

My Brother's Keeper: A Preaching Poet in Hitler's Germany

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My paper has a bifocal character. First I rehearse the inner crisis of the Protestant state churches during the fleeting moment of truly confessional opportunity following Hitler's accession to power, the "post-Constantinian" dilemma of a self-absorbed institution. Second, I turn to the later war years, 1941-45, and to the story of one man and the agony of contrition which led him to make a remarkable contribution within that part of the struggle of the church in Nazi Germany 1933-1945 which has never been so well known as that of martyrs such as Bonhoeffer.¹

My Brother's Keeper?

In the turbulent weeks following the Nazis' accession to power in 1933, the Protestant churches in Germany failed to recognize the challenge and opportunity of the hour. They remained mute in the midst of palpable and violent injustice done to fellow-Germans of suspect political conviction, such as Social Democrats and Communists, or those of non-Aryan race. 1 April 1933 witnessed the minutely orchestrated boycott of Jewish businesses, and on 7 April the infamous "Law for the Restoration of the Civil Service" was promulgated, of which §3, henceforth known as the "Aryan Paragraph," had been framed expressly to sweep Jews out of public influence even those whose families had been Christian for generations. It was the first step toward Auschwitz.

This law unveiled, for all who would see it, the heart of Hitler's plan

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for the purging of the *Volk*. It did not arise in a vacuum but rather focused one of the most powerful elements at work in the thinking and feeling of many of the Protestant laity and clergy of the day. Not only were slogans about “the Jew as our national disaster” common coinage among church people of all theological complexions, but also increasingly strident and aggressive as the spring weeks of 1933 passed the *Glaubensbewegung* “*Deutsche Christen*” (literally “Faith Movement ‘German Christians,’” hereafter GC) preached the need to eliminate the Old Testament from the life of the church and to defuse the power of Pauline (i.e., “Jewish”!) teaching in the New Testament. These notions, along with a conviction that the German people occupied a special nook close to the heart of the Creator, left the GC, by their own lights at least, well-positioned to become the midwives – and functionaries – of a new German Protestant church which would gather into itself all the powers hitherto vested by ancient Reformation/Confessional tradition in the presbyteries and consistories of the churches in each of the *Länder*, or states, which made up the Reich, each church independent but loosely federated up to that point in time. The GC were aflame with the *Führer*-idea, to be fulfilled through the office of a Reich Bishop with massive powers. Many “mainline” church leaders who were later to throw in their lot with the Confessing Church movement, were initially beguiled by this move toward one German Protestant church consolidated under a Reich bishop, while they for the most part would have no truck with the GC.²

The story of the Protestant church during the Hitler era is, on one level, the saga of the ways in which the non-GC Protestant people saw themselves being supplanted, disenfranchised as church people, theologically evacuated and handed over to a deadly mixture of surrogate *völkisch* theology and Nazi authority structure. The success or failure of that usurpation, from one state church to another, marks the subsequent history of each state church through to 1945.³ With the “Aryan Paragraph” in place in the “New Germany,” true patriot love could be construed as requiring that it be applied to root out the handful of Jewish Christian members of both clergy and laity employed within the Protestant state churches, which were after all part of the civil service. Those state churches, such as Saxony, Thuringia and Old Prussia, which GC zealots had most swiftly taken over by way of rigged synod elections (July 1933), also moved to implement this further work of “cleansing the temple.” “The church must enter completely into the Third Reich, it must be coordinated

into the rhythm of the National Revolution, it must be fashioned by the ideas of Nazism, lest it remain a foreign body in the unified German [National Socialist] community.”⁴ It is well worth musing on the metaphors which drive this statement: we must be *inside*, not outside; we must *get in step*, not be at odds, we must be clay in the hands of the potter. It evokes a community of fear, and a collective and ugly narcissism of the blood.

In retrospect it seems clear that there was offered to the Christian churches in the first weeks of the Nazi regime a slender lancet window of opportunity to be the Good Samaritan, to act on the solemn warning contained in the Matthew 25 scenario of the Last Judgement upon the nations. This would have involved, as we shall later develop, a willingness to recognize their Lord in every person, of whatever background or race, presented to their senses, but most especially if that person were a victim of oppression. It would have required a clean line of vision, that form of “purity of heart” which makes it possible to see God, people and issues in terms not of institutional status or survival but rather of compassion and costly love. At that moment, however, the churches betrayed, in clergy and laity alike, how far they had become intertwined with the racist and nationalistic agendas of their Fatherland. This was no less true of the free churches than of the state churches.⁵ The brief, precious moment of resolute action was forfeited.

Early responses to the “Aryan Paragraph” from within the conservative, we might loosely say “evangelical,” fold were muted, cautious, fearful of showing disloyalty. Moreover, the initial papers prepared by the Office for Apologetics in Berlin approached the “Aryan Paragraph,” if applied to the country at large, as a harsh but necessary step if the body politic was to be relieved of the “disproportionately strong Jewish presence” in the professions, media and cultural life of Germany.⁶ Walter Kunneth, just as much as Bishop Otto Dibelius of Berlin, Karl Heim of Tübingen and Paul Althaus of Erlangen, found nothing amiss in the notion of the state using its power to take drastic steps against one group or another in its pursuit of restored national integrity and cultural identity.⁷ Even Dietrich Bonhoeffer, surely one of the most discerning and compassionate of German churchmen, dallied at an early stage with a view of the churches’ proper posture toward the state which would leave any decisive action (“jamming the wheels of the state”) to hinge on the consensus of a national synod.⁸

To the GC forces busily dismantling the state church governments,

nothing was clearer than that the “Aryan Paragraph” must be rigorously applied throughout the clergy and laity in the employ of the churches. It is true that the non-GC forces generally rallied to attack this notion as a violation of the churches’ *status confessionis*. But the tragedy of this response to the initial GC-engineered successes in Saxony, Thuringia and Prussia lies in the fact that, to a man (and they were, so far as I can observe, all men) the church leaders allowed the battlefield to be determined by their adversaries. There is something hauntingly ironic about the efforts to fence the church establishments about with a carefully argued appeal to Bible and Confession, resting on the distinct character of the faith community within the body politic.⁹ For all the while the great mass of Jewish Christians out in the *secular* branches of the Civil Service, the products of centuries of gradual assimilation to the majority religious institution (Protestantism), were being left to fend for themselves – in spite of their being members of the several state churches! It is sobering to conjecture where Felix Mendelssohn might have figured in this scheme of things.

Beguiled by the care for their institutional survival, the churches were found derelict in their duty to be the Good Samaritan. This major betrayal of her “marching orders” left the church open to a steadily rising pitch of cocky truculence on the part of the GC, including voices calling for the new *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* to affirm Hitler as the German people’s saviour.¹⁰ Such was the backdrop for the formation of the Pastors’ Emergency League (*Pfarrernothbund*) by Martin Niemöller in September 1933, and then the birth of the *Bekennende Kirche*, the Confessing Church, in the months following. It was to gather clergy and laity from across Germany, seeking, with no little difficulty, to bring together the several state church traditions, Lutheran, Calvinist and United, in affirming the Reformation confessions in face of the competing Nazi and GC claims upon the allegiance of the whole man.

The first convocation was held in May 1934 in Wuppertal-Barmen in the Rheinland, one of the state churches that had been most thoroughly *zerstört* (“destroyed,” as one came to describe it) by the GC assault. So it is that its founding affirmation came to be known as the Barmen Declaration, in which the fundamental distinctness of the Christian’s personal and the church’s collective obedience to God and to the God-established orders of society was proclaimed.

Barmen was a bold drawing of frontiers, a warning to the Nazi state

not to violate the kerygmatic, confessional identity and *polity* of the church. And yet, Barmen almost completely failed to apprehend the far more fundamental assault being launched upon the church's *inner* integrity. The church tragically failed to "see her Lord" in the face of her Jewish neighbour, thus substituting institutional continuity for costly obedience. There were motions presented aiming at securing the prospects of Jewish Christian theology students. Although discussed, they were never incorporated in the Barmen Declaration or other statements issuing from the synod.¹¹ The Confessing Church, while affirming its Hebrew roots and the oneness of Old and New Testaments, was not willing to raise a prophetic voice against the savage acts of the state toward specific groups of people any more than she was prepared to cry out when the synagogues across Germany went up in flames in May 1938 in a concert of minutely orchestrated terror.

"*Nur wer für die Juden schreit, darf auch gregorianisch singen,*" Bonhoeffer was later to say; only those who cry out for the Jews have the right to sing Gregorian chant. We have to remind ourselves that nowadays especially, by an unholy reflex, many of us see everything German through the lens of Auschwitz, and this can horribly magnify our self-righteousness and distort the history of that remarkable people. Thus this paper is not conceived as a stinging rebuke to German church leaders of a half-century past as though the churches in Canada had nothing to repent of when surveying the history of Canada's response to the plight of the Jews during the Nazi years.¹² But the matters discussed here may help trace the path of an evil enchantment by which the churches, in the midst of their defence of the Truth, were found to be evading the very acts of obedience by which their truth-claims might have been stunningly vindicated and richly fruitful.

A Nation of Victims

In reflecting on this most of us would cry out for a sense of context: how are we to explain the double enigma of the church's failure of vision and of speech? One strong thread leading us through the labyrinth is the presence of a sometimes more, sometimes less, virulent grade of anti-Semitism within European society. This did not begin with Hitler, or with Luther, as the Nazis might claim with glee, or with St. John Chrysostom of Constantinople, but is the sombre and not unprovoked *obbligato* to the song of the church from the New Testament period onwards.¹³ With the se-

cularization of German society in the last century or two the ancient and explosive charge of "Christ-killers" had been replaced by an equally potent wrath against the Jew as exploiter and conspirator as reflected in the bogus *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* (ca. 1903). Anti-Semitism is to remain an available and privileged focus of discontent in Germany. But this is not our topic. Instead we remember the hectic euphoria of the German Reich as it finally, toward the end of the colonial day, became a nation-state in 1871 over the ruins of the pride of a stunningly defeated France, and a diligent rooter after colonial truffles in Africa and farther afield. We remember the foreboding voices of Pan-Germanic groups, calling at the end of the nineteenth century for a nation purged of Jews.¹⁴ We remember the devastation of the German Protestants' (and hardly less the German Catholics') sense of self in face of an abolished monarchy in 1918, in a country which had seen the Kaiser as the ultimate earthly point of reference for one's temporal existence and value.

The Protestants were especially orphaned for they had no international dimension and seat of authority. Orphans are vulnerable, and doubly so those who see themselves as victims of perfidy within and without the body politic. The Weimar Republic was seen as an engine of international, liberal, parliamentary democratic influence and despised to boot as the product of machinations by Social Democrats, in their eyes hardly better than rank Communists.¹⁵ Not a heady prospect for the future of the Protestant church. Even during the Great War, German theologians embarked upon beguiling speculations on the role of the *Volk* within the Creation and Salvation mandates of God.¹⁶

Where the ethical point of reference in theology had been the family, culture and the state, younger Lutheran theologians were discovering the *Volk*.¹⁷ In it they descried something which transcended the worn-out individualism of the recent past and which seemed to put them in contact with the ancient desire for community and solidarity, dedication and sacrifice, always seen against the sinister background of foreign envy. Where with the Treaty of Versailles almost all seemed lost, the *Volk* alone seemed to have survived. Piety and patriotism had defeated Napoleon a century before; now holding fast to Germanhood could be seen as a matter of character, of duty. And in many formulations of this new *völkisch* theology the obligation of dedicating oneself to the Fatherland and preserving the race effectively supplants the commandment to love one's neighbour, whoever he or she may be, as the parable of the Good Sama-

ritan is seeking to point out.¹⁸ For Paul Althaus of Erlangen, however, *Volkstum*, “peoplehood” rather than statehood, as the deliberate creative mandate of God, is the law of life. While Althaus remains otherwise an orthodox theologian, given the explosive historical moment, and coming from within a Lutheran theological faculty, such a notion must be seen as seductive to the unbalanced imagination of a generation craving satisfaction for wrongs genuine and imagined.¹⁹ With the sinew of the new political theology being provided by an exalted sense of the *Volk* finally regaining its identity and purity against a sea of adversaries, it is no surprise that anti-Semitism, in suitably bourgeois diction, is available once again, with heightened potency, to the imaginative life of the church almost as part of her mandate.²⁰

Thus it is impossible to assess the mood of the Protestant church in Germany on the eve and in the early years of the Nazi regime without registering just how deeply, at some level of potency or other, this *völkisch* theology had impregnated the spirit of clergy and laity. (But then we remember another national vision, another language: “Wider still and wider, shall thy bounds be set; God, who made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet . . .,” words made even more beguiling by Elgar’s grand instrumentation, and this may help us to retain perspective.)

The unfolding tragic failure to “see” Christ in the face of her Jewish neighbour is no vicious erratic lunge of a deranged leadership, but rather the slow harvest of centuries of Protestant anti-Semitism. The Community of Blood, as the Nazi theorists would have it, had obscured the Community of Grace, and *völkisch* identifications of race and divine election in the public theologizing of men such as Paul Althaus had left both clergy and laity vulnerable to manipulation by the Regime. If one adds to this potent force the sense of victimization of the German people by the outside world in and following the Great War (“The West wanted the war not we!”), and the dizzying prospect of restored national greatness under Hitler, it becomes clear how easily the sobering voice of a shared human frailty (e.g., the German share in the guilt of the Great War) was drowned out and how readily the churches could make their peace with the violation of the civil rights of their Jewish neighbours. The same reflections will make it evident how difficult it was for Germans within Germany to entertain any thought of opposing the “New Germany”; resistance could always be interpreted as a form of treason upon which Germany’s adversaries would be quick to pounce for propaganda purposes.²¹

Germany under Arms: The Hour of the Laity

Thus largely unchallenged, the state in due course would proceed along the parallel lines of euthanasia applied to the mentally and physically “unworthy” within Germany, and genocide for the Jews within and without Germany. This same sense of *carte blanche* left the Nazis confident that without risk they could bleed the Protestant churches white by drafting their pastors and deaconesses into the war effort, the former usually as common soldiers, and the latter in munitions factories. The crisis which at its height saw fully half of the Protestant pastors torn from their charges, gave rise to the army of lay readers (and in rare cases, lay preachers) ministering to the ravaged congregations.

Lay ministry is hardly a novel idea. It had emerged with vigour in the early Reformation under Luther as a means to handle the sheer volume of work; it had played a central role in the thinking of Calvin, himself perhaps the most distinguished layman of recent centuries, but had lost out to the relentless power of orthodox clericalism during the Enlightenment period. As we turn again to the *Kirchenkampf*, the struggle of confessing church people with the combined power of GC and the Nazi system, one test of strength came in March 1935 between the Confessing Church leadership and the GC-dominated governments of the so-called “destroyed” state churches, backed up by the Police. A Confessing Church declaration challenging recent state incursions by way of the GC authorities was prepared for reading from the confessing pulpits throughout Germany; the Police moved in, threatening pastors with incarceration if they did in fact read it. Seven hundred and fifteen of those who declared themselves unwilling to back down were placed under house arrest or put into protective custody.²²

The hour of the lay reader, ordained by the congregation for service under the Heidelberg and Augsburg Confessions, had again come. It is a moving and often humorous story, but can only be sketched here. The humour tended to arise at the point of an inevitable friction between the clergy, labouring under the burden of both traditional status and overwork, and the laymen who were discovering the excitement of a share in the ministry. One hilarious file in the Bavarian Church Archives in Nürnberg speaks of a lay reader who, together with the other elders, declared “We don’t need a pastor any more; I’ll do the whole thing myself!”²³ But in general there was a careful weighing of the relative importance of the

rights and duties of the church members on the one hand, and the call for an ordered administration of Word and Sacraments on the other. As to the share of lay readers in the work of the church, statistics from just one urban deanery (*Kirchenkreis Ansbach*) in Bavaria speak for themselves; by 30 January 1942 there were 45 lay readers ordained; by the end of March there were 115, and by the end of 1943 the numbers had swollen to 192. These were all *men*; a directive of Bishop Meiser of December 1943 observes tersely that “Women are not accepted as lay readers. It would be a bad sign for a congregation if not a single man were to be found for this service.”²⁴

R.A. Schröder: The Community of Contrition

From a safe distance, as it were, we have been picking our way through aspects of the story of the churches which offer individual cases of valour but an overall pattern of institutional faint-heartedness. So in the final stretch of my paper I wish to focus on one remarkable German in whose experience of the Hitler years we are able to touch the anguish, inner conflict and deepening contrition of the masses of ordinary “decent” people who came to see themselves duped and their most precious spiritual and cultural values betrayed by the state. In his case, as in that of countless other, less prominent but politically equally powerless Germans, we can trace the awakening of a sense of measureless guilt in relation to their Jewish neighbours, and the steps he took to face it by way of the spoken and written word.

So the final section of my paper tells the story of one of the most distinguished German men of letters in this century, Rudolf Alexander Schröder (1878-1963), poet, architect, publisher, artist and literary translator, whose person and *oeuvre* were of such stature that T.S. Eliot put his name forward for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1958. This celebrated public figure found himself, with the advent of the Nazi “millennium,” a stranger in his own country. We pick up his story in the autumn of 1941. As the agony of the Jews grew and the deportations to the East gathered momentum, Schröder was faced with the struggle of his Jewish friends, for whose “reprieve” he laboured in vain. His vision of his share in the collective guilt against these people, condoned by the silence of the church, led him to assume a remarkable public role as lay preacher in the Lutheran Church in Bavaria.

Schröder lived by his pen during these years in his cottage facing the Bavarian Alps. But as the war dragged on a pattern of very public activity was emerging; for several weeks each year he was underway throughout Germany lecturing, reading his poetry, visiting the theological faculties and speaking at weekend conferences of various cultural and literary associations. I have copies of many of his manuscripts of those years; the common strand in all of them is an attempt to give back to his people a spiritual-cultural heritage which was being systematically prostituted by the Nazi state. But gradually it became more and more difficult to speak in public, as the local Party officials repeatedly stepped in and prohibited any public appearance. Accordingly he shifted his base to the relative freedom of gatherings under church auspices, placing himself at the disposal of the local expression of the Confessing Church.

By the autumn of 1941, we remember, the invasion of Russia was in full spate; the assault on the life of inmates of mental and epileptic asylums within Germany, such as the Bodelschwingh institutions in Bethel, was abating in the face of an outcry from isolated church leaders notably Count Galen, Roman Catholic Bishop of Münster. But also in the autumn of 1941 the decree was promulgated which required all Jews of a certain age to wear the Star of David, and the "Final Solution" was unfolding in the waves of deportation to the death-camps in the East. This was the point at which the enormity of collective guilt was brought home to Schröder.

One of his literary collaborators was the poet and historical writer Jochen Klepper. His diary, later published in English as *Under the Shadow of Thy Wings*, records the struggle during the months following September 1941 to ward off the forced deportation of his Jewish wife and daughter. When all hope was lost, all three committed suicide in December 1942. During these same months Schröder was sharing as well in the agony of other Jewish friends closer to home, amongst them the artist Lina Borchardt in Munich. His unpublished letters tell the story of his attempts, during the autumn and winter of 1941, to mobilize such influence as he had, or thought he had, in hopes of effecting a "reprieve" for his old friend. While this correspondence with Lina Borchardt is poignant, the written exchanges with church leaders are much more revealing of the temper of the moment.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" "Who *is* my neighbour?" On 28 September 1941, four weeks after promulgation of the new measures against the Jews, Schröder preached for the first time known to us in the

parish church in Wankheim by Tübingen. In spite of the constant threat of Gestapo agents listening to every word spoken during a church service, Schröder sets aside the convention of cautious “cipher language” to speak from the heart:

Do we not see how today, out of the very ranks of the Christian churches and their teachers . . . enemies of Christ rise up; how in our Christian, German people, which still has kept the old *Gott mit uns* on the belt-buckles of its sons and defenders, naked godlessness is making room for itself by violence? But that is not the main thing: In us this antichrist lurks . . . poor, miserable creatures, issuing from the evil of this world, enmeshed in all the evil of this world.²⁵

The pastor in whose church Schröder delivered this first sermon was Richard Gölz, leader of a centre of liturgical renewal and of church music. Given Schröder’s deep interest in both translating early Latin hymnody and writing fresh hymns for the German church, his connection with Gölz is not surprising. But it also turns out that Gölz was deeply involved with the clandestine network of temporary asylums maintained by a number of German pastors and members of their congregations for Jews who had managed to “drop out of sight.” After he had given refuge and help in escaping to Switzerland to several of them, he was sent to Welzheim concentration camp in December of 1944 and only released by the advent of the Allies the following spring.

It is persuasive to picture this Württemberg pastor sharing his burden for the Jews with his distinguished visitor, and to find here the “other Germany” at work. At any rate in these same autumn days of 1941 Schröder was visiting and writing to church leaders in Munich on behalf of Lina Borchart. A letter of 2 November 1941 reports that she is to be “resettled,” i.e., deported to a death camp, a fortnight later. He goes on to ask his senior church official whether it is really impossible for the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, *together*, finally with *one* voice to speak out for the victims (which, of course, never did happen):

I should have thought that in such a matter touching all Christians it would be an easy thing to reach agreement with the central Roman Catholic authorities upon steps to be taken in common . . . If only our [German] people could be spared the ignominy of having taken not a single step to ward off even the most grievous of the wrongs being

done, and of having failed to accept our responsibility before God and Christendom . . . What church can demand of her members that they remain true to her when she has not even raised a finger to help or raised her voice in public protest? . . . If action is not taken soon, in my view our church [the Lutheran Church in Germany] will lay such guilt upon herself as to strip her of all claims and rights as shepherds of the flock.²⁶

In a letter to another (unnamed) Munich clergyman, also dated 2 November 1941, he is more stringent still:

What awaits her is a hell of indeterminate duration, over against which a swift death would be compassion itself . . . If the church . . . takes no initiative in this matter, if the most one can do is to express one's regrets, as you yourself did, Reverend Sir, for this poor old woman, that would be an especial catastrophe . . . within the general catastrophe of the church's failure. I hope to God that in these days he will grant his church courage and wisdom to do war duty, and that it must not again be said of our Lord, who stands before us in the form of these, the most wretched of his brethren, "then all his disciples forsook him."²⁷

It staggers the imagination that even on 17 December 1941 the bishops of the eleven GC-dominated state churches found nothing more compassionate to do than to cut adrift from the fellowship of their congregations any Jewish parishioners still attached to them.²⁸ What process of the deadening of the imagination is at work when people refuse to "see" the suffering caused or condoned by their callous hearts – should we perhaps call it an invited blindness? (The record of the Confessing Church leaders and bishops such as Meiser of Bavaria, and especially Wurm of Württemberg, eventually showed them to be courageous in challenging the state on some issues, including, very cautiously, the Jewish question. And here and there synods took a bold and risky stand toward the end of the war, as the horrendous nature of the Holocaust gradually became known.)²⁹

We return to Schröder. In a letter of those same autumn days of 1941 he confesses to his young pastor-poet friend Stehmann, soon to die on the front in Finland:

This business of Frau Borchardt has been going on for weeks now and

has absolutely finished us off, and we are merely fellow-sufferers . . . Since the order has come “from the top” everyone here is helpless – so we just stand by and ask God for grace and mercy for this one who must bear the brunt of it, but also for us all in this time of judgement . . . Dear friend, all those who have been allowed to cross over without having to go through this are to be envied. But that is not quite right; we must not grumble about the school in which we have been deservedly “enrolled,” and we must now, in spite of all our fear and all the dread, learn to spell, letter by letter, the great “Fear not,” and then to put it into practice. But how despairing, and of little faith, and *hard* is the heart of man!³⁰

Much of the intoxicating power of the jingoist verse produced at the beginning of the Great War on the part of both groups of belligerents had lain in the fact that it offered a meretricious national transfiguration in place of a moral encounter. It had tragically foreshortened the moral universe just as the behaviour of the men in power across Europe had done so that there seemed to be no gap whatever between “what we are” and “what we ought to be,” offering a sort of frantic idyll.³¹ Church leaders had fallen into the same trap in 1933 as they vigorously defended what was happening in Germany against the foreign press and ecumenical bodies.³² But the model that can now be seen to occupy Schröder’s entire imaginative space in 1941 and thereafter is rather that of an encounter with his own self through the mirror of his neighbour’s and his Lord’s broken body. At this point, as he was to develop in a very “personal” 1949 sermon, for him the central spiritual paradigm of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) and the awesomely practical criteria involved in the Last Judgement (Matthew 25) converge in the words “When *saw* we thee . . .”³³ It is surely not an idle exercise to wonder what might have happened if the churches had taken this question seriously in 1933.

At any rate Schröder had begun to see something of the toll that centuries of condoned European anti-Semitism were now exacting before his gaze – but also his own thoughtless “bourgeois” share in that community of wrong. These experiences led him to do two things. Firstly, after a full year’s anguished hesitation he had himself ordained as a lay reader which in his case meant a lay preacher in the Lutheran Church of Bavaria. This gave him the status necessary for his increasingly frequent appearances under the auspices of the church, the only context in which he could now have any reliable expectation of raising his voice. And secondly he turned

to writing poems of so unequivocally anti-Nazi character that most of them could only be circulated clandestinely from hand to hand. Of one song cycle he reported in 1943 that there were a good thousand handwritten or typed copies in circulation throughout Germany.³⁴

The soil in which Schröder's preaching activity was rooted came to light a few years ago through his still unpublished literary remains comprising his correspondence during the Nazi period. We have thousands of letters to him, and carbon copies of many of his replies. Predictably many letters concern publications and arrangements for lecture tours, but an astonishing number from writers, publishers, theologians, pastors and the wives of pastors out on the battle front, call for an essentially pastoral, counselling response to the acknowledged anguish of conscience on every hand. These papers show him in a helping role that he, being financially dependent on his writing, could scarcely have coveted.

Given the pastoral situation as the war approached its end in 1944-45, it is not surprising that apart from preaching engagements elsewhere, even as far as East Prussia – until the Russians came – Schröder began holding worship services in his home above the village of Bergen in the Bavarian Alps. Deeply spiritual, yet marvellously urbane in a sense reminiscent of C.S. Lewis, and full of dry humour and mother wit, these war-time sermons are collected for the most part in the 700-odd pages of Vol. 8 of his *Gesammelte Werke*, cheek by jowl with his poems, learned essays, translations of Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, the French Classics and T.S. Eliot. Again and again we are arrested by his ability to relate Scripture to both the immediate political-military moment and the spiritual situation of his hearers. Here national guilt is called by its name, and even in the last weeks of the war one sermon describes respect, justice and compassion for the Enemy as a matter of Christian obedience and discipleship.³⁵

It was known that Schröder had important, powerful friends in Switzerland; it would have been tempting to leave Germany for the duration. But he stayed, in a frame of mind that echoes the words of his author-friend Reinhold Schneider:

I can only live with my people; I would like to walk, and I *must* walk on the same path as they do, step for step. However high my regard for those who emigrated out of conviction, I have never considered for a moment leaving Germany. As events have shown, it is scarcely possible to exercise intellectual leverage upon a country subjected to

dictatorship if one is on the outside.³⁶

On a day-to-day level, then, the evidence is cogent: Schröder's presence and his extraordinary involvements contributed to the creating of something like a "Hitler-free zone" in people's dealings with one another, a refusal to accept the state's total control, and a certain obstinate determination to continue seeing the landscape of the European spirit as still being *Home*. As one who accepted the consequences of being a German in Hitler's Germany, he became a prophetic figure in spite of himself, and a vivid reminder of the power of the Word, the ministry of the laity, and the redemptive role of the "servant heart" in the inner transformation of society.

Endnotes

1. All translations other than those appearing in English editions were prepared by me.
2. John S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 45ff offers a brief but reliable treatment of the GC in English.
3. See Klaus Scholder, *A Requiem for Hitler* (London: SCM, 1988), 135-139.
4. Cited in Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 46.
5. For the role played by the free churches and associations see Erich Günter Rüppel, *Die Gemeinschaftsbewegung im Dritten Reich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969); and Karl Zehrer, *Evangelische Freikirchen und das "Dritte Reich"* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986).
6. I well remember the sheepish sense of connivance with which one learned of quotas for Jewish students of medicine at the University of Toronto and elsewhere in Canada during the 1950s.
7. The key document in this connection is the collection of essays *Die Nation vor Gott (The Nation before God)* first published in the spring of 1933 and edited by Walter Künneth, then a young and brilliant *Privatdozent* in Systematic Theology in Berlin, and Helmut Schreiner, Professor of Practical Theology in Rostock. This bulky work of over 500 pages attempted to place the issues convulsing the churches into the context of Protestant theology: race and eugenics; the Jewish question and the churches; German *Volkstum* in the light of history and biblical anthropology; and finally the challenge of the GC and other racially-based theologies claiming the imagination of the

German church people of the day. One is amazed at the ease with which Künneht and his collaborators, all serious Protestant clergy or lay people, could give hospitality, in highly civil formulations, to much of the Nazi arsenal of ideas regarding Germany's victimhood, western parliamentary traditions, the blight of the Jews, and the need for radical review of traditional views of the care of the mentally defective. The book was enormously influential, and by 1937 had been reprinted five times. Klaus Scholder summarizes the argument of Künneht's pivotal contribution with a balanced assessment of the confusion that it helped to foster (*The Churches and the Third Reich* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988], 1:274ff).

8. Bonhoeffer's argument, developed in an April 1933 article "The Church and the Jewish Question" is succinctly summarized and critiqued, perhaps a bit too gently, in Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, 1:275-277.
9. Künneht reminds us that in the medieval period Jews were customarily received into the host nation in consequence of being baptized (*Die Nation vor Gott*, 3rd ed. [Berlin: Wichern Verlag, 1934], 132). He couples this observation with the reminder, commonplace even in the non-GC Protestant statements of the time, that the Jews, since their repudiation of the Messiah, are no longer a people but live under a divine curse (*Die Nation vor Gott*, 128). It is especially sad then that he fails to reflect in print on what it means for Jews, Christian or not, to be forsaken by the "host" people.
10. See Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 48.
11. Günther van Norden, in a careful study of Barmen in relation to the Jewish Question offers (without a direct allusion to it) a poignant example of the failure of the "Good Samaritan-Principle." A Jewish Christian hospital chaplain in Cologne had recently been dismissed in keeping with the "Aryan Paragraph," but the leaders gathered at Barmen did not find any way to speak out in solidarity on his behalf. Van Norden wonders whether his not being associated with the Confessing Church may have been a cause of their silence ("Die Barmer Theologische Erklärung und die Judenfrage," in *Das Unrechtsregime: Internationale Forschung über den Nationalsozialismus*, eds., Ursula Büttner, et al [Hamburg: Hans Christians, 1986], 1:315ff).
12. See Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews 1933-1948* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1983).
13. A standard scholarly work on the antiquity of the question is still James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (New York: Meridian 1961).

14. For a brief account of these pre-1914 rumblings see Gordon A. Craig's *The Germans* (New York: Meridian, 1982), 135ff.
15. The works of prominent churchmen such as Otto Dibelius, Wilhelm Stählin and Walter Künneth abound with examples of this view. For a more general review of attitudes to the Weimar Republic see Peter Gay's recent but already standard study, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968), 23ff.
16. See Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, 1:99ff; Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), 98ff; Karl Hammer, *Deutsche Kriegstheologie 1870-1918* (München: DTV, 1974), 146ff; and Wilhelm Laible, ed., *Deutsche Theologen über den Krieg* (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1915), especially the article by Paul Althaus, "Der Krieg und unser Gottesglaube," 221ff.
17. Scholder offers the only broadly-based, sensitive and thoroughly scholarly account of the subject known to me (*The Churches and the Third Reich*, 1:99ff), complemented in the case of Paul Althaus by Ericksen's *Theologians under Hitler*, 79ff, note 15.
18. See Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, 100ff.
19. Found in his 1937 lecture at the University of Leipzig, *Völker vor und nach Christus: Theologische Lehre vom Volke*, published under the same title as Volume 14 of the series *Theologia militans* (Leipzig: A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1937). Paul Althaus (1888-1966) was one of the most prominent Lutheran theologians of the period; his voice carried far within Germany at least, and was widely listened to. Ericksen analyses this important paper in *Theologians under Hitler*, 102ff.
20. This strand of the story is carefully elaborated in Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, 1:115.
21. This crucial difference between the case of (at least privately) dissenting Germans in Germany and that of the resistance movements in subjected countries is cogently developed in Klemens von Klemperer, "Reflections and Reconsiderations on the German Resistance," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 1 (1988): 13-28.
22. See Albert Stein, *Evangelische Laienpredigt: Ihre Geschichte, ihre Ordnung im Kirchenkampf und ihre gegenwärtige Bedeutung*, *Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes* [Publications on the History of the Churches' Struggle] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), 27-29.

23. Letter of 29 October 1943 from the deanery of Naila, Bavaria, Landeskirchliches Archiv Nürnberg (LkAN), IV, 572a.
24. In "Official Reports of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, 5.21, 21 March 1941," LkAN IV, 572a.
25. *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1965), 8:631ff. This volume of his collected works contains about two-thirds of the sermons from 1941 to 1953.
26. Letter to Pastor Friedrich Langenfass, Dean of Munich, Deutsches Literaturarchiv (German Literature Archive), 1987 accessions.
27. Also Deutsches Literaturarchiv 1987 accessions. The recipient, as is clear from the Langenfass letter, was a Pastor Hofmann of Munich.
28. See Günther van Norden, "Die Barmer Theologische Erklärung und die Judenfrage," 327; and Kurt Meier, *Kirche und Judentum: Die Haltung der evangelischen Kirche zur Judenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 35 for the heartless GC-inspired prelude to this callous action.
29. Scholder, *A Requiem for Hitler*, 131ff, sketches the diplomatic context of these developments for both Roman Catholic and Protestant leaders. The initiatives of the synods are recorded in Meier, *Kirche und Judentum*, 38-41; and Günther van Norden, "Die Barmer Theologische Erklärung und die Judenfrage," 325-328.
30. Rudolf Alexander Schröder and Siegbert Stehmann, *Ein Freundeswort: Ein Briefwechsel aus den Jahren 1938 bis 1945* (Berlin: Eckart, 1962), 124.
31. I am thinking here of the war poetry generated during the first weeks and months of the hostilities by otherwise gifted poets such as Rupert Brooke, Laurence Binyon and Thomas Hardy, to be found in the anthology edited by Brian Gardner, *Up the Line to Death: The War Poets 1914-1918* (London: Magnum Books, 1977).
32. See Scholder for an account of the role played by Otto Dibelius and others (*The Churches of the Third Reich*, 262ff).
33. *Gesammelte Werke*, 8:596ff.
34. Schröder and Stehmann, *Ein Freundeswort*, 269. The cycle in question, "Wintertröst," is found in Schröder's *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1952), 1:1017ff.
35. *Gesammelte Werke Bd.8*, 683.

36. Reinhold Schneider, *Verhüllter Tag* (Köln: Hegner, 1956), 98.

