

Karl Barth's contribution to the German Church struggle against National Socialism

Ramathate Dolamo

Department of Philosophy and Systematic Theology,
University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Abstract

Germany was under a totalitarian regime led by Adolf Hitler from 1933 to 1945. This article looks at the responses of the churches in Germany during that period. In particular, Karl Barth's theology on church and state is examined to determine to what extent it did assist Germany in fighting National Socialism and in rebuilding Germany after the war. The author is of the view that most of Barth's insights could be relevant and would be applicable today especially in those countries that are still being ruled by autocrats and dictators.

Introduction

Not only do theologians differ as to whether the (divine) command should be grounded in the Christology or in the “orders of creation”, but also some theologians appear unwilling to recognise that the command is the ground and the instrument of God's creative will of love both in originating and in sustaining creation in its historical development (Maimela 1984:158).

Karl Barth's views on sociopolitical matters especially those on church and state relations that he started to formulate during his Safenwil pastorate in 1911 were put to the harshest and rigorous test during the reign of Adolf Hitler from 1933 to the end of World War II in 1945. This article is an appreciation of the insights of Barth as a theologian and as an activist during the church struggle in Germany against National Socialism.

Historical background (1886–1968)

Karl Barth was unquestionably the greatest theologian that has appeared for several hundred years. His stature rivalled that of the giants of the Church, not only those of the Reformation epoch, Luther and Calvin, but those of the ancient Catholic Church, Athanasius and Augustine (Torrance 1990:1).

Karl Barth was born at Basel, Switzerland in 1886 to a pastor and theologian, Fritz Barth. Universities that he attended were Bern, Berlin, Tübingen and Marburg. In the middle of 1909 Barth became an assistant pastor in Geneva and became a parish pastor in 1911 at Safenwil in the Aargau. Barth accepted three chairs at the following universities, Göttingen, Münster and Bonn respectively. He started in Göttingen from 1921 to 1925 where he lectured mainly on the Reformation, in Münster from 1925 to 1930 where he lectured predominantly on Protestant Theology and lastly in Bonn from 1930 to 1935 where he continued his lectures on Protestant Theology, Aquinas, Anselm and the New Testament.

After his expulsion from Germany in June 1935, Barth went back to Switzerland from where he continued to make a valuable contribution to the church struggle in Germany against National Socialism and the war effort. After the demise of Hitler and the end of the war, Barth became instrumental together with other theologians such as Martin Niemöller in the healing, reconciliation and reconstruction of Germany and Europe as a whole.

Barth left behind a legacy that has not been equalled to date. In fact, on the night that he died, 10 December 1968, Barth was still writing and researching. Therefore Torrance's appreciation of Barth cited at the opening of this section is no exaggeration, "Six decades of writing and doing theology" (Torrance 1990; Bush 1976; Gorringe 1999)!

Church and State

Hitler ascends to power (1933)

According to a psychoanalytical study undertaken by Langer (1974:28) on the life of Hitler, Hitler had already in his early childhood believed that he had been set aside to liberate Germany from Jews and Communists.

In November 1932, every third German voted for Hitler and, in January 1933, Hitler became Chancellor (Grünberger 1971). This demonstrated the people's faith in National Socialism. His main theme was the unification of Germany and, to an extent, the restoration of German dignity and pride – "Volkserhebung". Without going into details, a few of the many factors that contributed to Hitler's success were as follows:

- The Weimar Republic was regarded as a Jewish Republic. Jews had been dominant in spheres of banking, business, real estate, brokerage, money-lending, and cattle-trading.
- Germany had just lost a war and was forced into a treaty (the Treaty of Versailles) that had demoralised the Germans and had left them worse off than ever. Lands such as the Rhineland and Austria had been

excised from them. The Weimar Republic was therefore regarded as an interim phase (Mau & Krausnick 1963:17).

- The myth of a stab-at-the-back was still very fresh in the minds of most Germans. Hitler had promised them that the “traitors” would be dealt with. Those “traitors” were identified as Communists and Jews.
- To secure the vote of Christians, Hitler also preached a Christian awakening, promising the people that he would lead them on the Christian path. In a Nazi Party paper, as it appears in Mau and Krausnick (1963:19), there appeared a leading article entitled, “Christianity : the basis of Adolf Hitler’s government”.

Barth's theology on Church and State

Barth's critical stance against societal structures, such as Church and State, as exemplified in his Tambach lecture and in the second edition of the commentary on Romans, implied a positive evaluation of creation and society. This idea is further emphasised in his lecture entitled “Gospel and Law”, written at the end of 1935, after his expulsion from Germany. To ensure that the State does not wander into the sphere of the Church, the State must be drawn under the lordship of Christ. The Christological basis of the State is the main thrust of the lecture.

In line with Barth's positive affirmation of the State, he did not, at the beginning, question the legitimacy or the authority of the National Socialist State. It should be mentioned though, that he was apprehensive about Hitler, especially after reading *Mein Kampf*. He concluded that, with Hitler in power, the Church's position would be endangered (Busch 1976; Barth 1938). As we have seen, Hitler won elections with a comfortable majority and therefore the National Socialist State had to be recognised. In “Gospel and Law”, the civil use of the law, that is, “the sword”, is aimed at a restoration and transformation of the State rather than its annihilation. For Barth, the Law is a necessary form of the Gospel whose content is grace. Accordingly, Barth reverses the traditional law – gospel dialectic. He maintains that God's first word to us is not Law but grace. Only when Law is understood as a necessary form of the Gospel, may we, according to Barth, legitimately speak of Law and Gospel. (Barth 1959:26). Through preaching Law and Gospel, the Church assumes a tremendous responsibility towards the State. The Church should help the State to transcend the dialectical nature of the fallen creation. The State, in other words, must rise above societal conflicts, be they political, economic or otherwise.

In his subsequent writings such as Church *Dogmatics (CD)*, (II, 2; III, 4; IV, 2) *Against the stream, community, State, and Church* and *How to serve God in a Marxist land*, Barth adapted the views he had held since he had started to grapple with issues concerning the Church and State, as expressed

in his early theological ethics in general and the second edition of the commentary on Romans in particular.

In the later publications mentioned above, Barth points out the fact that in the New Testament, spiritual and invisible powers are discussed. These powers are prominent in the writings of Paul, such as in Ephesians 6:12. These powers perform certain functions in the lives of individuals and nations. These powers can be benevolent or demonic. They manifest themselves in creation through the actions of individuals or groups. It is the understanding of the New Testament that these powers possess people and act through them. Powers that are of God, prompt people to do good and those who stray and wander from God's sphere of activity prompt people to do evil. Having understood these powers, Barth connects the authority of political rulers with the powers. The rulers who uphold God's law whilst in power govern well but those who deify themselves become demonic and rule unjustly. The angelic powers of Romans 13 are the obverse of the demonic powers of Revelation 13 (CD III 4:32–46). As the State is an eschatological entity, Barth (1968:25) exhorts us to remember that even the demonic State will not be destroyed. With the return of Christ, these powers will be won over for God's Kingdom and will serve God (1 Cor 5:24; Phil 2:9ff, 1 Pet 3:22).

Although these powers are independent (Barth 1968:25) and separate from God (CD III 4:32-46), they are bound to Christ and His work. Barth contends that the State has its origin in Christ. That is why an ideal State is able to administer justice and protect the law. He goes so far as to say that, even Pontius Pilate, by deflecting justice and sending Jesus away to be hanged on the Cross, became an involuntary agent of redemption. He maintains therefore, that Pilate does not only belong to the Creed in general but to its second article in particular and therefore when we speak of the State, we are fundamentally in the Christological sphere (Barth 1968:120).

The Christian obeys the State according to Romans 13. By so doing, he or she submits himself or herself indirectly to the authority of Jesus Christ. Barth discusses Church and State in terms of two concentric circles. Christ is in the middle. This is to show that the two institutions should therefore not wander away from their centre. The Church forms the inner circle and the State, the outer one. The Church is closest to the centre because it is the instrument of justification of the sinner. The church has been set aside to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God. Fruition of the Kingdom comes at the end of times. Barth argues that the State, in its peculiar way, is also God's instrument of salvation. He says that the State belongs to the second article of the Creed. But he qualifies this statement by saying that the State cannot proclaim a justification of the sinner through faith. This is the function of the Church. The function of the State is to dispense justice and to

take care of the security and safety of its citizens. It cannot prepare candidates for heaven.

The State needs the Church and vice versa, and both are accountable to God through Jesus Christ. Both the Church and State are eschatological and each in its peculiar way should contribute towards the coming and realisation of God's Kingdom here on earth (Barth 1968; 1963).

The Church in Germany was divided. The majority, including members of the Confessing Church, at least initially, supported Hitler's war effort. The invasion of Rhineland in 1936 was welcomed by most Germans. By 1938, Hitler had annexed Austria and his appetite for more land had become insatiable (Broszat 1983; Rothfels 1962). Barth at that time was writing articles and also busy on the second volume of his *Church Dogmatics I*. He wrote profusely against Hitler and National Socialism and, as far as he was concerned, Hitler was a madman and he had to be stopped. In this regard he wrote particularly to the United States of America and Britain (Barth 1937, 1938, 1939& 1954).

Although there is much tyranny and human error in the State, Barth disagreed with those who regarded it as a product of sin. According to him, the State is one of the constants of the divine Providence. It shares both a "common origin" and a "common centre" with the Church (Barth 1968:165). Accordingly, Barth maintained that the Church cannot be against the State, but has to be for it. The Church in its mission cannot deny the mission of the State, but must recognise it, include it and transcend it. The wrath of God as practised by the State issues His burning love for humankind (CD II 2:205-233, 271).

Political power is God's way of being patient with the world by ensuring that the world receives grace and Church gets time and opportunity to proclaim this grace. The Church, Barth insisted, cannot be antipolitical or apolitical if it truly realises God's intention for the State. Political conceptions may change, States may rise and fall, but according to Barth, one factor did not change. It is the Church. It is the basis of all States.

In spite of this close connection between the Church and State, Barth (1968:195) cautions Christians to be mindful of the fact that they are strangers and pilgrims on this earth. Christians are citizens of heaven. This future city is described in Revelation 21. In the coming age, we are concerned with the real State. The only thing that separates the Church and State is the hope of the new age. But this hope also unites the two realms for we discern the will of God in the ordering of the present age. And, moreover, the coming age is a political ruler, a king. It is also interesting, as Barth remarks, that the real city, and not the real Church, will be revealed, according to Revelation 21. The Parousia will, in other words, usher in the end of the Church.

In the meantime, the earthly Church cannot assume the predicates of the heavenly State. The earthly State and the Church are both temporary

institutions. Whilst in waiting, the Church proclaims justification which is the eternal Law of Jesus Christ according to the book of Revelation. This mission is directed to all people and in particular to earthly rulers so that we, under their rule, may lead a quiet and peaceful life. The one cannot do the work of the other, because the Church and State have specific and separately defined functions. The State, emphasises Barth, uses force and the Church uses persuasion (Barth 1968:138).

That is why, on several occasions, Barth discouraged the formation of Christian political parties and rejected the idea of a Christian State. Although he appreciated the Swiss State for its Christian character, Barth was still not prepared to call it a Christian State. The Church must show that, although it goes its own peculiar way, it is not against anybody. The Church is for all people (Busch 1976; Barth 1968). According to Barth, the Church has no theory of a just State for there cannot be a duplicate of the Church in the political arena. The Church has no idea, system or a programme for such an enterprise. However, it can offer guidelines for creating a just society. The Church's task is to monitor the dispensing of social justice (Barth 1959; 1968). This means that, in a constitutional arrangement, an entrenchment of rights, duties, privileges and obligations of individuals has to be provided. This would be, according to Barth, an appropriate mechanism for the realisation of a just State.

In its witness, the Church cannot expect the State to become the Kingdom of God because the State functions in an unredeemed world where sin must be reproached and chaos prevented. What the Church should do is to see to it that the State is analogous to God's Kingdom. The legitimate goal of the State is righteousness. The Church should support State decisions which point towards, and clarify, the Kingdom of God. The Church must oppose those decisions which contradict and obscure God's Kingdom. Barth warned that Christians should not refer to the gospel directly in political matters, but should try to remain as anonymous as possible whilst witnessing to Christian truths in political deliberations. The nearest to political participation to which the Church can come is to provide political parties and the State with Christians who would influence the running of the State from the Christian viewpoint without necessarily overtly declaring their faith.

Barth's attack on National Socialism

In spite of the clear victory which he won, Hitler used undemocratic and unethical means to consolidate his power and he became the dictator of Germany. On 27 February 1933, an unknown person started a fire at the Reichstag. Communists were blamed for it. Many communists were rounded up the same night. The communists and the Social Democratic Press were banned, and the communists were excluded from the impending election

campaign scheduled for 5 March 1933 (Mau & Krausnick 1963). According to Broszat (1983), this unknown person was later identified as a Dutch communist, Marinus van der Lubbe. Whatever the truth of the matter, Hitler had grounds he needed to act harshly against his opponents.

The day after the Reichstag fire, a special edict for "Protection of State and people" was promulgated. This gave Hitler powers to eliminate his enemies and coerce his coalition partners into submission. (Mau & Krausnick 1963:24). The "Enabling Bill" that was officially known as the "National Emergency Termination Bill" and was passed by Parliament on 23 March 1933, and placed Hitler above the law and the constitution (Mau & Krausnick 1963; Broszat 1983).

Hitler's next move was to dissolve political parties. Having disposed of the communists (KPD) and social democrats (DDP), Hitler dissolved the German National People's Party (DNVP). The Roman Catholic Centre Party was pressured into dissolving itself on 5 July 1933. On 14 July 1933 a law which prohibited the formation of new political parties was enacted. As a result, the Nazi Party (NSDAP) was declared the only legal political party in Germany. This position enabled Hitler to become the absolute leader of Germany – the Führer. "Heil Hitler" became the official German salute and form of greeting on 20 July 1933.

The death of President Paul von Hindenburg on 2 August 1934 availed Hitler of yet another opportunity to consolidate his power. He assumed the presidency and consequently became the Head of the State and Supreme Commander of the "Reichswehr" (Mau & Krausnick 1963; Broszat 1983).

Having thus become the Führer, Hitler unleashed terror and propaganda to subdue Germans into submission (Rothfels 1962). Germany was thus "nazified" and this was the process by which Germans were forced to fashion and conduct their lives in accordance with the ideals, aims and objectives of the ideology propounded by the Nazi Party. (Mau & Krausnick 1963:36). As Hitler's intentions of dominating not only Germany, but also the whole of Europe, became apparent, so also the vehemence of Barth's attack on National Socialism increased. Barth (1938) points out that National Socialism was also directed at the contemporary world and the Church. Reviewing National Socialism after six years, that is, from 1933 onwards, Barth (1939) points out that his worse fears have been confirmed, and he feared for the worst if Hitler were not stopped. He says National Socialism has, during the period under review, penetrated every movement in Germany and made resistance and disagreement impossible. Hitler had apparently diverted Germany's attention from National Socialism to communism while Barth continued to insist that National Socialism, not communism, was the real political problem of Germany. National Socialism as an absurd political experiment and religious institution of salvation as Barth understood it, made

Barth to resolve by 1938 that he would be forthright in his battle against it. It was a totalitarian State and it needed to be opposed by whichever means available and possible (Barth 1939:38).

National Socialism, according to Barth (1939:50-57), is fundamentally a dissolution of the just State as a concept. It is a far cry from Romans 13. The damage that National Socialism caused made Barth to disregard and ignore the good it had achieved, namely the elimination of unemployment, the raising of the standard of living and the successful Winter Relief Project which helped indigent Germans. He started to question even the legitimacy of Hitler's government and points out that the National Socialists came to power by suspicious means. According to Barth, the suppression of the press and political opposition were contrary to the characteristics of a just State. National Socialists were a comparatively small clique and, by means of their press policy, had falsified elections and terrorised every German.

National Socialism, as far as Barth (1939:50-57) was concerned, was not the beginning of the Kingdom of God: it was its demonic counterpart. It crushed and killed with the might and right that only belongs to Divinity. It had become a secular Church. Theologically, the National Socialist State had moved away from the ideal State as portrayed in Romans 13 to the diabolical State as portrayed in Revelations 13. It recognised no authority other than itself. Democratic forces were regarded as the enemies of the State. Hitler regarded Christ as his competitor and he styled himself as the new revelation of salvation for Germany. This proved clearly to Barth that the National Socialist State was confronting the Church with a choice between Hitler and God. As indicated, it would not have been necessary to make a choice, had the National Socialist State remained the State and allowed the Church to be the Church. He was disappointed by the Thuringian German Christians who said "yes" to National Socialism. The true Church must say "no". The evil that Barth (1939:58) saw in National Socialism made him conclude that there cannot be a constructive engagement between National Socialism and the Church.

Whilst some Germans called for the boycott of Hitler Sunday, Barth appealed for its observance. But instead of praying for the expansion of National Socialism, he suggested that Christians should pray for its downfall. Hitler was to be deposed by prayer. The church regarded the prayer for the downfall of Hitler as a positive contribution. In fact, the Church would be praying for its own preservation in the face of its persecution by the State, and also for the creation of a just State as an alternative to the National Socialist State (Barth 1939).

The "nazification" of Germany did not only affect the civil service, press and radio, but also Christianity. Everything that was done was calculated to promote the deification of the Führer and the State (Grünberger 1971). Hitler's deification manifested itself in various ways and forms, and Langer

(1974:56) points to the following instances: (a) A large picture of Hitler was displayed, surrounded by little paintings of Christ in one of Berlin's large art shops on the Unter den Linden. (b) In Odenwald, the following words were painted on the hill side, "We believe in Holy Germany, Holy Germany is Hitler, We believe in holy Hitler". (c) At the 1937 Nuremberg Nazi Party rally, a large portrait of Hitler was displayed, on which the following words were written, "In the beginning was the Word ..." (d) Many families had corners in their homes reserved for Hitler and as they prayed for him, candles would be lit. Closely related to the deification of Hitler was the reintroduction of paganism and distortions of the Bible, according to Jacobsen (1969:84). Barth blamed the indiscriminate use of natural theology for this paganism. Natural theology as such was acceptable to Barth as long as the Word of God remained a primary source for Christian theology.

From the time of the second edition of the commentary on Romans, Barth intensified his attack against everything which would later be associated with Hitler and National Socialism. He parted company with Bultmann's "pre-understanding", Gogarten's "orders of creation" and Brunner's "point of contact" (CD III:635). At that time, Hitler as a manifestation of a new revelation was becoming popular. Germans regarded Hitler as a super-human messiah. He was regarded as the creative word through which a new Germany had been born. Hitler's understanding of what he called Positive Christianity clearly showed that the Confessional Church was in danger of being eliminated. According to Langer (1974:149-150), Jesus Christ was regarded as Hitler's competitor and Hitler would not brook any challenge to his power.

It was on the basis of such concepts as "orders of creation" and the misuse of Luther's two Kingdoms' doctrine that theologians such as Gogarten, Paul Althaus and Werner Elert formulated a theology that helped deify Hitler and the National Socialist State according to Barth. Barth replied with an emphatic and resounding "No!" According to Barth, Jesus did not come to sanction the fallen creation but to bring about a new one. It is by grace that ordinances of creation such as the State could be restored to a healthy and normal relationship with God. It is not an initiative on the part of humans. Yet Barth did not reject natural theology altogether. His main worry was that propagating natural theology without qualification at the time would make things easier for Hitler's programme of self-deification. Besides, Barth wanted to restore God's position in its rightful place, namely in the centre of theology. He wanted to make sure that theology no longer looked around for guarantees and approval from culture and science. Any guarantee should come from the Word (Barth 1964:161-162).

Referring to the light of Jesus Christ and other lights, Barth (CD IV 3) says that Jesus Christ is not one of the lights in the cosmos, nor is he the best. He (Christ) is the one and the only Light. He is the only Light of life, and as

such he is a complete total declaration of God about Himself and us. Yet, acknowledging the existence of other truths outside the Bible, Barth says that they have a positive role to play. The basis of such truths is due to God's reconciling the world unto himself through Jesus Christ. This he called the cosmic dimension of revelation because Jesus Christ also rules *extra muros ecclesiae*. These truths, continues Barth, have no ultimate power in, and of, themselves. Jesus Christ makes use of them to bear witness to him. And the State is also such a power that bears witness to God's forebearance with the world.

The kind of natural theology that was taught by some theologians who were supporters of Hitler was unacceptable to Barth. Christianity was falsified and Hitler came to be regarded as a new revelation of Germany. This was a temptation to transgress the First Commandment. Anti-Catholic propaganda was unleashed and those Protestants with whom the State wanted to make friends, through the "German Christians", were divided and the result was the formation of the Confessional Church (Mau & Krausnick 1963; Helmreich 1979). The Confessional Church consistently and concordedly opposed National Socialism. This was made possible by the theology of Barth. He argued that the Church is founded on the Word of God and everything it does must be justified from the Word. If the Church ever departs from this source, it will lose the very justification for its existence. Martin Niemöller, Gerhard Jacobie and Eitel Friedrich von Rabenau called a Pastors' Emergency League on 21 September 1933. By January 1934, over seven thousand pastors had joined the Confessional Church. Niemöller, as general secretary, became the leader of the Church (Mau & Krausnick 1963; Helmreich 1979).

The first Synod of the Confessing Church was convened at the Barnew-Gemarke Reformed Church between 29 and 31 May 1934. Barth's "Barmen Declaration" was accepted and adopted at the Synod. It was a rejection of all that the German Christians stood for and of everything that had to do with Bishop Ludwig Müller's Church. It stressed the freedom of the Word and the Church's freedom under the Word incarnated in Jesus Christ. It rejected the State's totalitarianism because totalitarianism abrogated to itself the powers and functions of the Church. It again rejected the Church's notion of becoming an organ of the State (Barth 1984; Helmreich 1979).

The second Synod was held in Dahlem between 4 and 5 March 1935. This Synod did not please Barth because, according to him, the insights that were formulated at Barmen were not translated into actions at Dahlem. But another declaration was made. It affirmed the First Commandment and went on to denounce those who worship gods of blood, race, folk, honour and freedom. This statement was clearly directed against Alfred Rosenberg's paganism and the "German Christ". In defiance of the State's decree, this statement

was read in pulpits on 17 March 1935. As a result of this disobedience, 715 pastors were arrested but were released immediately thereafter. Barth consoled them by pointing out to them that the Church in Germany had been offered an opportunity to experience what it means to serve God as a Suffering Church. He in fact encouraged them never to back off, because the Church was the only voice when every institution in Germany had lost its freedom and hope. The Church still stood under the freedom of the Word (Barth 1938).

One of the most powerful devices for inculcating and infusing religious veneration for Germany and Hitler was the Hitler Oath (Helmreich 1979:178). With Barth deported back to Switzerland, Confessional Christians agreed to take the Hitler oath but with the explicit declaration that allegiance to Hitler was relative to allegiance and loyalty to God. Anti-Semitic measures were the order of the day. These measures were legalised with the enactment of the so-called "Nuremberg Laws" of September 1935 (Mau & Krausnick 1963:124).

During the War, things became truly atrocious for Jews. According to Helmreich (1979:327-328), Jews were not only discriminated against but also brutally maltreated. To make sure that only Jews were affected, every Jew had to have a yellow Star of David displayed on his or her chest wherever he or she went. Their houses were also marked with this yellow star.

While many Germans interpreted the Jewish plight as God's curse and punishment, Barth advanced his own arguments. His basic argument was that they cannot hold Jews in contempt, especially as Christians, because Jesus Christ was a Jew and anti-Semitism is a sin against the Holy Spirit (Barth 1939:51). He maintains that any Church that becomes anti-Semitic or even asemitic would lose its object of faith. Israel's special importance despite its disobedience and the fact that it crucified Christ, can never be erased from God's salvation plan. In fact, it requires to be perpetually acknowledged if the Church is to survive (CD II 2:195-205; CD III 3:177-182). The "nazification" of Germany and the brutal treatment of the Jews were coupled with Hitler's need for more land, a need that plunged Germany and the world into the Second World War.

The outbreak of the Second World War

It became very obvious that Hitler's dream of a "Greater Germany" meant acquiring more land for Germans. As a result, in violation of the Treaty of Versailles, Hitler moved his army into the demilitarised Rhineland in 1936. On 13 March 1938 he announced the complete annexation of Austria to the German Reich. Under the pretext of going to the aid of the Sudeten Germans, Hitler marched into Czechoslovakia. But instead of confining his conquest to the German areas, Hitler pressured the Slovaks into demanding independence

from the Czech government. As confusion reigned, Czechoslovakia's President Hacha went to Berlin where he surrendered. Consequently, Hitler announced on 16 March 1939 that the Czech's State was part of the envisaged "Greater German Reich". On 1 September 1939 Hitler invaded Poland without giving any excuse. Britain and France then declared war on Germany. Hitler rushed to Stalin and concluded a non-aggression treaty with him in order to keep the mighty Russia out of the war. As a result, Russia concentrated its imperial design elsewhere, on countries such as Finland.

Hitler attacked Denmark and Norway on 9 April 1940. Denmark succumbed almost immediately, with Norway following after very few weeks of resistance. On 10 May Hitler crossed the Dutch, Belgian and Luxembourg frontiers. By 22 June, the whole of Northern and Central France including the Atlantic coast as far as the Spanish frontier, were declared occupied territories. Hitler successfully invaded Yugoslavia and Greece on 6 April 1941.

In spite of the treaty concluded with Russia, and in spite of the overtaxed army's strength, Hitler attacked Russia on the 22 June 1941. After losing almost 300 000 men, the Commander of the German Sixth Army, Friedrich von Paulus surrendered at Stalingrad on the 31 January 1943. At the same time, German and Italian forces were performing very badly against the Anglo-American forces which had landed in Morocco and Algiers on 8 November 1942. The Nazi-Fascist forces capitulated in May 1943.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt of the United States of America, and Sir Winston Spencer Churchill, Prime Minister of Britain, combined forces with President Joseph Stalin against Hitler (Mau & Krausnick 1963:119). For all intents and purposes, Hitler had lost the war by the 29 July 1944. Yet Hitler would not surrender; he committed suicide on 30 April 1945. On 22 May 1945 Berlin surrendered and, five days later, the entire "Wehrmacht" capitulated (Helmreich 1979; Grünberger 1971; 1974; Mau & Krausnick 1963).

As a result of the terror that was unleashed on the Confessional Christians and other opponents of National Socialism, Barth became more militant in his approach to the problem facing the resistance movement. Karl Barth was neither a pacifist nor a non-pacifist. He argued that one cannot, in principle, become a pacifist or vice versa. In this instance, Barth concluded that Hitler had to be forcefully removed. In general Barth did differentiate between a just and an unjust war. Because of this distinction, Barth agreed that in an unjust war a Christian may refuse to serve in the army. But he added that a conscientious objector must be prepared to accept the consequences of his or her refusal to be enlisted. Such a person will be in peace with his or her conscience and with God (CD III 4:24-48). Tyrannicide similarly, was not rejected out of hand (CD III 4:468). When attempts were made on Hitler's life, Barth, as far as one could ascertain, said nothing to discourage the resistance movement. One is of the opinion that Barth did not

mourn Hitler's death. According to Busch (1976), Barth regarded the outbreak of war as the beginning of the end of National Socialism. Barth was at least included among those who prayed for the end, not only of National Socialism, but also of Hitler (Busch 1976; Barth 1939).

On the basis of what has just been portrayed, it should not come as a surprise that Barth was sympathetic to First World War soldiers. He joined the home guard and spent several nights on duty. For soldiers stationed in his parish, he set up a reading room. When the Czechs were faced with Hitler's attack, Barth advised them, in a letter addressed to Josef Hromadka, to resist militarily, because their fight was for Europe and the Christian Church. That is why, when France and England sanctioned Hitler's move, he foresaw catastrophe for European freedom. Barth's advice was made public and, as a result, he was disowned by even the Confessional Church (Busch 1976; Helmreich 1979).

During the Second World War, Barth wrote passionately against Hitler. He said a concerted effort against Hitler was necessary, both militarily and theologically. Barth was therefore accused of militarism and anarchism. By summoning Switzerland to fight for its democracy and freedom, Barth had in fact suggested that Switzerland should break from its state of neutrality. According to him, neutrality need not mean failure to see the difference between Churchill and Hitler. In April 1940, Barth reported for armed military service. While on active service, he also preached to fellow soldiers. At that time, Barth became a member of a secret organisation whose aim was to defend Switzerland against any invasion. He was in fact a co-founder of a secret resistance movement whose membership was by invitation only and whose members were inducted by an oath (Busch 1976; Barth 1966). Barth's interest in and concern for Germany did not end with the termination of the War. His involvement with Germany in fact increased, and it became more direct since his deportation order had been nullified by the fall of the National Socialist State.

Post war projects

Two issues will be examined in this section. They are the concept of collective guilt coupled with denazification and reconstruction programmes.

Collective guilt

When the war ended, there was a feeling in the Protestant churches that, whatever had happened prior to and during the War, the whole of Germany was accountable. According to Langer (1974:139), Hitler was not the only person to be blamed. Hitler was regarded as the product of Germany. In other words, Hitler expressed, the state of mind that existed in 70 000 000 Germans

and, to some extent, in all western countries. Barth, together with others such as Bonhoeffer, argued that every German should feel responsible for what happened, instead of blaming Hitler alone. Barth (1939:58-67) propagated this concept of collective guilt within the first six years of National Socialism. He argued that the Church shared the guilt of National Socialism and, before it could call Germans to repentance, it had first to confess. The Roman Catholic Church refuted this idea and indicated that sin or guilt is a personal matter (Spotts 1973). The belief that corporate guilt excludes personal involvement results in pharisaism. Corporate responsibility underlines personal responsibility; it includes personal guilt.

The great architects of the collective guilt mentality, namely, Barth, Bonhoeffer and Niemöller, were not unmindful of the efforts made by individuals and groups in the struggle against National Socialism. Many Germans sacrificed themselves for the freedom of Germany. Perhaps Barth did not suffer much physically and financially, but he was deported from Germany. Niemöller was incarcerated several times in the concentration camps. Bonhoeffer did not survive the war; he was executed. Barth (1938 & 1954) went so far as to accuse non-Germans that they could not have performed better under similar circumstances. Those accusing outsiders asked where the Church was when Hitler came to power. They specifically demanded to know why the Church did not stop the persecution of Jews. Barth argued that the weak position of the Church after the First World War did not enable the churches to see the Bolshevik nature of National Socialism. Instead, he praised the Church's performance. According to Barth, the Church was consistent in its adherence to the First Commandment. The only freedom in Germany was embodied in the Church. Barth was obviously referring to the Confessional Christians.

One is glad that an extensive history of the resistance against National Socialism, and the motives of those who resisted, has already been published. But the idea that some Germans were innocent, as was asserted by Paul Berben (Rothfels 1962), should not be an attempt to morally exonerate some Germans for what happened during the Third Reich. All have sinned and are in need of absolution. Many Germans, through the Protestant Church, accepted the concept of collective guilt, according to Spotts (1973:93). Only conviction led to what became known as the "Struttgart Declaration of Guilt" (Spotts 1973:421). It was made during a conference held in Stuttgart between 18 and 19 October 1945.

Against this backdrop, the programme of "denazification" became, by and large, pharisaic. Barth was completely against the programme. Most Protestants agreed with the programme but the Roman Catholic Church rejected it. The Roman Catholic Church argued that judgement belongs to God and that people who were not "nazified" were the communists and social democrats. In practical terms, this would have meant that the positions in

civil government, industry and education would be occupied by them. The Roman Catholic Church suggested that only people who had committed criminal acts during the Third Reich could be punished; a clear distinction, on moral grounds, should be made between political criminals and political conformists.

Another flaw was that “denazification” was not uniformly and evenly applied in the four zones. By the end of 1946, 100 000 persons were in detention and more than 120 000 had lost their jobs. This displeased the churches, and pastors sabotaged the programme by issuing statements of good conduct to the victims of “denazification”. Bishop Wurm even said that there was something Bolshevik about the programme. This programme became so unpopular that it was officially discontinued in September 1948 (Spotts 1973:93-100).

Reconstruction

Bishop Theophil Wurm took it upon himself to unify the churches, a project in which many cooperated. During the Second World War, Wurm kept in touch with the ecumenical community with the aim of securing aid for the Church once the war had ended. After the war, the churches were faced with problems of reorganisation – with the exception of the Roman Catholic Church, whose hierarchy was still intact. Barth was also faced with two alternatives, namely to go back to Germany and become directly involved in the work of reconstruction, or to remain at the University of Basle to finish his *Church Dogmatics*. He chose the latter alternative. His choice did not, however, mean that he would no longer be interested in events in Germany (Busch 1976; Helmreich 1979; Spotts 1973).

Protestants had to form some sort of a regional Church organisation with the view to forming a national Church body. Through this body, they would re-establish contacts with the ecumenical community, and would soon be reaccepted in the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Bishop Wurm, representing the Church Leaders’ Conference, and Niemöller, representing the Reich Brotherhood Council – with Barth in attendance – played a crucial role in the negotiations of unification. In a meeting held in Treysa on 27 August 1945, it was decided to forge a new bond of Land churches and brotherhood councils which would work together to draft a new constitution. The name “German Evangelical Church” was changed to the “Evangelical Christians of Germany”. In that conference, a centralised relief committee was constituted. Eugen Gerstenmaier, one of the conspirators against Hitler, was elected as head of the committee. All kinds of help, such as clothes, food, Bibles, and song books, were received from USA, Switzerland and Sweden.

The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (DDR) were finally established in 1949. Although religious liberty was not as guaranteed or entrenched in the East as it was in the West, there was no outright and deliberate persecution of the Church there. The Church in the Democratic Republic nevertheless had to adapt herself to the Soviet-dominated political, social, and economic order. By means of the Church tax that was levied from practising Christians by the State, the Church in the FRG became wealthy and affluent. The money was partly used to undertake many social services which until then were undertaken by the State. Even today, the churches run orphanages, old age homes, sanatoriums, and so on. For example, 80% of crèches and pre-schools in Bavaria are run by the churches.

The Church wanted no political power. It nonetheless pledged itself to be more active in public and political life. Christian principles were to be inculcated into all spheres of life without necessarily favouring one party line over another. There was no question of forming a Christian political party. Barth advocated active, direct and concrete political involvement, although he was also not in favour of a Christian party. How he intended to implement his proposal it is not clear, but Niemöller advised Christians in 1950 to vote for the Social Democratic Party. Again in 1960, he discouraged people from going to the polls because according to him, none of the contesting parties deserved their votes. Barth, who was really a Swiss first and German second, should have taken a back seat and only advised the Germans when he was requested. As the trio – Barth, Niemöller and Gustav Heinemann – became more and more political, they became estranged from the Church. To demonstrate their disapproval of their actions, Christians did not re-elect Heinemann as president of the Synod in 1955, and Niemöller lost his seat on the Church Council, according to Spotts (1973:128).

In spite of convincing theological arguments Barth (1954) gave, the Church remained unconvinced. Ultimately, Heinemann and Niemöller entered active politics. In January 1951, Niemöller founded the Emergency League, a pacifist movement, for the Peace of Europe. The following year, Heinemann established the All-German Peoples' Party whose main objective was to establish the neutrality of Germany and to oust the "warmonger", Konrad Adenauer, in the following elections. Heinemann got only six per cent of the votes. In the meantime, Barth's influence diminished, a clear signal to him, one supposes, that he should have left Germany to the Germans. His efforts to declare rearmament a "status confessionis", and to form a new Confessing Church in that direction, fell on deaf ears, even though many Germans were against rearmament (Spotts 1973; Helmreich 1979). Barth's popularity continued to decline especially because he was suspected of being a communist agent.

Conclusion

The Church in Germany and Germans in general have benefited from Karl Barth's research and publications as well as his own direct interventions in the struggle against National Socialism. Not only have the Germans benefited, but also the entire world has in so far as he has contributed to the end of World War II and the thawing of the Cold War between East and West. Christians today who are living under undemocratic situations may also benefit in their struggles against unjust rulers.

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