearly directed against political Catholicism and against the CDU. Indeed, in planning meetings Dombois asked whether the ideas of CDU Catholics

⁴⁰ Hans Dombois to Friedelbert Lorenz, 18 December 1959, EZA 71/86/120.

⁴¹ "Protokoll der Arbeitsgruppe 6 'Der Staat' der Sitzung am 12./13. Januar 1959 in Fulda," EZA 71/86/109B, 2.

were similar to the illusionary politics of the Protestant churches in the Weimar Republic, arguing that both 1918 and 1945 had given rise to self-perpetuating political myths that needed to be overcome. And the SPD leader Fritz Erler made this argument much more explicitly.⁴² CDU members, such as the *Bundestag* deputy Elisabeth Schwarzhaupt, were more defensive, blaming the complexities of modern society and the legacy of the Third Reich for the deficiencies of postwar politics. In the complex world of modern politics, she argued, people needed the moral guidance of the churches.⁴³

Heinrich Lades, the CSU mayor of Erlangen, and Joachim Beckmann, the president of the church of the Rhineland, were given the task of addressing these questions of church-state relations at the Kirchentag gathering itself. In their speeches, both attempted to affirm the important role of faith in political life, while also steering a course between political extremes. On the one hand, both were critical of traditional Lutheran political teachings, which entirely separated the church and the state into different spheres of life.⁴⁴ On the other, both were also critical of Catholic politics and of the CDU, complaining that the “clericalization” of politics was bad for both the church and the state. Lades approached this topic from the perspective of practical politics, while Beckmann looked at the theological foundations of Christian political activity.

Lades began by looking at the role of the institutional church in political life. He argued that the church had important, albeit indirect, public responsibility in at least three areas. First, in a modern democratic state, information was an important political tool.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁴ Beckmann was more explicitly critical of the Lutheran “doctrine of the two kingdoms” in the workgroup’s planning meetings, but avoided direct attacks in his Kirchentag speech. See Erich Ruppel, “Protokoll der Sitzung der Arbeitsgruppe 6 ‘Der Staat’ am 13./14. März 1959 in Berlin,” 13-14 March 1959, EZA 71/86/109B, 5.

Interests groups and parties were always working to manipulate this information in order to support their causes. But the churches had an “obligation to the truth.” Through Sunday morning sermons and the activities of the church press, the church needed to question the self-serving, black and white stances of the political parties, offering their members clearer and more objective information. Second, the churches had a duty to offer religious guidance on a wide range of theoretical political questions. From the standpoint of Christian teaching, what was private property? What was the state? What were social justice, freedom, family, and education? For centuries the Lutheran churches had attempted to avoid these foundational political questions, and in doing so they had tacitly endorsed the status quo. It was better to be open and direct about their political positions, avoiding potential confusion. Finally, the churches had an important role in establishing moral and ethical standards that would underpin public life, informing the decisions of citizens and leaders. Christians might not always agree on what questions were matters of basic Christian teachings and what questions were matters of individual conscience, but these disagreements did not absolve them of their responsibility. Instead, Lades urged bishops and pastors to offer their advice and moral guidance to political figures: “Stand by them as brothers, with tact, but also with courage!”⁴⁵

At the same time, Lades recognized important limits to the political role of the institutional churches. Christian teachings were relevant to every area of life, including politics, but Lades cautioned against direct religious rule. First, the churches did not have the right to attempt to control the government, either through direct means or through alliances with parties and interest groups. Naturally, individual Christians had a duty as citizens to be politically active in these ways, but the churches should avoid direct

⁴⁵ DEKT 1959, 388-390.

involvement in matters of state. Second, insofar as this was possible, the churches needed to avoid turning purely political questions into matters of dogma and to avoid offering their members direct political instruction. Third, in order to avoid this error, it was essential for Church leaders to clearly indicate when their political pronouncements were being offered as private citizens and when they were speaking on behalf of the institution. Fourth, the churches needed to respect democratic principles. This meant that it was inappropriate for the churches to negotiate agreements with the state over the heads of church members and citizens. Finally, the churches had the responsibility to take their political teachings beyond vague axioms, such as “Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s, and unto God, what it God’s.” But they also needed to remain mindful of concrete facts and circumstances, to recognize their limits of their own expertise, and to avoid offering simple “Christian” answers to the complex problems of the world.⁴⁶

Beckmann approached the same set of problems from a more theological standpoint. Like Lades, he sought to chart a middle course between political activism and disengagement. Looking at the theological foundations of the church’s political activity, he argued:

The church is not a political entity, it has no political message. Its task is not politics, but the proclamation of God’s word. It must be strictly differentiated from the state, for the church is not of this world. But, the church does exist *for* the world. It can only fulfill its divine task, if it does not stay out of the world, but really lives in it and with it, bound to the world in genuine solidarity. . . . Therefore, the church cannot and may not withdraw from its God-imposed political responsibility.⁴⁷

The church’s political responsibility, he continued, was an outgrowth of its religious task. But these two duties were not identical. As the Barmen Declaration had

⁴⁶ Ibid., 391-94.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 395-96.

made clear, God had a claim on all aspects of life, including the political. But Protestants did not agree with the Catholic conception of Christian politics.

Christian politics is not politics in the name of God or in the name of Christianity or of the church, and also not politics according to Christian principles, according to the demands of the Sermon on the Mount, or the guidelines of natural law. Instead, it can only be rightly understood as the politics of Christians, who know their political thoughts and actions are subject to the consolations and demands of God in Jesus Christ, and who seek to obey God in this area.⁴⁸

The institutional church needed to clearly differentiate between its primary religious message and the secondary political convictions that might arise out of this message. The failure to do so would only distract from the church's true calling, with negative effects for both the church and the state. Instead, both church and state had their own roles. The state had no right to prevent the church from carrying out its religious and charitable duties. But the churches had no right to directly intervene in politics.⁴⁹

On the other hand, individual Christians had an obligation to take their beliefs seriously in the political realm. The only limits to this activity arose when their political activity brought them into direct contradiction with God's commands. On such occasions, when obedience to God and obedience to the political authorities came into conflict, their obedience to God had priority. Here Beckmann referred to Germany's own recent history: "When authority degenerates into tyranny, when it takes inhuman actions, the political responsibility of Christians in obedience to God, can even require them to take extraordinary action to remove the tyrants, as took place in the resistance movement

⁴⁸ Ibid., 397.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 400-403.

of 1944 against Hitler.” The church had no right to demand such actions, nor to forbid them. Instead, such decisions belonged to the conscience of each individual believer.⁵⁰

The main ideas of Lades and Beckmann were relatively uncontroversial, generating little argument in the discussion period that followed. As a few comments from audience members made clear, however, political divisions within the church were growing ever wider, and attempts to find some principled middle ground could come under attack from both the Right and the Left. Reflecting an extreme version of the church’s earlier Christian Democracy, one audience member argued against so much focus on the limits of Christian responsibility. He even argued that every audience member had a duty “to ensure that every politician, that everyone who has political influence, is a Christian.”⁵¹ On the other side of the spectrum, Johannes Rau, at the time a young SPD *Landtag* deputy from Duisburg, argued for a more activist form of Christian politics. While Beckmann believed every Christian had a duty to passively resist an unjust government, Rau contended that silence could also be a form of betrayal. Instead, Rau argued, the churches needed to take a more active and vocal role in promoting left-wing Christian politics.⁵²

For their second major theme, the leaders of the political workgroup chose the topic of political divisions within the church itself. In particular, they looked at the question of whether, and to what extent, Christians needed to agree in political matters. Addressing the fundamental question of the relationship between theological truth and political pluralism, they asked:

⁵⁰ Ibid., 403.

⁵¹ Ibid., 407.

⁵² Ibid., 408.

Whether differences of opinion could take place on different levels, so that there are some foundational questions, questions of life and death, for which no alternatives can be theologically considered. And on the other hand, whether there are secondary questions that even dogmatic Germans must acknowledge can be answered differently. With regard, then, to Catholic social-ethics or the earlier dogmatic position of the SPD, the political systems of the East, and even the naïve nationalism of the old Protestant church, it is necessary to separate the historically relative from matters of principle.⁵³

Yet the workgroup quickly returned to more comfortable territory, de-emphasizing pluralism in favor of a more personal moral focus, arguing that the fundamental problem was a matter of taking one's opponent seriously, "not just as the advocate of a position, but instead as a person." In order to ground these ideas in actual practice, the workgroup decided to invite the leading Social Democrat Fritz Erler, and Edo Osterloh, the CDU Culture Minister of Schleswig-Holstein, as speakers. By bringing together these political opponents, the workgroup hoped to demonstrate that opposition and conflict were not only "foundational presuppositions of a democratic system," but also the best guarantee that "the human being is still being taken seriously in politics."⁵⁴ This choice of speakers is itself significant. Erler was a major leader in the SPD, while Osterloh was a minor state official. The fact that no more prominent CDU official could be found to speak opposite Erler clearly demonstrates the growing distance between the CDU and the leaders of the Kirchentag.

In planning meetings for the Kirchentag, Erler played an important role in pushing for a more fundamental treatment of political pluralism, rather than a limited focus on personal morality. To Erler, there were two sets of fundamental problems that exacerbated political disagreements between Christians. First, as people who were

⁵³ Ibid., "Protokoll der Arbeitsgruppe 6 'Der Staat' der Sitzung am 12./13. Januar 1959 in Fulda," 12-13 January 1959, EZA 71/86/109B, 2.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 4.

strongly committed to the truth of their religious beliefs, Christians of all political stripes too easily carried this mindset over into their political opinions, turning political questions into matters of absolute truth and falsehood. Second, at least in Germany, Christians had adopted one-sided perspectives on issue of church-state relations. Until the time of the church struggle, during the Third Reich, German Protestants had hardly even differentiated between the church and state. But since the church struggle, some on the Protestant Left had adopted a completely opposite perspective, in which the state was seen as the enemy of the church. They needed to overcome these outmoded, black and white perspectives on the world of politics recognizing that disagreement was normal and healthy.

Any treatment of the themes of politics and political opposition must begin from the position that Christians can be political opponents. This belonging to different camps is a basic result of pluralist society and of freedom. The idea that one must always prevent conflict in political life and must try to find complete agreement misunderstands the basic requirements of a free state system.⁵⁵

Erler returned to this theme in his speech to the Kirchentag audience. Christians, he noted, often argued that unity and agreement were necessary in politics. But this idea was antithetical to the very nature of modern democracy. Democratic politics did not operate on the basis of consensus, but on the basis of “the struggle between opinions.” Naturally, unity was desirable when it came to the most important and fundamental questions of national life. But even then, this unity was not worth any price. In times of emergency or extreme crisis, all political parties might cooperate for the common good. But this was the exception rather than the rule. In normal politics, opposition played a vital role. The party of opposition had a duty to hold the majority accountable, and they

⁵⁵ Ulrich Scheuner, “Aufzeichnung über die Zusammenkunft einiger Mitglieder der Arbeitsgruppe 6 ‘Der Staat’ in Bonn am 29. Januar 1959,” 30 January 1959, EZA 71/86/109B.

had a responsibility to offer viable political alternatives. And in a country like Germany, with its rich and diverse religious tradition, it was only natural that Christians would gravitate toward different political parties.⁵⁶

This had not always been the case in the past. Before 1918, the Protestant churches in Germany had allied themselves with the authoritarian state. The churches had worked against any political groups that sought to challenge this power, identifying themselves with the political and social conservatives. But this had been bad for the churches, leading to alienation between the churches and the working class. Similar problems were possible in the present day as well. The differences between the present political parties in West Germany were not religious, but instead were centered on different concepts of social organization. When one political party declared itself Christian, rather than taking a more appropriate label such as conservative, it only confused the issue.⁵⁷

In the same way, it was dangerous for a political party to use religious arguments to generate support for its policies. Very few practical political disagreements were matters of religious principle. Instead, they rested on differences of judgment about concrete circumstances, the prioritization of goals, and the proper means to achieve them. “In the realm of politics,” he argued, “different solutions are always possible.” The danger was in confusing one’s personal opinions with religious obligations or dictates of conscience. “A well-founded opinion is still not a dictate of conscience,” he argued, “Opinions can be influenced and changed by arguments. Between different opinions there can be compromises. Conscience, by contrast, requires obedience, allowing no

⁵⁶ DEKT 1959, 410-11.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 412-13.

discussion or compromise.” Confusing these two led to unnecessary animosity and antagonism between political parties.⁵⁸

The real problem in politics, Erlar concluded, was not that Christians needed to “be nice to each other.” It was not that they needed to treat other Christians better. It was that they needed to behave as Christians towards others, toward non-Christians and political opponents. They also needed to recognize that conflict and disagreement were a normal part of politics. Christians were no longer called to simply submit to state authority; they had a duty to argue and dispute with the authorities. As Christians and citizens of a democratic state they were not beneath authority, they were part of it. They needed to recognize this fact, seeing government officials as flawed people like themselves.⁵⁹

Osterloh took a more conservative approach to the topic of political opposition, focusing primarily on the moral obligation to love one’s neighbor and its political implications. Yet, he too, came to the defense of pluralism within society and within the church. He began by arguing that Christians needed to act differently in politics than non-Christians, bearing witness to their faith even in the way they interacted with their enemies. In this respect, Christian Europe had failed to set an example for the world, as Christian nations had warred against each other in the two world wars. Now, however, they needed to serve as better witnesses of their faith, treating their opponents with

⁵⁸ Ibid., 413-14.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 415-16.

respect, not “seeing them as enemies to be fought with any available weapon up to the point of mutual annihilation.”⁶⁰

This did not mean that Christians should be politically passive and accommodating. If they lived within a society that denied them basic political rights, under a totalitarian regime like the Third Reich or the GDR, then political opposition could be a Christian duty. But it was important to recognize that this was not an attempt by Christians to seize power for themselves. Political opposition was only legitimate in the defense of basic rights and in the service of their fellow man. Even when fighting against a totalitarian state, Christians were to hold fast to their principles, loving their enemies and countering evil with good.⁶¹

In contrast to such circumstances, the political opposition between Christians within a democratic state like the Federal Republic seemed minor. Osterloh conceded that every party in the Bundestag had Christian and non-Christian members. The divisions between them were not matters of faith, but only differences of political conviction. These Christian politicians in all of the parties of the Federal Republic were bound together as Christians, whatever their political differences might be. They were required to see their opponents as fellow believers and fellow human beings, recognizing that their common bonds were more important than their disagreements. And Christians in every party were required to work together in the defense of individual self-worth, the freedom of conscience, factual political debate, and mutual respect. They needed to recognize that they themselves were sinners, and they needed to forgive the sins of their

⁶⁰ Ibid., 417.

⁶¹ Ibid., 418-19.

opponents. And they needed to respect the right of their opponents to engage in opposition to the government, and to criticize government policies.⁶²

But there was always the danger that Christians would instead use their faith as a form of self-justification, something that always confirmed the rightness of their own beliefs. They might lose the ability to distinguish between their own opinions and basic theological principles. This danger arose when politicians used theological arguments to defend their politics and when theologians engaged directly in political activity. It could lead them to substitute dogmatism for faithful obedience and to substitute the “unbearable certainty of the Pharisee” for the tolerance and respect that their faith required of them. This kind of conflict was destructive to both the church and to wider society.⁶³

These attitudes were especially destructive because there were many areas where Christians could come to legitimately different positions on the pressing political issues of the day. “Faith,” Osterloh argued, “does not lend us omniscience, and the bible contains no formula for individual political behavior. Until the last day, even we Christians must wrestle over the correct path, recognizing that we all can err, as long as we live.” The Catholic church might issue direct political instructions to its followers, but Protestants believed in the importance of individual conscience. It should hardly be surprising, then, that some would embrace pacifism, while others would be convinced the justness of arming themselves with nuclear weapons. The important thing was to prevent these differences of opinion from degenerating into personal hatred and defamation.

⁶² Ibid., 419-421.

⁶³ Ibid., 423.

Instead, Christian political opponents needed to strive to understand each other and to recognize their common responsibility in political life.⁶⁴

These ideas generated little controversy in the discussion period that followed. Most of the approximately 6000 listeners in attendance seem to have agreed with the basic premises of both speakers' presentations, recognizing that the complex political questions of modern society did not have simple, agreed upon religious answers. There was some debate about the legitimacy of the use of "Christian" in the name of the Christian Democratic Union. But most agreed that this name did not represent any exclusive claim to being the only party of Christians, referring instead to the party's historical development and foundational beliefs. Indeed, Erler turned this criticism on its head in a joking reference to the theological earnestness of the new SPD circle around Gustav Heinemann. Arguing that he opposed the idea of "Christian parties" even against those who sought to create one out of the SPD, he conceded to Osterloh that, despite the moralistic rhetoric of these Protestant socialists, "it is still alright for Christians to vote for the CDU."⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

While Protestants remained deeply politically divided in the late 1950s, it is obvious that several important changes were underway. Prominent Protestant conservatives, such as Eugen Gerstenmaier, continued to wield significant influence in the churches and in CDU politics. But the overall trend seems to have been marked by growing disillusionment with the CDU. Part of this was clearly a response to the CDU's

⁶⁴ Ibid., 422-25.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 426-28.

aggressive rearmament and Cold War politics, especially as these politics became more extreme and uncompromising. Arguments, for example, that West Germany needed to have some form of military defense in place seem to have resonated with a large number of Protestants, many of whom could not go along fully with the extreme pacifist and neutralist implications of Heinemann's political views. Seeking to acquire nuclear arms for the Federal Republic was a far different, and far more aggressive measure. It was bound to generate far greater levels of resistance, even among those who supported NATO and the *Bundeswehr*. By the late 1950s, as the prospects for German reunification became more distant, both the neutralist rhetoric of the Protestant Left and the aggressive Cold War rhetoric of the CDU seemed outdated. More and more people were looking for practical ways to coexist, rather than hoping for major political triumphs. In the midst of these changing priorities, the moderately conservative and liberal Protestants who dominated the Kirchentag political workgroup, found themselves drawn into dialogue with the more "realistic" foreign policy thinkers of the SPD and FDP.

As they began to distance themselves more from the politics of the CDU, they were forced to confront a second set of questions about the fundamental nature of Christian politics. German Protestants had always had some misgivings about the predominantly Catholic character of the CDU. Even prominent CDU politicians from the Protestant churches had questioned the direct role that the Catholic church sometimes played in electoral politics. These misgivings seem to have grown over the course of the late 1950s. Rather than remaining in the shadow of this form of Christian politics, West German Protestants in the late 1950s began to more vocally advocate their own Protestant alternatives. These alternatives emphasized the political freedom of the individual

Christian, the importance of following one's own conscience, and the dangers of "clericalized politics" and "politicized theology." This newer, more individualistic conception of Christian politics did not lead, in itself, to any immediate break with the CDU and CSU. Many of those who criticized the extremes of clerical politics remained loyal members of these parties. But these new ways of thinking lent themselves just as well, if not better, to the political philosophies of the FDP and SPD, especially after the SPD officially abandoned Marxism in the Bad Godesberg program of 1959. Many of these new ideas were very basic. Their acceptance did not have immediately far-reaching effects. But, by creating a solid foundation for political pluralism within the Protestant church, they paved the way for more dramatic political developments in the future.

CHAPTER 7

CONFRONTING THE PAST

On the morning of August 13, 1959 a bus full of church leaders departed the Munich Kirchentag for the Dachau concentration camp outside of the city. Upon their arrival, they met with a small delegation from the local Protestant congregation and proceeded to the location of the camp's crematorium. Ernst Wilm, the president of the Church of Westphalia, and a Protestant minister formerly imprisoned in the camp, spoke a few words on the significance of the site. Georg Schniewind, the Kirchentag vice president, read a passage from the book of Daniel. Then, accompanied by hymns, Heinrich Troeger, the vice president of the *Bundesbank*, laid a wreath emblazoned with the motto "You are my witnesses." Although the ceremony seems to have focused primarily on the witness of Protestant ministers who had perished in the camp, there is no question that the fate of Jewish Holocaust victims was also on the participants' minds. That evening, in their largest meeting hall, the Kirchentag held a special gathering on the topic of "Israel," discussing German and Christian anti-Semitism, guilt for the Holocaust, and the question of Jewish-Christian relations.¹

This was an important turning point for German Protestantism. It was not the first time that these topics had been addressed at a Kirchentag, but never before had they been discussed so explicitly and so boldly. Never before had these questions been the sole

¹ "Gedenkstunde in Dachau" 13 August 1959, *Kirchentagszeitung*, Aufgabe B, EZA 71/86/138; Circular Letter from Heinrich Giesen, 8 August 1959, EZA 71/86/138; DEKT 1959, 705-19.

focus of such a large meeting, attracting several thousand listeners and filling the Kirchentag's largest meeting hall. Until 1959, such explicit and concrete discussions of German guilt and Jewish-Christian relations had been limited to the small concurrent meetings of the German Protestant Committee for Service to Israel. These meetings had rarely attracted more than a few hundred participants and had often been much smaller. When questions of German guilt had been raised in the Kirchentag's larger meetings, the emphasis had never been this direct and concrete. Instead, the crimes of the Nazis had been subsumed under theological categories, treated as a prime example of human sinfulness, of every person's need for God. Or they had been used for political ends by anti-rearmament campaigners who equated true repentance with their own political goals. After the 1959 Kirchentag, by contrast, these discussions were much more explicit and their tone was more self-critical. The actions of the churches—even the Confessing Church—were not fully exonerated. The Christian roots of German anti-Semitism were not dismissed, but carefully scrutinized. And, amid ever-growing controversy, traditional theological teachings about Judaism became matters of heated debate.

It is not that German Protestants had been previously unaware of their guilt for the Holocaust and the other crimes of the Nazis. The Kirchentag had not been a site of collective amnesia. In fact, German guilt had come up in countless different contexts in the previous ten years of the Kirchentag's existence. But, until the late 1950s and early 1960s, the vast majority of German Protestants had managed to keep this knowledge separate from their self-image and group identity. It was a form of passive knowledge that posed no direct challenge to their beliefs, attitudes, or ways of thinking. With the Kirchentag meeting of 1959, and the activities of the Jewish-Christian workgroup that

emerged out of this gathering, all of this changed. German guilt, anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust became fundamental questions for German Protestant identity. Thereafter, these questions could no longer be ignored.

THE TURNING POINT

In the late 1950s, German Protestants became more interested in the questions of German guilt, restitution, and Jewish-Christian relations. But until the Kirchentag of 1959, this growing interest found little expression in the Kirchentag program. Adolf Freudenberg's German Protestant Committee for Service to Israel sponsored gatherings of interested individuals during most Kirchentag meetings, but these sessions normally attracted very small crowds. In 1954, at a Kirchentag with 60,000 fully-registered guests, for example, the committee only requested a meeting room that would be large enough to accommodate an audience of fifty.² There were several signs, however, that interest was growing. For their next meeting in 1956, the same committee requested a substantially larger hall, large enough to accommodate 500 people. And, in a programmatic speech to the Workgroup Leadership Committee in 1955, Hans Hermann Walz, the new Kirchentag General Secretary, singled out the issue of "restitution" as an important area for future discussion, something that the Kirchentag had neglected at previous gatherings.³ Yet these new impulses ran up against a large degree of institutional inertia. While few Protestant leaders were willing to directly oppose these endeavors, many saw them as a

² "Kirchentag Leipzig 1954. Sondertreffen," EZA 71/86/130.

³ Hans Hermann Walz, "Die Aufgaben der Arbeitsgruppen," 28 March 1955, EZA 71/86/23.

low priority. And few of their advocates were willing to devote the energy needed to overcome this passive resistance.⁴

The initial impetus for a more direct engagement with the legacy of Nazism came from Klaus von Bismarck, a leading member of the Kirchentag Präsidium. In an October 1958 letter to Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff, and in a meeting the following month with Heinrich Giesen, Bismarck explained his plans. In 1959 the Kirchentag would hold its first meeting in Munich, the “capitol of the Nazi movement.” And this presented an important opportunity to officially acknowledge the Nazi past. At Bismarck’s urging, Giesen agreed to create a small committee to consider how to integrate this theme into the existing Kirchentag plans. And the Kirchentag leadership also began to consider Bismarck’s suggestion that the Kirchentag hold a collection for some kind of memorial at the Dachau Concentration camp, possibly for the construction of an ecumenical study center.⁵

While the immediate reaction to Bismarck’s suggestions was underwhelming—Giesen explained that the Kirchentag staff had initially misunderstood his plans—the idea of looking more closely at the Nazi past began to gather support.⁶ At the next meeting of the Kirchentag Präsidium, committee members enthusiastically embraced the idea of taking up a collection to commemorate the holocaust. But they disagreed about how to best spend this money. In keeping with Bismarck’s original idea, many members wanted to fund the creation of a memorial of some kind: a sculpture, a church, an ecumenical

⁴ Gabrielle Kammerer, *In die Haare, in die Arme. 40 Jahre Arbeitsgemeinschaft “Juden und Christen” beim Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentag* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, Gütersloher Verlag Haus, 2001), 13-14.

⁵ Heinrich Giesen, “Aktenvermerk. Besuch von Bismarck am 5.11.1958 in Fulda,” 6 November 1958, EZA 71/86/138.

⁶ *Ibid.*

study center, or even a youth hostel specifically open to “all races.” Others hoped to support the Jewish community more directly, proposing financial aid for Jews in Germany or abroad, and even a collection to aid the construction of a German synagogue.⁷

Präsidium members also began to make plans for an assembly to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust, asking first Albert Schweitzer and then Martin Buber to give the keynote address. The self-critical theme of this gathering was already taking shape in Thadden’s letter of invitation to Buber:

In the coming August, there in the German south, it will be a matter of calling our church and our people with a new seriousness to be aware of the injustice and violence inflicted twenty years before on innocent people, many of whom were especially loyal and valuable citizens of our state, and who we horribly annihilated. This all belongs to the problem of the “unmastered past” that weighs heavily upon us. Only through God’s forgiveness can this be taken away and transformed by a younger generation.⁸

Thadden went on to discuss the importance of combating neo-Nazism among German youth and reeducating the Germans so that such crimes could never be repeated.

Unfortunately, for reasons of health, neither Schweitzer nor Buber were able to attend the Kirchentag. Unable to think of another speaker who could equal the stature of these men, the Kirchentag leadership scaled back their plans. In consultation with Protestant victims of the Nazis, such as Ernst Wilm, the president of the Westphalian Landeskirche who had spent several years as a prisoner in Dachau, they began to assemble a somewhat less dramatic program. Eventually, they settled on a small wreath-laying ceremony for the morning of August 13, and an evening gathering the same day where a handful of Protestant speakers would address the problems of anti-Semitism and

⁷ Heinrich Giesen, “Aktenvermerk. Betr. Dachau,” 11 November 1958, EZA 71/86.138.

⁸ RvTT to Martin Buber, 20 February 1959, EZA 71/86/138.

Jewish-Christian relations. Heinrich Troeger, the vice president of the *Bundesbank* would open the gathering. He would be followed by the theologians Walther Zimmerli and Helmut Gollwitzer, both of whom had recently returned from trips to Israel and would report on their trips.⁹

Unlike previous gatherings on this sort, the 1959 “Israel Evening” was heavily promoted by the Kirchentag leadership. Although it was forced to compete for attention with another evening session, featuring Hanns Lilje the bishop of Hanover, Kirchentag officials were clear that this was to be the evening’s main event.¹⁰ The Kirchentag leadership, at least indirectly, also promoted these themes as a major emphasis of the 1959 gathering. In the Kirchentag’s press reception, for example, Thadden spoke on the importance of confronting the German past. In his comments, he made it clear that the catastrophic nature of recent German history was not some kind of accident. Instead, the rise of the Third Reich, German defeat, and national division were the results of Germans’ own failures to properly deal with the social and national challenges of the nineteenth century. After laying out some of this history, he turned to the failures of all German people:

These things belong to a debt of guilt that does not pertain only to us. Nevertheless, we who make up the older generation must not ignore them. In the state, and in the same way in the church, we have too long submitted to authoritarian rule. We have been unused to taking responsibility, often uncertain in the measures we have taken, all too accustomed to patiently acquiescing to the willful acts of the bureaucratic authorities, and all too immature in making personal decisions. It is high time, that we leave behind this passivity, growing into a capacity for cooperation for the good of our entire society.¹¹

⁹ See Giesen to Wilm, 3 February 1959, Wilm to Giesen, 2 March 1959, Giesen to Otto Küster, 12 March 1959, and Otto Küster to Giesen, 20 March 1959, EZA 71/86/138; see also Kammerer, *In die Haare*, 15.

¹⁰ Fridelbert Lorenz, Vermerk, 21 May 1959, EZA 71/86/138.

¹¹ DEKT 1959, 21.

Here Thadden adopted a pragmatic and forward-looking tone, calling attention to German guilt, but avoiding direct confrontation with the worst of the Nazi atrocities. In the evening gathering on Israel, the errors of the past were confronted much more directly.

Speaking on behalf of the Präsidium, Heinrich Troeger opened the gathering with some personal reflections on the importance of the evening's topic. "Who among us in this hall," he asked, "can avoid constantly wrestling with this theme 'We Germans and the Jews,' after the dreadful experiences of the past decades." However, he continued, the Kirchentag needed to look at more than just the guilt of the German nation. The Christian churches, too, had been responsible for promoting dangerous and mistaken beliefs about the Jews. And German Protestants had a responsibility to confront this legacy as well. Here Troeger confessed his own past confusion and the errors of his ways. In his confirmation classes and in the sermons of his childhood minister, he had been indoctrinated with two ideas that had driven a wedge between him and his Jewish fellow students. The first was the false teaching that the Jews were solely responsible for Christ's suffering upon the cross. The second was the mistaken belief that Christianity was the only religion that promoted the love of one's neighbor, while Jews believed only in God's justice. It had taken him years, Troeger confessed, to see that all people—and not just the Jews—bore responsibility for Christ's death on the cross. And only recently had he come to see that Christian ideas of love were already foreshadowed in the books of Moses. Moreover, despite their prideful claims to be the only religion of love, Christians had utterly failed to express this love in their relations with the Jews. Drawing

attention to this contradiction, Troeger concluded: “What, I ask, is the value of the love of one’s neighbor, if it does not lead at minimum to tolerance between all people?”¹²

The Göttingen Old Testament scholar Walther Zimmerli opened the next speech with a basic question. The motto of the 1959 Kirchentag was “You will be my People,” words that God had originally spoken not to the church but to the Jews. How then, could the church think about the meaning of these words without also considering their own recent treatment of God’s chosen people? “Here in the territory of our Christian West,” he reminded his listeners, “we have experienced a storm of hatred and an outpouring of inhumanity toward the Jews that no one would have earlier thought possible.” Even before the World Wars, the Poles and Russians had carried out pogroms against the Jews. The French had persecuted them in the Dreyfus affair. And anti-Semitism had spread and grown throughout all of Europe. In Germany, “the land of the Reformation,” this hatred and anti-Semitism—promoted even in the churches—had culminated in the unthinkable. The Nazis had only taken the legacy of Christian and European anti-Semitism to its logical conclusion in their attempt to work out a “Final Solution” to the “Jewish question.” The results had been calculated mass murder. Yet these efforts to annihilate the Jews had failed. In the creation of the modern nation of Israel, God had saved a remnant of his people.¹³

Zimmerli had visited Israel the previous autumn and he described to his audience the experiences of his trip. Drawing on his encounters with Israel’s Jews, he painted a portrait of a vibrant people passionately committed to their religious tradition. The Judaism he had seen did not line up with common Christian portrayals of a dry and

¹² Ibid., 705-706.

¹³ Ibid., 707.

formal faith. It was not dead, but very much alive. In fact, Christians could learn much from the Jews' passion for God and for the Torah. And even political Zionism, he asserted, could serve as a model for the Christian West. In the community life of the Kibbutzim, for example, Zimmerli saw a model of faith-inspired sacrifice and community spirit. In their daily lives, these Jewish settlers were joyously living out their faith in way that Christians would do well to imitate.¹⁴

How, then, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, should Christians interact with these people of living and vibrant faith? Zimmerli proposed several answers to this question. First, although Christians had often been stubbornly blind to this fact, the first half of the bible consisted of the Hebrew Scriptures. As a result, Christians were bound to Jews as fellow recipients of the word of God. The Jews had been the first to receive this word and had carried for many years before the Christians came along. This fact should impel Christians toward humility, especially when it came to their own place in God's plan. Second, Christians needed to recognize that their own savior, Jesus of Nazareth, was a Jew. The salvation Jesus offered was for all peoples, including his own. Third, since Jesus death had been for the sins of all people, it was not the Jews that had killed him, but the actions of every human being. It was a scandal that Christians had turned this doctrine on its head, using Jesus' death as an excuse to persecute the Jews. Good Friday was a time to look at one's own sins, not the sins of others. And Easter was a celebration of forgiveness and reconciliation, two attitudes conspicuously lacking in the church's teaching about the Jews and in its dealings with them. When Christians approached the Jews with the message of Jesus death and resurrection—and Zimmerli believed that this was necessary—they needed to do so in a spirit of humility, recognizing their own

¹⁴ Ibid., 708-710.

failings. And they needed to do so with a willingness to let their own beliefs be changed and transformed by the encounter.¹⁵

Following up on this idea, the Berlin theologian Helmut Gollwitzer began the next presentation with another basic question. Would Christians recognize the debt that they owed to the Jews as God's chosen people, people for whom Christ died, and to whom gentile believers owed their own knowledge of Christ, their very salvation?

Or will this all be turned into misunderstandings and misuse, in which this message is turned into a means of self-exaltation and self-assertion, reaching its pinnacle when the Jews in your midst are treated with rejection, instead of solidarity, contempt instead of respect, not with a testament of the love of Christ, but arrogantly trampled underfoot with malevolent hatred?

Throughout history, Gollwitzer argued, Jews had been demonized in Christian teachings. Even Luther, who had himself later turned to "evil, unjustifiable" attacks on the Jews, had recognized these injustices in his earlier years. And, as a result of these attacks, Christians had transformed the cross from a symbol of reconciliation into a symbol of persecution; they had made the name of Jesus into a curse.¹⁶

This was why, as Gollwitzer argued, the "Jewish question" was really the "Christian question." "If there is not a fundamental change within the Christian churches," he argued, "then our people will also never change." The racial anti-Semitism that had led to the Nazi persecution of the Jews had its origins in the ideas and teachings of the Christian churches. And this guilt was not removed by the fact that the Nazis had later used these teachings to attack the churches as well. Nevertheless, this experience had taught the churches an important lesson: Christianity and Judaism were inseparably

¹⁵ Ibid., 710-13.

¹⁶ Ibid., 713-14.

bound together. If one attempted to purge Christianity of Judaism, one lost the entirety of Christianity as well.¹⁷

The fact that anti-Semitism had progressed so far in Germany had implications for the German people as well. Prejudice against the Jews was deeply rooted in the German consciousness. Indeed, Gollwitzer asserted, it was so deeply rooted that “good will is not enough to free many of us from it.” But Germans had two means of confronting these prejudices. The first was to see in their own history how dangerous these prejudices could be, to recognize them as the seeds of murder and inhumanity. The second was to look at the present-day state of Israel in order to see the falseness and stupidity of these beliefs. Many Germans were still bound by well-worn prejudices about the Jews, that they were “different” than the Germans, that they only craved money, that they were a people without honor and the other German virtues. Yet the existence and growth of the state of Israel demonstrated the error of these beliefs. Few nations could boast of people so willing to devote themselves to such hard work, so community-minded, so willing to forgive others who had wronged them. Seeing the danger and the falsehood of their prejudice, Germans needed first to reorder their thinking about the Jews. Second, they needed to put their new understanding into practice, praying for the Jews and offering help in their struggles. There were many different areas where Germans could contribute to the well being of Jews in Israel, in Germany itself, or in exile from Germany, living elsewhere in the world. But only in such concrete actions of repentance, could Christians and Germans show their true remorse, and their true character.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid., 715.

¹⁸ Ibid., 715-719.

Although it received less press coverage than its planners had hoped, this gathering created quite a stir. Both the Kirchentag leadership and the speakers themselves were inundated with letters praising the meeting as an important step in the right direction.¹⁹ Meeting with Gollwitzer immediately following the evening session, several participants even began to discuss plans for possible future gatherings. Several months later, further encouraged by letters of support, Gollwitzer wrote to Heinrich Giesen to communicate these plans. “The attendance that evening,” he argued, “and the strong echo it has generated (which can also be seen in many of the letters that participants have sent to you), shows how much resonance these ideas have found. In our opinion, it also obligates the Kirchentag leadership to devote special attention to these matters, not to let them drop again.” He continued by relating his plans to create a special committee—outside of the structure of the institutional church—to continue the discussion of these issues, possibly as a new permanent workgroup at the Kirchentag.²⁰ These plans would eventually lead to the formation of special, semi-autonomous Kirchentag workgroup. But the Kirchentag leadership also had their own plans for further pursuing these questions and themes.

THE “GERMAN CATASTROPHE”

When the Kirchentag leadership met in early 1960 to determine the program for their next major gathering, they returned to the question of the German past and its implications for the future. The desire to look anew at German guilt did not just come from the group around Gollwitzer, which focused on the problematic area of Jewish-

¹⁹ Many of these letters are collected in the folder “Dachau, Israel Abend,” EZA 71/86/138.

²⁰ Helmut Gollwitzer to Heinrich Giesen, 15 October 1959, EZA 71.86/302.

Christian relations. It was expressed in some form or other by a broad spectrum of the Kirchentag leadership. Some of the interest in this question was theological—how to make sense of recent German history in the light of Christian teachings about human guilt and forgiveness in Christ. But this exclusively theological treatment of the German past was no longer enough to satisfy many Protestant leaders. When the leaders of the various church and theological workgroups met in January 1960, they discussed the possibility of devoting one theological workgroup entirely to the topic “History-Fate.” There was substantial agreement among the workgroup leadership that this was an important and necessary topic that would fill a gaping vacuum in German Protestant thought. But there were some disagreements about how controversial topics such as the German past should be addressed. Some workgroup members such as the theologian Hans Böhm clearly saw this workgroup as a way to help German Protestants understand the rise of Nazism, German guilt, and defeat through the lens of Christian teachings about the incarnation of Jesus and the unfolding of “salvation history.” Others, such as Klaus von Bismarck, argued that these theological discussions needed to be accompanied by a more concrete consideration of problems and solutions. Among these concrete questions, Bismarck hoped to address broad topics such as “*Volk* and Destiny” and “Israel and the Jewish Question.” Both Böhm and Bismarck agreed, however, that this discussion could not be limited to the past, but also needed to look at the future implications of recent German history.²¹

In a preliminary discussion of the Kirchentag’s major themes in March 1960, discussions of this theme remained rather vague and impersonal. Rather than looking

²¹ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Bericht über die Sitzung von Vorsitzenden und Angehörigen der AGL 1-3,” 3 February 1960, EZA 71/86/119.

specifically at German crimes or German guilt, the emphasis was on “powers, their manifestation as historical forces, and the question of our future political, economic, and personal existence.”²² Over the next several months, however, Kirchentag planners moved steadily away from this abstract, theological approach to the German past, laying the groundwork for a much more concrete and grounded historical discussion. In the words of Friedelbert Lorenz, this workgroup would begin by “firmly and soberly explaining why all of this has happened to us, from the standpoints of secular history and theology.” Only after this careful and factual historical assessment, would it turn to the theological and political implications of these events for the German present and for the future.²³ In order to ensure a grounded historical discussion, the Kirchentag leadership decided to invite an academic historian to deliver the first speech of the workgroup, eventually settling on Helmut Krausnick, the director of the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich. They also considered inviting a Marxist historian from the GDR to offer another perspective on the course of recent German history, but ultimately decided against this.²⁴

Krausnick’s historical presentation, titled “Our way into the Catastrophe of 1945 – Explanation and Reflection Today” had two main goals. First, it was intended to address the tension between factual historical explanations of the German past and highly

²² Klaus Lefringhausen, “Protikollnotiz über die Zusammenkunft am 2.3.1960,” EZA 71/86/119.

²³ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Zu Thematik und Struktur des Kirchentages 1961 in Berlin,” 7 April 1960, EZA 71/86/120, 3; Lorenz, “Betr. Thematik und Struktur der Arbeitsgruppen 1961,” 31 May 1960, EZA 71/86/120, 2.

²⁴ Lorenz, Memo for RvTT and Hans Dombois, 27 June 1960, EZA 71/86/116; the idea of including a Marxist historian was proposed by Franz Reinhold Hildebrandt and supported by Lothar Kreyssig and Erich Müller-Gangloff. Müller-Gangloff also volunteered to represent this viewpoint himself, if no one else could be found.

charged and politicized contemporary discussions.²⁵ By presenting the Kirchentag audience with basic information about historical developments in Germany that had led to the rise of Nazism and the “catastrophe” of 1945, it was intended to create a common framework for further discussion. Workgroup planners were particularly concerned to overcome the generational division in understandings of the past, explaining for the youth how the rise of Nazism had been possible, while, at the same time, forcing the older generations to confront their own mistakes and errors. As such, it was also intended to advance the discussion beyond various one-sided, political, or self-exculpatory explanations. As workgroup member Lothar Albertin summarized: “For us, this is part of the necessary imperative to offer an account. It is not limited by generational boundaries and must not be falsified through hopes of untimely domestic- or foreign-political gain.”²⁶

The second major goal of Krausnick’s presentation was to force the Kirchentag audience to really confront their own guilt and culpability for these developments, setting the stage for a discussion of how to overcome the same tendencies in postwar German society. As Ulrich Scheuner argued in one planning meeting, this presentation needed to do more than just state “the facts.” “Even more,” he argued, “it is necessary that the presentation does not just show how National Socialism came about, but also considers what tendencies are still virulent in Germany today, making totalitarian movements possible.” To this end, working with Krausnick, the workgroup attempted to identify the various places in recent history where Germany had gone wrong, focusing especially on

²⁵ See comments by Friedelbert Lorenz in Lothar Albertin, “Bericht über die Sitzung der Arbeitsgruppenleitung 3/Politik,” 17 October 1960, EZA 71/86/116, 3.

²⁶ Lothar Albertin, “Bericht über die Sitzung der Arbeitsgruppenleitung 3 / Politik, 2/2-3/1961,” EZA 71/86/116, 1.

intellectual developments and flaws in the German character. In his comments during the workgroup's planning meetings, Thadden clarified the importance of this task: "In the conclusions drawn from this illumination of our recent past, the turning points cannot be laid out too radically. In many areas of social life, for example in the *Bundeswehr*, there are still patriarchal concepts of order. The Kirchentag has always concerned itself with the maturity of the congregations; it needs to promote political maturity with the same stridency."²⁷

At the Kirchentag gathering itself, Krausnick began his presentation by calling on his audience to recognize the importance of examining their recent past, however uncomfortable this might be.

Sixteen years separate us today from a catastrophe that is entirely unique in the history of our people, a history already replete with low points. While many still try to evade the facts of this catastrophe and the reality of its causes and consequences, in a questionable attempt at the normalization of German life and thought, we are all affected by them on a fundamental level. Our entire people remains in their shadow, and the borders that divide its living body are only the most visible expression of this.

After sixteen years, he continued, it was time to begin to look into the causes of this catastrophe, and to look for its lessons.²⁸ Krausnick went on to warn his audience against attempts to distance themselves from this past. For the older generation, he argued, there was simply no way to avoid a consideration of personal responsibility and guilt. But even the younger generations would not be able to escape the burden of the German past simply on account of their age. They, too, needed to consider the burdens of history that continued to weigh upon their lives. Krausnick also warned against the tendency to

²⁷ Lothar Albertin, "Bericht über die Sitzung der Arbeitsgruppenleitung 3 / Politik," 17 October 1960, EZA 71/86/116, 2-3.

²⁸ DEKT 1961, 218.

politicize this history, to reduce historical explanation to the service of one-sided political goals. “It is not a matter,” he argued, “of propaganda and defense against the outside, but of order and clarity in one’s own house.”²⁹

In the body of his presentation, Krausnick went on to painstakingly lay out the dangerous intellectual and moral failings that had paved the way for National Socialism. The course of German history, he argued, had not been set on some pre-ordained path that led directly from Luther to Frederick the Great to Hitler. All along the way, there had been choices. And all along the way, there had been mistakes and failures. Already in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Germans had embraced a form of romantic thought that rejected French and British notions of rationality and natural law. In place of this, they had emphasized the importance of the embeddedness of the individual in organic historical processes of development. And above the individual, in the same hierarchical system, they had placed the state, making it the embodiment of all human values. Still, Krausnick clarified, those foreign historians who drew a direct line from philosophical idealism to Nazism were mistaken, for these earlier German thinkers still held on to the ideal of an all-European community of peoples.³⁰

It was only after the disappointment of the 1848 revolution that this romanticism was transformed into the “realism” of Otto von Bismarck. The “iron chancellor” had united Germany creating the basis for a more particular form of national politics. But Krausnick was quick to defend Bismarck against other historians’ charges of foreign policy cynicism and cold political calculation. He argued that Bismarck had not been “the apostle of iron and blood.” Instead, in contrast to later German leaders, he had

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 219-20.

realized that power was not enough for a successful foreign policy. His policies had also taken into account the feelings and interests of Germany's neighbors, and the careful balance of power in Europe. Krausnick argued that it was only later that disciples of Bismarck, such as the Prussian historian Heinrich von Treitschke, had transformed the chancellor's realism into a form of political cynicism, where power was all that mattered and might made right.³¹

At the same time as these political and intellectual developments, Europe was undergoing dramatic social and economic changes. Among their many consequences, these developments led to a weakening of the Christian churches and a weakening of Christian moral teachings. In Western Europe, this loss of Christian morality was offset by the rise of humanistic ideals. But in Germany, traditional Christian morality was supplanted by much more sinister ways of thinking. In Germany, Darwin's theory of evolution devolved into an extreme form of social Darwinism, where nations and peoples were seen as locked in a violent struggle for survival. Already in the 1890s, social Darwinist theorists in Germany were arguing that stronger races had the right to annihilate the weaker. This was the intellectual environment into which Hitler was born, these were the ideas that had nurtured his worldview. Among the more respectable middle classes, this crude Darwinism had not yet taken hold. But these groups were infected with their own form of dangerous nationalism. This was not the relatively benign national sentiment of the romantics, but a new ideal that made much more absolute claims upon the individual. Already in the early years of the German Empire this nationalism was directed against "outsider" groups such as Catholics and Socialists. Later it was directed against national minorities such as the Poles. These ideas combined

³¹ Ibid., 220-21.

with the crude social Darwinism in the development of a new racial form of anti-Semitism. Although these dangerous ideas were not yet respectable, they were growing more popular as they were promoted by groups such as the Pan German League.³²

At the same time, Germany began to engage in a new, reckless form of foreign policy, based not on Bismarck's realism, but on illusions of world power. Ignoring the attitudes of other European nations and the delicate balance of European power, they soon found themselves isolated and surrounded, caught in an unwinnable two-front war. Krausnick conceded that many Germans had supported this war out of legitimate patriotic motives, such as self-defense. But, as the war went on, they had embraced shortsighted nationalism, demanding radical and unrealizable concessions from their enemies. When they realized the war was lost, the military general staff cynically manipulated German politics to place the blame for defeat on the civilian politicians. This laid the groundwork for the later myth that the German armies had not lost the war, but had been betrayed by the politicians at home.³³

Germany's defeat in the First World War was followed by the November Revolution that created the democratic Weimar Republic. But this republic never enjoyed the loyalty or support of its citizens. Democracy was seen as a foreign imposition of Germany and its supporters were never able to really change this perception. Here Krausnick singled out the Protestant churches for criticism, arguing that they were so used to serving the interests of the traditional rulers that they could not even conceive of any existence apart from the bounds of traditional authoritarianism. They had rejected democracy because they associated democratic ideals with the atheism of the

³² Ibid., 221-225.

³³ Ibid., 222, 225-27.

French Revolution and of militant Marxist organizations. And they had refused to accept the reality of Germany's military defeat, because they had too closely come to identify themselves with the interests of the nation.³⁴

The Weimar Republic had also been crippled by the actions of other groups. Old army officers gravitated to the parties of the radical Right. Even many social democrats found it difficult to give the new state their full support. And the provisions of the Versailles Peace Treaty, especially as enforced by the French, made it difficult for the republic to achieve any kind of social stability. As various right-wing groups openly worked to undermine the state, the army remained completely neutral. And even when the situation stabilized somewhat, the anti-democratic forces made considerable political gains. With the onset of the worldwide financial crisis that began in 1929, the parliamentary system in Germany finally broke down. After the failed efforts of Chancellors Brüning, Papen, and Schleicher to restore order, the members of Germany's respectable conservative parties threw in their lot with Hitler.³⁵

Hitler set about consolidating his power, aided by the naiveté of many Germans, including many in the churches, who refused to heed the warnings of people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Although Hitler's aims seemed more moderate at first, his actions were driven by a crudely social-Darwinistic worldview, founded on militant anti-Semitism and radical territorial expansion. Within Germany, Hitler set up a system of domestic terror. And he began to put his racial ideas into practice with the "euthanasia" program and the persecution of Germany's Jews. In the foreign policy arena, his insatiable expansionism

³⁴Ibid., 227-28.

³⁵ Ibid., 228-333.

led to outbreak of the Second World War. And, in this war, his two major aims came together in the mass murder of Poles and the deportation and murder of Europe's Jews.³⁶

Yet these actions, Krausnick insisted, could not be blamed solely on Hitler and the Nazis. The German people could have resisted Hitler, but they rarely did so. Only late in the war did conservative and military circles finally attempt to overthrow Hitler's regime, and their plans did not succeed. Krausnick went out of his way to defend the actions of the July 1944 plotters. These men had not been traitors, but true patriots. They had been the only ones who had sought to defend Germany against the menace of the Nazis, and in their actions they demonstrated that Germans were capable of better.³⁷

Krausnick's speech was followed by an unusually lively question and answer period. Addressing audience questions, Krausnick expanded on several aspects of his presentation, further examining the weaknesses of Weimar democracy, the warning signs that Germans had failed to heed with regard to the Nazi party, and the various myths that had underpinned extreme German nationalism. He also elaborated on the economic factors that had led to Weimar's collapse, the role of the Center and liberal parties in Hitler's rise to power, and the failed opportunity to create a democratic monarchy in Weimar. He also responded to several questions that were more defensive in tone: didn't the Nazis do any good for anyone? To what extent was the Versailles settlement to blame for the eventual rise of Nazism? Hadn't the Western powers also contributed to the collapse of the Weimar system? Alongside Krausnick, other members of the workgroup leadership also addressed a variety of audience questions. Hans Dombois considered the responsibility of the Protestant churches for the rise of Nazism, examined

³⁶ Ibid., 234-236.

³⁷ Ibid., 236-39.

different theological conceptions of guilt, and summarized present-day church teachings with regard to democracy. Lothar Albertin considered the question of whether the older generation would ever be able to fully re-order its thinking away from the dangerous ideas of the past. And Johannes Rau, then an SPD member of the North Rhine-Westphalian Landtag, elaborated on the perspectives of the youth toward the German past and on parallels between Nazism and political developments in West Germany. The CSU politician Roland-Friedrich Messner looked at the relationship between Christian morality and politics, confronting the question of whether Bismarck could be seen as a Christian politician. And, finally, Ephorus Wätzel offered a theological defense for the actions of the July 20, 1944 plotters, looking more closely at the theological significance of their actions.³⁸

The workgroup's second presentation—titled “Our Way into the Future – Guilt and Opportunities”—focused on the political and theological implications of this history. The original plans for this session called for speeches by the SPD politician Adolf Arndt on the political aspects of this question, and by Martin Niemöller on its theological dimensions. These plans ran into difficulties when the CDU Bundestag deputy Elisabeth Schwarzhaupt, one of the workgroup's more conservative members, argued that this lineup was too politically one-sided. Given the Kirchentag leadership's always unstable relationship with Niemöller, it was decided that it was unwise to withdraw his invitation. As a result, Arndt was dropped from the program and Niemöller was given full responsibility for the topic.³⁹

³⁸ Ibid., 240-52.

³⁹ Lorenz, “Vermerk. Betr. AGL3/Politik,” 30 September 1960, EZA 71/86/116; Lorenz, “Vermerk. Betr. AGL 3/Politik,” 14 October 1960, EZA 71/86/116.

Niemöller's draft for this speech focused on the lordship of Christ over all areas of life and the limitations this placed on the allegiance of the Christian to the state. It also attacked the desire of many Germans to minimize their own guilt and argued that only by accepting and learning the lessons of the past could German Christians move forward into the future. Finally, it emphasized the idea that German guilt could only be overcome by embracing solidarity with other nations and races. This, Niemöller argued, had implications for the Cold War, but also for role that European nations played in helping to advance Third World development.⁴⁰

Workgroup members were generally supportive of these ideas, but several disagreements arose in the particulars. Johannes Rau, for example, wanted to make it clear that no future actions could remove the guilt of the German past. The work that Niemöller called for, for reconciliation "between the different generations in Germany, within the church, between the church and the people, and in the ecumenical world" was an appropriate response to the lessons of the German past, but it would not make the past go away. Others such as Hans Dombois and Erich Müller-Gangloff wanted Niemöller to broaden his focus to look at guilt and forgiveness for German society as a whole. But Niemöller was adamant that such forgiveness was impossible outside of the church. Non-Christians could only understand suffering, they had no way to understand their guilt. As a result, any offer of forgiveness would only embolden them to sin again.⁴¹

These disagreements became moot when Niemöller decided in late March 1961 to boycott the upcoming Kirchentag, withdrawing from his position as a speaker. This

⁴⁰ Lothar Albertin, "Bericht über die Vorbesprechung von Mitgliedern der Arbeitsgruppenleitung 3 / Politik mit Kirchenpräsident D. Niemöller am 17.1.1961," EZA 71/86/116, 1.

⁴¹ Ibid., 2-4.

decision was based on the outcome of negotiations between the Kirchentag leadership and the GDR regime regarding the location of the 1961 Kirchentag. Plans had originally called for the Kirchentag to take place on both sides of the divided city of Berlin. However, the GDR regime, in the middle of a tense standoff with the western powers over the status of the city, had no interest in allowing such an all-German gathering. As an alternative, they offered the possibility of another Kirchentag in Leipzig. However, they made it clear that they would not allow certain “NATO pastors,” such as Otto Dibelius to travel to this meeting. Ultimately, the Kirchentag leadership rejected these alternatives, deciding to go ahead with their original plans, but to limit them to the western sectors of the city. Niemöller, who had always been suspicious of the political motives of the Kirchentag leadership—especially with regard to matters of inter-German politics—accused the Kirchentag of putting Cold War politics ahead of the Gospel. Arguing that the decision of the Kirchentag leadership “cannot be understood as anything other than a glorification of the free Christian world over against a totalitarian and tyrannical Eastern World,” he declared his intention to boycott the meeting. Niemöller also urged his church-political allies to do the same.⁴²

At this point, the political workgroup asked Lothar Kreyssig, the president of the State Church of Saxony, to take over Niemöller’s speaking duties. Kreyssig based his presentation on the themes that Niemöller had already developed, emphasizing the need to accept God’s punishment, God’s willingness to forgive sinners, the need to for those who had been forgiven to continue Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world. This, as the entire workgroup leadership could agree, meant undertaking concrete acts of

⁴² RvTT to Martin Niemöller, 29 October 1960, EZA 71/86/116; Niemöller to Heinrich Vogel, Martin Fischer, and Karl Kupisch, 22 March 1961; and Niemöller, to RvTT, 23 March 1961, EZA 71/86/686; see also Palm, “Wir sind doch Brüder!”, 278-95.

reconciliation. But it did not involve the endorsement of any one political position.⁴³ These plans were thrown into disarray once again when Kreyssig was unable to receive permission to travel to West Berlin to deliver his speech. In the end, his speech was delivered by Hans Reinhold Hildebrandt, the President of the Protestant Church of the Union, who worked from Kreyssig's notes, putting the ideas of the draft into his own words.

In sharp contrast to Krausnick's speech of the previous day, Hildebrandt's presentation focused primarily on the theological dimensions of German guilt. He began by looking at the natural tendency of Germans to think only about the future, without truly considering the burdens of their past. This, he argued, was a dishonest and self-defeating undertaking. If one could not confront the realities of one's past, then one could not create a better future. Instead, one only became more deeply mired in unreality and illusion. In both halves of the divided German nation, people had found their own illusions that blinded them to these realities. In the west, they were too busy enjoying material prosperity to consider their guilt. And in the east they were blinded by the simplistic lessons of communist ideology. But Germans in both West and East needed to soberly confront their past, if they wanted to move beyond it.⁴⁴

Next he turned to the nature of German guilt, to the old debate about who was really guilty for the crimes of the Nazis. Did the whole German people share in some form of collective guilt? Did the younger generation have to atone for the guilt of their parents? These, he argued, were the questions of Cain, who had asked "Am I my

⁴³ Lothar Albertin, "Bericht über die Sitzung der Arbeitsgruppenleitung 3 / Politik am 5.-6.Mai 1961," EZA 71/86/116.

⁴⁴ DEKT 1961, 254-55.

brother's keeper?" And, he continued, referring to the ongoing trial in Jerusalem, they were also the questions of the "Eichmann inside of us." But, in fact, Germans were called to bear the burdens of their people. This was the nature of belonging to a community or to a family; every member was responsible for the actions of one another. They all shared in a solidarity of guilt before both God and man.⁴⁵

Recognizing this guilt was also not enough by itself. It was not some magical process that would make everything better. Throughout all of history, humans had been torn between their God-given calling to live in the world as stewards of God's creation and the temptations of sin that perverted these actions. Only through the death and resurrection of Christ did they have the power to truly recognize their own guilt and to truly begin anew. The effects of sin were so pervasive that even the church and its teachings could be perverted, could themselves be a source of evil in the world. The message of love and forgiveness made manifest in the cross of Christ had been perverted in this way throughout the history of the church. For thousands of years Christians had accepted murderous anti-Semitic teachings, fanatically persecuting their Jewish neighbors. Christian conquistadors had brutally subjected the peoples of South America. Heretics and witches had been pursued by the inquisition and burned by the millions. And the native peoples of Africa had been captured and sold into slavery—all by a people that claimed to follow the teachings of Christ. Belonging to a Christian community or Christian society was not enough. The only true path into the future lay in confronting the reality of the cross of Christ, in recognizing the inseparable simultaneity

⁴⁵ Ibid., 256.

of guilt and forgiveness. Only when fully aware of one's own guilt, could one truly experience the grace of a new beginning.⁴⁶

Before Germans could create a better future, then, they were called to examine their guilt. They needed to see the deaths of six million Jews in the Holocaust as the consequences of their own anti-Semitism and hatred. And they needed to uncover the truth about their own inhumanity. In recent years, they had acquired a number of aids to this process. Reminders of their actions were all around them: in the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, in a new television documentary on the Third Reich, in the diary of Anne Frank, a new film on the Nuremburg Trials, and in visits to concentration camps. Living in the shadow of these events, the Germans were becoming a sober and skeptical people. But they also needed to see their personal moral responsibility for these events. When they saw pictures of Jewish women and children being led to the gas chambers it was not enough to feel bad. They needed to consider whether true followers of Christ would have accompanied them in their suffering, taking their place or suffering alongside them. Here Hildebrandt related a personal story that Kreyssig had included from his own past. To the present day, Kreyssig had written, he was haunted by the memory of a Jewish Christian whose deportation to a concentration camp he had personally witnessed. He had tried to comfort this man in his suffering. But perhaps he had been called to more than this. Perhaps, it had not been right to let this man face death alone. Recognizing that God had forgiven their sins, did not mean letting go of these images. It meant holding on to them, letting them direct their future actions.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid., 257-261.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 262-64.

Going forward into the future as a forgiven people meant changing their behavior. It meant constantly guarding against a return to these evils. It meant overcoming their tendencies to political resignation in order to take an active role in changing society. And it meant recognizing that their own sins were not absolved by the fact that others had also been sinful in their actions. When Germans accepted their sin and embraced the true forgiveness available in Christ, this would lead them to change their entire perspective on the world. True followers of Christ, who had learned from their past, would follow in the footsteps of men like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the members of the July 1944 plot against Hitler, putting their faith into action. “Changing one’s mentality, receiving forgiveness, beginning to work toward better obedience,” Hildebrandt argued, “this is an open future, this is a mastered past.”⁴⁸

Various members of the workgroup leadership once again followed this speech with clarifications and answers to audience questions. In response to those who felt that concepts of collective guilt were unfair, Hans Dombois acknowledged Theodor Heuß’ distinction between “collective guilt” and “collective responsibility.” From a juridical standpoint, he conceded, Germans were not all guilty of crimes against humanity. But all were responsible for letting these things happen. He also acknowledged that many ordinary soldiers had simply been trying to do their duty. Johannes Rau counseled German youth whose parents would not confront their guilt to avoid an attitude of self-righteous condemnation, being gracious in the face of their parents’ failings. Rau and Roland Friedrich Messner also responded to a number of questions that sought to derive more immediate political lessons from the German past, looking at controversies over the military chaplaincy, nuclear arms, the question of obedience to the GDR regime in the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 264-268.

East, and political developments in the Federal Republic. Both argued that Protestants were divided on these issues and should follow the dictates of their own conscience. But they also affirmed their responsibility as citizens to remain engaged and involved in such controversies.⁴⁹

Finally, in a round table discussion at the end of the gathering, members of the workgroup leadership turned their attentions to more practical political concerns. Here all of the speakers were again careful to affirm the importance of political involvement, the necessity of politics, and the dangers of traditional apolitical attitudes. Yet there were also several disagreements about the precise political lessons to be drawn from the past. Messner, for example, argued that the primary lesson was the need to guard against abuses of power. But Rau saw more specific continuities between the past and present, focusing on the ongoing need to overcome Germany's dangerous nationalist and militarist traditions. Messner also defended many members of the Nazi party and the German military, arguing that they had simply been doing their duty. Rau, by contrast, argued that Christians needed to take more personal responsibility for their actions.⁵⁰

The leaders of the political workgroup also coordinated a commemoration of the July 20, 1944 Plot on Hitler's life, meeting exactly seventeen years later at the Plötzensee memorial to executed members of the resistance. Here Franz von Hammerstein spoke of the example set by all of those in the resistance against Nazism, whose unpopular actions had demonstrated their true and heroic obedience to God's laws, even when the whole people had been disobedient. He emphasized that the various members of the resistance had come from many different backgrounds, socialists and Christians, women and men,

⁴⁹ Ibid., 272-280.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 281-290.

Catholic and Protestant, politicians and professors, soldiers and civilians. But all had one thing in common: “All rose up against terror and delusion in the name of humanity. Acting, suffering, and dying in the name of humanity, that is what they did here together, and in this they were the hands of the living God.” In closing, as Hammerstein recited the prayer of a Jewish victim of the Nazis, Reinold von Thadden laid a wreath to commemorate these victims.⁵¹

At the same time, another memorial service was held in the *Sophienkirche* in Berlin. Here Friedrich Graf zu Lynar also spoke of the obedience of the resisters to the will of God and the failure of the German churches to obey as boldly and directly. “The church,” he argued, “is and remains the location where injustice receives excommunication, where lies are exposed, where poisonous evil must be denounced, the location where mercy is practiced from the source of all life.” Too many Christians had ignored their duty during the Third Reich, failing to be the manifestation of God’s presence in the world. Yet God’s power was present in the world, even in times of evil and suffering. As Sophie Scholl, who had been executed as part of the White Rose resistance circle had written before her death: “I cannot understand why so many pious people today fear for the existence of God, simply because people pursue his traces with terrible and shameful deeds, as though God does not have power. I feel his power in everything, since everything lies in his hands. Instead, we must fear for the existence of humanity, since they have turned away from him.”⁵² Christians in Germany needed to

⁵¹ Ibid., 578-581.

⁵² DEKT 1961, 586; “Ich kann es nicht verstehen wie heute fromme Leute fürchten um die Existenz Gottes, weil die Menschen seine Spuren mit schlechten und schändlichen Taten verfolgen, als habe Gott nicht die Macht. Ich spüre in allem, wie alles in seiner Hand liegt, *die* Macht. Fürchten muss man sich bloss um die Existenz der Menschen, weil sie sich von ihm abwenden, ihrem Leben.”

learn from this example. The future had already begun. Their task was to follow in the footsteps of people like Sophie Scholl, seeing their own lives as an opportunity to do God's will.⁵³

JEWES AND CHRISTIANS

The 1961 Kirchentag in Berlin also saw the continuation of the work begun in the 1959 evening session on "Israel." Immediately following the 1959 meeting, a circle of enthusiastic supporters had gathered around Helmut Gollwitzer, with the hope of creating a more permanent forum to discuss these issues and to lobby for the reform of church teachings and practices. The widespread positive reaction to the 1959 gathering also spurred the Kirchentag leadership to consider the continuation of this discussion in a full-fledged workgroup. These plans were still quite vague when the theme selection committees began to meet early in 1960. Some Kirchentag leaders seem to have wanted to tie the themes of this gathering back into the existing Kirchentag program, rather than focusing so directly on questions of Jewish-Christian relations. One early suggestion for a future workgroup, for example, would have submerged these issues into a far more theological discussion of anti-Semitism as a form of atheism. Still other Kirchentag planners hoped to discuss these topics in another special evening gathering, rather than devoting an entire workgroup to them.⁵⁴

By May 1960, however, Kirchentag planners had begun to develop ideas for a more focused "Israel" workgroup. "Looking simultaneously at atheism and anti-Semitism in one workgroup," they concluded, "is clearly too much." Instead of watering

⁵³ Ibid., 581-87.

⁵⁴ Friedelbert Lorenz, "Zu Thematik und Struktur des Kirchentages 1961 in Berlin," 7/ April 1960, EZA 71/86/120, 6, 9.

down their discussion of anti-Semitism, they divided the atheism question between several other workgroups, giving the question of Jews and Christians priority. At this point, the plans for this workgroup were still quite broad and undeveloped. Initially they called for two discussions. The first would look at the status and role of Jews in the world “from the time of the Old Testament and after the destruction of Jerusalem until today.” The second would examine anti-Semitism as a form of atheism, in its rejection of God in the person of the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth.⁵⁵ These plans continued to face some opposition. In a meeting of the Präsidium in June, several members again downplayed the importance of a separate workgroup on these issues, arguing that they should be relegated to another evening meeting.⁵⁶

Eventually, however, the forces in favor of a separate workgroup on Jewish-Christian relations prevailed.⁵⁷ Meeting with Helmut Gollwitzer and Adolf Freudenberg in September, Friedelbert Lorenz, the academic director of the Kirchentag, began the work of assembling a new workgroup leadership committee for the topic “Jews and Christians.”⁵⁸ By November the Hamburg Old Testament Professor Hans Joachim Kraus—whose work focused on the Jews as the people of God—had agreed to serve as chair of the new workgroup. At his suggestion the themes for the 1961 meeting were

⁵⁵ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Thematik und Struktur der Arbeitsgruppen 1961,” 31 May 1960, EZA 71/86/120, 5.

⁵⁶ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Bericht ueber die Sitzung der Praesidialversammlung am 9. Juni 1960 in Berlin,” 9 June 1960, EZA 71/86/27, 4.

⁵⁷ Heinrich Giesen to Friedelbert Lorenz, 17 September 1960, EZA 71/86/118.

⁵⁸ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch in Sachen Arbeitsgruppe Israel im Hause Professor Gollwitzer am 27.9.,” 5 October 1960, EZA 71/86/117.

again reworked.⁵⁹ While earlier plans had called for largely descriptive presentations, Kraus favored a more argumentative and theologically pointed approach. Instead of simply looking at the history of Jews in the world, the first presentation would be titled “God’s Way into the World.” It would strongly emphasize the role of the Jews as God’s chosen people, without whom there could be no Christianity. The workgroup’s second presentation would not simply look at anti-Semitism as a form of atheism, as a clear deviation from traditional Christian teaching. Instead, Kraus wanted to look more closely and self-critically at the origins of anti-Semitism in the teachings of the early church itself. “Here,” he argued, “we cannot just speak of temptation, instead we need to talk about guilt.” These anti-Semitic origins would then be traced in their evolution through the middle ages, the ideas of modern philosophers, and finally through their effect on the modern psyche. For the workgroup’s final Sunday gathering, Kraus hoped that Gollwitzer could preach on the passage of Romans 11, demonstrating theologically that God had not abandoned his chosen people. With the suggestion of the Jewish social psychologist Eva Reichmann as one of the workgroup’s speakers, Kraus was also instrumental in inaugurating a change that would later become the workgroup’s signature feature. It would not be made up only of Christians talking about Jewish-Christian relations, but would include Jewish members. It would itself become a forum for Jewish-Christian dialogue.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ See Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Das Volk Gottes im Alten Testament* (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1958); also available in English translation as *The People of God in the Old Testament* (New York: Association Press, 1958).

⁶⁰ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Vermerk. Betr.: Arbeitsgruppe 6 / Juden und Christen,” 3 November 1960, EZA71/86/117.

The new workgroup held its first official planning meeting in January 1961. This discussion followed the format suggested by Kraus, but was modified in a few key areas. Among other changes, the workgroup leaders decided that their first discussion, on the Jews as God's chosen people, needed to also have a Jewish speaker, someone who could address Jewish self-understandings. Eventually the workgroup would settle on Rabbi Robert Raphael Geis of Dusseldorf. More controversially, it was also suggested that the workgroup's bible lesson for the first day should be presented by a Jewish theologian. In a clear sign of the tensions within the group, and within German Protestantism more broadly, discussion of this suggestion erupted into a major argument. On the one side, many of those present argued that it was clearly inappropriate to have a Jewish speaker presenting the workgroup's bible lesson. As adherents of this viewpoint argued: how could someone who did not accept the basic premise of the Gospel be asked to give theological instruction at the Kirchentag? Since all of the scriptures had been fulfilled and given meaning in Christ, a Jew could not have a proper understanding even of the Old Testament. On the other side of this debate were those who argued: "We need to take a risk, to expose all of our Christian beliefs to the fire. We need to be ready to let ourselves be questioned, to listen to a testimony of Jewish faith."⁶¹ In the end, against the protests of Kraus and Gollwitzer, plans for a Jewish bible lesson were vetoed by the Kirchentag Präsidium.⁶²

⁶¹ Lothar E. Knoch and Friedelbert Lorenz, "Bericht über die Sitzung der Arbeitsgruppenleitung 6 / Juden und Christen am 20./21. Januar 1961," 8 February 1961, EZA 71/86/117, 3-4; speakers are not identified in the meeting minutes.

⁶² Lothar Knoch, "Bericht über die 2. Sitzung der Arbeitsgruppenleitung 6 / Juden und Christen am 2./3. Mai 1961," 9 May 1961, EZA 71/86/117, 5.

Another source of tension arose with Martin Niemöller's decision to boycott the 1961 Kirchentag in Berlin and with his attempts to persuade his supporters to do likewise. Since many of Niemöller's strongest church political allies, such as Karl Kupisch and Helmut Gollwitzer, were in the leadership of the workgroup on Jews and Christians, this decision threw the entire workgroup into turmoil. In their March 1961 meeting, the workgroup approved an official letter of protest to the Kirchentag Präsidium.⁶³ And in a meeting with Reinold von Thadden in May 1961, Gollwitzer had the opportunity to personally express his concerns with the political direction of the Kirchentag leadership. But he was ultimately persuaded to continue his involvement.⁶⁴ Similarly, in letters to the workgroup members drafted in June and July, Thadden sought to defend this decision, while emphasizing the important work of the workgroup and the need to move forward despite their disagreements.⁶⁵ Ultimately, plans for the workgroup proceeded despite these tensions.

Since the idea of a Jewish bible teacher had been vetoed by the Kirchentag leadership, Gollwitzer was given the task of presenting the workgroup's bible lesson. Speaking on the assigned text of Psalm 139, he focused on the God's presence in the world, even in the darkest times. God was not just present in the "Christian West" but to people in all of the world. No one had a monopoly on God. In fact, he pointed out, the words of the psalmist were not first and foremost a Christian prayer, but a Jewish prayer. God had promised the Jews that he was there with them, even in their times of trouble.

⁶³ Lothar Knoch, "Bericht über die 2. Sitzung der Arbeitsgruppenleitung 6 / Juden und Christen am 2./3. Mai 1961," 9 May 1961, EZA 71/86/117, 5.

⁶⁴ RvTT, "Aktenvermerk über meinen Besuch mit Professor D. Gollwitzer in Berlin-Nikolassee," 6 May 1961, EZA 71/86/686.

⁶⁵ RvTT, Circular letters, 26 June 196 and 7 July 1961, EZA 71/86/117.

They were his people. God had been there with them even in Auschwitz, even during the terrible cruelties inflicted upon them, in their deaths in the gas chambers, and in the earlier periods of Christian persecution against them. Indeed, Christians had access to fellowship and community with God only by way of the Jews, through the death of the Jew, Jesus Christ. Jesus' followers in the church were called in the same way to renounce the way of the world, following Jesus instead.⁶⁶

Gollwitzer's bible lesson was followed by the workgroup's first discussion, on the Jews as "God's Way into the World." This discussion began with Theodor Vriezen an Old Testament scholar at the University of Utrecht, who addressed the nature of God's selection of Israel as his chosen people. This was a controversial topic, he acknowledged, that many in the worldwide church did not take seriously. But the experiences of Europeans in the last several decades demonstrated the need for Christians to wrestle with their theological assumptions. Since the events of the Second World War, he explained, he had been forced to rethink his own beliefs about the nature of Israel's calling, and he wanted to share his findings with the Kirchentag audience⁶⁷

God, he argued, had revealed himself to the Jews in a way that was unique in history. While many religious traditions had some concept of a creator God, this God had usually been seen as impersonal and distant. With the Jews, however, God had entered into a personal relationship. He had chosen them as the vehicle through which he would make himself known to the world. This was clear in God's calling of Abraham to leave his homeland and to become the father of a new people. Even in times of great suffering, as in the exile, God had reaffirmed this bond. Speaking through the prophets,

⁶⁶ DEKT 1961, 76-86.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 414-415.

he had called them to return to him and had promised to preserve them. And he had given them a special task. The Jews, as the prophet Isaiah had written, were to be a “light among the nations.” This special calling carried with it loneliness, struggle, suffering, and the hostility of others. But these struggles were not a sign that God had abandoned his people. In fact, Vriezen explained, God had promised to protect them.

Whoever harms Israel, will themselves be shamed. . . . Whoever treats Israel unjustly . . . will receive God’s punishment. This applies to the ancient world and to the modern, it applies to the Assyrians and also to the Germans, to the Arabs and the Slavs, to Christians and non-Christians, to the church and to the world. We have all sinned in that we have not lived in holy fear of God, but have trampled his will underfoot.⁶⁸

God’s will for his people had had its truest expression in Jesus of Nazareth, who had “taken the calling of his people upon himself, in order to renew Israel in the knowledge of God’s election and to call them to a life of unconditional service in the Kingdom of God.” Jesus’ mission was itself the clearest sign of God’s election of Israel. However: “He had not deposed the chosen people from their task, but returned them to their highest calling.” Far from proclaiming an end to the special mission of the Jews, Jesus had expanded it, removing the barrier between Jews and Gentiles so that others might enter into Israel’s special relationship with God. Unfortunately, the teachings of the Apostle Paul about the inclusion of the church within God’s chosen people had been misinterpreted as a denial of God’s continuing relationship with the Jews. This was a terrible mistake. God’s promises were, in fact, eternal and irrevocable. Israel remained the people of God, the church’s “elder sister.” The church needed to recognize this fact and to seek reconciliation with the Jews. “The church,” he concluded, “must change its understanding, before we can speak with Israel from the heart, before Israel can accept

⁶⁸ Ibid., 415-419.

the church as a partner on its path toward the Kingdom of God. The church must be forgiven. And Israel must be given time to overcome their mistrust.” This would be difficult, but it would be necessary in the end, because the church and synagogue shared a common calling and a common mission.⁶⁹

In the next presentation, Rabbi Robert Raphael Geis spoke on Jewish understanding of their calling and place in the world. He began by situating the Jewish people within the narrative of the first books of the bible. God had created the world and desired to have a relationship with humanity. But humans had repeatedly rebelled against God’s teachings. In doing so, they had earned God’s judgment. In order to restore this relationship, marred by humanity’s disobedience, God had chosen Abraham to be the father of a special people whose existence would be an expression of God’s continuing love for his creation. Israel had been chosen to be a sign of God’s desire for reconciliation and a model of the future state of reconciled humanity. This was apparent in at least three tasks that had been given to the Jews. First, they were called to fight against the creation of idols, the human tendency to worship natural forces rather than the creator God. Second, they were called to fight against the power of kings and rulers, who acted out of nothing besides the desire for personal power. Finally, they were called to keep themselves pure of these corruptions. They were called to reject even the Jewish temple and the sacrificial system when it hardened into a form of religious arrogance and oppression.⁷⁰

The Jews, according to Geis, had not always been diligent in pursuing this calling. They had often wavered or even abandoned God’s mission. And, in the process, they had

⁶⁹ Ibid., 419-422.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 422-23.

also become an example, not only of God’s love for humanity, but of his judgment against sin and rebellion. During the time of the exile, God had purified his people. Those who had abandoned their calling were cast off, but a remnant were restored to their true purpose. “Here,” Geis argued, “destruction and preservation go together at the same time; and the grace of election is apparent in both.” This had become even clearer after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The scattering of the Jews and their suffering in exile were signs of both their continuing election and the punishment for turning away from their calling.⁷¹

Because the Jews had been called by God to take an active stance against “heathenism,” they had often been subject to persecution. Indeed, influenced by heathen ideas, Christians had sometimes led this process. But the Jews, Geis argued, did not oppose the message of Jesus, only the heathenism that had become ingrained in Christianity. This had become especially clear in recent German history, when Hitler and the Nazis had explicitly embraced barbarism and heathen ideas. They had opposed the Jews because they recognized the Jews owed allegiance to a different God—“the God of social justice, of compassion, and love, the one and only God.” In their zeal to destroy the Jews, the Nazis had also turned against Christianity. This had had unintended consequences, however. For in the midst of this persecution, Christians had rediscovered their inescapable connection to Judaism. They had come to see that it was not possible to attack Judaism without also attacking the core of the Christian faith.⁷²

This realization created new openings for the future, and Geis concluded his speech with a few words on how Jews and Christians could get along. Christians had

⁷¹ Ibid., 423-25.

⁷² Ibid., 425-27.

sometimes been right, he said, to see the Jews as a people that had turned its back on God. But they had been wrong to think that God could ever really abandon his people. Instead of seeing the Jews as those who had rejected God's teachings, they needed to learn from them, in order to better understand their own faith. And if the Jews did, again, turn their backs on their calling, Christians were called not to persecute them, but to gently chide them and to remind them of their mission.⁷³

In the question and answer period following Geis' speech, several Protestant ministers and theologians addressed the audience's many questions. In all of these responses they focused on the idea of the Jews as God's chosen people and the persistence of this calling up to the present day. In particular, they worked to defend this position against earlier theological interpretations. How, for example, could the church reconcile the Apostle Paul's affirmation of the Jews as God's people in Romans 11, with his apparent denial of this in 1 Thessalonians? Was there a difference between the Jewish and Christian Gods? And had the church replaced Israel as God's chosen people, or were both Jews and Christians now included in God's community? Paul's comments in Thessalonians, they argued, had not been intended as a rejection of Judaism as a whole, but referred only to very specific and concrete theological disputes between early Jewish-Christian and Gentile-Christian communities. Both faiths worshipped one and the same God. And, while Christians were now included in God's calling, Jews also remained God's chosen people.⁷⁴

Another set of much more complicated questions concerned the Christian belief in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and the implications of this belief for Jewish-Christian

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 428-430.

relations. Here workgroup members were themselves clearly divided. Pastor Leuner, a Jewish Christian argued that it was only the actions of Christians, their centuries of persecution against the Jews, that prevented Jews from recognizing Jesus as their Messiah. Schalom Ben-Chorin, a Jewish speaker, acknowledged the respect that many modern Jews had for Jesus as a Jewish teacher. But he reiterated their rejection of Jesus' messianic claims. And another workgroup member, Lili Simon, worked to explain Jesus' comments that he was the only way to the Father. These comments, she suggested, did not exclude the Jews since, in context, he was speaking here of the path that his disciples should follow, not making any universal claim. Rabbi Geis, by contrast, reaffirmed the important theological differences between Judaism and Christianity, arguing "the things that separate us need to be allowed to remain; it would be a fundamental misunderstanding to not take these seriously or to try to discuss them away." Nevertheless, all of these speakers called for Christian humility in relation to the Jews and for tolerance and continued discussion.⁷⁵

In their final comments both Vriezen and Geis cautioned against trying to accomplish too much too soon. Vriezen again acknowledged the controversial nature of the workgroup and the difficulty to rethinking one's long-held beliefs. But he argued that the Gospels themselves were unmistakable in their affirmation of the Jews as God's chosen people. Jesus remained a point of contention between Jews and Christians, but this disagreement should not prevent them from seeking cooperation and discussion. Geis was even more determined to acknowledge the many theological differences that separated Jews and Christians. But he urged his listeners to focus on the many

⁷⁵ Ibid., 430-440.

underlying areas of agreement. And he called Christians in the audience to live a true Christians, following the example of men like Dietrich Bonhoeffer.⁷⁶

On its second day, the workgroup “Jews and Christians” examined the origins of modern anti-Semitism. The church historian Karl Kupisch began this session with a presentation on Christian anti-Semitism. He began by reminding his listeners that they could not simply dismiss the anti-Semitic horrors of the Nazis as something unrelated to their own beliefs. While Christian and modern racist forms of anti-Semitism were unquestionably different, the latter had grown out of the former. They had only been possible because of a long tradition of Christian teachings against the Jews. After looking briefly at the anti-Semitic beliefs of the ancient Greek and Roman writers, who branded the Jews “atheists” for their rejection of the classical gods, Kupisch turned to writings of the early church fathers. Out of the theological disagreements between early Christians and Jews, the church fathers had developed their own anti-Semitic beliefs, beliefs that went far beyond mere intellectual disagreement. They had come to see the Jews as a people cursed by God, a people who deserved nothing but persecution. With the rise of the “Christian West” after the conversion of Constantine, this had led to special legal persecution of the Jews. Among other things, Jews had been limited to a narrow spectrum of professions, such as money lending and trade, and these restrictions had served as the roots of modern anti-Jewish stereotypes. In the Middle Ages, and especially during the time of the crusades, spiritual renewal within European Christianity had led to increased persecution of the Jews, who were accused of ever more fantastic crimes. Church leaders, such as Pope Innocent III, had even gone so far as to proclaim

⁷⁶ Ibid., 440-43.

that God had condemned the Jews to a life of slavery, and Christian communities had frequently erupted in spontaneous violence against them.⁷⁷

Although many of the worst of these beliefs were rooted in medieval superstition, Kupisch continued, the Reformation had not put an end to anti-Semitic persecution. Even the reformer Martin Luther, although not an anti-Semite in the modern sense, had come in the later years of his life to accept the idea of the Jews as cursed, and to advocate violence against them. And these ideas had continued to shape the beliefs of German Protestants even into the present day. As one example of this influence, Kupisch reminded his audience of the anti-Semitism of the nineteenth century Imperial Chaplain and social reformer Adolf Stoecker and of his followers. The beliefs of Stoecker could not be equated with those of the Nazis, but they did belong to the roots of this later anti-Semitism. Only in the present-day, did German Protestants finally have an opportunity to really overcome this past.⁷⁸

Kraus spoke next, beginning with a summary of the major forces behind medieval anti-Semitism and tracing the evolution of these forces in the modern world. Christian anti-Semitism, he argued, had typically grown out of two impulses. After the emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, Christianity and political citizenship had become intertwined. This had led to the exclusion of Jews from political life. Similarly, prevailing mystical understandings of the sacraments led to the belief that Jews were a foreign element within the Christian community. These same ideas, in a more secularized form, persisted in eighteenth and nineteenth century thought. For example, in the philosophy of Hegel, “absolute spirit” was associated with the principles of

⁷⁷ Ibid., 444-48.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 448-451.

Christianity and the New Testament, while the God of the Old Testament was seen as the radical antithesis of these ideals. The mystical dualism of the Middle Ages, in which Jews were seen as foreigners, had become in Hegel a form of metaphysical dualism, in which Judaism was associated with all that was evil and bad. These ideas became central to German idealist philosophy and also crept into the teachings of the German churches.⁷⁹

The political anti-Semitism of post-Constantine Europe, in which Jews were excluded from the political community, was also replicated in Prussian notions of the Christian state. Kings, such as Friedrich Wilhelm IV, had limited the citizenship rights of Jews. Of even more importance, early nationalist thinkers often excluded Jews from their conception of the German religious-national community. Thinkers such as Ernst Moritz Arndt argued, instead, that the national community had no place for Jews and needed to be defended against their encroachments. These sentiments continued to develop into even more radical forms as Germans defined themselves in opposition to other groups. As the nineteenth century nationalist Friedrich Jahn had argued, “It is every German’s duty to hate all foreigners.” This hatred had not been turned exclusively against the Jews, but it had laid the groundwork for later anti-Semitism. These ideas had heavily influenced the ideas of the “German Christians” in the Weimar Republic and Third Reich. Later, these ideas had also been combined with crude biological theories, to argue that Jews were an inferior race and even a danger to the German people.⁸⁰

In various forms, these ideas had become widespread in Germany. They had been popularized in the churches by men like Adolf Stoecker and had become dominant in the German student associations. Eventually they had spread throughout the respectable

⁷⁹ Ibid., 451-53.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 453-455.

middle classes. These ideas had influenced the ideas of the Nazis and they had made it much easier for the Nazis to promote their own more radical version of anti-Semitism. “Today we need to clearly see,” Kraus argued, “that the Christian-German ideology was the ground out of which this murderous spirit arose.” Even the Confessing Church had been infected. Because of the latent anti-Semitism of many of its members, the Confessing Church had been unable to take an unequivocal stand against the Nazi persecution of the Jews. Germans in the present day needed to make a clear break with this past, something that could only take place if they were willing to engage in self-criticism. This did not mean adopting “a (more or less obligatory) declaration of guilt” but required real soul searching and self-examination “from the heart.” For the churches themselves, this would mean the critical re-examination of their own teachings, especially about the death of Jesus. The church needed to overcome millennia of false teachings, recognizing that Jesus had died for the sins of all, including the Jews. Every human being was responsible for this, and no one group could be singled out as Christ-killers.⁸¹

Finally, the Jewish sociologist Eva Reichmann spoke on the roots of middle class German anti-Semitism. Unlike the other two speakers, she did not focus primarily on the ideas of intellectuals, but on the social and psychological factors behind popular anti-Semitic beliefs. For the common man, anti-Semitism was not rooted in Christian theology or racial philosophy. These idea systems were merely used to rationalize

⁸¹ Ibid., 455-57.

existing prejudices. Instead, at least in the middle classes, anti-Semitism had arisen out of the fear that Jews had too much influence in society.⁸²

In the body of her speech, Reichmann set out to explain the origins of these prejudices, separating fact from fiction and conspiracy theory. Because Jews had had only limited vocational choices, it was not surprising that they had become over-represented in business and in professions such as law, medicine, and journalism. But they had still only been a minority in these areas. There had always been many “Aryans” who had also worked in these fields. Historical factors also explained the high proportion of Jews in big cities and their attraction to the parties of the political Left. But despite the influence that Jews had had in Germany, they had never dominated in the way that anti-Semites believed. While anti-Semites had branded Weimar a “Jewish Republic,” only a very small handful of Jews had ever served in its government. Out of the 387 government ministers between 1918 and 1932, only two had been Jews, while three others had some Jewish ancestry. Out of the 500 top state officials, only fifteen had any Jewish blood. Among the major bankers and creditors in Weimar, there had been just as many non-Jews as Jews. The same was true for the free professions of law and medicine. And Jews had been just as hard hit as non-Jews by the economic crisis of the late 1920s. But popular prejudice had never been dependent on the facts. Instead, it was rooted in “envy, suffering, unhappiness, and enmity” in the need for a scapegoat to blame for the “inflation, economic crises, and mass unemployment.” A full 44 percent of Germans had embraced these errors when they voted for the Nazis in 1933. Now, at the Kirchentag, it was time to “take an axe” to the roots of these old prejudices. Germany was making a real effort to turn around, but it was still haunted by “the ghosts of the past.” In order for

⁸² Ibid., 458-462.

there to be a real new beginning, individual Germans had to examine their own personal guilt and reorder their own thinking.⁸³

In the question and answer period following these speeches, workgroup members again elaborated on the speakers major ideas and worked to clear up misconceptions. Many questions sought to add nuance to the speaker's presentations. Some asked about the role of the Christian tradition in opposing anti-Semitism or drew attention to anti-Semitic thought outside of Germany. Others tried to connect Christian anti-Semitism to Catholic teachings or to explain anti-Semitism as a response to the actions of Jews themselves. In their answers, workgroup members continually worked to bring the discussion back to responsibility that German Protestants themselves had for the persecution of the Jews.⁸⁴

On the final day of the Kirchentag, before an audience of 10,000 people, the workgroup leadership continued these efforts, presenting a declaration calling on German Protestants to seriously examine their own past guilt and to rethink their teachings and actions. This declaration was also released to the press and was widely published, stirring up considerable controversy in more conservative Protestant circles. It began by declaring that Jews and Christians shared an insoluble bond and that the denial of this fact was the root of Christian anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish persecution. And it went on to condemn every form of anti-Semitism [*Judenfeindschaft*] as "godlessness" that led inevitably to "self-destruction." Calling attention to the Eichmann process in Jerusalem, it declared that all German Protestants shared in the guilt uncovered by this trial and it laid out several concrete proposals for how the church could demonstrate its repentance

⁸³ Ibid., 462-66.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 467-484.

and re-orientation. First, parents and teachers needed to break their silence, so that the crimes of the past could be examined and discussed. Second, German Protestants needed to be aware of the dangers inherent in hierarchical “command structures.” Rather than simply following orders, officials needed to be prepared to take personal responsibility for their actions. And public officials who were implicated in the persecution of the Jews needed to be removed from office. Third, Germans had a special duty to advance the well being of German Jews and the state of Israel, while also encouraging peace between the Israelis and their Arab neighbors. Finally, the churches needed to reject the false teaching that God had abandoned the Jews, recognizing that Jews and Christians were both the people of God.⁸⁵

This public declaration was not as radical as some workgroup members would have liked, representing basic ideas upon which all could agree. Even so, its publication, like the activities of the workgroup more generally, stirred up significant controversy inside and outside of the Protestant churches. On the level of party politics, this controversy surrounded the workgroup’s demands that all public officials who had been involved in the persecution of the Jews should lose their positions. In particular, members of the CDU took umbrage at the comments of workgroup member Dietrich Goldschmidt, who explicitly directed this statement at Hans Globke, one of Adenauer’s closest advisors who, during the Third Reich, had written the official commentary on the Nuremberg Racial Laws.⁸⁶ More theologically conservative Protestants, on the other

⁸⁵ Ibid., 486-487.

⁸⁶ For more on the controversy surrounding these statements, see “Dr. Globke und der politische Humanismus. Eine Kontroverse zwischen Professor D. Goldschmidt und dem Bundespresseamt” in *Diskussion*, Bundesverband Deutsch-Israelischer Studiengruppen – Hochschulgruppen, Nov. 1961, EZA 71/86/117.

hand, took issue with the theological implications of the workgroup's main assertions about Jewish-Christian relations. In particular, many objected to the claim that Jews were still part of the people of God, whether or not they accepted Jesus as the Messiah.⁸⁷ More worrying for the Kirchentag leadership, the leaders of the Kirchentag's own state committees [*Landesausschüsse*] had similar objections. In a meeting several months later, several members of these state committees argued that the Jewish-Christian workgroup was a "misuse of the Kirchentag." They cynically wrote off Gollwitzer's involvement as an attempt by the Protestant Left to find a new controversial issue after failing in their anti-nuclear weapons campaign. More substantively, they objected that the workgroup had failed to "look at all of the facts of the last several decades in Germany," that it had implied that the church and the synagogue were basically the same, and that its leaders had stifled any theological disagreement by accusing their opponents of racism.⁸⁸

The Kirchentag leadership responded to these objections by trying to downplay the radicalism of the workgroup, arguing for the most conservative possible interpretation of its statements. At the same time, members of the Jewish-Christian workgroup pushed ahead with their activities. Meeting directly after the conclusion of the 1961 Kirchentag, they reorganized themselves as a broad umbrella organization designed to promote Jewish-Christian dialogue within the Protestant churches. Besides reaching out to other, similar groups, they began making plans to publish their workgroup speeches. They also

⁸⁷ Horst Runge to Giesen, 27 July 1961, Paul Kupfernagel to the Kirchentag Leadership, 10 August 1961, Pastor Ueberhaar to the Kirchentag Präsidium, 19 August 1961, Lothar Kreyssig to Lorenz, 9 July 1961, Lorenz to Kreyssig, 9 July 1961, EZA 71/86/117.

⁸⁸ Rudolf Wolckenhaar, Minutes of the *Landesausschuss* Meeting, 15 November 1961, EZA 71/86/120, 1-2; the minutes do not identify individual speakers.

distanced themselves somewhat from the Kirchentag leadership, reorganizing themselves as a semi-autonomous group that met during the Kirchentag, but was not subordinate to the Präsidium.⁸⁹ Over the next several years, they would return to the themes and questions that they had pioneered in 1961, working to convince a skeptical public to reconsider its assumptions about Jews and Jewish-Christian relations. This work would remain controversial, especially when it addressed controversial theological areas such as Jesus' Messianic claims and Jewish "salvation." But it would also play a formative role in changing church teachings and theological assumptions.

CONCLUSION

For German Protestants the years from 1959 to 1961 marked an important turning point, especially with regard to their understanding of their own history and identity. While discussions at Kirchentag gatherings of the early 1950s had not ignored questions of German guilt for the Second World War and Holocaust, these ideas had rarely been a central focus of attention. By the early 1960s this had changed dramatically as these discussions became some of the most publicized and best attended Kirchentag meetings. The late 1950s and early 1960s also saw an important change in the way that German Protestants thought about the burdens of the German past. When speakers had addressed these topics at earlier Kirchentage, they had usually skipped over the concrete details of what had happened, focusing instead on more immediate theological and political implications. Nazism and the events of the war and Holocaust were mined for examples

⁸⁹ "Protokoll der Beratung der Arbeitsgruppe 6," 23 July 1961, EZA 71/86/117; Walz, Circular Letter, 19 January 1962, EZA 71/86/27; the workgroup published two conference volumes during the 1960s, see Dietrich Goldschmidt and Hans Joachim Kraus, eds., *Der ungekündigte Bund. Neue Begegnung von Juden und Christlicher Gemeinde* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1962), and Helmut Gollwitzer and Eleonore Sterling, eds., *Das gespaltene Gottesvolk* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1966).

of human sinfulness, of every person's need for God. But the churches themselves were often portrayed in a heroic light, not implicated in these events. Even when speakers looked at the guilt of church leaders and members, they focused on the theological and personal dimensions of these failings. More self-critical Protestant speakers, such as Gustav Heinemann and Martin Niemöller, were more direct in addressing the guilt of German Christians themselves, even in the Confessing Church and other resistance circles. But they too had a tendency to politicize these events, identifying repentance and contrition exclusively with their own political stances against West German rearmament.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s this began to change. Members of the younger generation, who had not personally experienced the Nazi dictatorship or war, began to ask questions about what had actually happened. And, as the events faded into memory, some members of the older generation sought to "normalize" the German past, to downplay the crimes of the Nazis or of ordinary Germans, or to minimize their importance. These developments led some (though certainly not all) in the Kirchentag leadership to see the need for more direct, fact based discussions of German history and Jewish-Christian relations.

These discussions, taking place in meetings of the political workgroup and the newly formed Workgroup on Jews and Christians, did not try to offer easy answers or simple theological and political lessons. Instead they worked to confront audience members with the unvarnished truth about their own past, forcing them to consider uncomfortable questions about their own behavior and beliefs. In doing so, they laid the groundwork for more sophisticated and controversial discussions that would come in the future. This did not represent the last word on the subject, only a new opening. But it

made it much harder for German Protestants to avoid difficult questions of German and Christian guilt, elevating these questions to a place of central importance for German Protestant identity.

PART THREE

1961-1969

CHAPTER 8

EXPERIMENTAL CHURCH

The Kirchentag first gained its national reputation in 1951 with the massive all-German gathering in the divided city of Berlin. Ten years later, in vastly different circumstances, many church and Kirchentag leaders hoped to reprise this role. The Kirchentag had always been one of the most visible symbols of German Protestant unity, despite German division. Already by the late 1950s, however, this unity was getting harder to maintain. On the one hand, many members of the Kirchentag leadership felt that a focus on the symbolism of German unity was a distraction from critically looking at the social and political problems of the West. This was especially true as hopes for German reunification became increasingly remote. On the other hand, Kirchentag gatherings in Berlin in 1951 and in Leipzig in 1954 had disappointed East German leaders, who had hoped to use them as a propaganda platform against the rearmament policies of the West German government. Some members of the East German government, such as Otto Nuschke of the CDU-East, continued to believe that the churches could be useful to the East German cause. But the East German politburo had already abandoned these hopes in favor of a new strategy of divide and conquer. This

involved sowing divisions within the East German *Landeskirchen* and working for the permanent separation between the Protestant churches in the East and West.¹

In this vastly different environment, the Berlin Kirchentag of 1961 could not hope to meet peoples' high expectations. Indeed, from the earliest planning stages, it was surrounded by controversy. In the midst of a major international crisis over the status of Berlin, the SED regime adamantly opposed any all-German gathering within the city. In numerous pronouncements, it made it clear that an all-Berlin Kirchentag would be impossible and that a gathering held only in West Berlin would be seen as a major provocation. Desperate to avoid this, GDR officials even offered the possibility of meeting again in Leipzig, or in some other city entirely within the East. Kirchentag leaders ultimately rejected these offers, since a handful of vehemently anti-Communist church leaders, principally Bishop Otto Dibelius of Berlin, would not be allowed to attend. They argued that this decision was necessary to defend the intellectual freedom and independence of the Kirchentag. Critics such as Martin Niemöller, however, argued that the Kirchentag was sacrificing church unity for the sake of the vanity of a few church leaders, thereby betraying its true subordination to the institutional church and to an anti-Communist political ideology.²

Despite a few problems—most notably the inability of several East German speakers to obtain travel documents, throwing several workgroups into disarray—the 1961 Berlin Kirchentag was basically successful. Although it was not nearly as large as its 1951 predecessor, it still attracted large numbers of Protestants from both German

¹ See Dirk Palm, “*Wir sind doch Brüder!*” *Der evangelische Kirchentag und die deutsche Frage 1949-1961*, Arbeiten zur Kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte, Series B, Vol. 36 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 216-277.

² *Ibid.*, 278-98.

states. It also pioneered several new and provocative topics of discussion, including the historical causes of the Third Reich and Christian-Jewish relations. Just months later, however, with the construction of the Berlin Wall, it became clear that the Kirchentag had outlived its usefulness as a symbol of German unity. The Protestant churches might take a decade to finally accept their institutional division, but division was an unavoidable fact. As a result, the very existence of the Kirchentag was called into question. As Carola Wolf, who became the Kirchentag's press secretary in 1962, later reported: "Because of the now almost unbridgeable division of Germany, many observers thought the Kirchentag had lost its most important function: namely as a meeting point for people of one faith, forced to live in two different political worlds."³ The Kirchentag faced the task of reinventing itself, finding a way to maintain its political and social importance, without the excitement and interest that had always been generated by its all-German dimension.

If the Kirchentag was to maintain its relevance, it would need to look more critically at the problems of West German society. But what did the Kirchentag, or the churches themselves for that matter, have to offer the increasingly secular society of the Federal Republic? Already in the middle of the 1950s, Kirchentag leaders had begun to grapple with this question, responding with two divergent impulses. First, recognizing that many Protestants were increasingly ignorant of essential Christian teachings, they had redoubled their efforts to educate the Protestant public in the basics of the Christian faith. Second, recognizing that theological principles and evangelistic appeals were not enough to solve the complex problems of a modern society, they began a process of more concrete, academic engagement with these problems themselves. By the early 1960s,

³ Carola Wolf, Report on the 1963 Kirchentag, undated, EZA 71/96/349, 1.

however, this dual response had become problematic. Neither of these tasks—Christian education and academic problem solving—were unique to the Kirchentag. Arguably, there were other groups within the churches that were better suited to each. And neither, by itself, was likely to draw the large crowds of the 1950s meetings. In addition, these two tasks often pulled the Kirchentag in opposite directions. Although they were not inherently incompatible, they assumed very different audiences, themes, and stylistic approaches. These tensions became more acute after the 1961 Kirchentag. Without the all-German symbolism as a public drawing point, Kirchentag leaders found themselves confronted by a series of difficult choices. What was the role of the Kirchentag in the church and in West German society? How could it draw crowds and generate excitement? And how could it engage in such divergent tasks without watering down its program and losing its relevance? For the Kirchentag, the 1960s was a decade of constant experimentation, as its leaders worked to address these problems.

A DELICATE BALANCE

Already in the mid-1950s, the Kirchentag had begun to reinvent itself. Members of the Kirchentag leadership had welcomed the symbolic all-German function, but they had never seen this as the Kirchentag's primary purpose. Instead, from the very beginning, Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff had created the Kirchentag as an organization devoted to the building up the faith and public responsibility of Protestant laity, helping them to develop into mature and effective leaders in the church and in society. At the Kirchentage of the 1950s, one aspect of this impulse was apparent in evangelistic, missions, and bible-study gatherings. However, another aspect found expression in academic presentations and discussions of pressing social and political issues. In the

middle of the 1950s, these discussions became more organized and better planned. At the same time, they became less dominated by theological perspectives, as subject matter experts from the Protestant Academies and from the universities were brought into the Kirchentag planning process. This led to the development of several new themes by the late 1950s, especially in the 1957 *Themenkonvent* in Arnoldshain and in the follow-up Kirchentag Congress of 1958.

Under the rubric of “Reality Today,” these gatherings worked to overcome the dominance of political, social, and theological “illusions,” attempting to bring the intellectual content of the Kirchentag into line with the realities of the modern world. These meetings succeeded in developing numerous new themes, as seen in the rapid multiplication of new workgroups for the Munich Kirchentag of 1959. They also began to establish the importance of dialogue and diversity of opinion as important guiding values for the Kirchentag movement, hinting at things to come. However, the Kirchentag meetings of 1959 and 1961 never fully incorporated these new topics or approaches. Instead, according to numerous observers, they often seemed like an incoherent and confusing mixture of the old and the new.⁴ Too provocative and controversial for the pious, these gatherings did not go nearly far enough in the eyes many progressives inside and outside of the church. In a similar way, they incorporated unprecedented numbers of youth, who were especially active in the question and answer periods following speeches; but these youth continued to feel unappreciated and marginalized. And critics from all sides complained that the Kirchentag had become too abstract and academic, that it was losing its connection to ordinary people.

⁴ See, for example, Friedelbert Lorenz, Press Report, 26 November 1959, EZA 71/86/113.

Kirchentag leaders were already well aware of these problems by the end of the 1950s, but they disagreed about how to solve them. Already in 1959, some critics were pushing for a radical reform of the Kirchentag structure and content. In a meeting shortly after the 1959 Kirchentag in Munich, for example, the Christian Press Academy devoted considerable attention to complaints about the Kirchentag. Summarizing their findings, they argued that the Kirchentag had become too “institutionalized” and “conformist.” Rather than limiting itself to the needs and interests of the local congregations, it needed to reach out to those on the margins of the church. Rather than serving as a platform for the theological ideas of the host *Landeskirchen*, it needed to develop its own critical theological perspectives. Finally, rather than serving as a top-down educational meeting, where church leaders presented their ideas in well-polished speeches, the Kirchentag needed to serve a meeting place where multiple perspectives were welcomed.⁵

The Christian Press Academy also recommended several changes to the format and style of Kirchentag meetings. Instead of merely providing listeners with information, speakers needed to be more provocative, to leave things more open to discussion, and to be more willing to disagree with one another. “Certainly,” they argued, “it is understandable to not want to let the unavoidable internal disagreements in the speeches and discussions explode in front of the public. But if one wants a truly honest and animated discussion, one has to trust that the church is strong enough to risk the occasional breakdown.” They also recommended that the Kirchentag adopt the American practice of breaking large audiences into small groups for discussion, allowing more people the opportunity to speak. Finally, they drew attention to the large number of

⁵ Uta von Zahn, Meeting Minutes, Christlichen Presse-Akademie, 17-18 August 1959, EZA 71/86/113.

youth at the Kirchentag, who were asking very basic, foundational questions after the speeches. These youth, they argued, were genuinely working to bridge the divide between “God’s Word” and “everyday life.” The Kirchentag needed to aid them in this practice by taking their questions seriously and by offering them not only information, but intellectual authority and expert guidance.⁶

Many of the same criticisms came up again several months later in a meeting between members of the Kirchentag staff and the editorial board of the *Sonntagsblatt* newspaper. The *Sonntagsblatt* editors began by pointing to the unique position of the Kirchentag as a major Protestant organization outside of the hierarchical structure of the institutional churches. This position gave the Kirchentag an important “critical function” with regard to the churches. Rather than following the lead of institutional church and the local congregations, the Kirchentag had the opportunity to break new ground. It was especially well placed to look at the questions and problems of young people and those on the margins of the church, helping them in their struggle to reconcile Christianity with their increasingly secular surroundings. This, however, meant making room in their program for the questions and doubts that these people had. “At the Kirchentag,” argued the *Sonntagsblatt* theological director Heinz Zahrnt, “there must be space for the courage to really doubt, the doubts of the laity must become loud, questions of belief must be discussed critically and without a safety net.” This meant going back to even the most basic questions in order to reexamine them in the light of the “practical atheism” of the modern world.⁷

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Fridelbert Lorenz, Report on the October 21, 1959 Meeting with the *Sonntagsblatt* Editorial Board, 19 November 1959, EZA 71/86/113.

At the same time, the Kirchentag needed to deal with a world that was becoming more indifferent to Christianity. The workgroups would have little resonance in the broader public if they began from the standpoint of Christian faith, only then moving on to address the problems of the world. Instead they needed to begin from the standpoint of contemporary questions, problems, and controversies. Preachers and bible teachers, too, needed to anticipate critical questions and objections, building them in to their presentations. Finally, the Kirchentag needed to take advantage of its independence from the churches, to take more risks and to engage in experimentation. This would require livelier discussions that drew in ordinary people, not just experts. It would also require workgroups to engage with the real problems that people faced, including controversial topics such as changing sexual morals. Finally, the Kirchentag needed to allow real discussion of these controversial topics, even when there was no possibility of coming to an agreement.⁸

Progressive critics were not the only ones putting pressure on the Kirchentag to alter its program. After the academic meetings of the late 1950s, many traditional Protestants, too, complained of the divide between the Kirchentag program and the concerns of ordinary people. Rather than advocating new experiments, however, many of these critics urged the Kirchentag to return to an emphasis on the task of building up and supporting the local congregations. While this task might include some engagement with “worldly” problems, it would be more populist and devotional in its approach. First and foremost, it would involve helping Protestants to maintain their traditional faith despite the challenges posed by modern society. As a secondary emphasis, it would be about offering Christian solutions to the problems of the world.

⁸ Ibid.

These concerns were apparent in a meeting of workgroup leaders, shortly after the 1959 Kirchentag. Here numerous leaders from both the West and East criticized the last Kirchentag's abstract, academic focus, complaining that it was cold and lacking in true fellowship. East German leaders complained especially about the Kirchentag's West German orientation and the lack of East German involvement. But many West Germans also argued that the Munich Kirchentag had drawn too heavily on the ideas of the Kirchentag Congress and that they had not had sufficient time to modify its program. While several of those present defended the new academic approach, arguing that the Kirchentag needed to remain engaged with the problems of the world, many others missed the greater emphasis of earlier Kirchentage on singing, worship, and bible study. Even defenders of the new approach were forced to acknowledge the gulf between speakers and audience. Reacting to these complaints, even Hans Herman Walz conceded that the workgroups needed to include more non-experts, who could better gauge the accessibility of the material for the broader public.⁹

Workgroup leaders also strongly rejected the notion that the Kirchentag should focus more on marginal Protestants and those outside the churches. The Kirchentag's primary audience, Heinrich Giesen argued, was the church's active core membership. These were the people the Kirchentag was supposed to serve. This did not mean that the Kirchentag needed to avoid innovative and critical approaches. It had a duty to look at critical questions and contemporary topics, but it had to approach these from the standpoint of belief.¹⁰ As members of the workgroup leadership concluded at another meeting, shortly thereafter: "The suggestions of the publicists for a fundamental

⁹ Workgroup Leadership Meeting Minutes, 5-7 November 1959, EZA 71/86/112.

¹⁰ Ibid.

restructuring of the Kirchentag were rejected. The idea of the Kirchentag as a Kirchentag for the local congregations was affirmed, in the sense that it has specific and important contributions to make to the renewal and reformation of the church. If it does this correctly . . . then it will also have an effect on those on the margins and the outside.”¹¹

The same approach was clear in a meeting with prominent Westphalian Protestants to discuss potential themes for the Dortmund Kirchentag, originally planned for 1961. Already in early 1959, those attending this meeting recognized that the Kirchentag was losing any real ability to bridge the divide between the East and West. If the Kirchentag was to remain relevant in these circumstances, they argued, it would have to return to Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff’s original vision. The Kirchentag should be an independent organization working under the aegis of the Protestant church to empower and educate the laity, an especially important task given the growing secularization of German society. This would involve basic evangelistic and missionary work. But it would also involve the work of strengthening and reforming the church from within, starting with individual members in the local congregation.¹²

In another 1959 planning meeting, at the Protestant Study Center at *Haus Villigst*, several prominent Westphalian Protestants offered some indication of the topics and themes that a Kirchentag in Dortmund might include. Suggestions ranged across such diverse topics as race relations in Germany, “youth,” the influence of jazz, film, and mass media, loss of meaning and purpose in the modern world, consumer society, alienation from the churches, and the relationship between the churches and modern society. Klaus

¹¹ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Report. Meeting of the leaders of Workgroups 1-3 on 12 January 1960,” 3 February 1960, EZA 71/86/119, 2.

¹² Friedelbert Lorenz, “Minutes of a meeting at the House of Graf von der Schulenburg on 22 April 1959,” 15 May 1959, EZA 71/86/118.

von Bismarck, who moderated the discussion, brought these elements together under the theme: “The church as a minority in secular society.” Under this broad rubric, he grouped suggested topics into four general categories to be addressed at the next Kirchentag: youth, social politics, the “new type of human being in industrial society,” and the church.¹³

This focus on “wordly” problems depended largely, however, on the Kirchentag’s proposed location in Dortmund, in the industrial Ruhr basin where the church felt most threatened by the forces of modernity. These plans were called into question when several members of the Präsidium began to push, instead, for a gathering in Berlin. The advocates of a Berlin Kirchentag wanted to play on the symbolic importance of 1961 as the tenth anniversary of the Kirchentag’s first truly all-German gathering. They argued that, despite recent difficulties, the Kirchentag retained an important function as a bridge between the churches in the East and West. And they argued that even a Kirchentag limited to West Berlin would draw large numbers of attendees from the East. Those in favor of Dortmund argued that, without the cooperation of the GDR, any Berlin Kirchentag was bound to be difficult and disappointing. And they argued that Dortmund would be a better location for continuing their engagement with the new ideas pioneered in 1958.¹⁴ Ultimately, however, Berlin was chosen in an 8 to 4 vote of the Präsidium, against the wishes of Thadden and the rest of the full time Kirchentag staff. Thadden, who was absent for health reasons, was called on phone and given the opportunity to

¹³ Klaus von Bismarck, “Memo: Meeting in Haus Villigst on 6 January 1960,” 28 January 1960, EZA 71/96/349.

¹⁴ “Zur Frage des Kirchentagsortes 1961: Dortmund oder Berlin,” prepared for the Präsidium Meeting of 17-18 January 1960, EZA 71/86/686.

exercise his presidential veto. Recognizing, however, that a veto would permanently fragment the Kirchentag leadership, he reluctantly deferred to the majority.¹⁵

Despite this decision, the location of the Kirchentag remained up in the air for almost a year as various church and Kirchentag leaders attempted to gain the approval of the GDR regime. Unlike previous all-German and East German Kirchentag gatherings, the intellectual content of the 1961 Kirchentag remained largely West German in its emphasis. Having already begun their planning with Dortmund in mind, the leaders in charge of thematic planning were reluctant to make drastic changes. They were supported in this by the Präsidium, which agreed “not to let the vote for Berlin *prejudice the Kirchentag thematic structure* and, especially, not to allow the thematic structure of a potential Berlin Kirchentag to be one-sidedly evangelistic or inner-church oriented.”¹⁶ As a result, the 1961 Kirchentag continued along the moderately reformist lines of the 1958 Kirchentag Congress and the Munich Kirchentag of 1959. Planners continued to reject arguments that they needed to reach out more strongly to those alienated from the churches, arguing that this would distract them too much from the core of their program. However they did continue to hope that a more concrete program—although directed primarily at church people—would help to draw outsiders in.¹⁷

Reform impulses at the 1961 Kirchentag were most apparent in new workgroup sessions on topics like Jewish-Christian relations and the historical developments that led to the Third Reich. To a lesser extent, other workgroups also began to move in new

¹⁵ Präsidium Meeting Minutes, 17-18 January 1960, EZA 71/86/159.

¹⁶ Report on the Special Meeting of the Präsidium, 2 February 1960, EZA 71/86/27, 5; emphasis in original.

¹⁷ Klaus, Lefringhausen, “Minutes. Meeting on 2 March 1960 in the ‘Haus der Begegnung’ in Mülheim,” EZA 71/86/119.

directions, although this was more apparent in the planning meetings than in the final Kirchentag program. In the early planning stages, for example, younger Kirchentag leaders such as Klaus von Bismarck hoped to address new topics such as “gender relations” and the growing “generational problem” in Germany. Ultimately, however, they entirely avoided the topic of gender, while subordinating the generational problem to the existing and very conservative workgroup on the family and education.¹⁸ The workgroup on the church also began to consider the need to address growing questions about the authority of the bible and about the historical Jesus. Since looking at both of these controversial issues was deemed too much for one workgroup, planners decided to focus on questions about the bible, leaving the historical Jesus debate for a future gathering.¹⁹ While more progressive theologians, such as Heinz Zahrnt, now a member of the Präsidium, had argued that the Kirchentag should plunge directly into this controversy, the “Bible” workgroup took a more cautious approach. Rather than directly engaging in the debates between traditional and “historical-critical” theologians about how to interpret the bible, they aimed their speeches at the practical questions that pious church members might have, presenting a moderate consensus viewpoint on the human and divine aspects of the bible’s provenance.²⁰

This moderate approach was not enough to satisfy critics, who pushed for much more radical changes. Already during the Berlin Kirchentag itself, delegates from the youth division [*Jugendkammer*] of the EKD and from the Protestant Youth in Germany

¹⁸ Präsidium Meeting Minutes, 8-9 April 1960, EZA 71/86/159; Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo: “Thematik und Struktur der Arbeitsgruppen 1961,” 31 May 1960, EZA 71/86/120, 4.

¹⁹ “Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo: “Zu Thematik und Struktur des Kirchentages 1961 in Berlin,” 7 April 1960, EZA 71/86/120, 1-2; Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo: “Thematik und Struktur des Kirchentages 1961,” 31 May 1961, EZA 71/86/120, 1.

²⁰ See DEKT 1961.

[*Evangelischen Jugend in Deutschland*] met to voice their criticisms and suggestions. While these youth appreciated the larger role that they had been given during the last several years, they complained that they were still ignored by many of the speakers. Echoing a common criticism, they also argued that the Kirchentag had become too abstract and intellectual, lacking lively discussion or real human interaction. Rather than trying to appease all of the different factions within the church, they urged the Kirchentag leadership to rise above these squabbles. Instead, the Kirchentag should work to create truly spontaneous communal worship, experimenting with new approaches and styles. The bible study should become more concrete and practical and less academic.²¹

Finally, they offered qualified praise for the new topics of several workgroups, urging the leadership to continue to address topics of contemporary relevance. However, they argued, these workgroups had still been too dry and factual. Rather than merely offering information on controversial contemporary issues, they urged the Kirchentag to become more active, working to generate “impulse and excitement.” For the “church” workgroup they suggested a return to practical questions of belief and life, looking at the role of communion, baptism, and confirmation. For the other workgroups, they urged the speakers to move beyond factual analysis toward action, calling on audiences to donate money to good causes, adopting resolutions, suggesting further readings, and providing contact information for organizations audience members might want to join.²²

Meeting with Heinrich Giesen immediately following the Berlin gathering, members of the Friends of the Christian Press Academy offered similar criticism. First

²¹ “Stellungnahme der Delegation der Evangelischen Jugend in Deutschland zum 10. Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentag in Berlin vom 19.-23. Juli 1961,” EZA 71/86/120.

²² Ibid.

and foremost, they argued that the Kirchentag was trying to do too much at once. As a result, there was a lack of coordination between the Kirchentag staff, the various planning committees, and local officials. The workgroups had also gone too far in emphasizing quantity over quality. Instead of trying to cover every important issue, they needed to focus more closely on a few contemporary topics. And they needed to approach these topics with more spontaneity, rather than planning them out far in advance. They also needed to expand the size of the workgroup leadership, bringing in new voices, and they needed to offer more opportunities for real discussion. They argued: “It was obvious, for example that any doubters who may have attended the “Bible” workgroup, were not drawn in or given any satisfactory answers.” Finally, they argued that the Kirchentag needed to be more radical and more provocative in its basic approach to contemporary issues. Looking again at the “bible” meetings, they criticized boring sessions with titles like “Our Questions about the Bible,” which could be much more provocatively reformulated as “Does the Bible contain errors?”²³

THE CENTER OF CONFLICT

This conflict over the structure and content of the Kirchentag became even more acute as the construction of the Berlin Wall, in August 1961, precipitated a major identity crisis within the Kirchentag leadership. The Kirchentag had always been more than just a symbol of Protestant and German unity. But its role as an organization that brought together Germans from both sides of the Iron Curtain had given it a special political and social importance. No longer able to fulfill this function, its very existence was called into question. Many conservative Protestants, frustrated by the critical political and

²³ Christian Press Academy, “Strukturprobleme des Kirchentages,” 23-25 July 1961, EZA 71/86/120.

theological direction of recent gatherings, argued that the Kirchentag had lost its only reason to exist. After all, the churches already had more reliable evangelistic and missions organizations. And the Protestant Academies and Study Centers were far better suited to careful academic analysis than were large Kirchentag gatherings. At the same time, many progressive Protestant leaders, upset about the breakdown in negotiations between the Kirchentag and the GDR regime and frustrated by the inner-church focus of the last several gatherings, argued that the Kirchentag had lost its critical capacity. To these critics, the Munich and Berlin meetings demonstrated that the organization had become fully subordinate to the institutional church hierarchy and to the conservative politics of the Bonn government.

Hans Hermann Walz, who had been largely responsible for the much-maligned academic turn of the late 1950s, responded to these criticisms in a short paper on the “Clericalization and Politicization of the Kirchentag,” circulated to the Präsidium in October 1961. Taking issue with charges that the Kirchentag had become subordinate to the institutional church hierarchy, he argued that the Kirchentag was “dependent not upon the church leadership, but on the ‘climate’ in the churches and in the local congregations.” When the Kirchentag seemed to promote the views of the church leadership or to take a political position with regard to German division, it was not speaking for itself, but merely reflecting the views of most German Protestants. With recent criticism, however, he admitted that this situation had become problematic. But the solution was not to cut off ties with the church hierarchy or to withdraw from the political sphere. On the contrary, Walz wrote: “The danger of clericalization and politicization has not grown out the fact that the Kirchentag has too often taken issue with

the church and political authorities, but from the fact that it has done this too little.” The Kirchentag was itself a “political phenomenon” and it needed to recognize this fact. It needed to continue its involvement in political questions, but it needed to do so more intentionally and self-consciously.²⁴

In order to achieve this, Walz proposed two somewhat contradictory changes in the Kirchentag’s approach. First, the Kirchentag needed to open its planning process to the outside more than in had the past, meeting with representatives from all of the various organizations and institutions of the church. Second, however, the Kirchentag needed to be bolder in developing its own positions on controversial issues, not simply reflecting the full spectrum of Protestant thought. This was not just true for theological divisions, but also for politics. The Kirchentag needed to seek out more ties with political groups and figures. “In its leadership and advisory bodies,” he argued, “it does not need the least colorful people available, who will never excite new impulses, but instead the boldest and most potent representatives of the various existing powers.” These people should not be limited to leading Protestant, or even Christian, intellectuals. Instead, the Kirchentag needed to open itself up to people on the cutting edge of contemporary social and political developments, regardless of their religious views. Only by openly embracing controversies, Walz concluded, could the Kirchentag avoid being unconsciously dragged into them, as it had in the past.²⁵

On a more practical level, Walz also began to see the need for a thorough structural reform. Writing up his assessment of the Berlin gathering, he argued: “The

²⁴ Hans Hermann Walz, “Klerikalisierung und Politisierung des Kirchentages,” attached to a Circular Letter from 22 October 1961, EZA 71/86/27.

²⁵ Ibid.

Kirchentag has reached a stage in its development where it needs to seriously consider its further course, looking at approaching, as-yet-unresolved or newly-formulated tasks, and at new structures and forms for its larger gatherings.” The main problem here was that Kirchentag had become too large and diffuse, with its activities spread across countless workgroups, cultural presentations, and mass assemblies. As a result, it had lost the ability to present a unified message, to offer a coherent perspective on the contributions that the church and Christian theology could make to the world. In order to regain this influence, Walz argued for a new, more concentrated format with fewer workgroups. Taking note of the rising numbers of single-day visitors, he also called for self-contained daily themes that would not presuppose attendance at previous meetings. And he suggested that the Kirchentag needed to make use of a wider variety of media in order to better communicate its message in the language of modern people. Finally, in order to better engage the public, he acknowledged, the Kirchentag needed to create more and better opportunities for discussion. This was especially true for the Kirchentag’s bible studies, which had evolved into full-fledged sermons. He also recognized the need for more provocative approaches to the workgroup topics, especially in the group on the bible, where young people were looking for answers to difficult questions.²⁶

As the Kirchentag leadership began the planning process for 1963, this new direction was given further impetus by major personnel changes. Heinrich Giesen, always one of the strongest advocates of the Kirchentag’s inner-church role, retired from the full time staff in October 1961.²⁷ Although Giesen had been responsible for

²⁶ Hans Hermann Walz, “Rückblick auf die Thematische Arbeit 1961, 24 November 1961, EZA 71/86/27.

²⁷ Präsidium Minutes, 22 October 1961, EZA 71/86/27.

coordinating most of the content for the first several Kirchentage, his role had become progressively smaller with the addition of Walz to the staff in 1955. Especially after 1959, when Friedelbert Lorenz joined the staff as a full time academic director, Giesen's role had been reduced to coordinating the preaching and bible study groups. His replacement by the younger and more progressive theologian Gerhard Schnath, in the newly created position of Kirchentag Pastor, opened the door more widely to progressive theological perspectives and new, experimental worship styles. Since he was 69 years old and in poor health, Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff had also begun to make plans for his retirement from the office of Kirchentag President. In a Präsidium meeting shortly before Berlin, his hand-picked successor, Klaus von Bismarck, was chosen to replace him as Kirchentag President. In the end, this change never went into effect. Shortly after his selection, Bismarck was offered a position as the director of West German Radio [WDR]. Unable to balance both positions, he felt compelled to decline the position of Kirchentag president, although he remained active in the Präsidium.²⁸ Thadden was forced to continue in office until 1964, while the Präsidium undertook a lengthy search for another replacement. In practice, however, he became less and less involved in day-to-day matters.

This generational shift also began to be reflected in the membership of the Kirchentag Präsidium. In the period from 1957 to 1963, the Präsidium lost many of its longtime members. Many others in the East—although still technically members of the Präsidium even after the construction of the Berlin Wall—were no longer able to play an active leadership role. The former included such leading members as Gustav Heinemann,

²⁸ Präsidium Minutes, 27 July 1960, EZA 71/86/159; Präsidium Minutes, 22 June 1961, EZA 71/86/27.

Marie Krüger, Friedrich Lahusen, Eberhard Müller, and Heinrich Troeger. The latter included leading East German Protestants such as Lothar Kreyssig, Reinhold Hildebrandt, Helga Krummacher, and Reiner Mager. These older members were gradually replaced in the early and mid-1960s by a growing cohort of younger, more progressive Protestant leaders. These included future Federal Presidents Richard von Weizsäcker and Johannes Rau, more progressive theologians such as Heinz Zahrnt, and younger journalists and academics such as Hans Jürgen Schultz and Rudolf von Thadden.

Following Walz' advice, the Kirchentag leadership began to open the planning process to outside perspectives as they worked on their ideas for Dortmund. Between 1961 and 1963, they held countless meetings with groups and individuals across the full spectrum of the Protestant church, in search of new impulses and ideas. They also began to much more carefully and systematically keep track of press reports and other criticism. Friedelbert Lorenz, who had joined the Kirchentag staff in 1959 in the newly created position of Academic Director [*Studienleiter*], played an especially important role in integrating the ideas of critics into the Kirchentag program. From the beginning, however, this was a difficult and contradictory task. Drastically expanding the number and diversity of people involved in planning the next Kirchentag only made it harder for the leadership to speak with a strong and decisive voice. Now, even more than before, the Kirchentag found itself caught in the crossfire between the young and old, the pious and the modern, between conservatives and progressives.

Planning for a Dortmund Kirchentag had already been underway since early 1959, before the decision to move the 1961 Kirchentag to Berlin. As they began to make plans for the Kirchentag in 1963, these earlier plans served as a starting point. These original

plans, centered on the problems of social life in industrial society, found considerable approval among the church leadership in Dortmund. A November 1961 meeting with the directors of the Dortmund Preachers' Seminar, for example, focused on the need to engage more directly with the changing role of the church in modern society. People in the modern world, these church leaders argued, had lost any sense of moral standards or values. The Kirchentag's task was to help people discover anew the importance of Christian faith for everyday, community life. However, this was not simply a matter of going back to an earlier time. Addressing these problems would require more than just reiterating the church's traditional social teachings, with their emphasis on the community and congregation. It would also demand an engagement with the pressing social issues that troubled people's lives today. These issues included peace, the fear of nuclear war, problems of human interaction on all levels, and relations between Germans and foreigners.²⁹

In other meetings, however, critics pushed for the Kirchentag to move in radical new directions. This was especially apparent in a November 1961 meeting with the younger, more radical academic directors of the Protestant Study Center at *Haus Villigst*. Rather than focusing, like older academics, on the loss of tradition and community in modern society, these young academics urged the Kirchentag to focus on the "discomfort" of the younger generation with West German society, taking bold critical positions against social and political "taboos." These taboo subjects included the need to accept German division, "creeping totalitarianism" in West German politics, the promotion of true freedom and peace, problems of social inequality, the need for an

²⁹ Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo: "Discussion with Studienleiter Rosenboom and Studieninspector Silomon, Prediger Seminar Dortmund," 14 November 1961, 27 November 1961, EZA 71/96/349.

“extra-parliamentary opposition,” and criticisms of the postwar “bourgeois restoration.” With regard to the church itself, these younger academics argued that Kirchentag bible study sessions needed to be more practical and needed to engage with the controversy over new critical methods of reading the bible.³⁰

In early drafts for the 1963 program, Lorenz struggled to integrate these competing perspectives. This process of integration was easiest in workgroups that focused on the church and its teachings. Here, even many moderates and conservatives saw the need for rethinking basic questions, if only to draw the youth back into the church. For concrete themes, Lorenz suggested that the Kirchentag examine the changing nature of the Christian congregation in the present-day, especially in its troubled relationship with secular society. Social problems like mass consumption, the loss of common values, isolation, and alienation in modern society were also relatively unproblematic, connected as they were to traditional Protestant social teachings. However, Lorenz had more difficulty giving concrete, factual expression to topics like “discomfort” with the West German system or the question of political “taboos,” complaining that they seemed too abstract and vague.³¹

The task of forging a common theme for Dortmund was further complicated as more conservative and traditionalist Protestants raised their objections to the proposed changes. In a letter to the Kirchentag leadership, written in early 1962, Hans Thimme, the Vice President of the Church of Westphalia urged a return to the Kirchentag’s

³⁰ Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo: Discussion with the Studienleitern of the Ev. Studienwerks on 15 November 1961, EZA 71/96/349.

³¹ Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo: “Thematik Dortmund,” 9 December 1961, EZA 71/96/349.

original focus on evangelism and missions.³² And in a meeting between Lorenz and several Westphalian church leaders, he argued: “No experiments! Comprehensive structural changes will only confuse Kirchentag visitors.” At the most, he conceded, the Kirchentag might include one “experimental” workgroup. The bulk of the Kirchentag, he argued, should instead look at the problems of isolation and individualism in modern industrial society, focusing on the role of the churches in creating a renewed sense of community and belonging. The Kirchentag could help different social groups to overcome their differences, focusing on divisions between the church and the world, the young and the old, Protestant and Catholic, German and foreign, government and opposition, pro- and anti-nuclear, under an overarching motto such as “Serve one another.” However, despite this emphasis on points of division, Thimme opposed any attempt to directly address the controversy surrounding “modern theology.”³³

In another meeting in early 1962 a group of older former academic directors from *Haus Villigst* also objected to the ideas of their younger colleagues. In fact, they urged the Kirchentag to avoid getting tangled up in controversial issues. As one of these older academics argued: “The Kirchentag should avoid getting into debates where the walls of prejudices between social groups are too high and too strong. The Kirchentag cannot break through these walls. The Kirchentag is not a place for quarreling with each other.” And in response to the idea that the next Kirchentag should address “the question of a free, democratic socialism,” another argued that the Kirchentag was in danger of “doing the SPDs work for it.” Such provocative suggestions, they argued, came only from small,

³² Hans Thimme to Kirchentag Leadership, 27 January 1962, EZA 71/96/349.

³³ Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo: Leadership Meeting on 11 January 1962 in Dortmund, 16 January 1962, EZA 71/96/349.

isolated intellectual circles within the church. The Kirchentag's task, however, was to appeal to the masses, who were looking for a positive subjective experience, not academic debate. In line with this approach, they approved plans for slightly more critical bible study meetings and they strongly supported a thematic focus, like that suggested by Thimme, on the divisions between different groups in society.³⁴

These ideas were further developed in a series of meetings with Protestant social-policy experts. Even here, however, there was disagreement about where the Kirchentag should devote its energy. Eberhard Müller, a former Präsidium member and the director of the Protestant Academy at Bad Boll, for example, pushed for a return to the Kirchentag's older social program. As key focal points, he suggested the dangers threatening rural and village life, the struggle between those who produced goods and those who served their fellow man, and danger of industrial workers losing their individuality and becoming slaves to the machine. Müller opposed any focus on conflict or on modern, progressive theological movements.³⁵

Most other social policy experts rejected Müller's ideas as out of touch and old-fashioned. These leaders generally approved existing plans, while several pushed the Kirchentag to move in a more radical, self-critical direction.³⁶ Arguing that the Kirchentag had too long been focused narrowly on problems within the church, the

³⁴ Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo: Meeting with "Altvilligstern" on 13 January 1962, 16 January 1962, EZA 71/96/349; the memo does not identify most speakers.

³⁵ Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo: Discussion with Eberhard Müller on 17 January 1962, 20 January 1962, EZA 71/96/349.

³⁶ See, for example, Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo: Discussion with the Sozialethischen Ausschuss der rheinischen Kirche and others on 23 January 1962, 29 January 1962, EZA 71/96/349; Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo: Discussion with the leaders of the Protestant Social Academy Friedewald on 24 January 1962, 29 January 1962, EZA 71/96/349; Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo: Meeting with EkiD Ausschuss für Dienst auf dem Land, 10 March 1962, EZA 71/96/349.

leaders of the Protestant Social Academy in Friedewald, for example, argued that the Kirchentag needed to “renew” itself. In particular, they argued that the Kirchentag had an important role in reaching out to those on the margins of the church. These people had no interest in religious and theological hair-splitting, but they were very interested in the role of the church and faith in the modern world. Drawing on their experiences at Friedewald, they argued that these people responded especially well to theologians who “started with the concrete situation or with questions of worldly life, correlating these with modern interpretations of the bible.” At Friedewald, they observed, such approaches to theology had sometimes angered the pious, but they had also generated considerable enthusiasm among outsiders, who would rally to the defense of the modern theologians.³⁷

Another meeting with a group of leading Protestant academics was even more radical in its suggestions. Here, the philosopher and educational reformer, Georg Picht argued that the Kirchentag had no less of a task than to rescue the churches from a position of social and political irrelevance. Up until 1918, he argued, the churches in Germany had relied on the state to put their ideas and beliefs into practice. As a result, they had never developed any effective lay-movement. Since 1918 and the end of the Prussian monarchy, the church had simply existed “without a body.” Without a strong lay-movement it was unable to make positive contributions to society. This was

³⁷ Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo: Discussion with the leaders of the Protestant Social Academy Friedewald on 24 January 1962, 29 January 1962, EZA 71/96/349.

reinforced by the churches' views of themselves as something in opposition to society, rather than as one of its constituent parts.³⁸

It was time, he continued, for the churches to stop criticizing the modern world and to start becoming part of it.

This incorporation can only be realized within the constraints of the pluralist and functionalist industrial-, production-, welfare- and consumer-society of our democratic state. This state is, itself, a dynamic process, not suited to being the body of the church in the old way. If the church, then, does not take part in the process of political actualization, it will fail both to develop a body and also fail to maintain its traditions.

On the other hand, if the Protestant churches were willing to play a positive role in modern German society, they were uniquely positioned to do so. While the Catholic church was tied to one political party, there were Protestants in each of the three major West German parties. This put Protestants in a unique position to work for social and political integration. Indeed, they had no choice. As Picht argued, "The Protestant church must integrate, or else it will be torn apart in the competition between interest groups."³⁹

This was where the Kirchentag entered his plans. In order to carry out this social task, the church needed to develop a cadre of politically responsible and active members. But it had proven unable to do this. The individual *Landeskirchen* were too provincial in their focus, while the Council of the EKD was out of touch with political realities. Only the Kirchentag could "[offer] coordination, counsel, motivation, momentum, etc. for the construction of this body." In doing so, the Kirchentag would essentially supplant the

³⁸ Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo: Discussion with the Collegium of the Christophorus Foundation on 12 February 1962 in Heidelberg, 20 February 1962, EZA 71/96/349. Members in attendance included Georg Picht, Hans Dombois, Günther Howe, Heinz Eduard Tödt, Schüssler, Eisenbarth, Walz, and Lorenz.

³⁹ Ibid.

Landeskirchen and the EKD as the real church in Germany. The Kirchentag, as a new kind of the church, would circumvent the state church model, adapting itself fully to modern consumer society. In this model, it would be financed entirely by the financial contributions of free “consumers” to whom it would offer “life help” and spiritual counsel in return.⁴⁰

Speaking on behalf of the Kirchentag leadership, Hans Hermann Walz, greeted the specific details of this plan with considerable skepticism, but he concurred with much of the broader outline. In fact, he pointed out, the Kirchentag had long informally occupied just such a position, serving in the eyes of many as the outward, social and political manifestation of the Protestant church. In their comments, others at the meeting also seemed taken aback by the enormity of Picht’s suggestions, but they did not dismiss them outright. As Günther Howe commented: “These suggestions imply a theology and an understanding of the church that has never before existed in the four-hundred year history of Protestantism.” And Hans Dombois questioned whether a new cadre of core church leaders could really be fashioned out of modern consumers. But those in attendance could all agree that the church lacked any public rallying point for those who wanted to live out their faith in society. As the progressive theologian Heinz-Eduard Tödt pointed out, drawing on his experiences working with the church’s student congregations [*Studentengemeinden*], the church was in danger of losing the whole cohort of 20- and 30-year-olds if it did not offer them a meaningful place in the church.⁴¹

Turning to more practical matters, several of those present strongly criticized the existing plans for Dortmund. Günther Howe took issue, in particular, with the vagueness

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

and ambiguity with which the churches approached modern social problems, mocking their treatment at previous gatherings as “dancing around the social calf.” “If we proceed this way, with all of this talk of ‘social problems, social problems,’ we run the risk at Dortmund, of simply combining the errors of the theologians with the errors of the sociologists.” If the church wanted to address these problems in a meaningful way, he argued, they would need to do more than recite a well-worn litany clichés, instead delving deeper into the actual problems and issues. Despite his radical views of the church, Georg Picht reserved his strongest criticism for proposed discussions of “the historical Jesus” and for debates about modern critical theology. Calling for an end to “the eternal blithering on about the bible,” he proposed that the sacraments, instead, were at the center of modern faith. He also called for the Kirchentag’s political discussions to center on the need for honesty in politics and on bridging the gulf of mistrust between the German people and their government. Finally, he argued that the Kirchentag needed to do more to “awake” the “ecumenical consciousness” of the church.⁴²

Amid all of these divergent suggestions for the Dortmund Kirchentag, there was one point of agreement. Regardless of their other views, everyone to whom the Kirchentag leadership talked could agree that German society, inside and outside of the churches, was torn by conflict and disagreement. When the Kirchentag finally held its theme selection meeting [*Themenkonvent*] the idea of conflict itself became the major focal point. Rather than simply rehashing existing debates about the problems of the social world, the plans of the Kirchentag staff called for a special focus on most controversial hot button issues of modern life. It also called for major innovations to the Kirchentag structure. Since Dortmund lacked large central halls for mass meetings, the

⁴² Ibid.

Kirchentag would be more decentralized than those of the past. Since the leadership expected a larger number of single-day visitors from the local area, each day was to have a self-contained theme. These themes would progress and build on each other across the three days of the Kirchentag.⁴³ While these plans—with their emphasis on controversy and topicality—contained the potential for real innovation, early drafts remained quite traditional. The first draft of plans for the *Themenkonvent* called for the Kirchentag to begin its first day with the theme of “difference, opposition, and conflict,” looking at their social and psychological impact on the modern individual. On the second day, the Kirchentag would turn to Jesus Christ, the only person who could overcome these conflicts. Finally, on the third day, they would turn to the need to “serve one another.”⁴⁴

Hans Hermann Walz elaborated upon this theme, while also hinting at some of its more radical potential, in a speech to the *Themenkonvent* entitled “Jesus Christ: Integrator.” Walz began his speech by looking at the major changes in German society since 1945 and the changing role of the Kirchentag. In the immediate postwar years, he argued, excited by their newfound freedom, German Protestants had sensed new opportunities for the renewal of the church and of society through the Christian faith. And they had also expected that their own religious unity could lead to the reunification of Germany. Both of these impulses had been strong at the Kirchentag meetings of the early 1950s, contributing greatly to the large crowds and the festive atmosphere of those gatherings. However, both of these impulses had faded with the passage of time, making the Kirchentag’s task far more difficult. Nevertheless, the Kirchentag retained an important function. It did not just exist to “preach the Gospel” and to spread the

⁴³ Fridelbert Lorenz, Draft: “Vorlage für den Themenkonvent,” 22 March 1962, EZA 71/96/374.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Christian faith—although these were indeed among its tasks. On a more fundamental level, the Kirchentag existed to “bear witness and serve” in the “broadest sense of these words.” In order to do this, it needed to recognize that practical meaning of these words was constantly changing as society itself underwent changes.⁴⁵

The greatest challenge of German society since the middle of the 1950s had been social integration. The church could not avoid this task, but there were different ways to carry it out in practice. To many theologians, this was simply a matter of providing theological principles and guidelines for social life. But, more recently, Protestant intellectuals such as Hans Dombois, Trutz Rendtorff, and Heinz-Eduard Tödt had questioned this perspective, arguing that theology needed to be engaged with (even subordinate to) external social realities. This, Walz argued, was a false dichotomy. The church did not have to choose between claiming to have all of the answers and admitting that it didn't have any. Rather, one could start from the perspective that faith was already vitally connected to modern reality, to “the world and history, nature and technology.” This connection was to be found in the person of Jesus Christ, whom each era needed to rediscover for itself. This was not just a matter of putting “the beloved formulations of the old Gospel in new words,” but of truly rediscovering Christ's presence in the world today. It was not just a matter of accepting Christ as the savior of souls, of escaping from the problems of the world through faith. This other-worldliness was, in fact, just another form of secularism. Instead, the task of the church—and of the Kirchentag—was

⁴⁵ DEKT 1963, 10-24.

to see Christ as the one who had already reconciled the world to God through his death and resurrection, participating actively in this process.⁴⁶

In practice, this meant that the church was called to the task of integration and reconciliation in the world. It was called to a form of solidarity “enlightened by the truth of pluralism” but also tied to principles of the Christian faith. This solidarity meant that, instead of complaining about the “disintegration” and dysfunction” of society, the church was called to find ways to change this. It meant boldly stepping into the fissures and ruptures of modern society, offering help and service to those in need. Finally, it meant recognizing that unity was not something the church created by rallying around any one theology or movement, or by reducing the plurality of perspectives in the world. Instead, it was a gift of God, experienced in the service of society.⁴⁷

Walz’ speech to the *Themenkonvent* was itself an attempt at integration, at bridging the divide between traditional theology and self-critical progressive perspectives. The church, in essence, could afford to be humble toward outsiders precisely because of its confidence in the unfolding of God’s plan. It could stand in solidarity with the world, not by giving up its traditional mission and traditional claims, but by reconceptualizing this mission as a form of service to the world. This formulation postulated a positive relationship between the claims of the Christian faith and the lived realities of the modern world. But it left the details of this relationship vague and undefined. The practice of actually working out this agenda fell to the *Themenkonvent* and the leaders of the *Kirchentag* workgroups, where things were much less clear-cut.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

One area where Kirchentag planners could agree was on the need for structural reforms. In keeping with their hope to integrate ordinary people and everyday experiences into the Kirchentag program, *Themenkonvent* members approved of Walz' and Lorenz' plans for a new decentralized structure. Rather than beginning each day with a bible study seminar, essentially with a programmatic sermon, they decided to introduce each day's theme with a short, provocative film. Rather than offering any answers, this film was intended to provoke questions as Kirchentag visitors thought about the intersection between their own lives and the day's larger themes. After seeing these films, Kirchentag visitors would be invited to participate in small group discussions, held in more than fifty different locations. Here, under the direction of a trained facilitator, they would be encouraged to talk about their own experiences and questions. Only in the afternoon would the Kirchentag hold its usual presentations, offering answers to the questions posed in the morning.

In the same vein, the topics chosen for the daily themes were broadened somewhat from Lorenz' original proposal, while the progression from one theme to the next was loosened. The Kirchentag would still have conflict as its overarching theme. But, where earlier program drafts called for moving from conflict to resolution to service over the course of three days, new drafts called for a more careful examination of conflict itself. The first day would examine interpersonal conflict. The second would look at conflict between societal interest groups. And only on the third day would the Kirchentag consider the role of the church—both in causing and in resolving these conflicts. Many of the concrete topics addressed under the rubric of these themes remained traditional, but several also moved the Kirchentag in a newly critical direction,

especially with regard to the situation within the churches themselves. On the second day, proposed sessions included structural problems within the German church and the churches' contributions to Germany's educational crisis. The final day included a session on Protestant-Catholic relations, especially in light of the meetings of the Second Vatican Council. And it also included a panel on the ways in which the church could model reconciliation and on the ways in which it fell short of this ideal.⁴⁸

However, it was the Dortmund Kirchentag's provocative slogan "Living with Conflict" that generated the most controversy. As the first Kirchentag slogan since 1950 not to be drawn directly from a passage of scripture, this slogan was a clear signal of a new, more worldly orientation. Unlike alternative slogans suggested by church leaders and Kirchentag planners, it also remained open to the fact that some conflicts could not be resolved. While initial suggestions had included such possibilities as "Jesus brings us together," "Christ is our peace," and "Christ - the Bridge," the motto "Living with Conflict" implied that the church might not be able fully reconcile every controversy or conflict. Instead, it might have to resign itself to living with them.⁴⁹

The provocative nature of this slogan was not an accident. In his defense against critics, Walz made it clear that this theme intentionally reflected the new function of the Kirchentag in a society no longer characterized by widespread political consensus. The Kirchentag leaders, he argued, had intentionally avoided a slogan that could serve as some kind of rallying cry. Instead, he argued, "It would be dangerous to offer some typical Christian slogan here, in the social situation of our Federal Republic, where there

⁴⁸ "Vorschlag des Themenkonvent," 11 April 1962, EZA 71/96/374; Hans Hermann Walz, Circular Letter, 7 June 1962, EZA 71/86/28.

⁴⁹ "Erwägungen für die Lösung des 11. DEKT 1963 in Dortmund," 28 September 1962, EZA 71/96/374.

is so much official Christian-ness [*Christlichkeit*] and so little Christian substance.” In the midst of all of this public Christianity, the Christian message had been lost. If the church wanted to regain its purpose in the modern world, he agreed with the American sociologist Peter Berger, it would need to do so wholly outside the boundaries of conventional Christianity. “The most important prerequisite for breaking out of these expectations,” he continued, “is that the word of the church is not heard merely as a pronouncement of the church, in which one simply believes, but as the word of God, who has not abandoned this world full of perplexity.” The church had gotten into this predicament, losing any social relevance, because it had failed to listen to the prophetic voices of its theologians, who had constantly warned against retreating into pious church language. “The proclamation of the Gospel,” he went on, “is a many layered event.” It was not limited to evangelism as traditionally understood, but also included “service” to humanity. The Kirchentag was not called to be a massive evangelistic gathering or to offer easy answers. “Living with Conflict,” he concluded, “—this is a slogan that does not conform to any expectations, that does not proceed smoothly. People will shake their heads at it, they will take offence [*Anstoss*] at it, and, hopefully, they will reflect on it.”⁵⁰

In the final Kirchentag program, this new direction was clearest in several self-critical speeches directed at the churches themselves. In a presentation entitled “Always Irritation with the Christians,” for example, the Dutch theologian Cornelius Dippel argued that the church deserved the scorn it received from people in modern society. This was because the church had too closely conformed itself to the patterns of the world, failing to live out the task to which God had called it. Instead of actually obeying God’s commands, the churches, he argued, “use the Gospel as a religious background against

⁵⁰ Hans Hermann Walz to Martin Nebe, 3 December 1962, EZA 71/96/374.

which we assert our foregrounded reality.” “We leave the church,” he continued, “the same as when we entered. We have become accustomed to the Gospel and the Communion table. But on Monday we rely on our own worldly experiences.” This had led the churches to play a tragi-comic role in history. As Dippel argued:

There is something in this Christianity, whereby Christian people, including their leaders, are always trailing behind the course of world history; always sanctifying the stupidity of the world powers with Christian words; always blocking progress and then, fifty years later, going along with it; honoring their seers, prophets, and martyrs too late, after their deaths, and then fifty years later crowning themselves with the martyr’s crown.

In this way, the churches had become complicit in “all of the suffering of history” “Slavery, racial hatred, hunger, colonialism, nationalism, war, the evils of the industrial revolution, and so on,” he continued, “all were approved by the churches of their time.”⁵¹

The scandal here was not that Christians had been involved in the activities of the world. Withdrawal from the world was just as bad, a form of defeatism that enabled the same crimes and atrocities. The problem was that the churches failed to understand their true calling to involvement in the world. They were not there to affirm the ways of the world or to impose their own rule or authority. Instead, they were called to true Christian service on behalf the helpless, the sick, the lonely and the oppressed. This service would also be a scandal—like the scandal of the Gospel—since it would pit Christians against prevailing cultural, political, social norms, with widespread and popular “views of humanity and of society.” But in this process, they would be bringing the true gospel to the world.⁵²

⁵¹ DEKT 1963, 341-343.

⁵² Ibid., 343-348.

The journalist Hans Jürgen Schultz followed up on this speech by bringing these criticisms to bear directly on the Protestant churches in Germany. In West Germany, after the war, he argued, the churches had reversed their passivity toward the state, embracing their public responsibility like never before. But they had become so caught up in their public leadership role that they had lost their soul. The Christian churches wielded influence in all areas of West German society, but they lacked the true strength, hope, and impetus of the minority churches of the Third World. This was not some coincidence, but was the direct result of their misunderstanding of the true structure and function of the church. Stuck in the past, Christian congregations in Germany had gone from the “vanguard” to the “rearguard” of society. “From of the ‘light,’” he went on, “they have become the ‘tail lights’ of the world.” In essence, they had fully lost touch with everyday life. But the true Christian congregation existed where there was dynamism and service, where belief transformed daily experience. Today, this was just as likely to be found in secular society as in the churches themselves. And so, the task of the church was not to build up and defend itself as an institution, but to find and develop true community in whatever forms it might take in the modern world.⁵³

These problems were addressed even more concretely in another session entitled “Does our church need to be reformed?” The church historian Rudolf von Thadden, son of the Kirchentag president, argued that the answer to this question was a self-evident “yes.” Everyday church practice demonstrated this clearly. But so did church history. Luther and the other great reformers had always intended the church to exist in a state of constant reformation. But the churches in modern Germany had abandoned this task, working to defend their institutions and traditions against any change. For all of the

⁵³ Ibid., 348-57.

massive upheavals of twentieth century Germany history, for example—across such important turning points as 1918, 1933, and 1945—the German Protestant churches had retained their traditional structure and church law. They were still stuck in the era of “Princely Absolutism” that had followed and corrupted the reformation. As a result, the institutional churches had lost any real popular basis. Ninety-six percent of Germans belonged to a church and paid their church taxes, but only six percent were actively involved. The Landeskirchen and the lay-church had clearly gone their separate ways. The church today, he concluded, was badly in need of reformation, not just in its institutions, but in its everyday practices. This task could begin with discussion among the church leaders, but, if it was to be effective, it would require everyone’s active participation. This work would not be easy, for the German churches were heavily burdened by history and tradition, but with God’s help, they would return to their true task.⁵⁴

Gerhard Heintze, a Church Superintendent from Hildesheim, followed Thadden’s appeal by arguing that the true church was not an institution or organization that needed to be preserved, but something that flowed out of the work of Jesus Christ in the world. The work of church reform then, was not simply a matter of changing the institution or holding more elections, but of making ordinary church members take responsibility for their church. If the Protestant churches in Germany were to truly reform themselves, this would have three implications. First, Protestants would need to recognize that the church was not an end in itself, but an organization designed to serve the world. Church renewal meant taking this obligation seriously by supporting missions and social aid programs throughout the world. Second, the church was not an institution run by functionaries, but

⁵⁴ Ibid., 409-417.

an institution based on the “priesthood of all believers.” The true church did not require church taxes, buildings, and organizations. What it required was true human interaction and community. Finally, the true church was an open and honest community. Whether or not it was strictly democratic, it had to be a place without taboos, where differences could be openly discussed. This meant that the churches had to accept the importance of disagreement and opposition.

THE KIRCHENTAG AS SELF-CRITICAL CHURCH

With its thorough structural reforms and increasingly self-critical content, Dortmund modeled a new experimental attitude for the Kirchentag. This experiment was successful in many ways. The Protestant magazine *Evangelische Welt*, for example, christened the Dortmund gathering a “Kirchentag for everyday life” [*Alltagskirchentag*], praising its open discussion groups where ordinary Protestants could talk to one another.⁵⁵ In a letter to Reinold von Thadden, Klaus von Bismarck praised the central role that had been given to the Protestant youth and the excitement that had been generated by several of the Kirchentag’s new topics of discussion.⁵⁶ And in a survey of young Kirchentag attendees, given by the Youth Ministry Office of the Westphalian church, overwhelming majorities approved of the new structure and format and the new, more worldly slogan “Living with Conflict.”⁵⁷ Summarizing assessments of the

⁵⁵ “‘Alltagskirchentag’ in Ruhrrevier,” *Evangelische Welt* 15 (1 August 1963), 444-447.

⁵⁶ Klaus von Bismarck to RvTT, 8 August 1963, EZA 71/86/28.

⁵⁷ Prolingheuer, “Jugendpfarramt der Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen, Ergebnis der Meinungsumfrage bei Jugendlichen Kirchentagsteilnehmern, Dortmund 1963,” undated, EZA 71/96/349.

Kirchentag in the popular and church press, Carola Wolf concluded: “At base, when we draw up the balance sheet, it went astonishingly well.”⁵⁸

Yet there was also a strong sense, among both critics and Kirchentag leaders, that the Kirchentag could not rest on its laurels. Dortmund was not so much the model of a new kind of Kirchentag, as an impulse to further experimentation. While greeting this meeting as a step in the right direction, many critics argued that it did not go far enough. Writing in the Westphalian *Kirchenblatt*, Eberhard Stammler described Dortmund as “two steps forward” and “one step back,” as an “unsatisfying mixture of traditional concerns and contemporary statements, of conventional church practice [*Kirchlichkeit*] and up-to-date theology.” In *Kirche in der Zeit*, Eberhard Roterberg complained that the Kirchentag was still too focused on problems inside the churches. And Hans Jürgen Schultz, writing in the magazine *Radius*, argued that the Kirchentag was “so pluralist that one can no longer grasp the whole.” Instead of letting everyone speak, he argued, the Kirchentag needed develop its own strong voice. Finally, Heinz Zahrnt praised the Kirchentag in *Sonntagsblatt*, arguing that it had finally developed into an independent voice for Protestants outside of and over against the institutional churches. But there was still a great deal of work to do. “Now,” he argued, “the Kirchentag comes to the next big step: the new form demands new content. This doesn’t mean that the Kirchentag should bring a new gospel, but it does mean that it must lay out the old gospel in new ways suited to our time.”⁵⁹

In his preliminary assessment of the Dortmund Kirchentag, Friedelbert Lorenz worked to make sense of these arguments, while admitting that he had not yet had time to

⁵⁸ Carola Wolf, Report on the 1963 Kirchentag, undated, EZA 71/96/349.

⁵⁹ Ibid.; Lorenz, Report to the Präsidium, 7 September 1963, EZA 71/86/28.

work through the more than 300 critical assessments that the Kirchentag leadership had collected. In his report, Lorenz drew a few basic conclusions. Despite attempts to reach out beyond traditional church circles, most Kirchentag attendees still came from the local congregations. These people had appreciated the greater opportunity for discussion—indeed, nearly one-third of all attendees had gotten to voice their opinions. This demonstrated that ordinary church people were “equipped and ready for discussion.” But the Kirchentag program had never really succeeded in integrating the perspectives of these ordinary church people with the Kirchentag’s larger themes. While the afternoon presentations had been intended to answer the questions raised in the morning’s decentralized discussions, the two parts of the Kirchentag had each gone their own way. In part, this was because presentations remained too academic and abstract. But it was also because Kirchentag visitors were much more interested in the problems of the church and in theology than they were in discussions of politics and society.⁶⁰

To address these problems, Lorenz argued that the Kirchentag would have to find a way to transition more smoothly from small-group discussions to its central overarching themes. Perhaps discussion groups could start small, getting larger over the course of the week. At the same time, rather than trying to go in so many directions at once, the Kirchentag program needed to focus on a smaller number of precise, concrete problems of issues. These should be chosen for their ability to “disquiet the Kirchentag congregation and to set it in motion.” Finally, Lorenz argued, if the Kirchentag wanted to do its work through discussion and conversation, instead of top-down presentations, this

⁶⁰ Lorenz, Report to the Präsidium, 7 September 1963, EZA 71/86/28, 1-5.

would require more planning than before, not less. Perhaps it would even require another Kirchentag congress, where the groundwork for future meetings could be laid.⁶¹

The new Kirchentag Pastor, Gerhard Schnath, drew similar conclusions. In his assessment of Dortmund, he argued that the role of the Kirchentag was to overcome the dichotomy between “Sunday” and “Everyday Life” [*Alltag*]. This meant that the Kirchentag needed to encourage church people to take part in Germany’s “pluralistic society,” “confronting the conflicts of the world.” But it also required them to reconsider the churches themselves in the light of the world outside. Quoting Hans Jürgen Schultz, Schnath argued: “Faith does not live out of self assertion, but presupposes unbelief and exists in dialogue with it. . . . For the believer—today more than ever—is himself a potential unbeliever.” According to Schnath, there were several ways to for the Kirchentag live out this faith in dialogue with the world. For one, the Kirchentag needed to fully integrate the practices of modern, critical theology, helping people in the local congregations to overcome their exaggerated fear of these approaches. For another, the Kirchentag needed to continue to experiment with new forms of worship, such as “jazz services.” This was not about being sensationalistic or modern for its own sake, but about working to express genuine faith in a contemporary context.⁶²

Richard von Weizsäcker—who would shortly be elected as the new Kirchentag president—laid out his own critical assessment of the Dortmund Kirchentag in a letter to his fellow Präsidium members. There were three main groups, Weizsäcker argued, that were interested in the activities of the Kirchentag. These were ordinary people from the

⁶¹ Ibid., 5-11.

⁶² Gerhard Schnath, “Erfahrungsbericht,” attached to the Minutes of the Präsidium Meeting, 9 September 1963, EZA 71/86/28.

local city where the Kirchentag took place, the Kirchentag's own community of regular attendees, and leading Protestant intellectuals who were preoccupied with the future of the church. In a thinly veiled criticism of Dortmund, Weizsäcker argued that it was a mistake to focus too much on the first of these groups. Until the Kirchentag was able to address the problems and questions of those at least nominally within the church, it would have little success reaching out to those outside. Too much emphasis on missions and evangelism might even get in the way of putting the church's own house in order. Instead, the Kirchentag needed to serve the latter two groups, looking more closely at questions of belief and church reform. "It is not the task of the Kirchentag," he elaborated, "to find a new theology. But the Kirchentag cannot avoid this theme, if it wants to treat its visitors as subjects." Only when the church had worked through its theological and organizational problems, would its members be in a position to address the problems of the world from a Christian perspective. At this point Weizsäcker turned to the role of the Kirchentag within German Protestantism and within German society. It was naïve, he argued, to suppose that the Kirchentag could solve the church's problems. It did not have any easy answers. But the Kirchentag could serve as a "focal point" for this discussion, bringing together the "administrative church and the core congregation, but also, above all, those laity who are far-removed from work of the congregations." Taking up the mantle of church reform would create difficulties with some of the existing Landeskirchen, but it was the only way to avoid greater difficulties down the road.⁶³

In the next meeting of the large *Präsidialversammlung*, which included many more representatives from the local Landeskirchen and the church's missions and social organizations, new plans generated considerable discussion. Many of those present were

⁶³ Richard von Weizsäcker, Circular letter, 30 October 1963, EZA 71/86/28.

critical of the Kirchentag's new direction. Against those who wanted the Kirchentag to champion progressive theology, the vast majority of *Präsidialversammlung* members defended the Kirchentag's theological neutrality. Some argued that critical theologians like Zahrnt, in their zeal to foster dialogue between the church and world, had embraced a form of pantheism that reduced God to the level of nature. However, even in this more conservative body, there was a real desire for the Kirchentag to adopt a more self-critical role. Arguing that many criticisms of the Kirchentag were really directed at the institutional churches, which the press was afraid to attack directly, some went so far as to argue that the Kirchentag had become the real church. "It is not a critic of the church," they argued, "but a critical church, and, to be open, a church that does not repel criticism, but invites it."⁶⁴

Several months later, Hans Hermann Walz gave fuller formulation to these ideas in speech to the leaders of the Kirchentag State Committees [*Landesausschüsse*]. Walz began his speech by looking at the relationship between the Kirchentag and the local Protestant congregation [*Gemeinde*]. In the early 1950s, he argued, many leaders in the German Protestant churches had promoted a view of the church in which the local congregation was central, while other church organs such as youth ministries, social missions, evangelistic organizations, and others, were of distinctly secondary importance. At best, the adherents of this view saw other church bodies as "temporary para-congregations" that lacked any real significance for the church. This extreme perspective had elicited an equally extreme reaction, in which some theologians, such as Hans Hoekendijk, had come to see the congregations as parochial, bourgeois institutions that

⁶⁴ Report on the Meeting of the *Präsidialversammlung*, 7-8 November 1963, EZA 71/86/28.

obstructed the mission of the church in modern society. This latter view had begun to spread in Germany, where the congregations were often seen as out of touch with the real world.⁶⁵

What was needed, Walz argued, was a critical congregation that was active in the world. And this is what the Kirchentag had always been. It was the “critical church,” a movement devoted to pushing the church in new directions. Now it needed to move beyond its childhood, fully embracing this task. Depending on their point of view, critics of the Kirchentag argued either that it was too worldly, leaving the congregations behind, or that it was too focused on the church. But both of these criticisms were based on a misunderstanding of the true nature of the church. The church was not supposed to be a well-defined, carefully self-contained organization. It was supposed to be a dynamic substance that expanded into the world. As Walz argued: “Everywhere that the congregation is defined from its boundaries inward—that is, according to the question of who belongs and who doesn’t—that is where it loses the true essence of Christian community [*Gemeinde*].” Instead, Walz offered a model of the church that was diametrically opposed to both the German state church model and the American free church model. It did not just democratize church government—it radically questioned the very distinction between the inside and outside. The best model for this kind of church, Walz said, was an explosion. In its center was a relationship with Jesus Christ. But this was not a “static, peaceful center, but an immense movement.” “It is like the middle of an explosion,” Walz continued, “The results of this explosion, the message, the Kerygma, or whatever comes out, that is the congregation. Its borders are relative, like

⁶⁵ Hans Hermann Walz, “Kirchentag und Gemeinde,’ Vortrag vor der Konferenz der Landesausschüsse in Mannheim,” 13-15 February 1964, EZA 71/86/29.

the edge of an explosion.” Outsider status was not determined by some boundary imposed by the church, but by a lack of connection with Jesus Christ, the center.⁶⁶

The task of the Kirchentag, Walz continued, was to work out this model of the church in the world. Naturally, the Kirchentag would rely heavily on the existing congregations in this task, and especially on its forward-looking elements. People in the existing churches would remain as the Kirchentag’s primary audience. But the Kirchentag would be devoted to opposing those forces that worked to draw the church inward into itself. The Kirchentag was not “anti-clerical.” But it recognized the basic fact that, “the church, in its institutions, its officials, its closed congregations” was “to a large extent, no longer present” in the modern world. Its primary task was not to reform the institutional church, but to be the true church in the middle of secular society.⁶⁷

CONCLUSION

Ever since its foundation in 1949, the Kirchentag had been intended to gather Protestant laity, to strengthen them in their faith, and to equip them for service in society. In many ways, despite major changes in its self-understanding, the Kirchentag of the mid-1960s continued to pursue these goals. However, dramatic changes within the churches and, especially, in the rest of German society, created the need for radical new approaches to this task. When German Protestants gathered at the *Kirchentage* of the 1950s, they did so assured of the relevance of their faith and its power to fully transform the world. German society might have been plagued by political, social, and geographical divisions; many Germans might have faced the temptation of despair in the

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

postwar struggle to find new lives for themselves; social changes might be challenging and transforming traditional forms of life; but individual and communal faith offered hope for a better future.

By the late 1950s, this optimism was being called into question. Despite gestures of religious and all-German unity, the German people remained divided into two opposing states. Despite their efforts to unite under some form of Protestant political ideology, German Protestants found themselves more and more divided. Despite their efforts at Cold War reconciliation, the world remained divided into two hostile camps. These developments led to disillusionment among younger and more progressive Germans both inside and outside of the churches. At the same time, new theological impulses within the universities challenged traditional forms piety. Changing social mores raised questions about church teachings. And the rise of new political constellations—especially within the younger generation—challenged earlier points of consensus. If the Protestant churches—and the Kirchentag itself—could not solve these problems, then what did they have to offer the German people?

In many ways, the Kirchentag was in a unique position to address this crisis. Formally independent of the EKD and the *Landeskirchen*, it was free to experiment and innovate with new forms of theology and politics outside of the churches' hierarchical structure. But even so, the Kirchentag was slow to embrace this task. As long as its own relevance was undisputed, as long as its all-German gatherings drew massive crowds and generated political excitement, the Kirchentag had no need to engage in such experiments. But after the construction of the Berlin Wall—having lost its all-German function—the Kirchentag sought new relevance as a self-critical Protestant organization

that would boldly address the difficult questions of faith and modern life. This was not simply a matter of shifting its emphasis from church concerns to matters of “worldly” importance. In many ways, it was precisely the opposite, involving a redefinition of the nature of the church itself. The church would no longer be seen as a self-evident entity, promoting the continued existence of a self-evident tradition. Instead, the church itself would be defined by its external function. The true test of its legitimacy was its ability to make a difference in the outside world.

This was a dangerous and risky step for the Kirchentag to take. On the one hand, it opened the door for more explicit and direct engagement with contemporary problems, allowing these problems to interrogate and transform the church’s own tradition and theology. This freed the Kirchentag to explore new ideas without being burdened down by the weight of tradition and bureaucracy. But would people who had been alienated from the church return in significant numbers, or was their disillusionment too complete? On the other hand, by adopting this test of legitimacy, the Kirchentag called into question the legitimacy of existing church institutions. How would the pious respond to having their own faith doubted? How would the hierarchy react to claims that the true church was “outside the church?” Would the Kirchentag retain its ability to bridge the divide between the young and old, progressive and conservative, pious and modern? Or, as some critics of the new directions feared, would the Kirchentag itself be torn apart in the struggle between competing factions?

CHAPTER 9

WAGING PEACE

In the first half of the 1960s the Kirchentag took on the task of rethinking the place of the Christian churches in modern society. Rather than seeing its activity primarily as an expression of the interests and agendas of the institutional churches, its leaders began to view the Kirchentag as the forum for a new, radically open theology that defied the traditional division between the church and the world. In the second half of the decade, this new theological orientation led to renewed practical engagement with the problems of the political sphere and to the formation of a new form of Protestant politics.

While the 1963 Kirchentag had touched only intermittently on broader social issues, the next several meetings signaled a new political orientation. The 1965 Kirchentag, centered on the theme of “freedom,” served as an extended call for German Protestants to re-engage with the problems and conflicts of the modern world. This “freedom” was not primarily political, although it included the political obligations of the democratic citizen. Instead, growing out of biblical and Lutheran concepts of “Christian freedom,” it referred, on the broadest level, to the obligation of the Christian to engage maturely and responsibly with the problems and conflicts of the world, rather than retreating into the realm of personal piety. Amid the social ferment of the 1960s, Christians were called not to protect their own privileges, or to defend the status quo, but to play an active, positive role in their rapidly changing society. By the time of the 1967

and 1969 Kirchentag meetings, with their themes of “Peace” and “Justice,” this vision had broadened still further, to encompass the problems of the entire world.

This shift was the product of a gradual evolution in Protestant attitudes, with roots going back as far as the early 1950s. Protestants of all political perspectives had long emphasized the importance of faith-inspired political activity. Especially on the Protestant Left, themes like peace and reconciliation had long had a central place. The worldwide church [*Die Ökumene*]¹—and not just the church in Germany—had been a growing area of emphasis at Kirchentag meetings since the mid-1950s. And at Kirchentag meetings in the late 1950s and early 1960s, German Protestants had begun to look more critically at their own national past and at their present-day national politics. By the mid-1960s, these diverse strands had begun to come together as parts of a new, more systematic whole.

This can be most clearly seen in the gradual convergence of the inter-German political priorities of the Protestant Right and Left. The 1961 Tübingen Memorandum, issued by a small group of relatively conservative Protestant intellectuals, had clearly demonstrated the growing frustration of the Protestant public with the Cold War posturing of the Adenauer government.¹ By 1965, disgruntled Protestant conservatives elaborated on these ideas in cooperation with more left-wing Protestant theologians like Helmut Gollwitzer, to create the Protestant Church’s first official public study [*Denkschrift*] on a major political subject. This document, titled “The Status of the Expellees and the Relationship of the German People to its Eastern Neighbors”—known

¹ See Martin Greschat, “‘Mehr Wahrheit in der Politik!’ Das Tübinger Memorandum von 1961,” *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 48 (2000): 491-513; and Martin Greschat, “Protestantismus und Evangelische Kirche in den 60er Jahren,” in *Dynamische Zeiten. Die 60er Jahren in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften*, ed. Axel Schildt, Detlef Siebert, and Karl Christian Lammers, *Hamburger Beiträge zur Sozial- und Zeitgeschichte*, Vol 37 (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 2000).

more colloquially as the *Ostdenkschrift*—argued that the problem of German division would not be resolved through Cold War antagonism, but through reconciliation between Germany and its Eastern neighbors and through more generous social policies at home.² This document did not represent any final consensus; indeed it elicited sharp criticisms from both inside and outside of the churches. But it demonstrated a new coming together, a new opportunity for dialogue and agreement, between practitioners of foreign policy *Realpolitik*, who wanted to bring West Germany’s foreign policy into line with the emerging American politics of détente, and members of the Protestant Left, with their more idealistic, theologically-motivated emphasis on peace and reconciliation.

This shift in political thought was further reinforced by new theological trends within the Protestant churches. Beginning in the early 1960s, prominent younger theologians, such as Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, began to argue for the centrality of eschatology to any proper understanding of Christian faith. Rather than remaining fixated on history—the history of the bible, the historical Jesus, or a one-time historical act of redemption—these theologians argued that Christianity needed to be oriented toward the future, toward the unfolding of the Kingdom of God. Christians, as Moltmann put it, were a people of hope, dissatisfied with the shortcomings of the present, looking forward to the future peace and justice that God had promised. This hope in God’s final victory did not lead to resignation or passivity, but to renewed activity in the world. As Moltmann argued: “The man of hope who leaves behind the corrupt reality

² See *ibid.* and Claudia Lepp and Kurt Nowak, *Evangelische Kirche im geteilten Deutschland (1945-1989/90)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2001).

and launches out on the sea of divine possibilities, thereby radically sets this reality of his at stake—staking it on the hope that the promise of God will win the day.”³

Drawing on these diverse sources, Kirchentag participants began in the late 1960s to work out a distinct new form of Christian political praxis. No longer satisfied to engage only in abstract problem solving and academic study, they increasingly worked to bring together factual information and ethical teachings with calls to concrete engagement and activity. At the same time, they expanded the scope of their political activity beyond the domestic politics of the Federal Republic and questions of German division, carrying the lessons of their own political experience over into the realm of world politics at the broadest level. Rather than thinking of themselves as Germans or as citizens of the Federal Republic, they began to see themselves more and more as citizens of Europe and of the world. Their self-proclaimed political task, by the end of the 1960s, was no less than to foster world peace through the resolution of concrete conflicts and the creation of a new, socially-just world order.

LOOKING BEYOND THE NATION

Starting in the middle of the 1950s, the Kirchentag program began to move beyond an exclusive focus on German and inter-German questions. This interest in the world outside of Germany did not begin with political or diplomatic considerations, but with a new emphasis on the German Protestantism as part of the worldwide Christian church, or *Ökumene*. Many of the Kirchentag’s most important early leaders and supporters—including Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff and Bishop Hanns Lilje—had worked in close cooperation with Protestant ecumenical organizations since the 1920s

³ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1967) [German original, 1965], 227.

and had been active in the foundation of the World Council of Churches in the 1940s. Their ecumenical perspective had implicitly shaped the program and organization of the Kirchentag since the beginning, and important ecumenical leaders such as Willem Visser't Hooft, the founder of the World Council of Churches, had often appeared on its program. But in the late 1940s and early 1950s, this ecumenical perspective was pushed into the background by more pressing and immediate questions about the fate of the German nation.

This began to change in the middle of the 1950s. Shortly after joining the Kirchentag staff, after serving as the director of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Hans Hermann Walz identified ecumenicalism and events in the ecumenical world as one of two themes that had received insufficient attention at previous Kirchentag gatherings.⁴ And at the 1956 Kirchentag in Stuttgart, ecumenical relations became a major area of emphasis, with the creation of a new Kirchentag Ecumenical Committee by the American pastor Franklin Littell, the greater inclusion of foreign speakers at the Kirchentag's large worship services and assemblies, and the addition of special "ecumenical" gatherings in the Kirchentag program.⁵ At the next two major Kirchentag gatherings, in 1959 and 1961, the program even included a dedicated Ecumenical Workgroup, which featured reports and presentations on the church around the world.⁶

This new ecumenical and international perspective was slow to penetrate the Kirchentag's political program. While some members of the political workgroup

⁴ Hans Hermann Walz, "Die Aufgaben der Arbeitsgruppen," 28 March 1955, EZA 71/86/23, 8; the other theme was "Wiedergutmachung."

⁵ DEKT 1956.

⁶ DEKT 1959, DEKT 1961.

leadership had argued as early as 1958 that their program needed to “move away from national self-centeredness” and “de-provincialize,” the group maintained its emphasis on German problems and questions well into the 1960s. However, these discussions did begin to adopt a more critical attitude toward German history and the German nation.⁷ And problems such as German division were increasingly framed as part the larger political complex of the Cold War, incapable of being resolved by German activity alone. This shift in perspective accelerated after 1961, as the construction of the Berlin Wall added to the seeming permanence of German division. This new perspective could be seen in early planning meetings for the 1963 Kirchentag in Dortmund. While the plans for the Dortmund Kirchentag focused on conflict and social interaction within West Germany, several church leaders suggested that these themes might also apply to German relations with the rest of the world. In late 1961, for example, the leaders of the Dortmund Preachers’ Seminar identified “peace,” “human interaction” in the broadest sense, and relations between Germans and foreigners as the three biggest problems facing Germany.⁸ And several of the younger academic directors of the Protestant Study Center at *Haus Villigst*, suggested to Friedelbert Lorenz that the Kirchentag should focus on the problem of how to promote freedom and peace, looking especially at ways in which the two German states might cooperate in the creation of a better world.⁹

Despite these suggestions, the emphasis of the Dortmund Kirchentag was firmly centered on social divisions within the Federal Republic. The major exception to this

⁷ See Chapter 6.

⁸ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Vermerk. Besprechung mit Studiendirektor Rosenboom und Studieninspektor Pastor Silomon, Prediger Seminar Dortmund, 14.11.1961,” 27 November 1961, EZA 71/96/349.

⁹ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Vermerk. Discussion with Haus Villigst Studienleitern on 15.11.1961,” 28 November 1961, EZA 71/96/349.

rule was in a series of presentations by the SPD politician Adolf Arndt and the theologian Heinz Zahrnt on the topic: “In the World You Will Have Fear.”¹⁰ Here Arndt argued that fear and anxiety were the results of social tensions between individuals, groups, and even nations. “The innermost cause of this fear . . .,” he continued, “is our lack of justice.” What people feared most was that they would not receive what they deserved, and this led to conflict and tension between the political parties, between employers and unions, and between the forces of the East and West in the sphere of world politics. These tensions were an unavoidable part of life. When people tried to ignore them or pretend they would simply go away, this only made them worse. But attempts to bring about a one-sided resolution were even more dangerous. As German history had shown, fear could lead to aggression, and one-sided attempts to resolve a conflict could lead to an escalating cycle of violence.¹¹

Tensions and conflicts in everyday social life could not be resolved by withdrawal from the world or through one-sided activity. Instead, they needed to be managed through dialogue and compromise. This, Arndt argued, was the cornerstone of West Germany’s democratic system. In an open and free society, this dialogue could rebuild trust between hostile groups. And concrete compromises could redress injustices and resolve longstanding tensions. In West German political life, Arndt argued, this could be seen clearly in recent interactions between trade unions and employers. By breaking their

¹⁰ This title, “In der Welt habt ihr Angst,” was taken from John 16:33, translated in the English King James Version as: “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

¹¹ DEKT 1963, 428-431.

longstanding cycle of hostility and working to resolve their tensions, these groups had turned a source of conflict into the foundation of a more just society.¹²

But, Arndt continued in a thinly veiled reference to German division, there were other conflicts that were not as easy to resolve, at least for the present time. These problems were especially prevalent in foreign policy. Here, the only solution was to soberly accept that such conflicts existed and to take them seriously. Instead of being blinded by fear, the parties involved in this kind of conflict needed to “be patient with one another and do everything within our power so that this problem, unsolvable today, can, through our cooperation, grow into a future solution.” In practice, this meant “working out the pre-conditions for agreements that can lead to a tolerable compromise, where nothing essential is relinquished, but, instead, where both sides receive more in the way of justice than they have staked on their conflict.” This attitude was difficult to adopt because of the deep-seated mistrust of those on both sides of any conflict. But some of this mistrust could be overcome by recognizing the guilt of one’s own side and the contributions that it had made to this state of affairs. Most of all, however, this activity would only be possible if people maintained their hope in a better future and were willing to work to make that future a reality.¹³

Heinz Zahrnt followed up on this speech by arguing that social and world conflicts had their theological roots in the alienation of humanity from God. Yet Christians knew that this alienation had been overcome in the reconciliation and “reunification” that had been accomplished through the work of Christ. Christ’s death and resurrection had laid the foundation for a whole new reality. Now, since Christ had

¹² Ibid., 432-434.

¹³ DEKT 1963, 436-438.

laid this foundation, Christians were called to take an active part in the construction of this new world. In earlier times, Christians had focused too much on the past, and this had led them to adopt a passive stance toward present-day problems. “What the Christianity of today needs more than anything else,” Zahrnt argued, “is to reverse the polarity of its consciousness from the past toward the future.” “If we really have hope in the in the arrival of God’s new world,” he continued, “then even here in this old, decaying world, we must believe in the possibility for new beginnings. If we really believe that Jesus Christ has confronted and healed the great rift that runs through all of existence, then we must confront the assorted smaller rifts that run through the world, endeavoring to heal them.” This was not a form of utopianism. Zahrnt made it clear that human beings could not fully or finally resolve the problems of the world. But it was a call to active involvement in the practical tasks of making the world a better place.¹⁴ At the same time, this call represented the emergence of a new Protestant perspective toward social and political problems. It was not enough to study the problems of the world and to work to understand them; instead, ordinary Christians—and not just policy experts and politicians—were also called to participate actively in the process of finding solutions.

This new approach continued over the next several years. Starting at the 1965 Kirchentag in Cologne this new perspective was also complemented by a shift away from the German question toward the political problems of the world outside of Germany. This new, more international focus emerged gradually in the Kirchentag planning sessions. Immediately after the Dortmund gathering, Klaus von Bismarck complained in a letter to Thadden about the national focus of the previous Kirchentag’s workgroups,

¹⁴ Ibid., 439-448.

arguing in favor of a more “ecumenical” perspective.¹⁵ And several other critics complained about the relative lack of attention to East-West politics in general.¹⁶ But, in his assessment of responses to the Dortmund Kirchentag, Friedelbert Lorenz concluded that most attendees had not minded the relative lack of political discussion. Instead, Lorenz reported, they had been most interested in sessions devoted to questions of personal belief, rather than in discussions of the problems within society more broadly.¹⁷

Nevertheless, Kirchentag leaders resolved that the 1965 Kirchentag in Cologne would have a broader focus than the church-oriented Dortmund gathering. Indeed, in choosing the theme of “Freedom” for their next gathering, they asserted that questions of Christian life could not be separated from social and political life. Christians had not been freed *from* the world, but freed *for* the world; they were specifically called to exercise their Christian freedom by taking responsibility for the problems of the world around them.¹⁸ In their early plans for the next political workgroup, drafted in the beginning of 1964, Kirchentag leaders continued with two well-worn themes. The first proposed topic was, broadly, political pluralism: the role of Protestant Christians in “each of the three parties in the *Bundestag*.” The second involved the continued discussion of

¹⁵ Klaus von Bismarck to RvTT, 8 August 1963, EZA 71/86/28.

¹⁶ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Zur Auswertung des 11. Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentages Dortmund 1963 auf dem Gebiet der thematischen Sacharbeit,” 7 September 1963, EZA 71/86/28.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ For more on this understanding of “freedom,” see Hans Hermann Walz, “Themenkonvent 1964,” 27-30 April 1964, 71/86/29.

German division under the rubric: “The Church in Divided Germany: What Aspects of this Unity are Illusion and What Aspects are Reality?”¹⁹

Later in the same meeting, however, Kirchentag leaders also raised the possibility of further broadening the scope of the political workgroup, suggesting as a potential topic: “The Church in the Ecumenical World” [*Kirche in der Ökumene*]. Ironically, this topic seems to have grown directly out of their existing pre-occupation with German unity and division. Finding it increasingly difficult to justify the inter-German unity of the Protestant church by appealing to some underlying national unity, church leaders had begun to re-conceptualize this relationship as a form of ecumenicalism. Thus, their proposals for “ecumenical” discussion topics included not just traditional theological reflections on the nature of the worldwide church, or tasks such as “the transformation of the introverted church into a world-encompassing church,” they also included a proposal to examine “ecumenical relations [*Ökumene*] within the EKID, from the standpoint of ‘the church in divided Germany.’”²⁰

The connection between the traditional topic of German unity and the new ecumenical theme becomes even more apparent in subsequent planning meetings. In a discussion of the upcoming Kirchentag with the leaders of the *Volksmision* committee of the Church of the Rhineland, church president Joachim Beckmann informed Lorenz: “The Theme: ‘The Church in Divided Germany,’ along with the theme ‘Unity of the EKID,’ is obsolete. A much more important theme would be something related to the question: What does the task of the church look like in relation to the current situation

¹⁹ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Ergebnisse und offene Fragen der Sitzung am 22./23. Januar 1964,” 28 January 1964, EZA 71/96/472.

²⁰ Ibid.

between East and West?” Beckmann went on to explain that the pressing issue was not the political or diplomatic resolution of the problem of German division, but the spiritual and ethical questions of unity and mutual responsibility between Christians in “different, separated socio-political systems.”²¹ Summarizing his discussions with Beckmann and with the State Kirchentag Committee of Bavaria, Lorenz concluded: “If we look at the role of the church in the larger East-West division, then we need to do so under the rubric of ecumenicalism.”²²

This approach was confirmed at the Kirchentag’s Theme Selection meeting in April 1964, when the workgroup on politics and society chose as their topic the problem of “Christian Service in divided Germany.” In discussing this theme, they began with a recognition of German division. But they argued that German Christians in the East and West were united by “a common past, history, and guilt” and, thus, by a common duty of service to each other and to the world. Equating the problem of German division with the larger division of the world into Cold War antagonists (“German division = the Division of the World”), they argued that ecumenical, Christian unity in Germany was a model for the resolution of global geo-political problems (“Christian Unity in Germany = Unity in the World.”)²³

In a series of meetings over the next several months, Kirchentag leaders continued to refine these ideas, planning for a discussion of inter-German relations within the larger

²¹ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Gespräch mit der volksmissionarischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft der rheinischen Kirche,” 24 February 1964, EZA 71/96/472, 5.

²² Friedelbert Lorenz, “Stimmen zu den bisherigen Überlegungen über Thematik und Struktur Köln 1965,” 25 March 1964, EZA 712/96/472.

²³ Dahlhaus, “Protokollnotiz Mühlheim 27.-30.4.1964, Arbeitskreis 3 (Politik-Gesellschaft),” 30 April 1964, EZA 71/96/472.

context of Europe and the “world-political horizon.”²⁴ This formulation was intentionally chosen as a way to avoid an overly narrow focus on the questions of the contested Oder-Neisse border between Poland and Germany and the relationship between West Germany and the communist states of Eastern Europe. While Kirchentag leaders generally agreed on the need to accept the Oder-Neisse line, they argued that this was a fruitless topic for discussion, since politicians refused to admit their real opinions for fear of offending interest groups. They also agreed that any future reunification of Germany would require reconciliation with the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe and they admitted that Germany was responsible for the present-day suffering of the Poles under Communism. But they argued that this topic would best be examined under the broader rubric of Europe-wide reconciliation and unity.²⁵ The task of fleshing out this broad topic was delegated to Richard von Weizsäcker, in conjunction with Klaus von Bismarck, Axel von dem Bussche, and Ludwig Landsberg. This group eventually decided to divide their broad topic into two slightly smaller discussion themes, to be addressed at evening forums during the Kirchentag. The first theme “Germany and Europe,” would examine German relations with Eastern Europeans and the expellee issue. The second theme “Germany and the World” would look at the obligations of the Germans, and of all Europeans, to provide aid for the developing world.²⁶

²⁴ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Thematik Köln 1965,” 12 June 1964, EZA 71/96/472; This meeting was attended by Richard von Weizsäcker, Heinz Zahrnt, Hans Hermann Walz, Gerhard Schnath, and Friedelbert Lorenz.

²⁵ Ibid.; Friedelbert Lorenz, “Vermerk über die Sitzung des Themenausschuss am 19.8.1964,” 21 August 1964, EZA 71/96/472, 8-9; This meeting was attended by Richard von Weizsäcker, Joachim Beckmann, Wittram, Heinz Zahrnt, Dahlhaus, Pfarrer Lubkoll, Hans Hermann Walz, Gerhard Schnath, Carola Wolf, and Friedelbert Lorenz.

²⁶ Präsidium Meeting, 17 February 1965, EZA 71/86/29.

The first of these forums, with the theme “Germany and Europe” was ultimately dominated by expellee politics, and by the question of Germany’s relations with its eastern neighbors. Including prominent representatives of the expellee groups, such as Philipp von Bismarck (Klaus von Bismarck’s brother), in its leadership, this group began with an extensive discussion of the current status of expellees in the Federal Republic as well as the process and problems of their integration into West German society.²⁷

In its second half, however, this discussion turned to more pressing political topics such as German guilt, reconciliation between West Germany and Poland, and the prospects for a new German *Ostpolitik*. Here, Ludwig Landsberg set the tone for a free ranging political discussion, calling on his listeners to look beyond controversial issues such as the Oder-Neisse Line, German reunification, and the national self-determination rights of German expellees. Rather than focusing on these narrow points of conflict, he urged them to look at the larger, overarching questions of German identity and East-West reconciliation. In the debate that followed, some discussion participants like Kurt Schebesch of Düsseldorf argued that the central question governing German-Eastern European reconciliation was not guilt but justice. Guilt, he argued, was not and could not be a solid foundation for restoring political and diplomatic contact. But others, like the Hanover *Oberkirchenrat* Erwin Wilkens, argued that German misdeeds and German guilt were central to the issue at hand. The politics of reconciliation, he conceded, could not proceed “purely out of the guilt complex of the German people.” And it could not be based on any one-sided conception of guilt that denied the suffering and injustice inflicted on German expellees. Any reconciliation efforts needed to be politically sustainable, based on the real concerns of both sides. However, he continued: “We need

²⁷ DEKT 1965, 786-799.

political negotiations rooted in the willingness to reconcile with one another, with the goal of creating a new just order. This needs to be made concrete in our relations with our eastern neighbors.” While this could not be a form of political activity rooted solely in guilt, it also could not be “de-coupled from the entire guilt question.”²⁸

The Freiburg historian Gottfried Schramm also acknowledged the pressing need for East-West reconciliation, but he argued that the expellee organizations did not pose a major barrier to reconciliation, as was often supposed. Instead, he claimed, the expellee community, with their particular expertise and interest, was ideally situated to take the lead in “building bridges” between West Germans and the people of Eastern Europe. Klaus von Bismarck, on the other hand, argued that the prejudice and resentment of the expellees was one of many important stumbling blocks in this process. He also acknowledged the complexity of the problem, and the barriers that the Soviet Union had also erected against East-West reconciliation. Reconciliation, he conceded, could not be a one-sided process. But, he argued, many of the political positions and arguments of the expellee organizations only exacerbated this conflict, making the Soviet Union less likely to come to the negotiating table.²⁹

The forum’s other political discussion was devoted to the issue of German and European responsibility for the plight of the developing world. In keeping with the Kirchentag’s new approach to such problems, this discussion forum was more about creating awareness and spurring activity than it was about finding academic or technical solutions. As Axel von dem Bussche, the group’s chair, argued: “It is a matter of shaking people up. No one should be able to say he didn’t know that he had a neighbor in

²⁸ Ibid., 799-802.

²⁹ Ibid., 804-807.

need.”³⁰ Like the Expellee Forum, this discussion was also intended to address a broad spectrum of specific political and social problems, including the need for a voluntary social service in Germany, the problems facing guest workers and foreign students, and the need for individual, church, and state-sponsored aid to those in the developing world.³¹ Its format incorporated several short speeches by a series of politicians, academics, and church workers, followed by a short question and answer period and an extended round table discussion.

At the 1965 Kirchentag, Axel von dem Bussche began this evening session by examining the fundamental reasons why Germans needed to be concerned with the developing world. Holding up a small, transparent globe, he proclaimed to the audience that the real globe was just as transparent and just as fragile. “Just in our lifetimes,” he continued, “although this is perhaps still concealed from us, it has become evident that, for the first time in human history, we in fact hold the fate of this fragile earth in our collective hands. The world will become very dangerous, if we do not realize this and reach out to those in need.” He went on to argue that if Germans could only see the big picture, they would realize that all of the parts of the world were interdependent. Suffering—even suffering on the other side of the world—presented Germans with an imperative to act.³²

Even more than this, though, the shrinking size of the world required Germans to reorder their whole way of thinking. Rather than seeing themselves at the center of all

³⁰ Fridelbert Lorenz, “Vorfragen der Politik. Die Christen, Europa, und die Welt—was tun wir?,” 6 July 1965, EZA 71/96/473, 4.

³¹ Ibid, 3-7.

³² DEKT 1965, 762.

things, they needed to see that they were just one small part of the larger whole. Their actions and priorities could no longer be based purely on national self-interest, but needed to be based on the interests of others. This change would begin at home. As von dem Bussche continued: “We might become desperate when we look at the smallness of our land in the middle of Europe, but we can and we need to ask: even if we can’t change the world, why don’t we change ourselves?” Christians, especially, were called to learn to truly love their neighbors. As a starting point, this meant promoting reconciliation in European politics. But, as the world continued to shrink, this task would soon come to encompass the entire globe.³³

Paul Lücke, the Federal Housing Minister, followed von dem Bussche with some thoughts he had previously delivered at the 1962 *Katholikentag*. Speaking as a Catholic and a member of the CDU, Lücke began by looking at the success of postwar German reconstruction. Having embraced Christian responsibility and the values of the free world, the Germans had successfully rebuilt their nation and had experienced tremendous progress in every area of life. But now they needed to address the needs of those left behind by this progress and prosperity, creating a society that was better equipped to take care of those in need. To accomplish this, he proposed that all German youth be encouraged to spend a year working in voluntary social service.³⁴

This, however, was only the beginning. Germans needed to apply the same principles of solidarity to Europe and to the wider world. They might begin by addressing the needs of Germany’s 1.2 Million guest workers. But they would also need to offer help to those abroad. As Lücke argued:

³³ Ibid., 763-64.

³⁴ Ibid., 764.

The young nations [*jungen Völker*] are in need, they require our help, and they especially require our humanitarian aid. I do not mean that we should go to these people as adventurers or as businessmen. Instead, we go because we see that they are made in God's image, because we see these people in Tanganyika, in Kenya, in Asia and Africa as our neighbors—this is how small the world has become. We do not go because we are worried about communism and not because we Germans think we are capable of anything, that we know so much, and so much better. No! We are required—and there is no vacation from this task—to offer humanitarian, Christian help within the Fatherland, in Europe, and in the World.³⁵

The only question that remained was how best to go about this task. Here Lücke was optimistic about the chances for success. If Europeans could recover from their own disastrous past, and if humans could land a man on the moon, then surely they had the economic and technical capacity to meet the needs of the developing world. To Lücke, however, this was not primarily a task for the government, but for the churches and for individuals. The state might encourage and coordinate these efforts, and it might provide some financial help, but what the world needed was the active involvement of German volunteers, German “legions of good will” analogous to Kennedy’s Peace Corps.³⁶

Lücke’s presentation was followed Gabriele Wülker, a third-world development expert from the Ruhr University in Bochum. Like the previous speakers, Wülker began by reminding her audience of how small the world had become and by addressing the implications of this development. “If there is fighting today in Vietnam,” she argued, “this concerns us here in Cologne. If famine reigns in central Africa, this touches us directly. This is to say that the social question is no longer a question within our borders,

³⁵ Ibid., 765.

³⁶ Ibid., 765-67.

but has much more become an intercontinental question that involves the entire world and compels us to responsibility.”³⁷

Unlike Lücke, however, Wülker did not believe that this responsibility could be reduced to financial and humanitarian aid. Instead, it was a matter of fostering international cooperation between the people of the developed and developing worlds. This was an area where the churches, and individual Christians, had an especially important role to play. It was only natural that governments would see social and economic aid in political terms. But, in order to foster true international cooperation between Europeans and the people of the developing world, it was vital that European aid be offered without any political conditions. It was, then, the task of Christians in Germany, and in all of the nations of the world, to correct their governments’ one-sided approaches to development aid. In this way, they would help to break down the barriers of mistrust that stood between the peoples of the developed and developing worlds. If they wanted to contribute to true international cooperation and trust, German Christians also needed to work to break down the barriers of cynicism and mistrust within Germany that prevented Germans from fully embracing the task of development. And, finally, Christians had the important task of fostering intellectual and spiritual cooperation. This meant humbly working to understand other cultures and other ways of thinking, learning to respect them, and learning from them.³⁸

Finally, Willem Visser’t Hooft, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, argued that the task of helping the developing world could not be limited to charity and voluntary aid. Instead, it was a matter of social justice. Over the last hundred

³⁷ Ibid., 767.

³⁸ Ibid., 768-770.

years, he argued, Europeans had developed a form of social politics based on the value of solidarity, the idea that every person in society was responsible for the good of the whole. This idea had to come to Europe through the socialist and communist traditions, but it also had deeper Christian roots. Now it was time for Europeans to embrace this value in their dealings with those in other parts of the world. In a world where the divide between the rich and poor was widening, where economic and racial divisions even threatened to eclipse the East-West division of the Cold War, Europeans were called to do more than simply offer their voluntary aid. They were called to provide real, constructive help. As Visser't Hooft argued: "From the church outward, we must learn to think much more in terms of structures, and less in terms of the individual." This meant reorganizing the entire system of world trade that was set up to the disadvantage of the developing world. To Visser't Hooft, however, there was also a spiritual dimension to this task. As nations around the world modernized and industrialized, they confronted the same spiritual vacuum that threatened modern Europe. Christian missions and evangelism were needed alongside of social aid, for only the gospel could fill this vacuum in modern society.³⁹

In the podium discussion that followed, the forum's speakers and other workgroup members elaborated on many of these ideas. Axel von dem Bussche and Wolfgang Winckler spoke in more detail about the difficulties facing foreign students in Germany, especially those who were in the country illegally. The *Oberkirchenrat* Heinz Kloppenberg spoke on the importance of personal action, endorsing ideas for the creation of a social alternative to mandatory military service. And he endorsed the need for more regulation and fairness in the global market. Responding to Visser't Hooft's comments on the importance of missions, Kloppenberg also argued for a redefinition of this term.

³⁹ Ibid., 771-73.

Missions, he said, was not about bringing a “higher religion” to people from another culture, but of opening a responsible dialogue with non-Christian brothers and sisters around the world. Visser’t Hooft, in response, defended the need for the proclamation of the gospel, and not just inter-faith dialogue, but he argued that this was the task first and foremost of the local church and not of European missionaries.⁴⁰

Finally, at the end of the evening, the discussion turned to the problem of motivating Germans to look more seriously at the needs of the larger world. This, argued the pastor Eberhard Stammler, was not just a problem of the individual, but was rooted in the “contemporary political consciousness” of the West German citizen. “If this is the case,” he continued, “then we must regard it as a catastrophe, for it shows that we Germans, despite all of the bitter and significant experiences that we have had, have not been able to find our place in the world. We have been prevented by our provincialism, or, in German, our *Kirchenturmshorizont*, or the sense that we are the center of the world [*der Nabel der Welt*].” What Germans needed, he continued, was more creativity, imagination, and fantasy: the ability to learn to think in wholly new ways that were not limited by their narrow daily experiences.⁴¹ Speaking on behalf of the younger generation, Wolfgang Winckler expressed the same idea in more apocalyptic terms: “If we only worry about the area beneath our own church tower, about our own internal problems, then, in our busyness with our own small matters, we may be surprised one day to find that the world has gone under in a flood of terror.”⁴² In his final remarks, Lücke, tied engagement in the wider world back to the central issue of German politics. If

⁴⁰ Ibid., 773-780.

⁴¹ Ibid., 782.

⁴² Ibid., 783.

individual West Germans were active in changing the world, he argued, they might even bring about the preconditions for an eventual, peaceful reunification of Germany.

Finally, Heinz Kloppenberg closed the meeting by calling on the Kirchentag itself to take these problems more seriously. “It is alarming,” he concluded, “that this question has not more strongly disturbed the Kirchentag as a whole.”⁴³

WORLD PEACE

In assessing the 1965 Kirchentag in Cologne, Präsidium members concluded that their more worldly focus had been a success. But they also found many of the workgroups to have been too academic and too divorced from everyday life. And some complained that the overall program was too diffuse. As they began to plan for the next Kirchentag gathering, Präsidium leaders found themselves looking for a new overarching, unifying theme that would be forward-looking in its perspective while still appealing to the broader public. Among the topics they found most promising were “peace” and “justice.”⁴⁴

The author and journalist Hans Jürgen Schultz, who had recently joined the Präsidium, was the driving force behind the selection of “peace” as the theme for 1967. Writing to the new Kirchentag president, Richard von Weizsäcker, several months before the 1965 Kirchentag in Cologne, he argued that peace was the ideal theme to bring together the diverse elements of the Kirchentag program. Peace, he argued, did not just refer to the prevention of war, but expressed an attitude and a way of living in relation to

⁴³ Ibid., 784-85.

⁴⁴ Hans Hermann Walz, “Planungsgespräch,” 4 October 1965, EZA 71/96/730; those in attendance included Klaus von Bismarck, Axel von dem Bussche, Riese, Schniewind, Richard von Weizsäcker, and Hans Hermann Walz.

the personal, political, ideological, religious, and even technological “borders” of modern life. This topic, which Schultz hoped could be developed further in a possible Kirchentag Congress, had the additional advantage that it took the recent thinking of Protestant intellectuals like Hans Schmidt, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, connecting these ideas to a set of problems of immediate relevance to ordinary people.⁴⁵

After the 1965 Kirchentag, Schultz elaborated these views in a short internal document titled “Keywords on Peace.” He began his analysis with a short assessment of the changing role of the Kirchentag in German society. Over the last several years, he argued, the Kirchentag had begun to move from its institutional childhood to a new level of maturity. But this process was not yet complete. The Kirchentag no longer served primarily as a celebratory gathering for core members of the Protestant congregations, but it had yet to really engage with the problems of the outside world. Politically, too, it was in transition. It had reacted to the political divisions within German Protestantism by trying to remain neutral, but, in the process, it had only succeeded in disappointing those on every side. The Kirchentag in Cologne, however, had hinted at the way out of this dilemma. Cologne had demonstrated that the Protestant public was itself maturing, becoming more capable of engaging in dialogue and seriously confronting the important issues of the day. Rather than seeing itself exclusively as an academic forum set apart from the Protestant public or, on the other extreme, only as a celebratory gathering of active church members, the Kirchentag’s task was to promote the continuing maturation of the Protestant congregations. This new approach would require the Kirchentag to go into more depth on a smaller number of themes and to provide more opportunities for

⁴⁵ Hans Jürgen Schultz to Richard von Weizsäcker, 23 June 1965, EZA 71/96/730.

open dialogue and discussion. Referring to the ideas of the American theologian Harvey Cox, Schultz argued that this would help to move the Protestant churches away from their “metaphysical theology” toward “a theology that promotes and facilitates world-responsibility”⁴⁶

The Kirchentag, Schultz continued, was ideally suited to this task. As a body that brought together Protestants from a wide variety of different perspectives, it was a natural forum for the discussion and promotion of new ideas. If it adopted “peace” as its overarching theme for 1967, the Kirchentag could offer a sort of “social therapy” to German Protestants, helping them to work through their traditions and their history and to develop wholly new ideas and strategies for the promotion of peace. In the process, the Kirchentag would contribute to the creation of a “active peace-consciousness” in Germany.⁴⁷

This “social therapy” consisted of three distinct steps. First, the Kirchentag would need to examine and work through “hindrances to peace.” These included the defeatism and cynicism of those who refused to believe that peace was attainable. They also included the very idea of just war, which had so often been used to legitimize force and violence. Finally, they included human psychological tendencies toward aggression, military and economic structures that served to promote warfare, and the unequal division of wealth that led to conflict between peoples and nations.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Hans Jürgen Schultz, “Stichworte zum Frieden,” “Anlage 3” attached to the Report on the Präsidium Meeting of 18-19 March 1966, EZA 71/86/29, 1-4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

As a second step, the Kirchentag would need to examine the “inherent necessity of peace” [“*Sachzwänge zum Frieden*”] in the present era of world history. Drawing on the work of Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, Schultz explained that the development of nuclear weapons, with their ability to destroy all of life, had made peace a necessity in the modern world. “World peace,” he argued, “is no longer the object of a utopia, but is instead a matter of the indispensable promotion of political reason. Six thousand years of ideas about war and peace have been ‘antiquated’ in one stroke. Peace is the categorical way of life of a thoroughly industrialized society.” Still, despite this necessity, human beings had the responsibility to actualize this imperative, giving it concrete form in a new system of “obligation, new tolerance, scientific responsibility . . . , strategies of disarmament, etc.”⁴⁹

Finally, this led to the third stage, the “planning of peace.” Peace was not a matter of preventing war, it was the “foundational concept and way of life of future world culture.” The task of German Christians in the present day was to build on this foundation. This required a new way of thinking about the problem of peace. As Schultz argued: “Developmental help is not enough any more; instead the problem is one of ecumenical world democracy.” The goal was the creation of an egalitarian and just world that transcended every political, ideological, and religious boundary.⁵⁰

Meeting in late 1965 with members of the Protestant *Studiengemeinschaft*, Schultz and several members of the Kirchentag staff continued to explore and refine these ideas. On the broadest level, the prominent academics in this organization agreed with Schultz that the Kirchentag needed to rethink its function in German society. While

⁴⁹ Ibid., 7-9.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 9-11.

Hans Hermann Walz argued that dialogue was the Kirchentag's most important task, others like Georg Picht and Heinz-Eduard Tödt promoted a vision of the Kirchentag as place for the "creation of public consciousness," a place where church members would be confronted with provocative new ideas. More narrowly, they also agreed with Schultz's promotion of peace as the overarching topic for the next Kirchentag gathering. But they made it clear that this was no small task. As Tödt argued, the church had thus far failed in its attempts to create a "theology of hope" that was still engaged in a dialectical relationship with reality. Picht agreed that currently existing theologies of peace were little more than re-appropriations of older romantic and Hegelian-Marxist philosophy. Existing theological works, like Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*, he continued, were not the right place from which to approach this topic. Instead of beginning with emotional appeals, the Kirchentag needed to begin from the standpoint of concrete, technical problems in fields as far ranging as religion, economics, education, the military, and science.⁵¹ In addition to these more traditional themes, Walz also suggested that the Kirchentag would need to explore the complex of psychological questions involving the relationship between peace, sexuality, and aggression.⁵²

Looking more closely at the potential Kirchentag program, meeting attendees agreed that the core of the next Kirchentag would have to be a series of foundational programmatic speeches addressing the current state of peace research and laying the

⁵¹ Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo. Meeting with members of the *Evangelischer Studiengemeinschaft* on 10.-11.12.1965, 11 December 1965, EZA 71/96/730, 1-9; those present included Georg Picht, Heinz-Eduard Tödt, Hans Dombois, Günther Howe, Schwerdtfeger, Eisenbarth, Hans Jürgen Schultz, and the members of the full time Kirchentag staff.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 15; for more on this relationship in the popular psychology of the time, see Dagmar Herzog, "Post-War Ideologies and the Body Politics of 1968," in Jan-Werner Müller, ed., *German Ideologies since 1945: Studies in the Political Thought and Culture of the Bonn Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

groundwork for the rest of the gathering. In order to create the broadest possible dialogue, and to work against the rising tide of political extremism in Germany, they also agreed on the need to incorporate politicians and military leaders into their program. The biggest disagreement emerged on the question of how to conduct the Kirchentag's bible study work. Here some like Günther Howe argued for provocative sermons based on prophetic biblical passages, while others like Hans Dombois preferred a more academic and sober approach.⁵³

At their next meeting in March 1966, the Kirchentag Präsidium made the final decision to go ahead with these plans. But they did so fully aware that they were taking a big risk. As Lorenz reported in his meeting minutes: "The Kirchentag must push itself, in the sense that Schultz suggests, into areas where there is no theological safety net. It is precisely in these areas that consciousness is shaped." Given the scarcity of existing work on peace, the lack of a developed peace theology, and the short time interval before the next Kirchentag, this meant that the Kirchentag staff would receive little formal help in addressing this massive subject. As a result, the Kirchentag planning process and the final program would have to be more self-consciously open to outside influences than in the past. Rather than offering well-thought-out answers to the complicated question of world peace, the Kirchentag would only be able to initiate and guide an open-ended discussion. Loosening their control of the program would also change the tone of the meeting, opening the door to more conflict and a more aggressive style. In sharp contrast

⁵³ Ibid., 9-15.

to earlier Kirchentag meetings, Präsidium members went into the planning process for the 1967 expecting to generate controversy.⁵⁴

Since the subject of peace was so new and so multifaceted, the Kirchentag leadership decided that the 1967 gathering would require more than the usual amount of planning. Instead of holding their usual theme selection meeting, attended by a small number of representatives from the various workgroups, they decided to hold a larger “Thematic Conference” with more than one hundred attendees. This conference would have two tasks. First, it would serve to lay the theological and philosophical foundations for the rest of the Kirchentag’s activity. Second, and more difficult, would be the challenge of finding the organic connections between the diverse elements of the Kirchentag program and the overarching theme of “peace.” Peace might be a straightforward concept in world politics, but what was its relevance, for example, to the internal life of the church?⁵⁵

This last question seems to have particularly bothered Hans Hermann Walz, who spent much of the time leading up to the “Thematic Conference” attempting to work out this relationship. As Walz saw it, this problem had two different dimensions. On the level of theology, it was clear that the biblical concept of peace was something very different from the world peace that the Kirchentag sought to address. It was not theologically responsible to simply equate these two concepts; their underlying relationship had to be discovered. On a more practical level, Walz worried about the public response to the Kirchentag’s new peace theme. Looking at the last several

⁵⁴ Friedelbert Lorenz, Minutes of the Präsidium meeting of 18.-19.3.1966, 20.4.1966, EZA 71/86/29.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 12-14.

Kirchentag meetings, he concluded that the Kirchentag's primary audience was much less interested in social and political problems than they were in questions of faith in the modern world and church reform. In order to draw these people in, Walz argued that the theme of "peace" needed to be organically tied to these other concerns.⁵⁶

The underlying problem was stark: Christianity had indirectly contributed to the Enlightenment, with its goal of eternal peace, but the Christian churches themselves had been generally hostile to this tradition throughout history. This put the churches in a difficult position in the present day.

The present-day 'Necessity of Peace' is a direct result of the 'achievements' of modernity. World peace will not come by way of any kind of supernatural God; and it is not the privilege of hearts converted by the message of the messianic Prince of Peace. Instead, if we achieve this peace, it will grow out of science and technology that operate on the basis of 'atheistic' principles, and as the result of a corresponding enlightened consciousness.⁵⁷

While Walz acknowledged that Christian faith had played a role in the development of the natural sciences and the Enlightenment, and that many Christians were active in these fields, the fact remained that the church had never really reconciled itself with this tradition. This, he argued, was the biggest contribution that the churches themselves could make to world peace. He concluded: "It is clear, among other things, that the question of the Christian contribution to world peace ties back into the structure of Christian belief itself." The churches needed to overcome the problematic aspects of their own tradition: the "crusade mentality" and dogmatic formulation of their beliefs that could lead to "a Christian variant of the totalitarian-imperialistic concept of peace." In

⁵⁶ Hans Hermann Walz, "Überlegungen zum Stand der thematischen Vorbereitung für den Kirchentag Hannover 1967," attached to the circular letter from 7 June 1966 for the Präsidium meeting of 16 June 1966, EZA 71/86/29.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

practice, this meant that the church itself needed to become more open to the outside, to the pluralism of beliefs and “truths” in modern society. It needed to transform itself from a militant force in society into a force that worked in the service of others. Finally, in the same way that inter-German and world peace might require the sacrifice of certain privileges, peace between the churches and their rival belief systems would also require the sacrifice of privileges that the churches had long enjoyed.⁵⁸ In this sense, Walz concluded, the tasks of church reform and modern theology were directly relevant to the question of world peace.

Speakers at the “Thematic Conference” in July 1966 took a more positive view of the relationship between Christianity and peace. In the opening speech of the conference, Richard von Weizsäcker explained that the idea of “peace” as the theme for the 1967 Kirchentag had grown directly out of the 1965 theme of “freedom.” Christian freedom compelled believers to take responsibility for the problems of the world, and the most pressing need in the present-day world was peace. But how, he asked, could Christians reconcile the biblical promise of peace with their present day reality, where the best they seemed able to achieve was the prevention of outright war? Here, Weizsäcker argued that the Christian concept of peace and the problem of world peace were dialectically related. “We are responsible,” he argued, “for the task of peace in this world, and it does little good if we merely invoke God’s plan in our perceptions and measures for peace. But, if we keep God’s promised peace in sight, do we not have the confidence, despite all of our conflicts and errors, to begin each day anew and to keep moving forward?” Faith,

⁵⁸ Ibid., 4-7.

he continued, was not something separate from life. It was something that enabled the believer to actively work for a better world.⁵⁹

In the present-day world, Weizsäcker continued, where the prevention of war was a necessary condition for the very survival of the human race, the churches had to work alongside the rest of society to prevent and manage world conflicts. But this was only one part of their task. They also had the responsibility to enlighten people about the need for peace and to help them to work together for its realization. This was a multifaceted task that involved the provision of information, the development of science and technology, and the promotion of new moral values. This last task, especially, was an area where the churches could make a major contribution. The idea of reconciliation was at the center of the Christian message. Now, in a variety of groups and organizations, Christians were called to join the task of promoting reconciliation and cooperation between “different-believing groups of people” toward the creation of “the initial stages of a world society.” The next Kirchentag, he concluded, would contribute to this task by mobilizing Protestants, educating them about the problems and tasks at hand, and fostering dialogue that could lead to reforms in the churches and new attitudes in Germany.⁶⁰

Following Weizsäcker’s opening, a series of other speakers addressed the different subject areas where the Kirchentag could contribute to the development of world peace. Wolf Häfele, a nuclear engineer, began by examining the ways in which modern scientific research could both threaten and promote peace. Looking at the

⁵⁹ Richard von Weizsäcker, “Einleitungsreferat,” Loccum Thematic Conference, 17 June 1966, EZA 71/96/730, 1-6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6-12.

American Manhattan Project that had developed the first atom bomb, and at the ongoing “scientific aggression” between the Americans and the Soviets, he argued that scientific research in the superpowers had far surpassed the scope of scientific activity in the rest of the world. European scientists, he argued, needed to learn from the scientific advancements of the superpowers, adopting similar system of science education and fostering similar cooperation between the state, private industry, and the science community. But, he argued, this shift needed to also be accompanied by a new form of scientific ethics. While the superpowers sought to dominate one another, Europeans needed to apply the same effort and dedication toward the problems of peace and human survival.⁶¹

Next, the political scientist Klaus Ritter, argued that world peace would require a fundamental change in political attitudes. Politics itself, he argued, could not solve the problems of the world, but the way that it was practiced could make them more or less acute. Looking at the problems of nuclear proliferation and German division, he went on to show how new ways of thinking could set the stage for eventual solutions. For the first of these problems, he argued that the way forward would involve a shift from the bipolar model of the Cold War toward a multi-polar world in which non-aligned nations worked to maintain the fragile peace. Within this model, small cooperative steps could lay the groundwork for larger ones, leading to the creation of a safer world and, even, an eventual “world state.” With regard to the second problem, he argued that no political or diplomatic measures could lead to any near-term German reunification. The GDR had been fully integrated into the Soviet sphere of influence. West Germans needed to accept

⁶¹ Wolf Häfele, “Aspektreferat Wissenschaft,” Loccum Thematic Conference, 17 June 1966, EZA 71/96/730.

this and to realize that only “much broader structural changes in the Eastern Bloc—and also in the West” could make any eventual reunification possible. Rather than focusing on reunification on the basis of national unity, or grudgingly accepting the need for peaceful coexistence, West Germans needed to work for a whole new political “architecture” in Europe. This would require the German people to move away from national categories of thinking, recognizing the interdependence of all people in the modern world. And it would require them to develop a new, carefully thought out strategy for political rapprochement [*Annäherung*] between the Eastern and Western blocs.⁶²

Finally, the theologian Hans Schmidt examined the history and future of peace theology within the German churches. In the past, he argued, Protestants had been divided between those who embraced romantic, utopian visions of peace, but were ineffectual in the real world, and those whose political realism had led them to accept the necessity of war. But now, in the postwar world, they found themselves searching for new alternatives. Christians needed to begin this process by understanding that conflict grew out of powerful social forces. “War and revolutionary activity,” he argued, “are expressions of a historical crisis . . . that comes in the wake of a growing and changing society.” War would only be eliminated if these necessary conflicts could be managed in some other way. World peace would only be the result of careful, long-term social

⁶² Klaus Ritter, “Politische Aspekte zur Friedensfrage,” Loccum Thematic Conference, 17 June 1966, EZA 71/96/730.

planning, the creation and promotion of international law, developmental aid, and common security structures.⁶³

The Christian churches could best contribute to these changes by examining and overcoming their own reluctance to embrace world peace. This reluctance, Schmidt argued, grew out of the Augustinian separation of the world into the City of God and the City of Man. Following Augustine, Christians had for too long accepted that the only peace possible in the secular world was the peace imposed by the force of some strong ruler. And they had concluded that the “heavenly peace” promised by God was entirely otherworldly. Schmidt went on to argue that this traditional view was flawed. Recent scholarship on the prophetic books of the Old Testament demonstrated that God’s peace was not utopian; it was instead a real, tangible promise, a “militant slogan” [*Kampfwort*] against oppressors and a “word of comfort” to the oppressed. This promise was not limited to spiritual peace, but made a claim upon the entire social world. In the New Testament, too, Schmidt argued, Christ had come to bridge the gap between God and humanity and to destroy the powers of evil that worked against peace. The task of the churches was to continue this work of reconciliation between all races, classes, and other hostile groups. This task was made possible by Christ’s prior work of reconciliation and was motivated by the knowledge of Christ’s ultimate victory.⁶⁴

These speeches served as the basic framework for the entire 1967 Kirchentag and, especially, as the foundation for its evening lecture program. The lectures in this series had originally been planned to follow the three levels of Hans Jürgen Schultz’s

⁶³ Hans Schmidt, “Was kann die Kirche für den Frieden tun?”, Loccum Thematic Conference, 17 June 1966, EZA 71/96/730, 1-9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-21.

“Keywords for Peace,” looking in turn at “hindrances,” the “inherent necessity,” and the process of “planning” for peace. However, drawing on the work of the Thematic Conference, the final plans called instead for discussion of the relationship between peace and subjects such as politics, education, and theology. In order to address the topic of peace more broadly, and to clarify its necessity in the modern world, the Kirchentag leadership also decided to ask Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, the brother of the Kirchentag president and a prominent public intellectual, to present his work on the subject of “Peace and Truth.”⁶⁵

They had more difficulty in selecting the remaining speakers. In a series of letters sent to the Kirchentag president in late 1966, Hans Jürgen Schultz argued that the Kirchentag program was too safe, lacking high profile speakers from the avant-garde. Against the dry, factual approach of the Kirchentag leadership, he suggested more provocative speakers such as Golo Mann, Alexander Mitscherlich, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Harvey Cox. Richard von Weizsäcker, on the other hand, insisted that the Kirchentag should focus on careful, thoughtful work, and not on provocation. In particular, he objected to Mitscherlich and others who sought to understand social problems from the standpoint of psychology.⁶⁶ In the end, besides Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, the Kirchentag settled on Alva Myrdal, the Swedish Minister for Disarmament Questions, for the political speech, Professor Hartmut von Hentig of Göttingen, on education, and the rising theological star Wolfhart Pannenberg, on the relationship between theology and peace.

⁶⁵ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Vermerk über die Kollegiumssitzung mit Präsident am 12.10.1966,” 18 October 1966, EZA 71/96/730.

⁶⁶ See Hans Jürgen Schultz to Richard von Weizsäcker, 2 November 1966; RvW to HJS, 8 November 1966, and HJS to RvW, 14 November 1966, EZA 71/96/730.

Alva Myrdal opened this lecture series on the first night of the Kirchentag, speaking on the “Political Problem of Peace.” She began by laying out the fundamental problem at hand:

Somehow or other, we need to all cooperate in the task of forging a new path, seeking out a balance between the desire for peace, that all people self-evidently carry inside themselves, and the world community that humanity has created, that seems like a diabolical machine for the sabotage of peace. Equipped with reason, as we human creatures are, we cannot tolerate the fact that our collective activity, and especially our international activity, must be so crazy, so self-destructive.⁶⁷

The problem, in a nutshell, was that people wanted peace, but didn’t know how to realize this goal. The task at hand, then, was to move beyond the level of desires, looking at real concrete measures.

The road from present-day conflicts to future world peace would be a long one. It could only be traversed through a series of smaller, more specific steps. The first of these was to prevent the further proliferation of nuclear and conventional weapons, and to work toward eventual disarmament. This task was already underway in the form of recent international agreements to stop the proliferation of nuclear arms beyond those nations that already possessed them. Next, the nations of the world needed to work to arrest the process of ongoing arms research and to reduce the quantity of weapons in current stockpiles.⁶⁸

The second step was to delegitimize the use of force as a means of solving local and international conflicts. This would begin with a commitment to keeping local conflicts local. The conflicts of the Third World grew out of the legacy of colonialism. Now, they were escalating beyond their original causes, as they were pulled into the Cold

⁶⁷ DEKT 1967, 690.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 691-93.

War. Rather than using these conflicts as Cold War proxies, the nations of the world needed to cooperate in the pursuit of non-violent solutions. Recent UN sanctions against the racist regime in South Africa were a test case for this new approach. So was the work of groups like the World Council of Churches to condemn racism in all of its forms. But this task involved a difficult balancing act. On the one hand, it was important for international organizations to prevent the spread and escalation of these conflicts, through arms embargoes and the creation of “nuclear free zones.” On the other hand, it was equally important to let these problems be resolved locally, without outside interference. Even interference that was designed to help make things better was ultimately destructive, since it prevented the development of local solutions.⁶⁹

The third step was the constructive counterpart to the de-escalation of conflict: the ongoing work of fostering international cooperation. On a fundamental level, this was a matter of changing people’s basic ways of thinking about the world. In a world where the gap between the rich and the poor was rapidly expanding, people needed to recognize their own responsibility for the well-being of all people, everywhere in the world. This might begin with various kinds of charitable and humanitarian aid. But this was only the start. Developmental aid had to be directed toward real international equality. For the immediate future, this meant developing a plan to address the expected population explosion in the Third World. For the longer-term future, it would require financial and technological aid for Third World industry, responsible investment and trade instead of expropriation, and the creation of better educational institutions.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Ibid., 694-697.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 697-700.

The final, and most difficult, step was to forge a future world governed by “international law” and directed toward the promotion of “peace, order, and progress.” This was not a matter of “pious resolutions” but of real, tangible integration. It was already beginning in the area of international economic cooperation. The next step would be to equip the UN with the economic and military resources to enforce world order. This process would require a shift away from the present-day power blocs that dominated international politics, toward some kind of true equality between the world’s nations. This task seemed distant. But there were many steps that could help to make it possible. Groups and individuals that truly desired peace needed to work to spread enlightenment and progressive thought. And they needed to influence politicians by changing the attitudes and ideas of voters. Finally, they needed to tirelessly oppose the spread of hate and propaganda, helping people to realize that peace was attainable.⁷¹

Speaking the following evening, the education professor Hartmut von Hentig elaborated on the need for “Education for Peace.” Drawing on the UNESCO preamble, he began by reminding his listeners that war was a product of the “human mind” and its prevention was a matter of changing people’s ways of thinking. The underlying causes of war were many: confusion and the inability to see the world truthfully, the human tendency to separate into groups of self and other, the underlying psychological drive toward aggression, and a loss of hope that things might ever be better. These causes could only be overcome by changing people’s basic ways of thinking, starting in early childhood. In order to promote peace, children needed to be trained from an early age to empathize with others, to viscerally reject injustice, disrespect, and indifference. They also needed to be inculcated with a basic antipathy toward the use of force. They needed

⁷¹ Ibid., 701-705.

to learn what war was really like, overcoming their romantic illusions. And they had to realize that peace was not a utopia; it might involve real sacrifices and compromises. Finally, children needed to be taught to accept uncertainty and doubt and to question authority. They needed to be able to tolerate a certain amount of social unrest, conflict, and disorder, rather than blindly following their elders.⁷²

Adults also needed to change their ways of thinking. In the political world, people had to accept the inevitability of disagreement and conflict. Rather than working to suppress this conflict, they needed to take it seriously, to understand it, and finally, to let it go. It was this last step that was most problematic in the Federal Republic. “The Federal Republic,” Hentig argued, “is a master at not being able to let any conflict go.” In order to overcome this problem, West Germans would need to learn to accept their own guilt, without expecting or demanding forgiveness. They also needed a basic political re-education. They were still too quick to accept authoritarian ways of thinking, instead of embracing the ideals and institutions of democracy. Finally, re-education was also necessary in the personal sphere. People had to recognize that any change in the world could only begin with their own action. They needed to learn to take personal responsibility for the problems of the world. These problems were not limited to America, with its ongoing conflict over the Vietnam War. German youth saw the same errors and the same tendencies in their own politicians, especially in their pre-occupation with German reunification, the Oder-Neisse border, and the non-recognition of the GDR. But in the end there was hope. Not, as some argued, because of any inherent compulsion

⁷² Ibid., 706-719.

to peace. But because people could be educated to think in new ways and to act on these beliefs.⁷³

Finally, in the third evening session, Wolfhart Pannenberg spoke on “The Peace of God and World Peace” while Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker followed with a presentation of “Peace and Truth.” Pannenberg began by admitting that the “peace of God” might not seem as relevant as the previous speeches on the problems of the world. But, he argued, in the end it was in fact bigger, more fundamental, and more encompassing. World peace was only provisional, involving the prevention of war and the management of conflict. God’s peace was eternal and final, the reconciliation between God and humanity, but also between all human beings. It also had an important practical relevance, for it was a source of power “that equips the ordinary citizen for ever-new endeavors for peace, preventing the resignation that arises in the thought that only earthy powers are in a position to defend it or put it at risk.”⁷⁴

Jesus death and resurrection, he continued, were both the ultimate foundation and the source of true world peace. This was a peace that transcended human categories, but it was not something that should lead to indifference toward the human dimensions of peace.

For the Christian there is, then, a “compulsion to peace” not only in the sense that human survival in the present age of technological progress requires us to forego the use of nuclear weapons and to anchor this refusal in institutions. For the Christian, the commitment to peace is much more a matter of fidelity to the spirit of the Gospel.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid., 719-29.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 730.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 731-33.

As the history of Christianity demonstrated, the churches had not always done a good job of embodying this ideal. Too often Christians had interpreted God's peace as an excuse for an otherworldly pacifism, for a rejection of their social responsibilities. Or, on the other extreme, they had been arrogant enough to think that they could bring about God's kingdom through their own military and political might. As was apparent in recent German history, they had made the mistake of thinking that the gospel did not apply to the state, of elevating the nation to the highest good. This had made both the nation and the churches guilty before God. Even more recently, in the early 1950s, they had been tempted to see the fight against atheistic communism as another form of holy war.⁷⁶

Now the churches in Germany needed to overcome this past, learning how they could contribute to the promotion of peace on earth. Among other things, they could work at forums like the Kirchentag to create public awareness of the need for world peace. And they could contribute to its creation, not through direct political activity, but by offering spiritual counsel and guidance. This influence could already be seen in the church's work for a new West German *Ostpolitik*. Here, the church was contributing to world peace by pushing Germans to overcome their political illusions and by urging them to reconcile with their eastern neighbors. The church's influence also needed to be brought to bear on the work of overcoming nationalism. As Pannenberg argued: "We do not need a new sense of nation, as we have recently begun to hear more often; instead we need a consciousness of the task of our people within the framework of the European

⁷⁶ Ibid., 733-736.

community of peoples and within the framework of a humanity, where the majority of people, unlike ourselves, still lack the economic conditions of a humane existence.”⁷⁷

German Christians also needed to learn the painful lessons of the Vietnam War, namely that the neither of the world’s superpowers served the best interests of humanity. Instead of seeing themselves as part of any one world-political bloc, they needed to work on behalf of all of humanity for a new, peaceful international order. This ambitious goal was a long way off, but Christians could help to bring it about by working in the present day for arms reductions, by giving up their own national illusions, by exposing psychological tendencies toward aggression, and by working to displace this aggression with love, respect, justice, and solidarity. The churches could also contribute by developing a new anti-war theology. This did not necessarily need to be a theology of pacifism, but it needed to recognize that there was no such thing as a just war. People might have certain rights to self-defense, but war was still always an evil. Ordinary Christians could also stand side by side with non-Christians in anti-war protests, and they could work with them toward the development of a more tolerant, pluralist society.⁷⁸

In the final programmatic speech on “Peace and Truth,” the physicist and public intellectual Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker presented his work on the nature and necessity of peace in the modern age. He began by looking at the conditions for modern world peace. World peace, he argued, was not an automatic result of progress. Instead it was something that people had to create, not a product of technology, but of politics. Indeed, technological progress was a constantly destabilizing force in the world. If people

⁷⁷ Ibid., 736-37.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 737-46.

wanted peace, they would have to learn to understand and control this process. World peace was also not some utopian condition. Instead, it was the practical result of “World Domestic Politics” [*Weltinnenpolitik*], of working to provide all people in the world with the same social benefits available to citizens in rich western nations. Finally, world peace was something that would only be possible through the development of new ethical ways of thinking, suited to the modern, technological age.⁷⁹

This peace was only attainable if it could be derived from underlying truths about the nature of reality. Weizsäcker went on to show that this was, in fact, the case. Peace was, first of all, a natural result of the application of reason to all areas of life. In the realm of ethics, as Kant had already demonstrated, reason was simply a matter of seeing the implications of one’s own actions on the larger whole. The categorical imperative was the simplest and purest expression of this reason. If people would only follow this imperative, becoming mature and learning to overcome their irrational drives, then they would have peace. Running parallel with the truth of reason was the truth of faith. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had demonstrated that morality was not just a matter of one’s actions, but of one’s underlying character. But faith worked to transform the individual and the larger world, making peace possible. Finally, peace was an outgrowth of the human orientation toward the future. This inherent future-orientation—embodied in the activity of planning—was precisely the aspect of human existence that made peace possible. Peace would not be the result of reason alone, nor of faith, but only of programmatic human activity.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ibid., 748-53.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 753-759.

Finally, Weizsäcker turned to the practical steps that could lead to the realization of world peace. First, he argued that peace would not come through the strict adherence to one model or plan. Instead, like progress in the natural sciences, it would arise out of the work of multiple competing groups working according to many different models. These models did not even need to be compatible. Instead, in the same way that the idea of complementarity in quantum theory allowed physicists to simultaneously apply wholly different models to the same physical phenomena, antagonistic ideologies such as communism and capitalism might also be seen as directed toward the same goal of peace, even if they operated on entirely different principles. The world, Weizsäcker argued, was moving away from the competitive bipolar division of the Cold War, toward a world marked by polycentrism, and by cooperative bipolarity. As problems such as the spread of nuclear technology and the threat of world hunger loomed larger, communists and capitalists had more and more reason to cooperate for the common good. Finally, world peace would be the result of a new peace ethic, based not on the right to self-defense but on the principle of love for one's neighbor. The churches could help to bring this about by rejecting the concept of just war and calling on Christians to instead reject all recourse to force.⁸¹

In the meetings of the Kirchentag political workgroup, speakers addressed the same set of overarching questions, looking more specifically at their implications for West German foreign and domestic politics. The workgroup opened with speeches by Herbert Wehner, the SPD Minister for All-German Questions, and the conservative historian Karl-Dietrich Erdmann in a session entitled "What is our purpose as

⁸¹ Ibid., 760-763.

Germans?”⁸² Wehner began this presentation by arguing that recent conflicts in Asia and the Middle East clearly demonstrated the willingness of both of world’s superpowers to wage war. What was needed in the world, however, was people who were willing to wage peace. Given their special circumstances as a nation divided between the two world power blocs, the Germans were in a unique position to fill this void. But this would require them to genuinely commit themselves, not just to the prevention of war, but to the larger tasks of de-escalating conflict and fostering cooperation. This was the common task of the German people on both sides of the iron curtain. Although they were required to live divided into separate states, they could demonstrate their national unity by cooperating in the promotion of peace. This task had four concrete components. First, Germans needed to work together for greater European cooperation and unity. Second, they needed to promote convergence [*Annäherung*] between the nations in the West and East. Third, they needed to work together to offer humanitarian and development aid to the Third World. Finally, they needed to forge common structures of peace and security.⁸³

Erdmann was even less equivocal in his assertion that peace was the task of the German nation. This was not, he clarified, a special German mission or calling. “After all that we have experienced . . . ,” he conceded, “any appeal to a mission or calling must be rejected.” Instead, it was a matter of the German people finding their own national purpose and identity in their common commitment to the “universal human mission” of

⁸² “*Wozu sind wir als Deutsche da?*”

⁸³ DEKT 1967, 114-122.

peace.⁸⁴ This task operated on three different levels: the world, Europe, and Germany itself. On the first of these levels, peace was threatened by ongoing wars of decolonization. These wars all had their own immediate causes, but their underlying causes were the same. They resulted from rapid population growth in the developing world and from the shortage of food and other vital resources. In their own ways, both Marxists and Capitalists recognized the need to address these problems. And this made the crises of the Third World an ideal arena for East-West cooperation. Indeed, Erdmann suggested that this cooperation should become the focus of the June 17 “Day of German Unity.” Here, he argued: “What a day it would be for the Germans, if our self-consciousness as a nation were to manifest itself, directly as a result of our position in the world, in voluntary help to heal the wounds of war, to end hunger, and to do our part to contribute to the softening of opposition.”⁸⁵

On the level of European politics, Germans were called to work to build trust and reconciliation between the East and the West. This would require them to rethink their own foreign policy goals, recognizing that whatever legal rights they might have, there was no realistic possibility for peace as long as they maintained their claims to the territories across the Oder-Neisse border. They were also called to promote the continued integration of Western Europe, expanding the European Community to encompass the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, and, eventually, even the eastern European countries. And they were called to work against the resurgence of nationalism, making it clear that the future of the nation state was only possible as part of a larger international

⁸⁴ Ibid., 122.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 123-126.

community. Finally, inside their own borders, Germans had the task of working for peaceful national unity. This unity was not based on any kind of national self-assertion, but on the mutual responsibility of the German people for the well being of one another. It was a matter of building cultural and institutional bridges between the two German states and of finding common tasks and goals.⁸⁶

On the second day of the Kirchentag, the political workgroup addressed the topic of “Peace Service with and without Weapons.” Here, as approximately 600 anti-Vietnam War protestors rallied outside of the meeting, Klaus von Bismarck moderated a discussion between conscientious objectors and representatives of the *Bundeswehr* in the hopes of demonstrating that each of these groups was working—in its own way—for the promotion of world peace.⁸⁷ This workgroup was also intended to serve as a model for the rational discussion of controversial issues, demonstrating ways that political opponents could sit down together and find common ground. Bismarck argued that, although they disagreed about means, both of these groups shared a common goal. Yet their work was ultimately complementary. The military promoted peace by working to deter aggression. But the civilian service work of conscientious objectors was just as important. It was not simply a way to avoid military service, but was instead a wholly different form of service, engaged in the alleviation of the underlying causes of war. In the discussion that followed, Brigadier General Rolf Juergens defended the need for military deterrence in Europe, and the importance of self-critical citizen soldiers. But he also recognized the rights of German youth to serve their country without weapons.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 127-132.

⁸⁷ For a report on these protests, see Hans Horn, “Bericht über den evangelischen Kirchentag,” undated, EZA 71/96/117.

Pastor Martin Schröter of Dortmund argued that the civilian alternatives to military service were also honorable and important. And he called for this alternative service to be more directed toward underlying Third World problems such as hunger, the lack of economic development, population growth, illiteracy and education, and racial intolerance and discrimination. As might be expected, given the protests outside, the question period that followed the podium discussion was dominated by anti-war protesters. In their questions, these protestors decried the workgroup's moderate tone and failure to adopt any resolutions, while calling on the churches to take a stronger stance against the legitimacy of military force.⁸⁸

Finally, the political workgroup devoted the last day of the Kirchentag to the question of "Investments for Peace." Here Wolf Häfele reprised his presentation from the Thematic Conference, looking at the ways in which education and technology were drafted into the service of war, and the ways in which they could be redirected toward the promotion of peace. The United States and the Soviet Union might have considerable scientific might, he argued, but this was directed toward fighting the Cold War. It was up to the people of Europe to show the world a different way. "In civil-technology projects," he argued, "Germany and Europe have an immediate task and an opportunity to protect the future and to secure peace. And unlike the situation in America, German efforts can be aimed directly at finding solutions in civil-technology projects, without taking a detour through military armament projects." However, the success of these projects depended heavily on the reform of the German educational system and on better

⁸⁸ DEKT 1967, 169-215.

cooperation between the state, private industry, and science.⁸⁹ Gerhard Stoltenberg, the Federal Minister for Scientific Research, made the same arguments in the following speech, laying out in greater detail the specific crises of the developing world and calling on the developed nations of the West to dedicate their resources to finding solutions.⁹⁰

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND REVOLUTION

As the political discussion of “Peace Service with and without Weapons” most clearly demonstrated, the 1967 Kirchentag in Hanover was marked by the rapidly growing divergence between the liberal (and often quite abstract) perspectives of its leadership and the much more radical and critical views of many younger attendees. Meeting just days after the 1967 Kirchentag, members of the Christian Press Academy brought many of these criticisms to the attention Kirchentag leadership. The Hanover Kirchentag, they argued, had lacked true spontaneity and flexibility. And it had given insufficient attention to the most important, pressing issues and concerns of the present day. For example, given the ongoing protests outside of its meetings, the formal Kirchentag program had dealt surprisingly little with the war in Vietnam. Indeed, Christian Press Academy members suspected that discussion topics had been chosen based on the potential for practical discussion and cooperation, rather than for their contemporary relevance. And they argued that the Kirchentag program needed to convey

⁸⁹ Ibid., 217-227.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 228-237.

a greater sense of urgency in its discussions of peace, making it clear that “there is no time to lose.”⁹¹

In their own post-Kirchentag assessment, the leaders of the political workgroup were much more equivocal. On the one hand, group members were pleased that they had succeeded in providing such objective, factual information to their audience. And they praised the sober, balanced tone of their discussions. Some even went as far as to argue that these podium discussions had served an important pedagogical role, providing the audience with a model for mature political discussion. But they also acknowledged the many complaints about the lack of conflict, the failure to adopt any resolutions, and the general unrest among the younger members of the audience. Part of the problem here, they argued, was that they had tried to address far too many different topics in their limited time, leaving insufficient room for thorough discussion of many controversial issues. Another underlying problem, though, was that, in their youthful enthusiasm, many audience members refused to acknowledge the complexity of political issues. To address this problem, they concluded, the leadership would have to work harder to draw these people in, including more representatives from the younger generation and from more radical political perspectives on their panels. They hoped that if audience members could better identify with one or more discussion participants, this would help them to engage with the ideas under discussion and would limit disruptive interruptions.⁹²

⁹¹ “Protokoll der Manöverkritik über den Kirchentag anlässlich des CPA-Treffens in Hildenheim am 26.6.1967,” 71/96/117.

⁹² Friedelbert Lorenz, “Bericht über die Auswertungssitzung der Gruppenleitung Politik am 19.7.1967,” 28 July 1967, EZA 71/96/730.

When they met to begin their planning for the next Kirchentag, members of the Präsidium expressed an interest in revisiting the theme of “Peace.” But they also hoped to avoid any simple repetition of their previous work. Drawing once again on the ideas of Hans Jürgen Schultz, the Präsidium ultimately decided to look more closely at the spiritual underpinnings of social action, focusing their next gathering on “The Sermon on the Mount as an eminent political text.”⁹³ As Schultz argued, this approach would allow the Kirchentag to overcome the growing divide between its theological and political discussions, bringing together the urgent need for world peace, the insights of critical theology, and questions of religious and political praxis.⁹⁴ This approach remained somewhat controversial. Hans Hermann Walz worried that it would encourage naïve theology and simplistic political formulations, neither of which would be rooted in proper understandings of the underlying material.⁹⁵ And Richard von Weizsäcker, while accepting the basic idea, expressed concern that this topic would lend itself to superficial formulations with little practical application.⁹⁶

Despite these concerns, however, the Kirchentag leadership decided to go ahead with these plans, making the concept of “social world peace” [*“soziale Weltfrieden”*] the central emphasis for 1969. As this new theme implied, the emphasis of the 1969 Kirchentag would not be on peace as a whole, but on its foundation in a socially just

⁹³ Hans Hermann Walz, Präsidium Meeting Minutes, 15-16 September 1967, EZA 71/96/159.

⁹⁴ Ibid., see also Friedelbert Lorenz, “Besprechungsunterlage für überlegungen zur Thematik des Kirchentages 1969,” 27 November 1967, EZA 71/96/910; and Hans Hermann Walz, Präsidium Meeting Minutes, 1 December 1967, EZA 71/96/159, 3-4.

⁹⁵ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Besprechungsunterlage für überlegungen zur Thematik des Kirchentages 1969,” 27 November 1967, EZA 71/96/910, 2.

⁹⁶ Richard von Weizsäcker, “Arbeitstagungen in Arnoldshain,” 4-5 January 1968, EZA 71/96/117.

world order. To further emphasize this perspective, the Kirchentag leadership chose “Hungering for Justice” as their motto for 1969. And, in their discussions of the problems of the Third World, they began to shift their perspective away from the problems of development aid, toward the issues of social and political revolution.⁹⁷

This new, more revolutionary perspective was most apparent at the 1969 Kirchentag in the workgroup titled “Justice in a Revolutionary World.” This workgroup was sharply divided between those who continued to look at the problems of the Third World from the standpoint of development aid and those who advocated a more aggressive, revolutionary approach. Representatives of the latter position asserted that development aid was simply an alibi for continued economic exploitation. And they argued that the Third World did not need “peace” but “revolution.”⁹⁸

At the Kirchentag itself, the first of these approaches was represented in speeches by the CDU Bundestag member Walther Leisler Kiep and the German economic development expert Hans Ruthenberg. Kiep argued that Germans needed to be more generous in their foreign aid to the developing world. But, amid whistles and catcalls from the audience, he categorically rejected Marxist and revolutionary perspectives. Many Third World nations, he acknowledged, needed more democracy and not just a stronger economy. But these goals had to be pursued in ways that respected the value of the individual human being. By spreading hatred, resentment, and revolution he

⁹⁷ Hans Hermann Walz, Präsidium Meeting Minutes, 1 December 1967, EZA 71/96/159, 3-6; Friedelbert Lorenz, “Berechungsunterlage für die Sitzung des Kollegiums mit Präsident am 18.3.1968,” 15 March 1968, EZA 71/96/910; Friedelbert Lorenz, “‘Soziale Weltfrieden’ Berechungsunterlage für die Sitzung am 19.6.1968,” 12 June 1968, EZA 71/96/952.

⁹⁸ See Friedelbert Lorenz, Report “Konsultation zum Thema ‘Sozialer Weltfrieden’ am 19.Juni 1968 in Köln,” 9 July 1968, EZA 71/96/952.

continued, Western intellectuals only exacerbated the humanitarian crisis.⁹⁹ Ruthenberg also called for a more coordinated policy of humanitarian and development aid, suggesting the Marshall plan as a useful model. Addressing the structural economic hindrances to Third World development, he argued for fairer trade policies and the encouragement of economic diversification. But he also argued that there were local hindrances to development, including inefficient and corrupt government, backward tax and property laws, and political shortsightedness.¹⁰⁰

Speaking from a more critical perspective were the Afghan economist Heider Dawar and the student pastor Dieter Brezger. While Dawar acknowledged the considerable role of local political corruption in preventing economic development in the Third World, he spent the bulk of his time talking about the inequalities of the international trade regime. Poverty in the Third World, he argued, was the direct result of the exploitative policies of colonial governments. In order to better control their colonies, colonial rulers had created the corrupt class of native government officials that were currently exploiting their people. And, in their economic policies, they had encouraged their colonies to develop narrow, undiversified economies based solely on the export of raw materials. They had also used their colonies as dumping grounds for excess industrial production, preventing the development of any local industry. Even after colonial rulers left, these problems continued to plague Third World countries, while trade barriers and indirect economic exploitation continued to prevent development.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ DEKT 1969, 492-499.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 500-505.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 506-513.

Finally, Brezger opened his speech with a sustained personal attack on Kiep. Defending protesters who had repeatedly interrupted Kiep's presentation, he argued that it was Kiep and the CDU who were responsible for the present-day crises. They had been in power for decades and had done little to solve the problems of the Third World. And, although Kiep claimed to support development aid, his actions and words in other forums called this into question. Moving on to his main focus, Brezger argued that the problems of the Third World were the result of exploitative capitalism. Private firms, he asserted, were only interested in trading with and investing in the Third World in order to make a profit. Whatever investment they offered was far outweighed by their exploitative policies. In the same way, the West German government might claim to offer humanitarian and development aid, but this was little more than propaganda. Their real goal was simply to support the activities of German business interests, funneling money from German taxpayers into the hands of private capitalists. The same exploitative relations also dominated within West Germany, where a small political and economic elite worked to impoverish and disenfranchise the masses. If Germans wanted to help people in the Third World, he concluded, they would not export this system, but work to overthrow it at home.¹⁰²

Speaking the following day on "Development and Solidarity," Erhard Eppler, the SPD Minister for Economic Cooperation, sought to find a middle ground between these perspectives. Acknowledging that the process of Third World development was painfully slow, he cautioned the youth against impatience and ideological rigidity. "Reality," he argued, "does not conform itself to our formulas or ideologies." Neither the problems of Third World poverty, nor their solutions were black and white. Some Third World

¹⁰² Ibid., 514-520.

countries had made great progress in the last twenty years, while others had gotten worse. Modernization and industrialization were, themselves, highly ambivalent developments, leading to progress but also initiating new suffering and new crises. Part of the blame for slow development in the Third World could be laid on the unfair trade practices of developed nations. But developing nations were also hindered by local economic and political policies. And, as could be seen on the Korean peninsula and in the two Chinas, both Capitalism and Marxism could offer viable models for modernization. The solution, then, was not to embrace any one ideology, whether Marxist or Capitalist. Instead, solving these problems would require cooperation and coordination from people of all political perspectives. People needed to learn to think of the world as a whole. And they needed to develop rational cooperative strategies for the betterment of humanity.¹⁰³

Finally, following Eppler, Axel von dem Bussche moderated a discussion on the opportunities and limits of private capital investment in the Third World. This discussion quickly devolved into an argument between the panel's business leaders and economists, on the one side, and the representatives of the radical youth movement, on the other, over the basic legitimacy of the capitalist system.¹⁰⁴

CONCLUSION

By the late 1960s, political discussions at the Kirchentag were dominated by a wholly different set of topics and perspectives than at the beginning of the decade. This represented a significant change in both the substance and style of Protestant political thought. Political discussions in the late 1950s and early 1960s had usually consisted of

¹⁰³ Ibid., 521-529.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 530-42.

fact-based exploration of contentious political issues, under the careful guidance of academically trained subject-matter experts. But over the course of the 1960s, the focus of political workgroups—and of the Kirchentag as a whole—shifted away from academic study toward tasks like “raising awareness,” “building consciousness,” and inspiring political activism. The themes and topics that dominated political discussions at the Kirchentag also underwent a gradual, but significant shift. Geo-political discussions since the early 1950s had focused on questions of German national identity, including German division and reunification, inter-German relations, and the legacies of German history and guilt. But, starting in the early 1960s, these themes began to give way to a newer, more ecumenical and international perspective.

To a certain extent, both of these changes had roots in the earlier history of the Kirchentag, and German Protestantism as a whole. Despite their very different intellectual and political contexts, the activism of the late-1960s Kirchentag shared many similarities with the activism of the early 1950s. In both of these eras, Protestants placed a strong emphasis on the direct relevance of moral and theological principles to everyday political life. And they focused on the personal moral accountability of every individual for the problems of the world. But, by the late 1960s, the theological and moral framework that guided this activism was very different in its particulars from the Christian Democratic ideology that had dominated early 1950s politics. Speakers in both eras affirmed the importance of faith-inspired political activity. But, drawing on the legacy of the more academic period in the late 1950s and early 1960s, speakers in the 1960s drew their inspiration from a faith that was much more self-critical and much more actively engaged in dialogue with other beliefs, ideologies, and traditions.

The new, more international political perspective of the late 1960s was a more substantial departure from the German Protestant tradition. But it, too, had roots in the earlier history of the Kirchentag. On a theological and church-political level, this new perspective was clearly an outgrowth of the ecumenical interests of many of the Kirchentag's founders and early supporters. Even when their geo-political interests were fully absorbed with questions of German national identity, their ecumenical contacts and perspective helped prevent the Kirchentag leadership from entirely losing sight of the world outside of Germany. This was, itself, a significant departure from the dominant National Protestantism of the 1920s and 1930s. The emphasis on peace and reconciliation at Kirchentag meetings of the late 1960s was also clearly an outgrowth of the earlier Barthian theological and political tradition prevalent on the Protestant Left. Already at the very first Kirchentag gatherings, representatives of this tradition were promoting a vision of German identity based on the unique geographical and ideological location of the German people between the East and West. And they were active in pushing German Protestants to examine their own guilt for the crimes of the Nazis, working for reconciliation with all of those they had wronged.

Finally, and perhaps most decisively, the new international orientation of the Kirchentag meetings of the 1960s grew out of the changing perspective of moderately conservative and liberal Protestants as they struggled to overcome national illusions and face the uncomfortable geo-political realities of the world in which they lived. By the middle of the 1950s, even many conservative Protestants had become dissatisfied with the Cold War politics of the Adenauer government, without necessarily seeing the positions of the Protestant Left as a viable alternative. In the decade between 1955 and

1965, in a variety of forums including but not limited to the Kirchentag, these Protestants worked to find a new approach to the German question that recognized the need for coexistence and détente, but was still rooted in political realism. These attempts can be seen in the political discussions of the 1958 Kirchentag Congress, in the 1961 Tübingen Memorandum, Egon Bahr's well known 1963 speech at the Protestant Academy in Tutzing, and the work of the 1965 *Ostdenkschrift* of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD). While the ideas that grew out of this work did not enjoy anything approaching full consensus in the churches, they did provide a solid foundation for positive political cooperation between Barthian-influenced members of the Protestant Left and disgruntled conservatives and liberals.

At first this work remained solidly focused on Germany. But, as it became clearer that the German question would not be solved in isolation from the rest of the world, it became necessary to adopt a more international perspective. This can be seen in the planning meetings for the 1965 Kirchentag, where the topics of ecumenical and international relations grew directly out of inter-German concerns. For some, this seems to have been a smokescreen, a way of legitimizing an ongoing pre-occupation with German division by providing German issues with a superficial sheen of internationalism. For others, it was based on the recognition that the German problem really was irresolvable without the creation of better relations between the superpowers. This could only be accomplished through the resolution of conflicts all around the world, and particularly in developing nations. Finally, for some, it involved a revival of the earlier Barthian notions that inter-German relations were a microcosm of the larger Cold War and that inter-German cooperation could serve as a model for world peace. From this

standpoint, Third World development was one of the most obvious theaters for practical cooperation between the Marxist and Capitalist worlds. And this cooperation would serve to rebuild trust and changing political attitudes on both sides of the iron curtain, making the ultimate realization of world peace much more likely.

These ideas led directly to the “peace” theme of the 1967 Kirchentag, which was only possible because of the newfound opportunities for consensus and dialogue between the erstwhile representatives of the Protestant Left and Right. Yet this new consensus quickly came under attack. Some members of the younger generation accepted its major points, but pushed for more radical formulations and a more aggressive style. At the same time, others questioned its most basic foundational concepts, including the very desirability of peace in light of Marxist notions of revolutionary justice. Protestants at the Kirchentag had spent two decades forging a broad liberal consensus while simultaneously promoting the values of dialogue and pluralism. The fact that these values were now under attack not from the Right but from the Left is a testament to how successful they had been in these endeavors. But it also demonstrated the need for their work to continue. For the Kirchentag, the new challenge would be to find ways to draw the younger generation into dialogue, without endangering the foundations upon which this dialogue was based.

CHAPTER 10

DIALOGUE AND DEMOCRACY

In May 1964 the Kirchentag Präsidium accepted the long-planned retirement of Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff from the position of Kirchentag President, electing Richard von Weizsäcker as his successor. As he handed over control of the organization that he had created and led for the past fifteen years, Thadden reflected on its past and future. He had founded the Kirchentag, he explained, as an expression of a new vitality in German Protestantism that emerged out of the experiences of the Nazi dictatorship and the Second World War. It had served the desire of postwar Protestants to affirm their faith and their social responsibility in the midst of a rapidly changing world. Now, as the founding generation faded away, the responsibility for the Kirchentag's future course lay in the hands of a new generation of Protestants who—thankfully—had not shared in the experiences that had shaped their elders. The world had changed dramatically since 1949. And the new Kirchentag leadership had the responsibility to guide its course into uncharted waters. Many tasks remained the same: to assemble the Protestant laity in Germany and to equip them for service in the church and in the world. But, in order to effectively carry out these tasks, the Kirchentag needed to look forward to the future, “freeing itself, to a certain extent, from its past operating procedures,” experimenting with “as-yet untested solutions,” and seeking to carry out its task in ways better suited to

present-day realities. “This step from yesterday into an unknown Kirchentag future,” he continued, “will be no less risky than the steps that I had to take in 1949/50.”¹

By the time that Weizsäcker officially assumed his new duties, with the close of the 1965 Kirchentag in Cologne, this process was already well underway. After several years of intense scrutiny and criticism, the Cologne Kirchentag, with its emphasis on Christian responsibility in the unsettling modern world, made quite a favorable impression on observers. As Carola Wolf reported in her analysis of the press commentary, this Kirchentag had been especially well received by the generation of Protestants in their thirties, who had appreciated its sober, objective engagement with controversial political and social issues. And, as the Protestant publicist Eberhard Stammler commented, the Kirchentag had presented “an image of mature [*mündig*] people who took their maturity [*Mündigkeit*] seriously.” In the same vein, Heinz Zahrnt proclaimed that the Kirchentag had “demonstrated that our congregations are more mature than many of their shepherds want to believe.”²

By 1965, as these comments demonstrated, the Kirchentag was firmly in the hands of a younger generation of leaders and participants—many in their thirties and forties—who were committed to liberalizing the churches and the rest of German society.³ They contrasted their own sobriety and maturity with the emotional political

¹ RvTT, “Ansprache von President D. Dr. von Thadden-Trieglaff,” Attachment 1 to the Report on the Präsidium Meeting of 13 May 1964, EZA 71/86/29.

² Carola Wolf, “Der Kölner Kirchentag ist noch im Gespräch. Auszüge aus Kommentaren und Versuch einer Presseanalyse,” Attachment 1 to the Report on the Präsidium Meeting of 17-18 November 1965, EZA 71/96/159, 4-6.

³ As seen, for example, in the concerns of the Council of the EKD that the Kirchentag was becoming less overtly religious and more theologically and socially liberal. The council also complained that the Kirchentag was too intellectually close to *RADIUS*, the journal of the *Evangelische Akademikerschaft in Deutschland*, which reflected the critical views of young-to-middle-aged professors

and religious style of their elders, priding themselves on their open-mindedness on issues such as German division and their willingness to engage in dialogue across social, political, and ideological boundaries. This shift can be seen clearly in the “provocative” program of the 1967 Kirchentag, with its emphasis on peace. And it is equally apparent in the negative reaction of the nascent fundamentalist movement in Germany, the emergence of which was, in part, a direct response to the more liberal direction of the Kirchentag.⁴ Ironically, however, this new generation of younger Kirchentag leaders hardly had time to consolidate their position before coming under attack from an even younger, more radical, and less patient generation, frustrated by the slow pace of change in West German society.

In the midst of the “youth revolt,” that erupted in the summer of 1967 with riots in Berlin and that lasted until the elections in the fall of 1969, the new Kirchentag leadership found their commitment to liberal democratic principles such as dialogue and tolerance severely tested. While they rejected the violent methods and the ideological rigidity of certain elements in the student movement, the new generation of Kirchentag leadership sympathized with the students’ frustrations. And—though the students would have doubtless disputed this—they considered themselves to be part of the same broad movement to reform the outmoded structures and cultural values of West German society. Taken by surprise by the radicalism of the youth at the 1967 Kirchentag in Hanover—a radicalism that made their own intentionally “provocative” program seem

such as Georg Picht. Adolf Wischmann to Richard von Weizsäcker (on behalf of the Council of the EKD), 18 August 1965, EZA 71/96/159.

⁴ “Abschrift Bekenntnisbewegung ‘Kein anderes Evangelium’ an das Präsidium des DEKTs und an die Kirchenleitung der Ev. Luth. Landeskirche Hannovers, Betr. Grundentscheidung zum Kirchentag 1967 in Hannover,” 29 April 1966, EZA 71/86/29; see also Hartmut Stratmann, *Kein anderes Evangelium. Geist und Geschichte der neuen Bekenntnisbewegung* (Hamburg: FÜRche Verlag, 1970).

tame—Kirchentag leaders were determined not to repeat this mistake in 1969. Instead, they welcomed the youth to the next Kirchentag in Stuttgart, giving them an unprecedented role in the planning process. Following the lead of the new president, Richard von Weizsäcker, they worked to make the Stuttgart Kirchentag an experiment in open communication and direct democracy.

It is hard to exaggerate the degree to which Stuttgart represented a major change in the content and, especially, the style of the Kirchentag. As recently as early 1967, fearing the reactions of conservative Protestants, the Präsidium had severely limited the plans of the Youth Committee to hold evening dance and “Beat-Music” performances.⁵ A year later they were making plans to accommodate sit-ins and protest marches, and inviting avowed Marxists and leaders of the SDS [*Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*] to participate in their panel discussions. Through their own tolerance and willingness to engage in dialogue, the Kirchentag leaders hoped to set a good example for the German youth, channeling their boundless energy into more productive political activity. In these efforts, they tested the limits of their own political liberalism and their own commitment to a more democratic society. Could the political and social values that German Protestants had developed since the end of the Second World War survive what many saw as the greatest political crisis since the 1930s?

FIRST RUMBLINGS

To the leaders of the Kirchentag, the selection of “Peace” as the overarching theme for 1967 had involved a great deal of risk. While previous Kirchentag topics had been firmly rooted in scripture and in well-established theological precedent, peace

⁵ Hans Hermann Walz, Report on the Präsidium Meeting of 24 February 1967, EZA 71/86/29, 7.

theology was a new and undeveloped field.⁶ It involved new ways of thinking and opened the door to new political ideas, the practical implications of which had yet to be tested. To older Kirchentag attendees, it was radical enough when several speakers in the political workgroup called for Polish-German reconciliation and the West German recognition of the Oder-Neisse boundary. When the Berlin Pastor Erich Müller-Gangloff used the workgroup's round table discussion to call for formal recognition of the GDR, even more progressive politicians—such as Conrad Ahlers—responded with near-disbelief.⁷ The shock of more conservative attendees was compounded when the news of these comments reached the crowd of several hundred students, protesting the Vietnam War outside of the hall, who promptly added “Peace with the GDR” to their collection of slogans.⁸

As radical as some aspects of the 1967 Kirchentag were, however, they reflected the style and priorities of liberal, middle aged Protestants, not the rebellious youth. Young people in their teens and twenties made up significant portions of the Kirchentag audience, but rarely appeared on the podium. And, since the Kirchentag program had been planned out well in advance, the recent explosion in student uprisings and demonstrations had no formal place on the agenda. Still, in political workgroup discussions only weeks after the student protestor Benno Ohnesorg had been killed by the Berlin police during protests against the Shah of Iran, some treatment of the “youth revolt” was inevitable. Indeed, it was hardly surprising that the left-wing pastor Erich

⁶ See Friedelbert Lorenz's report on the discussion between the Kirchentag and the *Evangelischer Studiengemeinschaft* on 10-11 December 1965, 11 December 1965, EZA 71/96/730; also see Lorenz's Report on the Präsidium Meeting on 18-19 March 1966, 20 April 1966, EZA 71/86/29 and its attachments.

⁷ DEKT 1967, 145-147.

⁸ Hans Horn, “Bericht über den evangelischen Kirchentag” undated, EZA 71/96/117.

Müller-Gangloff took advantage of the workgroup's podium discussion to rally to the defense of the Berlin students, accusing the press of misrepresenting their actions. What was surprising was the degree of unanimity between the panel members on this point. Discussing the underlying causes of this student radicalism, the SPD Minister Herbert Wehner criticized the lack of openness and transparency in German politics and the growing power of private interest groups. And he defended student demonstrations, while arguing that some of their actions crossed the line into illegitimate provocation. Günther Berndt, a youth pastor from Wolfenbüttel in Lower Saxony, conceded that the students ought to be more engaged in the existing political parties, rather than taking their complaints to the streets. But, he argued, the more pressing problem was the failure of the rest of German society to take the students' complaints seriously. Even the more conservative members of the panel, such as Karl-Dietrich Erdmann and Philipp von Bismarck came to the students' defense. On the broadest level, Erdmann blamed the demonstrations in Berlin, and the death of Benno Ohnesorg, on the pervasive breakdown of communication in German society. But, on a more immediate level, he faulted the Berlin police for using student demonstrations as a justification for violence. Relating his own recent experiences at a demonstration on Berlin's *Kurfürstendamm*, Philipp von Bismarck, too, reported that the students had been non-violent until provoked by the police.⁹

However, this sympathy did not translate into any real engagement with the youth. Despite occasional references, speakers and panel members rarely addressed important youth issues such as the Vietnam War, the "danger" posed to democracy by the Grand Coalition, and the need for greater student involvement in the governance of the

⁹ DEKT 1967, 140-162.

universities. When topics such as Germany's educational crisis did arise, their focus remained firmly centered on issues like curriculum reform that were important to progressive members of the professorate, not on issues of administrative transparency or democratic governance that were important to the students.¹⁰ Other panels such as "Peace Service with and without Weapons" were far too balanced and consensus-oriented to engage students. This panel was intended to provoke both sides of the political spectrum, arguing that military service was honorable, while also defending the rights of conscientious objectors. And it was intended as a model for civil discourse between people of opposing viewpoints. To its critics, however, it was a bland and inoffensive venture that avoided any issues of real controversy.¹¹

In their assessments of the Hanover Kirchentag, conservative critics complained that the organization was now wholly dominated by the Left.¹² Indeed, several more conservative groups in the churches, such as the fundamentalist *Bekennnis Bewegung* "Kein anderes Evangelium" urged their members to boycott the gathering entirely.¹³ But many other critics in the Center and on the Left, argued that the Kirchentag leadership needed to do more to integrate student perspectives. Meeting shortly after the 1967 gathering, the Christian Press Academy complained that the Kirchentag had tried too hard to avoid controversy. Because the program had barely addressed issues such as Vietnam, and had provided insufficient opportunities for the students to speak from the

¹⁰ See, for example, Wolf Häfele's speech on "Investitionen für den Frieden," DEKT 1967, 216-237.

¹¹ See DEKT 1967, 169-215 and Friedelbert Lorenz, Bericht über die Auswertungssitzung der Gruppenleitung Politik, 19 July 1967, EZA 71/96/730, 2-3.

¹² See Hans Horn, "Bericht über den evangelischen Kirchentag" undated, EZA 71/96/117.

¹³ See Hartmut Stratmann, *Kein anderes Evangelium. Geist und Geschichte der neuen Bekenntnisbewegung* (Hamburg: Fürche Verlag, 1970).

podium, the youth had had no choice but to take their protests to the streets. Offering advice for the next Kirchentag, they suggested: “One needs to consider what there is to offer a young person, like those in Berlin, who stand against the establishment as a whole and advocate for ‘a new understanding of the world.’ The Kirchentag must create a platform where the youth can formulate their ideas.”¹⁴

In their own assessments, Kirchentag leaders agreed with the main lines of this critique. While they continued to hope that relations with more conservative and fundamentalist Protestants could be restored, they also saw the inclusion of the youth as an urgent task.¹⁵ In their post-Kirchentag assessment, members of the political workgroup defended their objective, factual approach, even arguing that they had provided their audience with a model for effective political communication. But they also devoted considerable discussion to “the problem of the ‘young generation.’” As the workgroup concluded:

*The aggressiveness of the young generation is an opportunity for the church and for democracy. This is a first-order task for the Kirchentag. But the opportunities of the Kirchentag with regard to the younger generation are temporally limited. If they get the impression that they will be manipulated, they will react negatively. If we represent the establishment, then, from the outset, this will severely limit the interest of the youth in the Kirchentag. It would be best, then, through confrontation with reality, to run the “risk of uncertainty.”*¹⁶

¹⁴ “Protokoll der Mänoverkritik über den Kirchentag anlässlich des CPA-Treffens in Hildesheim am 26.6.1967,” EZA 71/96/117, 3-5.

¹⁵ For more on the ongoing negotiations between the Kirchentag Präsidium and the German fundamentalist movement, see Hans Hermann Walz, Report on the Präsidium Meeting of 22 March 1968, 30 April 1968, EZA 71/96/159, 8-9; Walz, Report on the Präsidium Meeting of 6 September 1968, 27 September 1968, EZA 71/96/159, 6-9; Friedelbert Lorenz, Memo: Discussion with the “Notgemeinschaft Evangelischer Deutscher” on 14 November 1968, 21 November 1968, EZA 71/96/910; Hartig and Bäumer to Richard von Weizsäcker, 28 October 1968, EZA 71/96/159; and Richard von Weizsäcker to Rudolf Bäumer, 11 December 1968, EZA 71/96/159.

¹⁶ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Bericht über die Auswertungssitzung der Gruppenleitung Politik ,” 19 July 1967, EZA 71/96/730, 6.

At the next meeting of the Kirchentag Präsidium, Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff praised Hanover as a model of balance that “offered the younger Generation an impression of what Christian faith can be today,” but did so in a way that was acceptable to the sensibilities of the older generation.¹⁷ And Richard von Weizsäcker and Hans Hermann Walz defended the Kirchentag as an important and progressive forum for political dialogue. But they too acknowledged the frustration of the youth and the pressing need to address their concerns. As Walz noted in his meeting report, the members of the Präsidium appreciated the involvement of the young generation in the Kirchentag, but, beyond the categorical rejection of the status quo, they weren’t exactly sure what the students stood for. “In connection with this,” Walz continued, “the observation was made that, only with the Hanover Kirchentag had many even realized that this was not just a matter of unrest caused by a few student rioters, but was instead a society-wide phenomenon.”¹⁸

While this new form of youth activity represented a challenge, Kirchentag leaders were largely optimistic about its implications. As Walz reported: “This discomfort with West German society, considerably strengthened by the creation of the Grand Coalition, has asserted itself in the young generation in a spirit beyond the ‘without me’ slogan for the first time in post-war history.” The very fact that the youth were channeling their frustrations into political activity rather than resignation, seemed to be a positive sign. Kirchentag leaders went on to acknowledge that the “extra-parliamentary opposition” of

¹⁷ While Thadden was sympathetic to many of the *Bekennnisbewegung*’s theological concerns, he dismissed their boycott of the 1967 Kirchentag as a form of political self-justification, not truly based on theological difference; see the Report on the Präsidium Meeting of 15-16 September 1967, EZA 71/96/159.

¹⁸ Hans Hermann Walz, Report on the Präsidium Meeting of 15-16 September 1967, EZA 71/96/159, 3-9.

the youth had its basis in legitimate “weaknesses in classical democratic ideology.” The youth revolt was an understandable, if misguided, outgrowth of the dominance asserted by “technological and technocratic structures” over all aspects of modern life.

Concluding their discussion of the generation problem, Kirchentag leaders agreed “that it would be good for the Kirchentag to take this into consideration in its future planning.”¹⁹

While the Kirchentag leadership acknowledged the legitimacy of many of the younger generation’s complaints and remained upbeat about the effects of their activity, this optimism was ultimately based in their hope that the youth could be “tamed” and brought into dialogue with their opponents. In a post-Hanover report on the social and political role of the Kirchentag, Walz made this clear, arguing that the Kirchentag was firmly rooted in the “pluralist-dialogical structure” of modern society. It had the task of bringing together representatives from every side of the political spectrum, holding all of these groups to the standards of “rational” argumentation that made society possible. “This kind of dialogue,” he continued, “is the way to experience truth and to come to terms with reality.” In a functioning democracy, it was important for political and social responsibility to grow from the ground up, not to be the privileged sphere of any existing elite. But direct democracy in the purest sense, was also not realistic. The next Kirchentag needed to examine “questions of democratization in the church and in society” and “the responsibility of all types of ‘extra-parliamentary opposition.’” But it also had to look at “the responsibility of the establishment that will always and must always exist.” Walz hoped that, in its structure and practice, the next Kirchentag would embody a form of spontaneous, but also civil and rational discussion. This could begin with the selection of speakers who represented opposite sides of important political

¹⁹ Ibid.

issues. However, in the discussion that followed these presentations, Walz expected that new political alliances would spontaneously emerge, electing their own representatives, who would then have the opportunity to speak from the podium.²⁰

Richard von Weizsäcker expressed similar hopes for the Stuttgart Kirchentag, although he exhibited a bit more skepticism. “The theme youth,” he cautioned in his official report to the Präsidialversammlung, “requires a great deal of care and patience. The youth themselves don’t need to have patience; they have recently had partial success in also causing their elders to lose patience.” But he went on to acknowledge the need to address the criticisms of groups like the “Protestant Youth in Germany” who argued that Hanover had been too abstract and had worked too hard to maintain political balance and neutrality. He also responded to the criticism that the Kirchentag had been marked by the conspicuous “absence” of “the GDR, the youth, Marxism, and the Third World.” The youth, he argued, had clearly been present in large numbers, but they had felt that they were not taken seriously enough by the Kirchentag organization. To address this, he argued: “We need to struggle for an openness that does not just allow their activity (silent protests, leaflet distributions, street discussions, etc.) outside, but brings it inside.” But he took issue with complaints that topics like “relations with the GDR” had not been openly discussed. In fact, he asserted, they had been discussed quite candidly, but critics were upset because their own views had not dominated the discussion. The next Kirchentag in Stuttgart, he concluded, would not be any easier to run than the Kirchentag

²⁰ Hans Hermann Walz, “Auftrag und weiterer Weg des Kirchentages,” Attachment 9 to the Report on the Präsidium Meeting of 15-16 September 1967, EZA 71/96/159.

in Hanover had been, but he hoped it would provide an opportunity to follow up on the Hanover themes and to correct those things that had gone badly.²¹

As they began preparations for 1969, the Kirchentag leadership worked hard to address these concerns. Although they saw the Stuttgart Kirchentag, with its overarching theme of “hungering for justice,” as a direct follow-up to the “peace” work of the previous gathering, Kirchentag planners went out of their way to more fully “open” the program to the concerns of youth. Some topics like Third World poverty and the relevance of faith in modern society, which were intended to build directly on the work of Hanover, were reformulated to make room for more radical, Marxist perspectives.²² And a number of new themes—such as democratization and the psychology of aggression—grew directly out of the experiences of the youth revolt. Finally, in their plans for Stuttgart, the Kirchentag planned for an unprecedented degree of spontaneous activity and direct democracy. While their rules had previously prohibited the distribution of pamphlets and other literature on the Kirchentag grounds, the Präsidium agreed to allow this activity in Stuttgart as long as it didn’t disturb the public order. They also made provisions to permit Kirchentag attendees to submit their own resolutions to any workgroup, to be accepted or defeated in a direct public vote. Finally, in sharp contrast to the rigid control that they had previously exercised over the direction of Kirchentag discussions, the leadership agreed to give the audience full sovereignty over the direction and course of each workgroup. While Präsidium members and workgroup chairs were given the task of ensuring that democratic procedures were followed, they were also instructed to defer completely to the will of the audience, no matter how much this might

²¹ Report on the Präsidialversammlung Meeting on 23 March 1968, EZA 71/96/281, 5-6.

²² Ibid., 9-10; DEKT 1969.

disrupt their plans. They were also instructed to respond to provocations with rational arguments and to avoid involving the police unless the life or health of audience members was endangered.²³

DEMOCRACY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

The new workgroup on “Democracy” that premiered in 1969 provides one of the best examples of the attempts of the Kirchentag leadership to address the concerns of the younger generation. In the earliest formulations of this topic, drafted shortly after Hanover, Kirchentag leaders had approached democracy as one important element in the promotion of peace, alongside “World Domestic Politics,” the Cold War, and the “German Question.” Peace, after all, did not just apply to relations between nations, it also applied to domestic turmoil, including the ongoing student demonstrations that were disrupting German society. As the physicist Günther Howe, a frequent contributor to the political workgroup, argued: “We Germans still have to fill a major democratic backlog; this theme is an indispensable condition for peace work.”²⁴

This topic began to grow as Kirchentag leaders considered the many concrete areas to which the “democracy” problem applied. In one ambitious early draft, Friedelbert Lorenz hoped to explore four very broad sub-topics as part of this discussion. First, the “Democracy” group would address the structural barriers to further West German democratization. This meant looking at the “impenetrable” social and political structures of the Federal Republic, the “discomfort” of the youth with this system, the

²³ Hans Hermann Walz, Report on the Präsidium Meeting of 30 May 1969, 1 June 1969, EZA 71/96/159, 4-6; also see Attachment 4 “Entwurf einer Geschäftsordnung für die Arbeitsgruppen des Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentages Stuttgart 1969,” EZA 71/96/159.

²⁴ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Besprechungsunterlage zur Thematik des Kirchentages 1969,” 27 November 1967, EZA 71/96/910, 7.

role of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition, and the more theoretical question “What is genuine democratization?” Second, the group would look at democratization in higher education. Third, it would address the ongoing topic of “democracy in the work world.” Finally, under the rubric of “Ideological Critique as Peace Work,” it would examine the errors of the nationalism of the far-right NPD and fundamentalist Protestant groups, on the one hand, and the “Maoism” of the SDS, on the other.²⁵ In another early suggestion, Heinz Zahrnt focused on the tensions between “technocracy” and democracy, looking at the alienation of the individual citizen in the face of an ever-more specialized society. And, alongside several other political and social topics, Hans Dieter Bastian proposed that the Kirchentag examine the “rebellion of the youth,” the problem of “restoration” in postwar society, and the problem of “conflict tolerance.” Lorenz also reported some interest in the role of authority in a democratic system. And in a somewhat less academic vein, Richard von Weizsäcker suggested a more concrete, forward-looking focus on the challenges of ongoing democratization in Germany.²⁶

These ideas were not without controversy. Several members of the Präsidium—hoping to engage the younger generation in dialogue—wanted any discussion of democracy to focus on the present-day crisis and the concerns and fears of the youth. But others opposed this contemporary focus, with its inherent controversy, preferring a more abstract and theoretical discussion of democratic principles. In their evaluation of Bastian’s proposals, for example, several Präsidium members urged the workgroup to

²⁵ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Besprechungsunterlage zur Thematik des Kirchentages 1969,” 27 November 1967, EZA 71/96/910, 7.

²⁶ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Besprechungsunterlage für die Sitzung des Kollegiums mit Präsident am 18.3.1968,” 15 March 1968, EZA 71/96/910, 5-10.

avoid such direct discussion of the contemporary youth revolt, focusing instead on its theoretical goals and underlying causes, which were shared by many liberals.²⁷ And in another, later planning session, the Präsidium member Wolf Häfele urged a continued focus on peace issues and on broad concepts such as “responsibility, power, authority, and justice,” rather than a narrow focus on democracy. But other members of the Kirchentag leadership criticized this approach as too abstract and out of touch with current events. As Rudolf von Thadden argued, the emphasis of these plans on the generic issue of political power was “suited to the state of the discussion in 1961, not 1968/69.” At the very least, he argued, the democracy workgroup needed to address the differences between representative democracy and the more direct, plebiscitary approaches advocated by many student radicals. And the constitutional court judge Ernst Gottfried Mahrenholz defended the importance of looking at democracy itself, arguing for a broader understanding of the word. “The problem of democracy is a social problem,” he argued, “a matter of process, not a matter of a fixed, static legal structure. The problem of democratization is present in many different areas of society, in different variations. So, we need to talk about democracy, not some other vocabulary.”²⁸

This conflict was partially resolved by the decision to divide the Kirchentag’s political topics between two separate workgroups, one devoted specifically to democracy, while the other looked more broadly at “revolution,” peace, and justice in the world. In contrast to the doubts of some Präsidium members, the leaders of the democracy workgroup were in broad agreement about the need to begin from the standpoint of the

²⁷ Hans Hermann Walz, Report on the Präsidium Meeting of 22 March 1968, 30 April 1968, EZA 71/96/159, 7; the objectors are not named in the meeting report.

²⁸ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Notizen zum ‘Demokratie,’” 6 September 1968, EZA 71/96/788.

present-day generational crisis. Klaus Reblin of the Protestant Academy in Bad Boll, for example, urged the workgroup to focus its efforts on student concerns about the deficiencies of parliamentary democracy and the problems inherent in the Grand Coalition. “If the topic ‘Grand Coalition’ is not addressed,” he contended, “we will have to deal with the sit-ins and go-ins of the young generation.” The publicist Eberhard Stammler agreed, arguing that the best starting point was “the fact of extra-parliamentary opposition.” And Herbert Rösener, a youth pastor from Bethel, went even further, calling from the workgroup to practice the democracy it preached, inviting the direct participation of the radical students.²⁹

The question, then, was how to move from contemporary events to underlying political issues. Here Stammler argued that the very existence of the extra-parliamentary opposition raised fundamental questions about West Germany’s parliamentary democracy. He proceeded to pose several of these underlying questions. “How do things stand,” he asked, “with our democratic *habitus*? Have we already arrived or are there too many authoritarian structures?” Had democracy “perhaps promised more than it can deliver?” Did Germany’s liberal democratic parliamentary system suite the needs of the modern “technical world?” Or were there other, better ways—perhaps the democratic “council” system of the student movement—for enabling citizens to exercise their democratic responsibility? The group, he insisted, also needed to deal with the “conformist mentality” in German political life, which was out of touch with liberal ideas about the positive functions of social conflict. And they needed to address concerns about the new “majority” election law that would severely limit the influence of the

²⁹ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Unbearbeitete Notizen von der Konsultation über das Thema ‘Demokratie’ on 15./16.7.1968,” 24 July 1968, EZA 71/96/788, 2-3.

minor parties. Was it better, Stammler asked with regard to these plans, to have a smoothly functioning system, or to offer citizens as many choices as possible? Finally, he argued that the workgroup should address the urgent need for democratization in the church itself.³⁰

In response to these suggestions, Johannes Rau, the leader of the SPD faction in the North Rhine-Westphalian *Landtag*, warned against diluting the program with too many different, broadly-formulated questions. Instead of looking primarily at the concerns of the younger generation or at democratic theory, Rau advocated a focus on the concrete political issues that divided the parties in the upcoming *Bundestag* elections. These issues included the new “majority” election law, the benefits and problems of expanding democratic “co-determination” into all areas of society, and the inherent tensions between private capitalism and the new “World Domestic Politics.” On a more theoretical level, Friedelbert Lorenz suggested that the workgroup should address the general question of “authority.” And, looking at the contemporary political crisis, Reblin suggested the question of “tolerance and intolerance in a democratic society.”³¹

Another important issue, raised by Rösener, was the question of provocation? Did the group really want to get into heated discussions about the basic nature of democracy, or was it better and safer to work more modestly on the elimination of the worst abuses? All of the workgroup members rejected radical revolutionary approaches in favor of evolutionary reforms, but they disagreed about the extent to which the workgroup should include more radical perspectives. Johannes Rau defended the existing political system, while blaming its flaws on the corruption of profit-seeking

³⁰Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 3-4.

interest groups. But he reserved his sharpest criticisms for the self-serving language of the student Left. These groups, he argued, praised “spontaneous” action, while accusing their opponents of political “manipulation.” But weren’t they the ones engaged in manipulation? “Everything that doesn’t fit with the trend to the Left,” he argued, “is called manipulation; everything that fits is consciousness-raising. Where is the line? Who sets the norms?” Continuing his defense of the parliamentary democracy against those who longed for a Marxist system, he added: “At least, it seems to belong to the nature of parliamentary democracies to avoid bypassing norms such as human dignity.” And he defended the importance of planning and delegation in democracy. On many social and political issues, he argued, the public lacked the necessary information to make good decisions. Existing decision-making hierarchies did not need to be eliminated, but they needed to become more flexible and more democratic in order to regain the people’s trust.³²

Addressing the same basic question, Stammer contended that the root of the problem lay in the misconception that democracy was merely a “value-free” mechanism of social regulation. In fact, he countered, democracy was always tied up with other cultural values. When these values changed, the democratic system needed to change as well. For nineteenth century liberals, democracy had been closely tied to the idea of the nation. The painful experiences of the German “catastrophe” had discredited this set of values, but now they needed to be replaced. Perhaps, he suggested, their place could be filled by a new set of community values rooted in “socialist democracy,” where the good of society was valued more than the autonomy of the individual. Here Stammer agreed with Rau that private capital posed certain threats to democracy, but he weighed this

³² Ibid., 4-7.

against the importance of enabling individuals and groups to initiate political change. The present danger to democracy was not rooted in the empowerment of individuals and groups, but in the way that some of these groups—such as the powerful, right-wing Springer Press—abused their political rights. “Our democracy,” he argued, “provides no means of defense against the discrediting of democracy that occurs there.”³³

Temporarily leaving aside these theoretical concerns, the workgroup next turned to the task of formulating a practical program. After long deliberation, they agreed on three basic elements that their program would have to include. First, the workgroup would need to address the concrete doubts that the youth were expressing about the West German democracy. Second, it needed to go into more theoretical detail about the nature and function of democratic systems. And, third, it needed to look at the concrete question of future developments. How could Germany overcome the present-day crisis, creating a more democratic society?³⁴

Despite their agreement on this overarching framework, however, the workgroup ended its first meeting with as many questions as answers. Within this broad framework, what narrower topics should they address? And how should they order these topics? Was it better to begin with controversy, immediately drawing in the youth, but risking an immediate breakdown in communication? Or was it better to begin with theory, setting a moderate and dialogical tone for the rest of the gathering? Another practical problem concerned the concrete difficulties of actually running such a contentious workgroup. Should the workgroup make room for total spontaneity, running the risk that a small group of students might shut down the entire meeting? Or should it have a more ordered

³³ Ibid, 5-7.

³⁴ Ibid., 8-25.

structure, where the focus remained on the podium, rather than the audience? And, if the workgroup leaders chose spontaneity, how could they ensure that conservative and liberal audience members were not drowned out by more aggressive and radical voices?³⁵

Over the next several months, concrete plans for the workgroup program began to take shape. Deciding to minimize their direct discussion of the specific complaints, fears, and worries of the youth, the workgroup leaders proposed instead that the first day should be devoted to the need for democratization of West German society and culture on the broadest level. One focus here would be on the tensions between human values and values of the technocratic, “bureaucratic world” of the Federal Republic. The other major point of emphasis would be on the persistence of illiberal and undemocratic values in broad segments of the West German population. On the second day the workgroup would explore the tensions between authority and direct democracy in politics. And the workgroup’s final day would focus broadly on the importance of democratic participation.³⁶

As for the difficult question of spontaneity versus order, this was taken out of their hands when the Präsidium decided to allow for direct democracy in all of the Kirchentag workgroups. But this decision created a new set of difficulties for the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ For these developments, see Siegfried von Kortzfleisch, “Einige Erläuterungen zum Programmvorschlag der Arbeitsgruppe ‘Demokratie’ für den Kirchentag 1969 in Stuttgart,” 10 September 1968; “Entwurf II für die Arbeitsgruppe ‘Demokratie’ beim Kirchentag 1969 in Stuttgart,” 15 October 1968; Wolf-Dieter Narr, “Problemskizze zur Vorbereitung der Arbeitsgruppe ‘Demokratie’ beim Kirchentag 1969 in Stuttgart,” 3 December 1968; Eberhard Stammmler, “Problemskizze zur Vorbereitung der Arbeitsgruppe ‘Demokratie’ beim Kirchentag 1969 in Stuttgart,” 3 December 1968; Klaus Roth-Stielow, “Neuer Arbeitsvorschlag für die Arbeitsgruppe ‘Demokratie’ beim Kirchentag 1969,” 8 December 1968; Lorenz, Report on the Meeting of the Democracy Workgroup on 14 December 1968, 29 December 1968; Kortzfleisch, “Arbeitsgruppe Demokratie,” 23 January 1969; Lorenz, Report on the Meeting of the Democracy Workgroup on 31 January-1 February 1969, 21 February 1969; and Lorenz, Report on the Meeting of the Democracy Workgroup on 14-15 March 1969, 2 May 1969; all of the above are located in EZA 71/96/788.

workgroup leaders, forcing them to contend with the independent work of various unofficial Kirchentag committees that had formed in the Protestant Student Congregations. These committees of students formulated their own plans for the Kirchentag. Since the coordinated action of these groups could shut down the entire gathering, they retained an effective veto power over the program. Ultimately, this led to only one major change in workgroup's plans. After receiving veiled threats of disruption from their contacts in the Student Congregations, the workgroup leadership agreed to begin the first day's program with a critical psychoanalytic assessment of modern German politics. Since Alexander Mitscherlich, their first choice for this task, was already speaking in another workgroup on the roots of aggression, the social psychologist Klaus Horn of the Sigmund Freud Institute in Frankfurt was selected to fill this role.³⁷ Yet the influence that the student movement exercised over the workgroup went far beyond this minor change in plans. Having spent months preparing resolutions and learning the complexities of the new procedural rules, the students were ready to fully dominate the course of the Kirchentag itself. When the workgroup actually met at the Stuttgart Kirchentag, the challenges it faced would be less theoretical and academic, and more practical. Rather than laying out their ideas before a passive audience, the workgroup leadership would have to contend with the difficulties of direct democratic practice. As the conservative Protestant newspaper *Christ und Welt* would sardonically report on these endeavors: "The life course of this workgroup . . . was like one of the

³⁷ Lorenz, Report on the Meeting of the Democracy Workgroup on 31 January-1 February 1969, 21 February 1969, EZA 71/96/788, 1.

Federal Republic's cyclical business crises: upwards—ever higher—and then the plunge. But by that time the brakes were gone.”³⁸

The workgroup's activity began smoothly enough with a speech by Klaus Horn on the “Hindrances to Democracy” in West Germany. Horn began his assessment of the sickness of West German democracy with a side-by-side examination of its manifestations in the older generation and in the youth. On one side stood people like the CSU politician Franz Josef Strauß, who “defined his opponents as animals” and wanted to force them out of the country. Then there was the elderly pensioner in Berlin's *Gedächtniskirche* who had assaulted the student leader Rudi Dutschke with his cane. Or, finally, the actions of the pistol-wielding Joseph Bachmann, who had critically wounded Dutschke in a failed assassination attempt. “This is all the same political style,” Horn explained, “only in different degrees of escalation.” On the other side, however, were the student protestors who blocked traffic with their demonstrations, disrupted gatherings and speeches, harassed their professors, and plotted to burn down department stores. On both sides the problem was the same. The Germans had not learned how to live together in civil public life. Instead they viewed their political opponents as enemies to be violently eliminated. And this cycle only escalated as despair and helplessness drove both sides to harden their stances against each other. “Every successive violent attempt to maintain an obsolete form of social order,” he continued, “sows the seeds for its own radical negation.” “The stupid self-assuredness of the powerful,” their “moral indifference,

³⁸ Martin Bernstorff, “Durst nach Geschäftsordnung: Arbeitsgruppe Demokratie,” *Christ und Welt*, 25 July 1969.

intellectual rigidity,” and “political intransigence” were the very causes of the chaos that they sought to quell.³⁹

This political “incapacity,” Horn argued, was not natural, but learned. At root, it was a product of long-term historical developments in Germany, in particular the uncritical deference of Germans to tradition. As the rest of the world had industrialized and modernized, Germany had been dominated by a backward-looking feudal elite. Even the German middle class, rather than taking a progressive stance, had ultimately allied themselves with the old elite in the defense of traditional values. This had also been the reaction of the Protestant churches. And this tradition of passivity and deference to authority had led directly to the present-day crisis. How else could one explain the fact that only 53 percent of citizens over the age of 18 accepted the basic right of the student protestors to demonstrate? And how else could Dutschke’s attacker imagine that he was simply carrying out the will of the people? “From within this undemocratic, state-devoted political tradition,” he argued, “political initiative looks to the ruling classes like insubordination and disturbance.”⁴⁰

This historical inheritance was compounded by a second problem: the technocratic approach of modern West Germans to all areas of life. Rather than seeing democracy as a continually changing process, Germans saw it as a static “closed system,” governed by eternally-fixed rules. Instead of approaching democracy as a way of organizing human relations, they looked at it as an impersonal administrative task. This system of government led to the alienation of citizens from their own society. And it led

³⁹ DEKT 1969, 390-92.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 392-93.

the established authorities to see any political initiative as a threat to their “technical regiment.”⁴¹

The symptoms of these problems were apparent in many areas of public life: from the impersonal administration of the German university system to the authoritarian patterns of education in the schools. They were also obvious in Chancellor Kiesinger’s adulation of the inherently undemocratic military as the “school of the nation” and in the failure of Germany’s elites to face the lessons of the Nazi past. Finally, they were apparent in the debased political language of the lower classes and their inability to grasp any complexity or nuance in political discussions. Rather than seeking to understand the complex roots of society’s problems, modern Germans were trained to seek out scapegoats. In this regard, he argued, with its constant attacks upon the student Left, the Springer Press was the heir to Joseph Goebbels propaganda ministry. In its manipulation of public opinion, it had turned “the parliamentary system of our democracy” into “a hypocritical mantle” behind which was the rule of powerful interest groups.⁴²

These problems could only be overcome through a thorough reform of the goals and means of the educational system, through concerted efforts to oppose the manipulation of the “politically helpless,” and the direct transformation of the prevailing political style. Instead of violence and confrontation, Germany needed a politics that was rooted in dialogue and genuine communication. And this was especially true for relations between the generations. While the political attitudes of both the young and the old were a barrier to real democracy, the older generation held all of the political power. As a result, the burden of change fell hardest on their shoulders. The transformation of

⁴¹ Ibid., 393.

⁴² Ibid., 394-400.

German society would require the older generation to learn to tolerate criticism, and even to make this an institutionalized part of the political system itself.⁴³

Following Horn's assessment, the sociologist Willy Strzelewicz elaborated on the ways that West Germany's bureaucratic and technocratic society impeded further democratization. Democracy, he argued, was not a "fixed condition of state organization" but a "far reaching process" that connected to "all areas of life." As a result, true political democracy was not attainable unless it was rooted in social and economic structures. "A democratic state organization based on the rule of law but without democratization" he argued, "is insufficient and absurd." In earlier history, this social and economic democratization had been stymied by old feudal elites and by private capitalists who worked to defend their own narrow interests. In modern society, however, the problem was far more complex. Ordinary citizens were still disempowered. But this was less the result of narrow class interests, than a product of the complex hierarchical character of the modern social world. In modern business and industry, managers made every important decision, limiting the opportunities of those on the lower levels of the hierarchy. As a result of this system, those on the bottom lost their capacity to think for themselves or to make decisions. And this led to the undemocratic rule of an elite class of experts and specialists.⁴⁴

But this was not the end of the story. There were still ways to work against these developments. The "administrative world" of German society, dominated by the "narrow expertise of the specialists," could still be reformed. In order to become more fully democratic, West Germans needed to rein in the power of the bureaucracy, creating a

⁴³ Ibid., 400-402.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 404-408.

more open and transparent system that was subject to criticism. Mid-level bureaucrats needed to be trained to think for themselves, not to simply follow orders. And they had to be given more opportunities to take individual initiative, to hold real responsibility, and to seek out and solve problems. To a large extent, this would be the outcome of necessary educational reforms. By expanding access to higher education, the pool of experts and specialists would grow beyond its current narrow base. Similarly, new, less authoritarian teaching styles would ensure that ordinary citizens had the capacity to hold their leaders accountable for their actions.⁴⁵

On the second day of the Kirchentag, the democracy workgroup set out to address the place of authority in a democratic society. But, while the previous day's discussions had proceeded more or less according to plan, the second day saw the evolution of the workgroup from political theory to anti-authoritarian practice. The program started out with a presentation by Helmut Ridder, a professor of law and politics at the University of Gießen and a leading campaigner against the "Emergency Law" recently passed by the Bundestag. He was followed by the more conservative legal scholar Kurt Biedenkopf, the rector of the University of Bochum. Ridder began by arguing that the question of "authority" was not just some abstract legal concept or a problem for political scientists. It was an immediate and pressing issue in present-day Germany, rooted in the concrete facts of Germany's recent history. While many Germans experienced this problem only as some kind of "indistinct 'discomfort'" with the present-day political system, it had in fact developed into "a chronic constitutional crisis." This, he added, was most clear to members of the younger generation who would no longer tolerate the "evasions,"

⁴⁵ Ibid., 408-11.

“maneuvers,” and “appeasement”-attempts of their elders. This crisis was rooted in three common misunderstandings or political fallacies.⁴⁶

The first of these was the common belief that the democratic ideals of universal freedom and equality were merely a form of “noble, foolish, or criminal sentimentality.” In fact, these ideals were the necessary foundation for any democratic system. And while they might never be fully realizable, they were worth defending and promoting. Instead, however, West German democracy was being corrupted by the uncritical acceptance of private capital. This capitalist system undermined the foundations of democracy by serving the interests of the privileged few at the expense of the majority. And this was supported and legitimized by the self-serving work of scholars, who argued that capitalism was a necessary and unavoidable condition for modern industrial society. This way of thinking, Ridder argued, was the present-day equivalent of the national liberal ideals of an earlier generation of scholars, ideas that had led to the disaster of the two world wars. It was a dangerous misuse use of academic authority to legitimize existing power structures, and it went against the proper role of scholarship in a healthy democracy. Rather than affirming the existing system, scholars were obligated to hold it up to critical scrutiny, working for its continual improvement. This, Ridder concluded, highlighted the urgent need for educational reform in Germany. Rather than working to pacify the students, it was the role of the educational system to train them to be critical democratic citizens.⁴⁷

This undemocratic educational system was supported by another common fallacy: a misunderstanding of the lessons of recent German history. “Undemocratic education

⁴⁶ Ibid., 415-16.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 416-417.

policy,” Ridder argued, “begins in the history books of our students.” Rather than viewing the Nazi dictatorship as the result of democratic deficiencies in German society, Ridder contended, these textbooks advanced the idea that fascism had been an understandable reaction to the legitimate dangers of democratic mass politics. The true lesson of the Nazi dictatorship, by contrast, was that Germans needed to be educated into democratic ways of thinking. Instead of addressing this problem, however, West German society had worked to transform its citizens into unthinking consumers. In their fear of the masses and their desire for security, Germany’s leaders refused to recognize the mass demonstrations of the students as a defense of democratic principles, or to even consider the need for a more direct, plebiscitary form of democratic governance.⁴⁸

The final anti-democratic fallacy prevalent in West Germany was the belief that authoritarian social structures merely reflected the unavoidable rule of impersonal forces in modern life. In fact, Ridder argued, no matter how they might work to hide it, this authoritarianism was always the rule of people over other people. While its advocates might claim that the West German social market economy empowered the workers, this was only smokescreen for authoritarian rule. And the Grand Coalition’s attempts to reform this system from within only reinforced these underlying problems. Biedenkopf might argue, as he recently had, that the economic policies of the CDU/CSU were merely the “realization” of a value free “economic positivism.” More accurately, Ridder countered, “this ‘new economic policy’ is in fact the positivism of undemocratic economic opportunism.” It was not the rule of value-free economic and social principles, but the rule of “property owners,” in which “all of the most important and life-affecting decisions” were made on the basis of an “authority which can have only the most distant

⁴⁸ Ibid., 417-420.

and formal relationship with democracy.” Indeed, he continued, this “total absence of the capacity for democratization in the jails, in educational facilities, in the *Bundeswehr*, the church, and the ‘economy’” reflected a society like that of the Third Reich, in which the parliament had a merely decorative function.⁴⁹

Responding to these arguments, Biedenkopf conceded the existence of many unresolved social and political problems in the Federal Republic. But he argued that these problems needed to be addressed from within the existing political system. “Unlike Herr Ridder,” he stated, “I am not of the opinion that one should abandon the potential of the constitution to those who now control it. I am much more of the opinion that the constitution applies equally to us all, that it is not the constitution of the ruling classes, but belongs to us all and that we are in a position, at least in many areas, to restore the constitutional possibilities that they have artificially limited.” The contemporary crisis, he continued, was not the result of some flaw in West Germany’s constitutional system. This system already required those in power to seek democratic legitimacy from the public. The problem was that some of those in power failed to take this responsibility seriously, refusing to publicly defend or justify their decisions. This, in turn, discredited the entire system. The ruling classes had grown too comfortable. But there were already ways to democratize this system from within. This was simply a matter of electing new representatives who were less self-satisfied or of re-organizing the Bundestag to allow for greater transparency. On a more fundamental level, the solution to Germany’s political

⁴⁹ Ibid., 420-24.

crisis was not a new constitution, but rather increased democratic initiative on the part of ordinary citizens.⁵⁰

Much to the consternation of conservative commentators, the students in the audience resolved to immediately put this advice into practice. As Martin Bernstorff reported in *Christ und Welt*: “The day before, [Workgroup Chair, Siegfried von] Kortzfleisch had declared, ‘The Hall is sovereign.’ Now it was so sovereign that it dissolved itself.”⁵¹ Taking advantage of the Kirchentag’s new, fully democratic operating procedures, a group from the Protestant Student Congregations proposed that the workgroup dispense with its planned program, reconvening outside the North Rhine-Westphalian *Landtag* for a protest against the new university *Ordnungsrecht*, a law that would limit the rights of students to hold public protests, that was set for a vote that day. In the ensuing controversy, Kortzfleisch was voted out of his position as workgroup chair. And, after a democratic vote by the audience (dominated by members of the Student Congregations), the workgroup meeting was dissolved. Before the students left, as Bernstorff indignantly noted, one group raised a banner above the podium on which they had written: “While you listen to this prattle, the *Landtag* is abolishing democracy and adopting the *Ordnungsrecht. Heil.*”⁵²

When the workgroup reconvened in the late afternoon—now under the direction of Klaus Reblin of the Protestant Academy at Bad Boll—Otto Herz, the leader of the protest action, provided a report. After apologizing for any inconvenience caused to those who had opposed the morning’s actions, he explained how a large body of students

⁵⁰ Ibid., 427-433.

⁵¹ Martin Bernstorff, “Durst nach Geschäftsordnung,” *Christ und Welt*, 25 July 1969.

⁵² Ibid.

had proceeded from the Kirchentag to the area outside the *Landtag*, where “perhaps it is not just the windows that are brown.” When they arrived, they had held a sit-in, making declarations against the proposed law and demanding that its supporters come talk to them. It was indicative of the state of democracy in Germany, Herz explained, that although the universities opposed this law, and although no *Landtag* members would publicly defend it, the law had nevertheless been passed. Only a handful of deputies, notably Karl Schröder of the SPD and Ralf Dahrendorf of the FDP, had been willing to talk to the protestors. And they had both spoken against the new law. Now that this law had passed, Herz continued, the students needed to consider ways that they could protect themselves against this abuse of power. He proposed that the workgroup forego its planned question and answer session with leaders from the major political parties—who would only manipulate the audience with their “mock arguments,” while working together to defend their own power. Instead, he suggested that they discuss the ways that the church could promote social justice, providing financial assistance to oppressed minorities in their struggles against the government.⁵³

This time the audience rejected Herz’s proposal and the political discussion went forward. Since the leaders of the CDU and SPD had pulled out at the last minute, the two major parties were represented in the ensuing discussion by the CDU *Bundestag* deputy Arved Deringer and the SPD Justice Minister Horst Ehmke. The FDP was represented by its parliamentary leader Wolfgang Mischnick. And the pastor Heinrich Werner spoke as a representative of the *Aktion Demokratischer Fortschritt* [ADF], a new left-wing party that had formed in opposition to the passage of the Emergency Law. This panel was intended to be an open discussion of the question: “How can we improve our control

⁵³ DEKT 1969, 437-439.

of power?” But it almost immediately abandoned this topic, as both the moderators and members of the audience took advantage of this opportunity to directly confront party leaders with their wide-ranging political frustrations.⁵⁴ As the centrist *Sonntagsblatt* reported: “Young activists sought to turn this scene into a tribunal. Leaders of the party establishment chose to stay away, or to speak ‘election campaign German.’ Student Congregations avidly fed the revolutionary machinery. And if anyone at all listened to anyone else, they heard only the sounds of intolerance.” While the first day of the “democracy” workgroup had been an effective exercise in communication, the *Sonntagsblatt* continued, the afternoon of the second day was dominated by bearded, megaphone wielding students, who shouted down their opponents.⁵⁵

This disorderly gathering—more free-for-all than discussion—was dominated by a handful of recurring themes. The first of these revolved around the revulsion of many audience members toward the CDU. In response to an ongoing barrage of questions, a stuttering Deringer struggled to defend the party’s claims to be a Christian party and to fend off accusations that it stood for the dominance of the churches over all aspects of society and the disenfranchisement of all others. Several of the same audience members also questioned the CDU’s commitment to the true principles of Christianity. How, they asked, was simplistic anti-communism or the refusal to contemplate political “experiments” Christian? Later in the meeting, amid accusations that he was only

⁵⁴ The discussion was moderated by the journalists Reinhard Appel and Karl Hermann Flach (also involved in FDP politics) and the political theorist Karl-Dieter Narr.

⁵⁵ Ottmar Hall, “Gehversuche am Saalmikrofon: Schwierigkeiten beim Sagen der Wahrheit,” *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*, 27 July 1969.

speaking “election campaign German,” another audience member, accused Deringer of manipulation and called for a (failed) vote to force him off the stage.⁵⁶

The questions addressed to Horst Ehmke of the SPD were only slightly less hostile. Ehmke was repeatedly asked to clarify his position on the Grand Coalition and was urged to categorically oppose its renewal after the next election. He admitted that the coalition was not his preferred political outcome. But, amid angry shouts and catcalls, he refused to rule it out on pragmatic political grounds. This refusal led into a long discussion of the origins of the far-right NPD as audience members accused the Grand Coalition of creating the climate that led to its rise and of failing to take any action against its continued growth. Here, to the vehement denial of the other party representatives, Heinrich Werner of the ADF, accused the all of the established parties of keeping the door open to a potential coalition with the NPD. In response, Deringer and Mischnick contended that they had, indeed, campaigned against the NPD, while a frustrated Ehmke simply accused the audience of political ignorance. Another audience member accused the CDU of containing its own neo-Nazi tendencies, forcing Deringer—in the midst of an overtly hostile audience—to try to explain the important ideological differences between his party and the NPD.⁵⁷

In another major thread, several podium and audience members—including the left-wing politics professor Wolf-Dieter Narr—attacked the West German parliament as a façade for the rule of bureaucrats and private interest groups. According to Narr, the Bundestag was too busy pursuing “*Wirtschaftsdemokratie*” and promoting economic growth to care about popular opinion or the public good. Narr also attacked the recently

⁵⁶ DEKT 1969, 440-44.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 441-456

passed Emergency Law, accusing the government of trying to intimidate its opponents by fostering a climate of fear. Here, Werner enthusiastically endorsed this assessment, arguing that the German state was returning to Nazism and arguing for the need to counter-balance the dangerous forces of capitalism. Mischnick agreed in a more limited sense that there was a lack of public transparency in West German government, advocating a better dissemination of information. Deringer, while admitting some problems, argued that reform needed to take place within the existing system. And Johannes Rau, who had replaced Ehmke on the podium, agreed with his colleagues in the FDP and CDU, defending the existing parliamentary system and rejecting plebiscitary alternatives as too open to manipulation and abuse. Next, the discussion turned to the university *Ordnungsrecht*, against which the students had protested that morning. Here Rau, the SPD leader in the North-Rhine Westphalian *Landtag*, made it clear that no SPD deputy had voted for this provision. Deringer, asked to defend the actions of his CDU colleagues, simply asserted that he was not a member of that body and he did not know their reasoning. Finally, all of the major-party politicians found themselves defending the need for a West German military. Here, responding to the suggestions of the audience, Rau argued that it was naïve to simply argue that all military funding should be channeled into education.⁵⁸

After this tumultuous session, the final day of the workgroup was much more subdued. According to press reports, this was largely because the student activists, having accomplished their goals, had moved elsewhere. They would only return at the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 447-462.

end of the day, to provide enough votes for the passage of their political resolutions.⁵⁹ This moderate tone was also apparent in the theme for the workgroup's third day: the concrete, practical steps that could lead to a more democratic Germany. The theologian Dietrich von Oppen began this examination, calling attention to the tension between the facts of everyday life and the ideals expressed in the Sermon on the Mount. This tension, he argued, could not be overcome through radical revolutionary gestures. Instead, it would be accomplished through the small steps of individuals, working together for a better world. In the midst of the major social upheaval in present-day Germany, the most important first step toward this goal was dialogue. What Germany needed was "no more and no less," he argued, than "talking with each other, no matter what the circumstances, as fundamentally equal partners, no matter how unequal our life conditions." The Kirchentag had worked to promote this capacity for dialogue. Now, with the Kirchentag's end, these values needed to spread to family and school life, to political and social organizations, to relations in the workplace, and to the existing conflicts between all the generations, races, and peoples.⁶⁰

Drawing on the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, Oppen explained how the changes needed in German society would begin with changes in individual attitudes. Accepting Jesus' injunction not to worry about tomorrow, the older generation in Germany needed to find the courage to take new risks, and to give up some of their security. They needed to learn how to accept and tolerate criticism. Likewise, the younger generation had to learn that criticism did not automatically lead to a better

⁵⁹ See Ottmar Hall, "Gehversuche am Saalmikrofon: Schwierigkeiten beim Sagen der Wahrheit," *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*, 27 July 1969; and Martin Bernstorff, "Durst nach Geschäftsordnung," *Christ und Welt*, 25 July 1969.

⁶⁰ DEKT 1969, 463-464.

society, but could instead lead to social chaos. And, if they accepted Jesus' call to "judge not lest you be judged," then Germans of all ages would look to their own flaws, before turning to the failings of their neighbors. Finally, however, Oppen conceded that individual changes were not enough. If the churches took the crisis situation in Germany seriously, then they would also see the need for underlying structural reforms. This had to start in the churches themselves, as they critically examined their own traditions and structures.⁶¹

This theological presentation was followed by a speech by the radical political theorist Fritz Vilmar, who addressed the disempowerment of workers within German industry. Vilmar admitted that some of the pressures workers faced were rooted in the basic technical requirements of modern industry. But, he argued, many of the worst aspects of modern industrial work resulted from the persistence of older authoritarian traditions or they grew out of capitalist attitudes in which workers were seen merely as a commodity. This dehumanization of workers could only be overcome, he argued, through the implementation of several concrete reforms. First, workers' co-determination rights needed to be expanded and extending into all areas of industry. Second, in order to ensure that their needs were taken seriously, workers needed to be given more influence in the industrial lobbying organizations. And, finally, the Federal Government itself had an obligation to protect the working classes through better economic planning and the implementation of a stronger social welfare system.⁶²

Alfred Krause, the chair of the German Official's League (DBB), a civil service union, followed this speech with a defense of government bureaucrats against the

⁶¹ Ibid., 465-466.

⁶² Ibid., 467-473.

accusation that they remained entrenched in older authoritarian social models. In sharp contrast to these claims, he argued, most bureaucrats saw themselves as public servants. They were often at the forefront of calls for government reform, but were stymied by political leaders. Indeed, he argued that government bureaucrats, as a class, were among the most open segments of German society when it came to the criticisms of the youth. They were not the agents of the government against the people, but were, instead, the representatives of both sides to one another. On the other hand, he took issue with the idea that hierarchical structures were always authoritarian. Hierarchies were often legitimate, rational forms of organization. The real danger, he concluded, was not in bureaucracy itself, but only arose when bureaucrats became unaccountable for their actions.⁶³

Finally, as the Kirchentag drew to a close, student activists moved from hall to hall, ensuring that there would be enough votes to adopt the resolutions that they had prepared in advance. In the “democracy” workgroup, they pushed through several such resolutions. The first called on the government to grant a full amnesty to all activists who had engaged in politically-motivated demonstrations and uprisings since the summer of 1967. In another series of resolutions, they called on the Protestant churches and all of their affiliated organizations to work for “the implementation of social, political, and economic equality and co-responsibility of all citizens” by helping the student movement in their formation of citizens’ committees. Another urged the Federal Republic to work for reconciliation and friendship with the Polish people, recognizing its past atrocities and accepting the finality of the Oder-Neiße border. And another demanded that the CDU stop misusing the Christian name by withholding co-determination rights from workers, adopting emergency laws against the rights of opposition groups, by sabotaging anti-

⁶³ Ibid., 474-481.

nuclear treaties, spending billions of marks on arms, and cooperating with the fascist regimes in Greece, Spain, Portugal, and South Africa. Still others called on the UN Human Rights Commission to recognize conscientious objection to military service as a basic human right, and called on the Bundestag to eliminate screening procedures for those who claimed to be objectors. Finally, a resolution suggested by the Stuttgart Student Pastor Peter Klimm condemned the injustice of the Federal Republic's "Foreigner Law" [*Ausländergesetz*].⁶⁴

Looking back at the democracy workgroup, observers offered decidedly mixed assessments, largely dependent on their own ideological leanings. While Heinrich Werner of the ADF praised the workgroup as "a big step toward democratization," liberals and conservatives were much more critical.⁶⁵ Indeed, the chaos of the workgroup's second day prompted Strzelewicz to characterize the student activists as "left-radical psycho-terrorists," while the moderate political science professor Waldemar Besson branded the entire gathering a "children's crusade."⁶⁶

DISCOVERING DIALOGUE

The democracy workgroup clearly illustrated the gulf between the democratic theory of older liberals and the radical direct-democratic practice of the student movement. But it offered few suggestions for overcoming this divide. Instead, it fell to another, more experimental workgroup to point the way forward. This workgroup—

⁶⁴ Ibid., 482-490.

⁶⁵ Carola Wolf, "Das Echo auf Stuttgart 1969. Kirchentag Stuttgart aus der Sicht der Publizisten," Attachment 1 to the Report of the Präsidium Meeting of 24-25 October 1969, EZA 71/96/159, 4.

⁶⁶ Ottmar Hall, "Gehversuche am Saalmikrofon: Schwierigkeiten beim Sagen der Wahrheit," *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*, 27 July 1969; and Martin Bernstorff, "Durst nach Geschäftsordnung," *Christ und Welt*, 25 July 1969.

somewhat clumsily named “The Tribunal for the Discovery of Bliss”—was the brainchild of the journalist Hans Jürgen Schultz.⁶⁷ At the most basic level, it reflected his desire that the Kirchentag’s religious focus—the Sermon on the Mount—not be addressed in separate bible study sessions, but instead be organically integrated into the more “worldly” Kirchentag forums. While most workgroups ultimately chose to adopt a more traditional approach to the religious instruction at the Kirchentag, Schultz continued with his plan, making it the core of a new workgroup idea. The workgroup’s basic task, as originally conceived, was to discover the “correlation between reality and the Sermon on the Mount.” But rather than featuring presentations by theologians and subject matter experts, it adopted an experimental new discussion-centered format. Starting with the everyday experiences of the audience, it would work inductively and dialectically, to discover new, more complex truths. According to the workgroup’s plan:

Speeches will grow out of the exigencies of information and discussion. This way the Sermon on the Mount and reality will not be seen as two opposite, rigidly-defined blocs. The task is much more to express the existing pluralistic understandings of each so that, in this way, not only is it possible to have a coming together, an integration, but both sides will also relativize and criticize their own previous understandings.⁶⁸

As Schultz and a small group of friends worked to further develop this idea, their emphasis continued to evolve. While many had reservations about the workgroup’s specific content, they were intrigued by its innovative approach. As Eberhard Stammer argued, summarizing the group’s perspective: “What is special in this attempt is the

⁶⁷ The workgroup’s name, an idea of Ulrich Schmidhäuser, was derived from his reading of Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s play “Die Panne.”

⁶⁸ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Vermerk über die Sitzung der AGL Schultz am 5.12.1968,” 13 December 1968, EZA 71/96/953, 3.

method.”⁶⁹ Rather than focusing solely on working out the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, the workgroup became a forum where Kirchentag attendees could work together dialectically to try to resolve their personal, social, and political problems. While the Sermon on the Mount was still intended to provide underlying guidance for the group’s proceedings, each day of the workgroup was also devoted to a more concrete and tangible set of problems. On the first day, the tribunal would address the problem of private property. On the second, it would examine marriage and sexual relations. And on the third, it would turn to the subject of violence and non-violence.⁷⁰

Every aspect of this workgroup was designed to promote dialogue. Rather than taking place in a lecture hall, where the audience was clearly separated from the podium, it was held in a large amphitheater, where the audience surrounded a central stage. Ten open microphones were spaced throughout the room, and audience members were welcomed to come to the microphones at any time to interject their own experiences and opinions.⁷¹ Instead of featuring designated speakers, the workgroup assembled political opponents who would start off each meeting by briefly presenting their opposite views. And, to facilitate discussion, it gathered a group of subject-matter experts who would be available for consultation with the assembly. Rather than guiding the discussion, however, these experts were there to help answer audience questions and to provide more detailed technical information. The course of the tribunal itself was left intentionally open ended. While each day’s discussion would begin with conflict between the

⁶⁹ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Vermerk über die Sitzung des Freundeskreises um H.J. Schultz am 15.10.1968,” 28 October 1968, EZA 71/96/953, 8.

⁷⁰ Friedelbert Lorenz, “Bericht über die Sitzung der AGL Schultz am 15.1.1969,” 30 January 1969, EZA 71/96/953, 2-9.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

representatives of different views, it was hoped that through the evolution of constantly shifting alliances, the workgroup would work toward some kind of consensus, or at least some mutual understanding. The difficult task of moderating this endeavor was given to the federal judge Helmut Simon.⁷²

This experiment in open dialogue started out slowly. After Schultz explained the gathering's purpose and ground rules, the audience was shown a short introductory film on the subject of private property, and the meeting turned to the reading of various statements of thesis and antithesis. However, the ideal of open dialogue came under almost immediate threat from those on both sides of the political spectrum. Speaking for the Left, Frank von Auer, announced to the audience that the tribunal was not a game (as implied by Schultz's reference to its *Spielregeln*), but a deadly serious matter. The openness of the Kirchentag could not compensate for the fact that hundreds of students were on trial for their protest actions or erase the other injustices of the West German system. And he announced that the Left reserved the right to break the meeting's ground rules at any time, if they thought it was necessary to do so. Rainer Tross, a representative for the Right, complained that the prepared theses did not accurately represent his views. And the progressive psychologist Peter Brückner, called upon to offer his expertise to the group, began by questioning the very idea of scientific "objectivity" on which the enterprise was based. When an audience member later tried to enlist Brückner's expertise on behalf of the Left, another objected, introducing a resolution to forbid the "expert" panelists from offering their personal political opinions. Going still further, this person suggested that members of the radical SDS should only be allowed to speak when

⁷² Ulrich Schmiedhäuser and Eberhard Stammler, Letter to Tribunal Participants for the First Day, 2 July 1969, EZA 71/96/953.

they were ready to “talk about the matter at hand and not school strikes and similar things that don’t belong to the topic.” When Simon, in his role as chair, defended the ability to the experts to distinguish between their personal opinions and their professional expertise, the discussion entered a long digression on the meaning and value of “objectivity.” Finally, at the end of the first morning’s session, the Tribunal was able to agree that “Private property ought not to lead to dominance over people.” But almost immediately thereafter, the workgroup again returned to dissent, as podium speakers and audience members argued about what this actually meant.⁷³

The afternoon continued in this fashion as Helmut Simon worked to defend the tenuous dialogue between the Right and Left. While reminding the students in the audience of the importance of respecting minority rights—the importance of which, he argued, they ought to have been intimately familiar with—he also continued to defend the importance of discussion against those who wanted the group to defer to expert opinion.⁷⁴ As one of the workgroup’s organizers reported in the conservative newspaper *Christ und Welt*, the first day of the Tribunal continued to “be disturbed by endless and pointless procedural debates and technical questions. Because the young people in the hall were filled with such a deep distrust of the podium, they could not comprehend that they were not here to be manipulated.”⁷⁵

On the second day, however, things began to function more smoothly. Almost immediately after the end of the day’s introductory film—on the tensions and difficulties

⁷³ DEKT 1969, 595-617.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 617-18.

⁷⁵ Sigurd Daecke, “Ein Tribunal ohne Tribun. Geplantes Glück—gefundenene Form,” *Christ und Welt*, 27 July 1969.

in changing gender relations—a member of the audience introduced a resolution to open the workgroup to discussion from the floor. Simon agreed with this request, and the tribunal turned directly to the audiences' own experiences and thoughts on marriage and gender. While some audience members still refused to follow the workgroup's guidelines—taking over the microphone reserved for procedural resolutions in order to try to dominate the discussion—this problem was quickly resolved. Rather than taking any official action to silence these attempts, Simon simply urged them to stop, informing them that their anti-social behavior was turning the entire hall against them. For the remainder of the day, without adopting any resolutions, the workgroup held an open discussion of the problems women faced in the workplace, the fair division of domestic labor, the rights of women in the church, and the respective advantages and disadvantages of the commune as an alternative to the traditional middle-class family.⁷⁶

On its final day, the Tribunal addressed the controversial topic of violent and non-violent social change. This time, the group returned to its original format, starting with short presentations from the podium. First, Thilo Koch, a well-known German Radio (ARD) correspondent in Washington, DC spoke on Martin Luther King, jr., the American civil rights movements, and the prevalence of violence in American society. Next, Hildegard Luening gave a short presentation contrasting the revolutionary Marxism of Che Guevara with the more evolutionary style of Camillo Torres. And, finally—in the speech that would dominate the entire rest of the forum—Frank von Auer spoke on the danger of capitalism, calling for solidarity between the German Left and the liberation movements in the “Two-Thirds World.” Arguing that parliamentary democracy in Germany was a sham that existed only to protect the interests of “late stage capitalism,”

⁷⁶ DEKT 1969, 663-711.

Auer defended the need for the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition. While the CDU was virtually indistinguishable from the neo-Nazi NPD, he argued, the SPD had also betrayed the interests of the working class, abandoning Marxist ideology, joining the Grand Coalition, and voting to pass the Emergency Law. As a result, the Left had no alternative but revolution. This did not necessarily mean violence, but, on the other hand, violent revolt was completely justified. In fact, it was merely a response to the violence that West German society visited upon the youth. This violence was everywhere. “The daily content of the *Bild* newspaper,” he argued, “is more violent than one thousand eggs thrown at the heads of police officers.” “The necessity to be sold for money as a worker, in order to be able to live,” he continued, “is violence.” So were the lack of more extensive co-determination laws in Germany, the fact that private individuals owned the means of industrial production, parental upbringing in the home and discipline at school, and compulsory military service. Finally, the violence of West German society was made explicit in the repression of student demonstrators. Humanity itself, Auer asserted, was being destroyed by this capitalist rule. Against this destructive tide, he concluded, the church had a special duty to rediscover its revolutionary roots, reinventing itself as a subversive social and political force.⁷⁷

Any semblance of dialogue quickly disappeared, when more conservative panelists, such as Manfred Wörner, a CDU *Landtag* deputy in Baden-Württemberg (and future defense minister), responded to these charges. Arguing that Auer had “bypassed reality a little bit” in his assessments, Wörner mocked any comparison between the conditions in Germany and those in Latin America. The problems in Germany, he continued, were typical for any highly developed society and they would not be solved by

⁷⁷ Ibid, 715-729.

revolution. Amid uproar from the audience, he continued by arguing that society simply could not function at all if industrial labor was defined as some kind of violence. And, when his co-panelist Peter Brückner tried to silence him—arguing that it would be “repressive tolerance” to let him finish—he responded that he hoped his opponents could at least support the right to free speech. Finally, he asked, how would Auer organize society, so that this kind of “violence” could be avoided?⁷⁸

This exchange set the tone for the remainder of the meeting. While a few more moderate members of the Left attempted to mediate between Auer’s “utopianism” and Wörner’s conservative views, the discussion quickly devolved into a running argument between those on the extremes. While Wörner continually pressed his opponents to explain how their system could actually work, Auer pointed to the “council” democracy of the Student Movement as a model for democratic practice. And Brückner, responding to the same challenge, argued that new communicative strategies would allow for an effective dictatorship of the proletariat that could avoid any recourse to repression or violence. A few more moderate voices tried to find a middle ground in this discussion. Theodor Ebert, a leading German pacifist, for example, warned of the violence perpetrated by well-meaning socialists in the past, and advocated the non-violent reform of German society. But the time for compromises was past. Conservatives in the audience rejected the tribunal as a platform for the SDS, while student radicals began to work on plans to fully democratize the Kirchentag itself. Although there was no existing

⁷⁸ Ibid., 730-31.

provision for them to do so, they proceeded to spend the remainder of the workgroup electing their own representatives to the Präsidium.⁷⁹

THE WAY FORWARD

In her report on press responses to the 1969 Kirchentag, Carola Wolf observed that few previous gatherings could claim to have generated such a vast quantity or such an astonishing diversity of responses. Many of these, she argued, had little to do with the actual events of the Kirchentag meeting, consisting instead of ideologically-driven projections onto the Kirchentag and the churches. Commentary in the various vehicles of the Springer Press, other right-wing organs, and in the newspapers of the fundamentalist movement, for example, characterized Stuttgart as a perfect expression of the utter failure of the church's modernization efforts. The divisions and demonstrations at the Kirchentag, according to this narrative, were the expressions of a deep crisis of faith that was shaking German Protestantism to the core. The implication of this commentary, even if not directly stated, was that attempts to modernize the church had been wrongheaded and self-destructive. Rather than giving rise to a new, more vibrant religious life, they had taken an axe to church's roots. This interpretation was also shared by some commentators on the extreme Left, who believed that church reform was impossible and cheered this self-destruction as the necessary precondition for a better future society.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ibid., 731-782; see also Daecke, "Ein Tribunal ohne Tribun," *Christ und Welt*, 27 July 1969; although it embarked on its own democratic reforms, the Präsidium never seated these delegates.

⁸⁰ Carola Wolf, "Das Echo auf Stuttgart 1969. Kirchentag Stuttgart aus der Sicht der Publizisten," Attachment 1 to the Report of the Präsidium Meeting of 24-25 October 1969, EZA 71/96/159, 1,8.

To many other observers, however, the Kirchentag of 1969—while fraught with difficulties and problems—was sign of hope and new life for the Protestant churches. The churches—and the Kirchentag—had not yet arrived where they needed to be, but they had found the right path. Heinz Zahrnt praised Stuttgart as the beginning of a long, ongoing “learning process” for the churches. And Karl-Werner Bühner wrote in the *Deutsche Pfarrerblatt*: “The Kirchentag was a new beginning for a forgotten history.” Along the same lines, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* editorialized: “The Kirchentag has demonstrated that the Christians have an opportunity to advance beyond the burden of their two-thousand year old history of mistaking law for justice, freedom for privilege, and confession for faith-based life.” And it went on to suggest that this offered some hope that the new church Left might be spared the authoritarian and violent experiences that had shaped their more conservative elders.⁸¹

Commentators were especially optimistic when it came to the Kirchentag’s direct democratic and dialogical style. Praising this new approach, the *Deutsche Pfarrerblatt* lauded the “direct democracy of the so-called base” which was no longer relegated to the role of passive “consumer.” And the *Frankfurter Rundschau* optimistically asserted: “Stuttgart exemplified the fact that democracy is not a state, but a process—a process of overcoming slander, privilege, and authority through the collaborative work of many individuals who are conscious of their human rights and their equality. Out of this emerged a hopeful union of Liberals and Socialists. The example of this Kirchentag will have after-effects.”⁸²

⁸¹ Ibid., 9.

⁸² Ibid, 4.

Within the Präsidium, too, the Stuttgart Kirchnetag was seen as a confirmation of the organization's risky new direction. Discussing the effects of their experiments in direct democracy, Präsidium members concluded: "The practices of fully open discussion at the Stuttgart Kirchentag were not only practically indispensable in order to prevent any escalation into a riot; they are also the right methods for the mission of the Kirchentag." And, while they admitted that many things had not gone as well as they had planned, they praised the gathering as "a big step forward in the direction of better communication." While a few members of the leadership worried that the communicative style to which the Kirchentag aspired was simply not attainable amid the current social tumult, most defended its mission as a place for open discussion, pointing especially to the Tribunal as a model for the future.⁸³

Rather than using the chaos of the Stuttgart Kirchentag—or the provocation of the younger generation—as an excuse to retreat from their liberal democratic ideals, Kirchentag leaders saw these events as a sign that they needed to continue along the road of democratic practice. Following up on the experiences of Stuttgart over the next several years, they worked to democratize the Kirchentag's own leadership structure and to establish better ground rules for discussion and debate. And, instead of trying to prevent such disruptions, demonstrations, and public actions in the future, they worked to improve their own organizational "planning for spontaneity."⁸⁴

At least when it came to the Kirchentag, the youth revolt of the late 1960s did not begin the process of liberalization and democratization in West German society. In fact,

⁸³ Hans Hermann Walz, Report on the Präsidium Meeting of 24-25 October 1969, EZA 71/96/159, 2-3.

⁸⁴ Richard von Weizsäcker, Report of the President to the Präsidialversammlung on 20 March 1970, EZA 71/96/281.

as the history of the Kirchentag clearly demonstrates, each successive generation of German Protestants pursued these two ideals on different levels and in very different ways. But the youth revolt—however misguided or utopian at its extremes—did serve as a constructive challenge to the work an older generation of committed liberals, who were acclimated to a slower pace of social change. Putting the older generation’s liberal democratic beliefs to the test, members of the student movement pushed their elders to more self-consciously and boldly promote the ideals of a fully democratic and just society. This confluence of different generations and different political styles—itsself embodied in the dialogue and debate of the Stuttgart Kirchentag—would pave the way for a thorough and long-lasting reform of the West German political and social system.

CONCLUSION

In 1945 German Protestantism found itself at a crossroads. Amid the physical ruin and social collapse that accompanied German defeat, Protestant leaders saw an opportunity for the churches to take the lead in Germany's spiritual and social renewal. Indeed, outside observers, such as the American occupation authorities, expected no less. But the churches were also weighed down by the burden of their own past. Postwar Protestants had inherited the legacy of a rigidly hierarchical, heavily-clericalized church structure that afforded little opportunity for lay-leadership. They were burdened by a National Protestant tradition that had led them into complicity in two world wars, the Nazi dictatorship, and the Holocaust. They were deeply divided over the experiences and lessons of the "church struggle" during the Third Reich. And they struggled to overcome a political tradition steeped in authoritarian and conservative attitudes, a tradition that—at least implicitly—had preached unquestioning obedience to political authority.

By 1969 German Protestantism was characterized by a very different set of values. In contrast to prior deference to political authority, the dominant liberal consensus at the Kirchentag meetings of the 1960s was firmly rooted in the importance of democratic political participation, political and ideological self-criticism, and dialogue. Younger radicals at the late 1960s Kirchentag went even further in their rejection of authority and their calls for direct-democratic action. The nationalism that had led the churches to support two world wars had been virtually banished from mainstream

Protestantism. In its place, both liberal and radical Protestants promoted a sense of national identity founded on the promotion of social justice and world peace. And, although the Protestant churches retained their rigid hierarchical structure, Protestant organizations that existed outside of the institutional church, or on its margins—groups like the Protestant Academies, the Student Congregations, and the Kirchentag itself—were empowering the laity to take control of their own religious identity.

Over the course of just twenty-five years, in other words, German Protestants had reinvented themselves and transformed their tradition to an almost unbelievable degree. No longer the reactionary social force that they had been in the 1920s, the Protestant churches after 1945 had become active contributors to the stability of West German Democracy. Indeed, at the Kirchentag, they had become leading proponents of a variety of liberal and progressive political causes. While there were—of course—still many continuities with the past, the differences were far-reaching and profound. This dissertation has attempted to gauge the extent of this transformation and to chart its course, explaining how such radical change was possible in such a short time. And it has attempted to offer some insight into the significance of this change for the rest of German society. In conclusion, I want to return to these underlying questions. How did Protestant attitudes and values change over this short period of time? What forces were behind these changes? And what was their broader significance?

THE TRANSFORMATION OF GERMAN PROTESTANTISM

Until very recently, studies of the Protestant churches in postwar West Germany have been dominated by the conceptual dichotomy of “restoration” and “new

beginning.”¹ According to the dominant narrative, the immediate postwar years were a lost opportunity for the churches. For a brief period of time, after the collapse of the Third Reich, there had been the real possibility of radical theological and structural reform. But the efforts of those who promoted these changes—principally members of the radical wing of the confessing church—were beaten back by the power of vested interests and hindered by the sheer weight of tradition. By the mid-1950s, according to this model, the forces of “restoration” had largely triumphed in rebuilding the traditional church order and reasserting the dominance of traditional theological perspectives. Moreover, the conservative political leanings of these restorationists and their uncritical attitudes toward the German past were leading the churches, and the German people, down the same dangerous path that had led already to the Nazi dictatorship and the two world wars. This impending disaster was only averted because of the work of small, non-conformist groups on the Protestant Left, who offered a radically new and different model of the church, the nation, and the role of faith in public political life. According to this model, it was only in the 1960s and 1970s, with the rise of a new generation of younger Protestant leaders, that these progressive ideas began to overtake the dangerous “restorationist” trends of the early postwar period.²

This view of postwar church history is deeply rooted in the experiences and self-understandings of the Protestant Left in the 1950s and 1960s. To Protestant victims of

¹ See Martin Greschat, “Weder Neuanfang noch Restauration” in *Protestanten in der Zeit*, ed. Jochen-Christoph Kaiser (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1994) and Thomas Sauer, *Westorientierung im deutschen Protestantismus? Vorstellungen und Tätigkeit des Kronberger Kreises* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1999).

² For an overview of recent historiography, see Thomas Sauer, “Die Geschichte der evangelischen Kirchen in der Bundesrepublik – Schwerpunkte und Perspektiven der Forschung” in *Evangelische Kirche im geteilten Deutschland (1945-1989/90)*, ed. Claudia Lepp and Kurt Nowak (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2001), 295-309.

the Nazis, radical members of the confessing church, and those with strong Barthian theological convictions, it was painful to see the numerous continuities in the churches and in German society that persisted across the so-called “zero hour” of 1945. Further angered by the westernization policies of the CDU, which seemed to prioritize reconstruction and economic stability over national unity, these figures harshly criticized the desire of most Protestants—and most Germans—for a return to a relatively normal life. Over the next several decades, members of the Protestant Left worked tirelessly against this perceived restoration, repeatedly calling for a new sense of German Protestant identity rooted in the recognition of German guilt for the crimes of the Third Reich and the Christian obligation to repent and seek reconciliation with those who had been wronged.³ It would be difficult to overstate the importance of these activists in keeping such inconvenient truths alive and in forcing the rest of society to take them seriously. Indeed, the transformation of German Protestant theology, politics, and national identity that took place in the decades after World War II would not have been possible without their efforts. It is with good reason, then, that experiences and self-perceptions of this group have so strongly dominated historical interpretations, especially since the late 1960s.

Yet this historical narrative tells only one part of the story. It is unquestionably true—as progressive contemporaries and modern scholars have both observed—that there were many intellectual and personal continuities between the Protestant churches before

³ See Matthew D. Hockenos, *A Church Divided: German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004).

and after 1945.⁴ The end of the war was not a “zero hour” for the Protestant churches or for the rest of German society. Instead, as Jeffrey Herf has perceptively argued, the immediate postwar years were marked by “multiple restorations,” as nearly every ideological or political faction turned to its own past in search of future direction.⁵ Yet the converse is also true. The decades after World War II were not only shaped by continuities with the past, but also by multiple, imperfect, and gradual departures from it. The decades after the war gave rise to not just one but multiple new beginnings.

For historians of postwar West Germany, then, it is not enough to identify “reactionary” and “progressive” forces and to chart the triumph of the latter over the former. Instead, the study of the postwar period requires the historian to examine the ways that different groups and different generations reacted to the Nazi legacy, to analyze the ideas and motivations that lay behind these different responses, and to chart the complex interplay between these different—and often opposite—reactions over time. In order to explain this transformation, this dissertation has looked in turn at the Christian Democratic new beginning that emerged in the late 1940s and early 1950s, at the moderate conservative and liberal challenges to this tradition in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and at the Left Liberal consensus that emerged in the middle of the 1960s. Finally, it has examined the challenge posed to this consensus by the “youth revolt” and the rise of the New Left at the end of the decade. Each of these ideologies, in its own

⁴ See, for example, Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel, *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999); Clemens Vollnhals, *Evangelische Kirche und Entnazifizierung 1945-1949. Die Last der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit*, Studien zur Zeitgeschichte, Vol. 36 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1989) and Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: the Politics of Amnesty and Integration*, trans. Joel Golb (New York: Columbia, 2002).

⁵ Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

way, was a reaction to the Nazi past, and an attempt to overcome its legacy. However, each of these movements understood Nazism differently, emphasizing different aspects of Nazi thought and practice. As a result, each adopted its own unique approach to the task of overcoming the past and creating a new and better German society.

These movements also existed in a dialectical relationship with one another. Both the liberal, modernizing impulses of the late 1950s and early 1960s and the more radical left-wing ideology of the late-1960s student movement were reactions to the excesses of Christian Democracy. The emphasis of late-1950s liberalism on “sober,” “factual” politics, for example, was both an outgrowth of the CDU’s foreign policy “realism” and an attempt to further divorce this realism from emotionally- and ideologically-driven approaches. And the ideas of the late 1960s New Left—while ostensibly directed against the “fascism” of the older generation—were in many ways a reaction against both the rigid religious conservatism of Christian Democracy and against the impersonal technocratic style of late 1950s modernizers. While late-1960s radicals saw the conservative social values of West German society and the emphasis on law and order as direct continuities with the Nazi past, older Christian Democrats and liberals saw these values as a necessary response to the socially and politically subversive aspects of Nazism.⁶ And, while older conservatives and liberals associated the tactics of student protestors with the subversive activities of Nazi “brownshirts,” students viewed the forces of the “establishment” as part of the continuing legacy of the Nazi police state.

⁶ For this observation, I am indebted to Dagmar Herzog’s arguments in “Post-War Ideologies and the Body Politics of 1968,” in Jan-Werner Müller, ed., *German Ideologies since 1945: Studies in the Political Thought and Culture of the Bonn Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Rather than adopting the sometimes-polemical rhetoric of any one of these movements, a balanced historical analysis of West Germany's postwar transformation needs to recognize the complex relationship between the Nazi past and the multiple responses it engendered. And it has to recognize the ways in which these different movements—while often hostile to each other—were also complementary in their approaches. In many ways, each successive movement built on the foundation laid by its predecessors. And, each of these movements—each with its own distinct political ideology—appealed to and transformed the ideas and practices of different groups in German society. While the conventional narrative is correct, then, in calling attention to the important role of progressives and non-conformists in the transformation of West German society, it is wrong in assuming that other groups simply resisted this movement or were unwillingly dragged along. Instead, each made contributions to the ultimate democratization of West Germany. Each played a role—albeit to widely varying degrees—in the long, painful process of confronting the Nazi past and overcoming the legacy of German nationalism. And, within the churches, each was engaged in the same basic task of mediating between a centuries-old religious and theological tradition and the demands of a rapidly-changing world.

CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY

To many Germans in the 1950s, in both the Catholic and Protestant churches, the lesson of Nazism was clear. As Hans Meiser, the Protestant Bishop of Bavaria, argued succinctly at the Kirchentag of 1952: “Where Christ does not reign, things cannot help but fall apart.”⁷ While historians have only recently rediscovered the “modern” aspects

⁷ DEKT 1952, 50.

of Nazism—having long focused largely on its romantic, irrational, and traditional elements—many Christian Democrats in the 1950s were firmly convinced that it was a perfect expression of the pathologies of modern life.⁸ It had arisen out of the destruction of traditional social structures, appealing to the desire of rootless modern individuals to return to some form of community. It had taken advantage of the dangerous freedoms offered by liberal democracy to mobilize the masses in a social and political revolution against traditional elites. And while it had hidden its true agenda behind a veil of religiosity, disillusioned Christian leaders in the postwar period had gradually come to see it as a form of atheism and neo-paganism.

After the destructive experiences of Nazism and of the Second World War, leaders in both the Protestant and Catholic churches saw religious renewal as the only hope for a new beginning. And, in the midst of the social collapse that followed national defeat, the churches took on a leading role in the multi-faceted process of reconstruction. While Protestants came out of the war deeply divided on questions of theology and church government, nearly every faction within the churches could agree on the centrality of Christian faith to the postwar rebuilding effort and to the future course of German society. Many remained ambivalent toward the Catholic dominated CDU and CSU. And many on the Protestant Left quickly rejected the policies of the Adenauer government, particularly its prioritization of Western European integration over German reunification. But they continued to share many of the same foundational assumptions, especially when it came to relationship between faith and politics. Indeed, much of the activity of the

⁸ The views of 1950s Protestants are summed up well in Max Picard, *Hitler in uns Selbst* (Erlenbach-Zurich: E. Rentsch, 1946). For more recent discussions of modernity and Nazism, see Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge, 1984); and Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

Protestant Left during the 1950s can be seen as part of an ongoing effort to create ideological and political space between the unacceptable alternatives of the Christian but conservative CDU and the left-leaning but formally atheist SPD.

At the Kirchentag, this broad “Christian Democratic” consensus—encompassing the views of most Protestants both inside and outside of the CDU—found its clearest expression in repeated calls to “public responsibility.” While many Germans responded to the experiences of dictatorship, war, and defeat with political resignation, Protestant leaders worked throughout the 1950s to draw them back into public life. These efforts operated on many different levels. Sermons and bible studies at the Kirchentag repeatedly reminded German Protestants of their duty to participate in the Christian task of “saving humanity.” Some sermons on this topic focused on the supernatural work of Christ beyond all human effort, and others looked more directly at the activities of the church and its institutions. But all could agree that Christian faith was the starting point for any lasting social and political renewal. Building on this foundation, Protestant leaders promoted the work of missions and evangelism, acts of charity and social assistance, and the concrete tasks of rebuilding local churches and communities. Little of this work was overtly “political” in nature, but it played an important underlying role in the reconstruction of civil society.

Community was an especially important value to postwar Protestants. Indeed, most viewed community as a fundamental human necessity. And they blamed the breakdown of traditional community structures for the success of the Nazis, who had filled this vacuum with their own ideas of nation and race. Now that the exclusionary *Volksgemeinschaft* of the Nazis had been discredited by war and defeat, and now that its

murderous logic had been exposed, Protestants turned to local and church community to fill the void. At the Kirchentag meetings of the early 1950s, speakers from across the political and theological spectrum condemned the idolatry of race and nation that had dominated in the Third Reich. And they offered the church itself, and the Christian faith, as alternative sources of belonging. This emphasis permeated a wide variety of different Kirchentag discussions. Sermons directed at returning soldiers and POWs urged them to seek comfort in faith and in the church community. And many speeches called on the local churches to welcome these soldiers back, rather than shunning them as a reminder of a past that people wanted to forget. This theme was also apparent in the many speeches and discussions devoted to the refugee crisis in West Germany. Again, refugees and expellees who had lost their homes were urged to look to the churches for a new “homeland.” And speakers repeatedly called on the churches, local communities, and the state and federal governments to work to address the refugees’ myriad spiritual, psychological, and material needs.

Beneath this broad agreement on the nature of Nazism, and on the centrality of faith to postwar rebuilding and renewal, however, lay many important differences. These became increasingly apparent over the course of the 1950s, as Protestant leaders moved beyond vague generalities to address specific national and political questions. For example, nearly every Protestant leader or speaker at the Kirchentag promoted the importance of “public responsibility.” To more conservative Protestants, this meant joining the CDU and working to advance its conservative social agenda. To the nascent Protestant Left, on the other hand, the CDU’s concepts of “Christian society” and “the Christian West,” were just other forms of self-affirming idolatry. In part, this rejection of

CDU politics reflected the deep-seated suspicions that many Protestants harbored toward the Catholic church, especially since Catholics had attained numerical parity with Protestants in the Federal Republic. Theologically, it was rooted in Karl Barth's rejection of all forms of "natural theology," broadly defined as any theological system that went beyond the basic message of the gospels. However, it also grew out of specific objections to the political actions of the CDU. This was especially true when it came to questions of postwar German identity.

The major national political priorities of the early CDU were the material reconstruction, social stability, and military security of the new West German state. To Konrad Adenauer, the chancellor and leader of the CDU, these goals would be best attained through the integration of West Germany in Western Europe and through a political and military alliance with the United States. While Adenauer—like most Germans—wanted national reunification, he was not willing to have this at the expense of political or ideological compromises with the Soviet Union. Instead, he argued that a strong and prosperous West Germany would be able to attain reunification on its own terms. Leading members of the Protestant Left raised several objections to this approach. For one thing, they opposed this prioritization of reconstruction and material prosperity over soul-searching and repentance. In his desire to reconstruct German society and to heal the internal divisions of the war, they argued, Adenauer was minimizing the guilt of ordinary Germans for the atrocities of the Third Reich and was allowing many former Nazis to return to positions of social and political importance. This, they argued, represented a failure to learn the moral lessons of the Third Reich.

Members of the Protestant Left also raised a variety of objections to Adenauer's pursuit of West German autonomy and security. On a theological level, leaders such as Martin Niemöller argued that Germans had sinned against the peoples of both the West and the East. As a result, they needed to humbly seek reconciliation with both sides in the emerging Cold War, instead of allying themselves with only the West. In the rhetoric of the Protestant Left, such high-minded moral arguments were also often accompanied by naïve moral equivocation between capitalism and communism, between western liberal democracy and East German "democracy." Indeed, using the categories of Barthian theology, it was easy to label both of these systems as forms of sinful idolatry, and to gloss over their rather considerable differences.

The Protestant Left enjoyed the greatest success when its ideas aligned with popular sentiment. It was not only idealistic Protestants and left-wing intellectuals that objected to Adenauer's policies of western integration. Many ordinary Germans resisted these policies for much more nationalistic reasons, objecting to the tacit acceptance of German division and decrying the abandonment of Germans in the east. Since the historical and demographic center of German Protestantism lay in the East, these objections were especially strong within the Protestant churches. Left-wing Protestants were not above appealing to this sentiment in order to gain popular support for their own political priorities. This is most apparent on the issue of West German military rearmament. Viewed by Adenauer and the CDU as an important step toward national sovereignty and as a necessary defense against communist aggression, the creation of a new German army generated considerable fear on the Protestant Left. In numerous Kirchentag speeches, anti-rearmament crusaders such as Martin Niemöller, Gustav

Heinemann, and Helmut Gollwitzer argued that, after the two world wars, the Germans could not be trusted with a military. Yet they also couched their concerns in nationalist sentiment, arguing that remilitarization raised a barrier to any near-term reunification. Instead, they advocated Cold War neutralism and called for a German “Third Way” between the West and the East. Even after the formal remilitarization of West Germany, and its entry into NATO in 1956, these debates continued. Now, however, the focus shifted to the campaign against nuclear armament that emerged under the slogan “fight atomic death.”⁹

These divisions within the Protestant churches, and at the Kirchentag, were important for at least two reasons. First, they prevented Protestant leaders from forging a unified political ideology like that created by the Catholic Church. While Protestants agreed on the basics of “Christian democracy,” this agreement did not translate into political unanimity. As a result, they were forced to come to terms with the irreducible fact of political pluralism. If they did not want to tear the churches apart, Protestants needed to learn to accept a multiplicity of perspectives and viewpoints. This tolerance for diversity and pluralism, in turn, created space for a variety of intermediary perspectives between the extremes of the Right and Left. While most Protestants remained in the CDU, at least in the early 1950s, they did not simply toe the party line. Instead, forced to defend themselves against the sometimes-harsh attacks of the Protestant Left, Protestant conservatives learned to refine and critique their own political

⁹ For a somewhat one-sided take on these developments, see Johanna Vogel, *Kirche und Wiederbewaffnung. Die Haltung der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland in den Auseinandersetzungen um die Wiederbewaffnung der Bundesrepublik, 1949-1956*, Arbeiten zur Kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte, Series B, Vol. 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1978); see also Gustav W. Heinemann, *Verfehlte Deutschlandpolitik. Irreführung und Selbsttäuschung* (Frankfurt/Main: Stimme-Verlag, 1966); and Christian Walther, ed., *Atomwaffen und Ethik. Der deutschen Protestantismus und die atomare Aufrüstung 1954-1961. Dokumente und Kommentare* (Munich: Kaiser, 1981).

ideas. Indeed, in the process of defending their own political views, many conservative Protestants became especially strong defenders of democratic values and freedoms.

Second, these disagreements within the Protestant churches laid the groundwork for future cooperation between the churches and the SPD. While even most members of the Protestant Left did not view the SPD of the 1950s—with its formally atheist program—as a viable political alternative, their cooperation in the anti-rearmament and anti-nuclear campaigns forged personal contacts and overcame longstanding prejudices. By the late 1950s, members of the Protestant Left were beginning to enter the SPD in greater numbers. And, in order to accommodate this entry, SPD leaders began to push for the new non-atheist, non-Marxist party program finally adopted at Bad Godesberg in 1959.

LIVING WITH MODERNITY

By the middle of the 1950s, it was not just members of the Protestant Left who were pushing for reforms. While many conservative Protestants remained staunch supporters of the CDU, and some on the Left began their migration toward the SPD, other liberals and moderate conservatives worked to develop their own critical perspectives. To many of these critics, from across a fairly wide spectrum of political views, the Christian democratic ideology of the early 1950s had become ineffectual and had lost touch with the changing realities of modern life. Many of these critics also rejected the emotional and moralistic style of the Protestant Left, branding its neutralist and pacifist leanings unrealistic. Within this movement, different figures had different motivations and goals. Some were conservatives who simply wanted a more adaptable form of Christian democracy, better suited to the modern world. Others raised stronger

objections to the ideological rigidity and emotional religiosity of Christian democracy. Whatever their concerns, these moderate Protestants were united in their desire to modernize the churches and the rest of West German society.¹⁰

Some of these modernizing impulses had been present since the very first Kirchentag meetings. However, it was not until the middle of the 1950s that they began to have a major impact on the program. There were several reasons for this delay. The first several Kirchentag gatherings were more spontaneous and less thoroughly planned than later meetings. As the Kirchentag rapidly grew in size and importance, its woefully overburdened staff struggled to stay on top of even basic logistical concerns. While the provisional leadership and the office staff might set the meeting's overall tone and select its overarching themes, individual speeches and sermons were rarely as well coordinated or well vetted as in later years. As a result, the program tended to focus on general theological and political principles on which nearly all Protestants could agree. Leaders did not plan for controversy or disagreement. And when opinions clashed—as in the debates over rearmament—the role of the Kirchentag leadership was reactive, emphasizing damage control over open debate. It took time for German Protestants to overcome this aversion, learning how to manage disagreement.

Another important reason why the early Kirchentag meetings emphasized broad generalities over nuanced debate had to do with the Kirchentag's role as a major meeting place for Protestants from the West and East. In the early 1950s, the Kirchentag became a symbol of German Protestant and all-German unity. This—much more than the intellectual or theological program—was what attracted such massive crowds. And this

¹⁰ One of the few historical works to recognize this movement is Thomas Sauer, *Westorientierung im deutschen Protestantismus?*

was also the element that received the most thorough coverage in the press. Although the Kirchentag leaders had not anticipated this role, and were sometimes frustrated when such symbolism eclipsed the meeting's intellectual content, they ultimately came to embrace it. But there was a definite tension between the Kirchentag's role as a symbol of unity, on the one hand, and its role as an intellectual forum dedicated to refining the perspectives of the Protestant laity, on the other. While broad theological and political generalities might apply to Protestants in both German states, narrower social and political arguments rarely did. East Germans at the first several Kirchentage frequently complained that discussions of democratic politics—and even of “public responsibility” more generally—did not apply to the circumstances in the East. More intellectually- and politically-oriented West Germans complained that vague discussions of “power,” “authority,” and ideological “idolatry” failed to address the real problems and issues in the West. This tension was never really resolved as long as all-German gatherings remained a possibility.

By the mid-1950s, as the possibility of reunification became more remote, those who wanted more nuanced political and social discussion began to reassert themselves. While Kirchentag leaders were exhilarated by the outward success of gatherings such as the 1954 meeting in Leipzig—entirely within the GDR—they were also wary of becoming too “politicized,” of having their intellectual and theological program eclipsed by national enthusiasm. Structural and organizational reforms implemented between 1953 and 1955 also made it easier to plan a more complex program. Finally, more and more Protestants were becoming dissatisfied with the static, predictable political debates between the Protestant Right and Left. Both self-critical conservatives and liberals

wanted to move beyond these ideologically-driven perspectives, engaging more directly with the complexities of modern life. Within the Kirchentag organization, the new general secretary Hans Hermann Walz became the champion of this new perspective, working to forge stronger ties between the Kirchentag and the Protestant Academies and with social and political policy experts in the universities. By the time of the Kirchentag Congress of 1958, these efforts were beginning to pay off. This smaller academic gathering, devoted to no less a topic than “reality today,” saw the emergence of a new set of ideas and topics that the Kirchentag would explore over the course of the next decade.

Among other things, the Kirchentag Congress gave voice to a more liberal political orientation that was emerging within German Protestantism. This new perspective was founded on the conviction of Protestant academics and intellectuals that political decisions should be based on an objective analysis of the “facts,” on “objective” reality, not on ideological or theological first principles. This approach was often described by its practitioners as the process of “overcoming illusions.” While this movement was often critical of the policies of the CDU, it was not a direct outgrowth of the work of the Protestant Left. In fact, its adherents tended to be just as dismissive of the “enthusiasm” and utopianism of those around Niemöller and Heinemann, as they were of the political and social rigidity of the CDU. At Kirchentag meetings in the late 1950s and early 1960s, this new perspective asserted itself in two major areas. First, because of its emphasis on sober analysis over emotion and enthusiasm, this movement promoted the virtues of political pluralism, discussion, and dialogue. Second, it championed a new “realist” perspective on the German question and the Cold War, based on the acceptance of German division and the need for coexistence.

The first of these new emphases—on pluralism and dialogue—was largely an outgrowth of the political circumstances within the Protestant churches. Attempts to paper over the differences between the CDU and Protestant Left had failed, and this had thwarted efforts to create any unifying Protestant political ideology. Leading Protestant theologians, pastors, and lay-persons found themselves on opposite sides of the political fence. Now they had to reconcile this real diversity with the often-universal claims of their separate ideologies. In short: if they wanted to maintain any semblance of Protestant unity and fellowship, they had to learn how to coexist. While many Protestants in the mid-to-late 1950s were still quite uncomfortable with political disagreements, they had no choice but to learn to live with them. Kirchentag speakers in the early 1950s had frequently railed against the selfishness of private interest groups, blaming them for the divisiveness of German politics and the breakdown of community. And they had pushed for a return to some older, more organic form of social organization. But by the mid-to-late 1950s these arguments were gradually giving way to principled defenses of intellectual and political conflict. The mere existence of “interest groups” was no longer blamed as for every social and political ill. Instead, although they continued to fault them for their disproportionate influence and political myopia, most Kirchentag speakers—at least in the political workgroup—began to see them as a necessary form of democratic political expression. Kirchentag speakers did not just preach the virtues of pluralism and dialogue; the Kirchentag itself also began to better embody these ideals. Social Democratic speakers, for example, started to appear much more frequently on the Kirchentag program. And, in the leadership of the political

workgroup, moderate social democrats and liberals began to even outnumber defenders of the CDU.

Kirchentag speakers also began to promote a new, more liberal understanding of the relationship between faith and politics. Political debates at the Kirchentage of the early 1950s had broken down along the divide between advocates of theologically-driven, faith-based politics, on the one hand, and, the “negative politics” of the Protestant Left, where faith was seen purely as a source of opposition against every political ideology, on the other. By the late 1950s, moderates and liberals on both sides of the spectrum were working out a more sophisticated understanding of the place of religious belief in a liberal democracy. Speakers from all of the major parties continued to promote political engagement and activity. But they also began to better delineate the rights and responsibilities of the churches, of individual Christian citizens, and non-believers. According to this new perspective, the churches had an important indirect role to play in the political process. But they did not have the right to simply impose their beliefs on others. Christian faith was an important source of political values and of political inspiration, but this did not correspond to any one political program or agenda.

Kirchentag leaders and speakers also began to develop a new perspective on the “German question,” criticizing the views of both the CDU and those of the Protestant Left as out of touch with reality. This emerging view—which eventually culminated in the 1963 *Ostdenkschrift* of the Protestant Church in Germany—grew out of the conviction that the Cold War division of Germany was a fixed, unchangeable geopolitical fact.¹¹ According to this perspective, neither aggressive Cold War posturing,

¹¹ For more on these developments see Martin Greschat, “Protestantismus und Evangelische Kirche in den 60er Jahren” in Axel Schildt, Detlef Siegfried, and Karl Christian, eds. *Dynamische Zeiten:*

nor appeasement, was likely to dramatically alter the status quo. As a result, Germans would simply have to learn to live with division. As in Kirchentag discussions of domestic disagreements, the central concept here was “coexistence.” This did not mean accepting the legitimacy of East German communism or overlooking its flaws. Advocates of this new perspective prided themselves on their realism and clear-mindedness. But it did mean working to de-escalate specific conflicts and points of tension, insofar as this was possible within the framework of existing geopolitical realities. Advocates of this perspective pushed especially hard for the reconciliation with the eastern European victims of Nazism—such as the Poles. And they argued that political realism—and not just moral obligation—required the West German state to acknowledge the legitimate interests of the Soviet Union.

This realist focus on overcoming political illusions also led some German Protestants to redouble their efforts to deal with the legacies of the Third Reich and Second World War. This meant objectively and unemotionally facing uncomfortable “realities” about the German past—looking beyond the illusions and myths they had constructed to exonerate themselves and downplay their own responsibility. Since the late 1940s small groups of Protestants—mostly on the Left—had pushed for a closer examination of German guilt. And they had promoted a program of reconciliation with Germany’s victims, especially Poles and Jews. But such voices were in the minority, as most Protestants focused on their own suffering and on rebuilding their own disrupted lives. Kirchentag leaders such as Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff were sympathetic to the need to confront the German past, but did not go out of their way to push this agenda.

Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften (Hamburg: Hans Christian, 2001); see also Martin Greschat, “‘Mehr Wahrheit in der Politik!’ Das Tübinger Memorandum von 1961” in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 48 (2000): 491-513; and Thomas Sauer, *Westorientierung im deutschen Protestantismus?*

When German guilt appeared on the Kirchentag program in the early 1950s, it was usually in the context of the anti-rearmament arguments of the Protestant Left. Only in the small gatherings of the German Protestant Committee for Service to Israel did Kirchentag attendees look more closely at the persecution and murder of the Jews.

This reticence only changed in the late 1950s as more liberal Kirchentag leaders like Hans Hermann Walz and Klaus von Bismarck began to push for a more self-critical examination of German guilt. Starting in 1959 with the “Israel Evening,” Kirchentag speakers began to confront the legacy of the Holocaust more directly, working to overcome lingering anti-Semitism in the churches and in German society at large. These activities were expanded in 1961, when the political workgroup devoted its meetings to the question of what went wrong in the German past. The 1961 Kirchentag also saw the first meetings of a new workgroup on “Jews and Christians,” dominated by veterans of the Protestant Left such as Helmut Gollwitzer, who had long been at the forefront on this issue. Speakers in this workgroup pushed tirelessly for a greater recognition of Protestant guilt for the persecution of the Jews. And they called on all Germans, and especially German Protestants, to repent for their sins and seek forgiveness and reconciliation. While earlier discussions of this sort had been conducted from the perspective of Christians or converted Jews, the workgroup “Jews and Christians” began to change this as well. Realizing that real reconciliation required personal contact and concrete dialogue, workgroup leaders worked to ensure the presence of Jewish speakers. And they encouraged wide-ranging discussion and argument on the many cultural and religious issues that still divided Jews and Christians. Not only did speakers work to break down longstanding prejudices about the Jews in Germany, many also promoted a new more

inclusive theological perspective that recognized both Jews and Christians as the people of God. By the mid-1960s, the workgroup began to bog down in theological controversy as traditional theologians and their liberal counterparts sparred over the messianic claims of Jesus and the question of whether Jews were “saved.” But despite these problems, the group had already accomplished a great deal. It had opened the door to extended, mainstream discussions of German guilt within the Protestant churches. And it had presented a major challenge to the anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic prejudices that persisted in postwar German society.

LIBERAL CONSENSUS AND RADICAL CHALLENGE

The liberalizing and modernizing trends of the late 1950s gained strength after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Until this point, the Kirchentag had remained divided in its emphasis between the issues facing West German society, on the one hand, and the problems of German unity and division, on the other. With the construction of the Berlin Wall, and the ensuing crackdown on inter-German contact, however, the East German government made it clear that all-German activities, like those of the Kirchentag, would no longer be tolerated. Since the Kirchentag had been so strongly associated in the popular mind with Protestant and all-German unity, many believed that these developments heralded its end. Members of the Protestant Left, who prioritized German unity, blamed the West German government and conservative Protestants for the inter-German breakdown, arguing that it could have been prevented if groups like the Kirchentag had been more accommodating to the SED. And West German conservatives, who had become irritated with the emergence of critical liberal and Social Democratic perspectives at the Kirchentag, concluded that the gathering had outlived its usefulness.

Kirchentag leaders, on the other hand, viewed these developments as an opportunity to expand their critical examination of West German politics and society.

This critical turn began with a self-critical assessment of the role of the Kirchentag—and the churches more broadly—in the changing society of the Federal Republic. In consultations in the early 1960s with Protestants from across the theological and political spectrum, Kirchentag leaders came to the conclusion that the churches were losing touch with the German people, including many of their own members. In order to combat this tendency, some urged the Kirchentag to return to its origins as a gathering devoted to evangelism, church building, and community life. Others argued for a more direct engagement with modern theological, social, and political trends. But nearly all agreed that the Kirchentag needed to find new ways to connect with ordinary members of the Protestant public. Embracing this advice, Kirchentag leaders turned the gatherings of the early 1960s into an experiment field for new kinds of organization, new styles and approaches, and—to a lesser extent—for new theological and political ideas. This process began somewhat slowly, with structural and stylistic reforms. However, as the Kirchentag leadership worked to integrate new voices and perspectives, and to generally broaden its intellectual and political base, the tone became more radical. By the middle of the 1960s, leaders like Hans Hermann Walz were arguing that the Kirchentag did not exist to serve the agenda of the institutional churches, but instead to function as a more democratic, more open, and more progressive alternative. The Kirchentag existed to push for the reform of the existing church structure, to be sure, but also to serve as the “church in the world” in a way that the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) could not.

As the Kirchentag evolved into a more progressive forum, it generated considerable criticism and opposition. But it also saw the emergence of a new Left-Liberal Protestant consensus. By the middle of the 1960s both older members of the Protestant Left and younger, more principled liberals had come to embrace similar positions on a variety of issues. Members of the old Protestant Left may have approached politics from a moral and theological standpoint, while their younger, more liberal counterparts did so from the “sober,” “realistic” perspective that had emerged in the late 1950s. But, despite their differences in style and emphasis, both could agree on the need for internal reforms in the Federal Republic and for new approaches to the “German question” and West German foreign policy. The Kirchentag served as an important meeting place for these groups, a place where they could explore and build upon their agreement, creating a new intellectual tone for German Protestantism.

These efforts culminated in the 1967 Kirchentag devoted to the topic of peace. This Kirchentag program brought together the ideas of more “utopian” theologians like Jürgen Moltmann, the enlightenment-liberal philosophy of intellectuals like Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, and the practical insights of peace and development experts in a collaborative effort to overcome conflict in the world. Within the Federal Republic, this meant working for political tolerance, dialogue, and understanding between opposing groups. For the “German Question,” it implied moving beyond mere coexistence, finding new points of contact and cooperation between the two German states. It required better political and economic cooperation in Western Europe. And, finally, it meant drawing on the lessons of the German past, and applying them to the issues of poverty, hunger, and violence in the developing world.

While the “German question” and the problems of political tolerance and dialogue had long been prominent themes for the Kirchentag, the issue of Third World development was new, representing an emerging international perspective among German Protestants. Though this new emphasis clearly had some roots in earlier discussions of world missions and ecumenicalism, it also seems to have grown out of the lessons that liberal and socialist Protestants were drawing from recent German history. The experiences of the two world wars had demonstrated the devastation of modern warfare. And the experiences of the Cold War, of living under the constant threat of nuclear annihilation, had impressed upon them the urgent need for peace, if humanity itself was to survive. While many people contributed to this developing consensus, it was Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker who provided these new ideas with the coherent integrative framework of “World Domestic Politics.”¹² As the world became smaller and smaller, Weizäcker argued, new tensions and conflicts were emerging. And these could only be overcome through a fundamental shift in political perspective. Problems that had traditionally been relegated to foreign policy now had to be seen as central to the lives of all people everywhere in the world. The German people, by implication, had to overcome their self-centeredness—even their laudable focus on German guilt and German crimes—in order to see themselves as part of the larger world outside of Germany. In the years that have followed, this position—with its conspicuous internationalism—has become one of the major pillars of German Protestant thought.

The Left Liberal consensus of the mid-to-late 1960s did not go unchallenged. On the one hand, the leftward shift of the Kirchentag during the 1960s spurred the creation of

¹² For more background, see Ulrich Bartosch, *Weltinnenpolitik. Zur Theorie des Friedens von Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker*, Beiträge zur Politischen Wissenschaft 86 (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1995).

more theologically and politically conservative alternatives in the German fundamentalist movement. On the other hand—and of more significance to the Kirchentag’s future development—the “rational” and “modern” perspective of Protestant liberals also came under attack from younger radicals in the New Left. Rejecting the moderation of their elders—and enamored with popular Marxist and psychoanalytic theories—these young radicals pushed for a more substantial break with the German past. Although they couched this agenda in the language of overcoming fascism, much of what they rejected had grown out of earlier postwar ideologies such as Christian Democracy of the early 1950s and the modernizing liberalism of the late 1950s and early 1960s. In place of strong, traditional community values, they pushed for the freedom to experiment with new lifestyles and new forms of social organization. In place of Germany’s “social market” capitalism, they pushed for Marxist alternatives. And, in place of principled liberalism and parliamentary democracy, they advocated new, more direct forms of democratic participation.

The protests of the youth posed a significant challenge to older liberals at the Kirchentag. While many agreed with the students’ tangible criticisms of West German society, especially the need for greater bureaucratic transparency and for the broad-based democratization of cultural attitudes and norms, they rejected the emotionalism and intolerance of the student movement itself. However, instead of ignoring the student protestors or rejecting them out of hand, Kirchentag leaders in the late 1960s took the risk of trying to engage them in dialogue. At the 1969 Kirchentag, they made considerable concessions to the youth, basing the entire gathering on the issues of the protest movement, and giving the youth-dominated audience nearly complete control. Rather

than abandoning their own commitment to tolerance, pluralism, and dialogue, they demonstrated the sincerity of their liberal democratic beliefs. In their willingness to listen and to dialogue, they helped to lay the groundwork for future cooperation.

The emergence of the New Left in the late 1960s, then, was not the first step in the liberalization or democratization of West German Protestant attitudes. But it was an important test and a defining moment. It served as a source of provocation, spurring older, established liberals to work more quickly and decisively for social change. And it provided a new source of popular enthusiasm and energy to drive this movement. It did not overturn the Left Liberal consensus that had already begun to emerge. Instead, it reinforced this perspective against the views of more conservative Protestants. And it helped to color and shape this movement's continued development over the course of the next several decades.

PROTESTANTISM IN POSTWAR WEST GERMAN SOCIETY

The transformation of West German Protestantism between 1949 and 1969 did not occur in isolation from changes in the rest of West German society. While discussions in the churches and at Kirchentag meetings were colored by many specifically Protestant concerns and preoccupations, they were also strongly shaped by the problems facing German society at large. Devoted to strengthening the spiritual maturity and political responsibility of Protestant laity, the Kirchentag was created to be a bridge between the churches and the "world." And, as its course over the period between 1949 and 1969 clearly demonstrates, a sizable number of West German citizens did not see faith and politics or faith and national identity as entirely separate spheres of life. This is most apparent in the politics of the early 1950s, dominated by a Christian

democratic ideology (or set of ideologies) specifically founded on the centrality of Christian faith to every political and social question. In more subtle ways, however, faith was also an important inspiration for the work of many later liberals and progressives. At gatherings like the Kirchentag, German Protestant beliefs and attitudes were themselves transformed through contact with ideas and social forces from outside of the churches. But, as the meetings of the Kirchentag suggest, these changes within German Protestantism also played a part in the transformation of the rest of West German society.

A comprehensive examination of the influence of the churches in German society goes beyond the scope of this dissertation. Kirchentag documents tell us more about the ways that Protestants appropriated and reacted to larger social and cultural changes than about the effects that changes in the churches had on the outside world. But it is possible to suggest some conclusions about this influence by examining the developments at the Kirchentag—and in the Protestant churches—in the context of postwar German history. Protestants at the Kirchentag had many of the same concerns as West Germans outside the Protestant churches. And the Kirchentag program offered many points of contact—and comparison—with political and social issues that were of importance to West German society as a whole. This dissertation has focused on three major themes: changing understandings of the place of religious belief in society, questions of national identity, and the transformation of political attitudes and values. Each of these themes can be examined in its relation to broader social and cultural trends.

RELIGION AND SECULARIZATION

It is clear from the Kirchentag that German Protestant attitudes toward Christian belief and toward the churches underwent significant changes over the course of the

1950s and 1960s. This study has focused most closely on their relation to questions about the broader relevance of religious belief in West German society. German Protestant attitudes in this area were relatively straightforward in the early 1950s. In keeping with the ideology of Christian Democracy, most Protestants believed that the churches—and religious faith—needed to be at the center of any social and political renewal. Christian faith was the only secure foundation for a healthy future society. Indeed, even Protestants who were critical of Christian Democratic politics adhered to their own variations on this theme. This emphasis on the centrality of faith seems to have played an important role in convincing German Christians—in both the Protestant and Catholic churches—to accept the legitimacy of the Federal Republic. If, to paraphrase Bishop Meiser, Christ was to rule West Germany, then naturally German Protestants had an obligation to support and defend his reign.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, German Protestants looked forward to a society-wide religious revival. While the social influence of the churches had been declining since at least the late nineteenth century, they believed that the postwar period would see a reversal of this trend. This belief was not entirely unfounded. In the immediate postwar years, amid the nearly total collapse of German society, the churches did see an influx of new members. But, as church leaders began to realize in the late 1940s, this interest declined again as social conditions normalized. In fact, the Kirchentag was founded, in part, to address this decline. The work of Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff, and the other Kirchentag leaders, was based on the belief the postwar revival could only be sustained if the Protestant laity were given a larger role in the churches. The disappointment of the Protestant Left with the “restoration” of the

churches' prewar institutional structure also needs to be viewed in this light. Already by the early 1950s, the opportunity for wholesale revival and religious renewal seemed to be slipping away. Over the next two decades, many Protestants revised their attitudes toward the role of the churches in society. While most continued to believe that Christian faith had an important social and political role to play, they began to interpret this role much less directly. Healthy political and social life still needed to be rooted in Christian faith, but faith was not enough, by itself, to solve the problems of the world.

It is tempting to view this transformation under the rubric of "secularization." Religious belief, one could argue, came to play a smaller role in the lives of most Germans, making the Christian-democratic optimism of the early 1950s unsustainable. However, this explanation is problematic for several reasons. On the most basic level, at least according to demographic data, the period between 1949 and 1969 was not characterized by any rapid secularization. The percentage of West German citizens who identified themselves as Protestants held steadily around 50 percent until the 1970s. And the proportion of West Germans who claimed to be without religious affiliation only grew from 4 to 6 percent over the same period. The number of West Germans choosing to formally leave the Protestant churches also remained steady at around 2 people each year per thousand, only rising to four in the mid-1960s and hovering between six and seven during the 1970s. On the other hand, regular church attendance was quite low among Protestant church members, certainly no higher than 10 percent. But this was not a new development. Church attendance numbers were already quite low in the 1940s and 1950s and they remained low in the 1960s.¹³

¹³ Karl Schmitt, *Konfession und Wahlverhalten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, *Ordo Politicus* 27, ed. Dieter Oberndörfer (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1989), 310-11; See also Christoph

Studies of West German voting patterns offer an additional reason to be cautious about attributing postwar changes in attitude to secularization. Over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, Protestants who regularly attended religious services exhibited similar political behavior to those who did not. While Protestants who regularly attended church were slightly more likely to vote for the CDU during the 1950s than those who did not, this factor had only about one-third of the weight that it did among Catholic voters. And by the end of the 1950s, this difference had shrunk to insignificance. Around half of the Protestants who regularly attended church voted for the CDU in the early 1950s. And around half continued to vote for the CDU until the mid-to-late 1960s. While the SPD did gain religious voters during the same period, these gains came from the ranks of the politically inactive and from the supporters of the smaller political parties.¹⁴

Anecdotal evidence from the Kirchentag also suggests the limitations of “secularization” as an explanation for changing attitudes on the role faith in society. Kirchentag leaders like Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff and Bishop Hanns Lilje of Hanover, for example, were strong supporters of the CDU—and of the Christianization of West German society more broadly—but they also argued for a relatively nuanced understanding of the relationship between faith and politics. And members of the Protestant Left, like Martin Niemöller and Gustav Heinemann, were just as likely to make exclusive faith-political claims as Protestant conservatives—especially on the issue of rearmament. By the mid-1960s, in fact, it was Protestants on the Left who were

Kleßmann, “Kontinuitäten und Veränderungen im protestantischen Milieu,” in *Modernisierung und Wiederaufbau: Die Westdeutsche Gesellschaft der 50er Jahren*, ed. Axel Schildt and Arnold Sywottek (Bonn: Dietz, 1998), 403-417.

¹⁴ Ibid.

making moral and theological arguments for peace and social justice, while liberals and moderate conservatives prided themselves on their “rational,” “fact-based” approach.

If secularization does not explain the shift in Protestant attitudes on the role of religion in society, then what does? Rather than looking only at the social behavior of German Protestants, an adequate answer to this question needs to consider cultural and intellectual factors. German Protestants did not necessarily become more “secular”—depending, of course, on how one defines secularization—but their religious beliefs and cultural expectations underwent a significant transformation. This transformation was doubtless the result of many different factors. But one obvious explanation would be the gradual development of a more democratic *habitus* among German Protestants. As the evolution of the Kirchentag program strongly suggests, the experience of living under a liberal democratic state system had a gradual but cumulative effect on the way that Protestants thought about political and social life. While faith remained an important source of values and an inspiration for political activity, the available, socially-acceptable outlets for this activity changed. Though Protestants continued to want to “live out” their faith, this impulse found very different expressions in 1969 than it did in 1949. From this perspective, the changing views of religious belief at the Kirchentage of the 1950s and 1960s, were a matter of affirming and reinterpreting the Protestant religious tradition, not of leaving it behind.

NATIONAL IDENTITY

The Protestant churches also played a crucial role in overcoming the legacy of German nationalism. German Protestantism had long been closely associated with the idea of the German nation. Indeed, this connection goes back at least as far as the

creation of the modern German state under the auspices of Protestant Prussia. Part of being a good Protestant—according to this longstanding tradition—was being loyal to the German nation. Indeed, some Protestants went further, defining German-ness in ways that excluded Catholics, Jews, liberals, or socialists. Even the experiences of the “church struggle” during the Third Reich were not enough to immediately overturn this legacy. While a few theologians, most notably the Swiss citizen Karl Barth, rejected nationalism as a form of idolatry, even most confessing church leaders prided themselves on their patriotism and willingness to serve the nation. At the outbreak of World War II, for example, even Martin Niemöller, one of the most radical leaders of the confessing church, volunteered for military service from his cell in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.¹⁵ Only as the campaign against the churches and against religious instruction in the schools continued, as Nazi atrocities began to come to light, and as the war turned against Germany, did Protestant leaders begin to question these automatic ties between the church and the nation.

After the war, members of the Protestant Left embraced Karl Barth’s position. Protestants who had belonged to the radical faction of the confessing church, in particular, came to see the nation as a dangerous idol. Building on this foundation, left-wing Protestants, like Martin Niemöller and Gustav Heinemann, argued for a new national understanding rooted in the acknowledgement of German guilt. This position, almost the mirror-image of earlier nationalist ideas, remained focused on the unique place of Germany among the nations of the world. Rather than championing German superiority, however, it emphasized Germany’s unique guilt and the burden this placed upon the German people. While other nations might pursue their own national interests,

¹⁵ James Bentley, *Martin Niemöller* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 146-147.

left-wing Protestants argued, Germany had a special obligation to pursue repentance and reconciliation. At least during the 1950s, these ideas appealed to a relatively limited audience. Most Protestants—and most Germans—were more interested in getting their own lives back on track than they were in self-critical reflection. But, as one of the first—and most strident—groups to look systematically at German guilt, the Protestant Left did lay an important philosophical and theological foundation for the future.

Of more immediate significance to most ordinary Germans, the experiences of defeat and division also had a profound impact on national attitudes. This was particularly true for German Protestants—who felt national division especially deeply. While members of the Protestant Left accepted West Germany as the heir of the German Reich—and called for national repentance—many other Germans were reluctant to accept the legitimacy of the West German rump state. Their national loyalty was to a state that no longer existed. And their political priority was reunification at any cost.¹⁶ This position had adherents from across the theological and political spectrum. Some, working within the conceptual framework of the Protestant Left, accepted that division was God’s punishment against Germany. But they believed that repentance might lead to reunification and national renewal. Others came to this position from a more traditionally conservative perspective. But—whatever their motivations—adherents of this viewpoint shared a common rejection of German division and a strong desire for renewed national unity. Although the Kirchentag leadership was uncomfortable with this perspective, this attitude was responsible for much of the gathering’s early success. As a popular forum

¹⁶ For more on right-wing opposition to rearmament, see Michael Geyer, “Cold War Angst: the Case of West German Opposition to Rearmament and Nuclear Weapons,” in Hannah Schissler, *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001): 376-408.

for Germans from both the East and West, the Kirchentag meetings of the early 1950s were powerful symbols of all-German unity. On a more practical level, these meetings were also an important point of actual contact for Protestants from the two German states. While Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff emphasized the importance of the Kirchentag as a forum devoted to strengthening the religious and political maturity of the Protestant laity, most press reports focused the East-West reunions it hosted, or on the awkward, non-political meetings between East and West German politicians.

Over time, however, as the prospects for reunification became more remote, this national enthusiasm turned into national disappointment. Gradually, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, Protestants at the Kirchentag began to come to terms with the seeming permanence of division. Discussions shifted from reunification and unity to East-West coexistence and cooperation. This national disillusionment created a new opening for the ideas of the Protestant Left. Starting in the mid-1950s, workgroup speakers began to address the need for Polish-German reconciliation, a position that brought together the “realist” and “moralist” concerns of different Protestant factions. And, starting in 1959, workgroups at the Kirchentag began to systematically address the legacy of the Nazi dictatorship, the war, and the Holocaust. This confluence of left-wing moralism and liberal *Realpolitik*, in turn, helped to lay the foundation for a new, more “international” German identity. The principles of reconciliation were no longer applied only to relations the two German states or between the two sides of the Cold War, but, as seen in Carl Friedrich Weizsäcker’s concept of “world domestic politics,” to geo-political relations at the broadest level. Certainly, German Protestants were not alone developing these new ideas. But they were consistently at the forefront of the West German debate.

As one of the groups in German society most implicated in the destructive nationalism of the past, they were also among the most disillusioned by German defeat. And this led them, over time, to thoroughly reject nationalism in favor of a much more “international” sense of German identity.

DEMOCRATIZATION

The postwar transformation of Protestant political attitudes also made an important contribution to the ultimate democratization of West German society. Protestants, after all, made up approximately half of the West German population in the 1950s. And they were among the groups most disillusioned by defeat and most inclined toward political resignation. By constantly promoting “public responsibility” Protestant leaders worked against these tendencies. This was true across the theological and political spectrum. At Kirchentag gatherings in the early 1950s both supporters and opponents of the CDU argued for some form of faith-inspired political activity. And they promoted the idea that political activity—whether positive or negative—was a Christian duty. This advocacy succeeded in drawing large numbers of Protestants back into civil society and into the democratic political process on all levels, laying the foundation for a healthy democratic system.

Many Protestant leaders feared that the deep political divisions within the churches—especially on the issue of West German rearmament—might contribute to renewed disillusionment. And they worked at first to avoid or minimize open conflict at the Kirchentag. However, these fears appear to have been unfounded, at least over the long term. Rather than causing Protestant voters to turn their backs on political activity, these disagreements seem to have further politicized the Protestant public.

Approximately half of the most religiously active segment of German Protestants (those who regularly attended church services) voted consistently for the CDU during the 1950s. This support remained steady until the late 1960s. But nearly a third of these Protestants voted for a minor party or did not vote at all in the early 1950s. By the early 1960s most of these voters appear to have shifted their allegiance to the SPD.¹⁷ Rather than causing Protestants to reject politics, it appears that the emergence of multiple, competing political perspectives within the Protestant churches—and, thus, the availability of more political options—further contributed to the politicization of West German Protestants.

On the level of political attitudes, the emergence of competing forms of Protestant politics also helped to acclimatize West German Protestants to political pluralism and dialogue. Much of the Christian democratic enthusiasm of the early 1950s (on both the Protestant Right and Left) had been premised on universal political and theological claims and on the importance of political agreement. Over time, however, West German Protestants became more comfortable with their disagreements and political differences. In the process of learning how to coexist with one another, Protestants on the Left and Right gained a new appreciation for the liberal values of tolerance, pluralism, and dialogue. By the late 1950s and early 1960s they were self-consciously promoting these values as important tenets of democratic society. Of course, German Protestants were not the only group to promote liberal democratic values in West Germany. Nor were they the first. But, because the size of West Germany's Protestant population and because of their long history of illiberal attitudes, this transformation played an important role in stabilizing the West German system. This liberalism and commitment to self-criticism and dialogue was strong enough to withstand the challenges posed by radical youth

¹⁷ Karl Schmitt, *Konfession und Wahlverhalten*, Table A19b, 322.

politics in the late 1960s. As the 1969 Kirchentag demonstrates, liberal Protestants were among the segments of the West German population most willing to engage in dialogue with the radical youth. In working with, rather than against, the youth protestors, Protestants at the Kirchentag demonstrated the sincerity of their liberal democratic beliefs. And, just as important, they helped to draw youth back into the political process, channeling their energy into positive political activity and laying the groundwork for future political and social reform.

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