Karl Barth's Political Views
in the Context of "Dialectical Theology"

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This paper considers Karl Barth's perspective of the political and social issues of his time as an expression of the extent of his theological thought to his social responsibility. First, I consider the issue that was central for all Europeans in the nineteen-thirties—the "Third Reich." Barth understood this phenomenon as a theological anomaly. His belief that the source of the Nazis' evil was religious compelled him to denounce them. They competed with the Church, and almost succeeded in replacing it with a substitute, Nazi Church. It was this realization which spurred Barth to take a leading role in the effort to resist the Nazis. This effort resulted in the Barmen Declaration of 1934, which helped stop the transformation of the Church into the religion of Hitlerism.

The following section explains the roots of Barth's social thinking. It offers a summary of the basic themes of Barth's commentary on The Epistle to the Romans. The appearance of this book was an affront to the tradition of "Liberal theology" and an impetus for renewed interest in "Dialectical theology." It was largely influenced by Franz Overbeck's criticism of theology for being too closely linked with changing ideologies. This association, he argued, prevented theology from addressing the eternal, unchanging aspect of Christian truth recorded in the Bible, and encouraged its compromise with cultural ideologies.

The subsequent chapters focus on the role of the Church in preserving and proclaiming the eternal Word of God. First, I summarize Barth's views about the Church's relation to the State, and then discuss how Barth applied his understanding of this relationship to the situation in eastern Europe after World War II. During this period, a change in the historical status of the Church occurred. Previously, it had been supported by the established political powers. Now it had to deal with disinterest or even antagonism on the part of the State. Barth's opinions about this new situation were based on the idea that the Church needs neither material support nor ideological endorsement from the State in order to perform its duty and fulfill a significant function.

The last part of the paper examines Niebuhr and Tillich's criticisms of Barth, which were directed toward Barth's reluctance to formulate a systematic theology. In fact, neither of these contemporary thinkers had penetrating objections, because they did not understand that their points were automatically refuted by Barth's assertions about the distinction between theology and ideology as well as between theology and philosophy. The primary purpose of Barth's theological method was to be consistent with Scripture and to preserve the eschatological character of Christian faith. If Barth had yielded to their criticism, his theology might have been more directly reflective of contemporary thinking. However, it would not have retained its value of being free from the influence of the currently predominating schools of thought.
Introduction

For Karl Barth, theology begins with the assumption that the content of the message of the Bible is objective truth, independent of human culture. Therefore, the attempt to base theology on an understanding of human culture is a useless endeavor. For one must take into consideration that human culture changes: it goes through cycles of improvement and deterioration. In contrast, the message of the Bible is eternal. Therefore, to formulate theology around an interpretation of human culture in a particular period is to assume that theology has a scope which, according to Barth, is much too narrow. The limitation of theology to an expression of human culture necessarily results in a need to periodically reconstitute theology when culture goes through changes.

Barth's theology assumes that every event in history can be addressed in terms of the content of the Bible. It follows from this that what is required in order to understand one's culture is to absorb oneself in the study of Scripture. According to Barth, an understanding of the Bible is the prerequisite to an understanding of one's culture.

The source of Barth's distinction between Christian faith and culture is his rejection of the type of theology that religious thinkers during the Enlightenment developed. Their work was based on the idea that theology must conform to the intellectual framework of that period.

Robert Eriksen's summary of theological thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is useful for understanding the tradition from which Barth broke. Eriksen summarizes Enlightenment thinking: "Reason was contrasted with
superstition [...], and theology was often relegated to the latter sphere." (p.6) Theology was under pressure to become a totally rational academic discipline. One of the tasks presented to theologians was to deal with and somehow to make acceptable the inconsistencies in the Bible, the accounts of miracles and other components of Christianity that were unacceptable to the intellectual trend of the times.

After the Enlightenment, theologians could no longer assume that the biblical and traditional picture of Jesus was unquestionably true. Such an assumption was contrary to reason. The logical response was to search for the truth about Jesus through reason, especially using the tools of historical scholarship. This quest had an additional, important motivation, based on a further obstacle to the enlightened Christian. That obstacle was the obviously flawed history of Christian institutions. Perhaps if the true nature of Jesus' life could be rediscovered, Christianity in a pure and beautiful form could be given back to the world. (Eriksen p.6)

To this end, several attempts were made at reconstructing Jesus' life, giving various rational explanations to the miracle accounts in the bible and arriving at an interpretation of the consistency within the gospels through historical-critical analysis. However, Eriksen argues that this attempt to deal with biblical texts "scientifically," to decipher the "unperverted" truth from the text, was unsuccessful.

Reason decreed that some elements in the gospels had to be rejected if the message were to be consistent and believable, but faith for the Christian and vocation for the theologian decreed that some parts of the story had to be retained. The means of accepting and rejecting in the nineteenth century were based on sophisticated and complex scholarship. Historical-critical analysis of the biblical documents is a marvel of modern research. But ultimately the choice of a connecting link could never rise above the arbitrary. The conclusions drawn by individual theologians could perhaps be explained as effectively by their own idiosyncrasies as by historical-critical reason. (p.9)

In addition to the discussion of historical-critical theology, Eriksen describes the trends in systematic theology since the Renaissance. He cites Schleiermacher's Über die Religion. Reden an
Here he defends religion by reference to feeling, a feeling of the "universal" and a religious feeling which, he maintains, all people experience. But the real purpose of the book is to give a rational, and therefore acceptable, foundation to Christianity for educated people. This insistence on reason and faith marks Schleiermacher's career. His rationalism never excluded romantic and pietistic insights. This allowed him to approach Christianity as religious feeling and experience rather than as a body of truth [...]. (p.11)

Eriksen summarizes Schleiermacher's conclusion that "the historical experience of the Christian community" is a "reality that could be found in history and culture which, when sifted and tested, would provide a rational framework for Christian faith." (Eriksen)

Another influential theologian of the nineteenth century was Albrecht Ritschl, whom Eriksen describes as being "anxious to satisfy the god and religion of his day, positivism." (p.11) According to Eriksen, Ritschl believed that "knowledge of [...] Jesus secured through historical research should form the basis of the Christian message." He had difficulties, as did the historical-critical theologians, in trying to produce a cohesive exposition of Christianity. The fact that "he readily gave up those supernatural elements in Christianity which defied reason" (p.12) indicates that he was unable to reconcile Christian faith with positivism without disregarding some elements in Scripture.

Eriksen attributes a similar project to Troeltsch: to devise a rationally consistent Christianity. "He sees science and history as the two overwhelming realities of modern life and he allies Christian Theology to the twin force. The result is a general science of the religious phenomena in history in which Christianity is given high marks for certain of its values which Troeltsch found admirable." (p.12) Troeltsch, like the others who attempted to make
Christianity thoroughly acceptable as a scientific, historically valid school of thought, was unable to find a definitive way of getting beyond the restrictions inherent in this attempt. The events of God's revelation proved not to be fully amenable to rational explanation.

Early in the nineteenth century, Feuerbach had rejected the view that Christianity could become a viable school of thought, equivalent to an academic discipline. He criticized Christianity as being, like other religions, "an attempt to project the best human virtues of strength and goodness onto an anthropomorphic God." (Eriksen p.13). This perspective differed from those of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Trolsch, in that it critically viewed religion as a product of culture.

Against these prevailing trends, Kierkegaard alone stood opposed to the rationalists. He attempted to show the futility of the idea that Christianity could be rational, and that there is indeed value in this irrationality. If faith can be rationally explained, then one can no longer argue that the God to which faith is directed is unknown. Anything which human beings at some level know or can come to know is not truly objective.

Kierkegaard had an extensive influence on Barth. In the preface to his Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, Barth says,

[...] if I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the "infinite qualitative distinction" between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as having negative as well as positive significance. "God is in heaven, and thou art on earth." The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy." (p.10)

Barth builds on Feuerbach and Kierkegaard and further develops a critique of "Liberal Theology" with its basic assumption: with
human beings' gift of rational thought, there is perhaps no limit to the development of their understanding of themselves and their culture. Theologians could look at the Bible as a product of a generation that was less developed than theirs, because it was written at an earlier stage of history, and was therefore necessarily qualified as a source of knowledge. The theologians of this period conceived of mankind in a continually improving process, in a progression toward God, by which the more humanity experienced and learned, the more its quality of existence would be exalted and led farther from deprivation.

In his theology, Barth strictly distinguishes between religion and revelation. Religion is an institution of human culture. On the one hand, it has a unique role because its subject matter transcends human culture, but on the other hand it is fundamentally like other cultural institutions: it is formulated by humanity whose entire activity is conditioned by its fallen state.

In contrast to this, revelation, as recorded in the Bible, is not a product of human culture. God's revelation is completely free. The knowledge we have of the revelation of the Word is God's free act of extending himself to us; it is a knowledge that we can receive rather than attain.

The fact that this knowledge is unattainable re-enforces the idea that theology cannot have as its starting point the study of human culture: rather, it must start with the study of the knowledge that has been received in the form of Scripture.

Not all of his contemporaries share this perspective. In an article written in the 1935 Journal of Religion, called "What Is Wrong With Dialectical Theology?", Paul Tillich criticizes Barth. He finds it unacceptable to consider the separation between God and
man-- just as the opposition between religion and revelation-- as thoroughly and as uncompromisingly as Barth does. The juxtaposition of the one upon the other is too inconceiveable. He claims that there must be more of a connection between the human and the transcendent spheres than Barth allows.

Tillich offers a general definition of theology as "the methodical form of speaking of the human impossibility, and of the divine possibility, which has become a reality." (p.137) He then refers to this realized possibility as an "event," and describes the problems involved in considering this event, or revelation, as "a foreign injection into history." (p.138):

Were an event only a foreign substance in history it could neither be absorbed by history nor could it continue to be operative in history. It is as far from right to call history purely God-abandoned as to call it simply God's revelation. Indeed, when speaking of revelation, one must say that history is always equipped with revelation because it always contains divine answers and human questions. (Tillich, p.138)

Tillich's objection is based on the logical incoherence of the complete absence of the transcendent God within human culture. He conceives of "preliminary procedures" (p.138) which consist of a process of doubt, questioning, and "preliminary erring knowledge" (p.138) which "lead to the ultimate answer" which revelation provides. Without this preparation, the "answer" of revelation would be "unasked, unintelligible, and alien." (p.139)

Tillich verges on a concept of compatibility between man and God. His main criticism is that, "In general, Barth leaves unexplained how revelation can communicate anything to man if there is nothing in him permitting him to raise questions about it, impelling him toward it, and enabling him to understand it." (p.142). He disagrees with Barth on the function of the Holy Spirit:
Assuredly the God-likeness of man is not an unfolding of personality independent of revelation; but it cannot be understood merely as a work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirit—a witness that we are able to understand, since this witnessing takes place not beyond our spiritual life, but in response to the quest for a relation to God." (141-2)

It is for this reason that Tillich qualifies his definition of theology with the claim that it is "the solution of the anthropological question, which is the problem of the finiteness of man." (p.141) Without the basis of these anthropological assumptions, the concept of revelation is "unintelligible." (p.141) In other words, Tillich is asserting that theology cannot begin to talk about God without first talking about human beings. He coins Barth's perspective as being "too supernatural," in that it denies any process from human culture to revelation.

Another contemporary, Reinhold Niebuhr, considers Barth to be naive in his insistence on theology's capacity to encompass cultural issues. He claimed that the interpretation of political events is a field in its own right, and cannot be adequately dealt with on a theological basis. This criticism is based on Barth's collection of post-World War II writings—many of which specifically address political issues—called Against The Stream. In "Why Is Barth Silent On Hungary?", an article which appeared in a 1957 issue of the Christian Century, Niebuhr explains some of his objections to Barth's political writings.

Niebuhr distinguishes himself from Barth by claiming not to be a theologian. He deliberately describes himself this way as evidence that he is a more objective "observer" (p.109) of political issues. He criticizes Barth for being too much of a theologian to evaluate adequately political situations. For Niebuhr, one must recognize that by definition, faith and politics are separate acts: "[...] even a theologian who thinks he can solve
everything by drawing on the wisdom of the 'Word of God' is a man who makes his decisions about proximate ends according to his political presuppositions." (p.109)

He claims that Barth gives "confusing advice" to the Hungarian Reformed Church, and remarks about his Word-of-God-oriented advice,

This advice would be more palatable if Barth were not so interested in passing political judgements while he constructs a theology which disavows political responsibility in principle. He has a framework for these political judgements, which can be discerned below the level of his theological framework. (p.109)

According to Niebuhr, Barth's specific theological framework prevents him from being able to penetrate the true issues in politics. First, it is too "eschatological" and therefore too indifferent to political events. Second, it is built on "extreme pragmatism, which disavows all moral principles." (p.109) This latter point is grounded on the fact that Barth refrains from developing a system of ethics and describing a "Christian morality."

Barth insists on approaching events without the reliance upon a moral system. Such "equipment" allows individuals to be less rigorous in their approach to interpreting issues, because they are more likely to forget the fact that all human righteousness is subject to God's judgement, which is not predictable. Barth claims that Christian faith, which rests on the individuals inability to know the basis of God's righteousness, must preclude a systematic way of discerning ethical decisions.

The main source of Niebuhr's annoyance with Barth is that because of his lack of a system, he chooses not to associate Communism with Nazism as an "irresponsible power" (p.109) and he therefore does not recognize it as a power which must be actively warded against. Niebuhr considers him irresponsible in not stating
this sentiment to which the rest of the West has almost unanimously adhered.

Niebuhr's objection to Barth's lack of a system can also be discerned in Tillich's criticism. While Niebuhr finds Barth irresponsible in his lack of a system of morals, Tillich finds Barth "unintelligible" in his lack of a system of logic.

The purpose of this paper is to consider whether or not these criticisms are in fact justified. It begins, not in a chronological context, with a description of his cultural surroundings and a look at Barth's views and actions in the period during which he was first challenged to respond to social and political issues according to his theological viewpoint. What one perceives from reading a variety of Barth's writing about the events during his life is that his lack of a system does not hinder him in any way from being able to develop a cohesive Christian understanding of the issues which he is confronted with. Rather, the absence of a system in his theology allows him to develop a perspective which is less restricted by the current intellectual trends than his contemporaries. Any system which is devised to make a paradoxical concept more accessible is based on the vocabulary and concepts of that particular period; they are based on the intellectual mentality of the day. The lack of a system in Barth's theology is a sign that he did not rely on contemporary thought-structures to explain Christian faith, but rather relied on Scripture to understand the issues of his time from a less culturally-bound perspective.

The first chapter focuses on the mentality of the Germans during the period in which the Nazis rose to power, which was also the early period of Barth's professorship in the German university
system. Thorough attention is given to the language used by those who gained popularity, so as to be able to evaluate Barth's understanding of their ideas.

The second chapter examines Barth's first major theological project, which was to study and write about Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Although he further developed his thought and changed some of his formulations and emphases in later writings, this early work shows the influence of Paul on his thinking and the fundamental points on which he differed from the tradition of liberal theology.

The third chapter shows how Barth built on the ideas in his commentary on Romans concerning the role of the Church. It summarizes his writing on the relation between the Church and the State, which he felt needed clarification because of the failure of the Reformers to elaborate adequately on the complexities of this relation.

The fourth chapter further develops the idea of the political role of the Church. It considers Barth's views on the East-West conflict, which were based on the idea that the Church should not conform to the predominant political and ideological opinions of the culture in which it is situated.

The fourth chapter discusses Niebuhr's criticism of Barth's political views. It discerns the extent to which Niebuhr fails to understand Barth's basic propositions which preclude such criticism.

The final chapter considers Tillich's criticism of Barth's interpretation of dialectical theology, and considers whether or not it is appropriate for theology to conform to a system of logic. It concludes with the assertion that Tillich's criticism is not penetrating, because Barth's method of theology more closely
conforms to Scripture and to the basic tenets of Protestant Christianity.
God has created me a German. Germanism is a gift of God. God wants me to fight for my Germany. Military service is in no sense a violation of Christian conscience, but is obedience to God. The believer possesses the right of revolution against a State that furthers the powers of darkness. He also has this right in the face of a Church board that does not unreservedly acknowledge the exaltation of the nation. For a German the Church is the fellowship of believers who are obligated to fight for a Christian Germany. The goal of the Faith Movement of "German Christians" is an evangelical German Reich Church.

At the "German Christians" convention in Berlin in April of 1933, this statement was included in the closing resolution. This movement in the Evangelical Church, whose goal it was to make the Protestant Church into a Nazi institution, came to the height of its power in the middle of 1933, winning the abruptly scheduled national Evangelical Church elections by a large majority in July of that year. This group posed a serious threat to the existence of the opposing "Confessing Church," and almost succeeded in establishing a radically changed Confession and constitution of the Protestant Church, replacing Scripture and doctrine with a teaching of "Positive Christianity."

The German nation almost unreservedly succumbed to the attraction of the "dynamicism" (a term Hitler emphasized) of the Faith Movement of "German Christians" and embraced the ideology of "Positive Christianity." Karl Barth was in the midst of this near-conversion to Hitlerism. As a professor at the University of Bonn in Evangelical theology, Barth's position required him to try to communicate the precepts of Christianity over and against the ideology of Nazism to the German public. According to his outlook, the phenomenon of Hitler's rise to power was a theological issue.

The background for the German attraction to "Positive Christianity" was what Robert Eriksen calls the "crisis of
modernity." (p.2) He provides a useful summary of the factors which contributed to the decline of values in Germany which led to the wide-spread support for Nazi ideology. He describes various "destabilizing elements" which exacerbated this crisis. One of these factors was the effect of the industrial revolution, which required very radical social adjustments:

The modern, industrial, technological world produces a rapidity of change in lifestyle and values [...]. Change and mobility in occupation and migration to urban areas wreak havoc with family ties and traditional values, to the extent that vice, crime, prostitution and pornography are all rightly associated with the modern city. Pluralism, resulting from the mobility and inter mixture of people of disparate cultures and values, further adds to the breakdown of a shared set of traditional ideals. (Eriksen p.2)

Second, Eriksen suggests that the shift towards a more democratic society, which resulted from the need to accommodate the masses of workers who were needed for the factories, was taken as an affront by the established and traditional social classes. This shift "gives legal sanction to pluralism" and "denies the right [of the established classes] to impose one set of values or one set of religious beliefs on all citizens." Therefore, "outsiders in society suddenly have the rights of citizenship and the protection of the state to believe as they choose." (p.2) Eriksen claims that in the years of the Weimar Republic, Germany had a more difficult adjustment to democracy than other nations:

[...] Germany moved only slowly to the rhythms of democratic principle, and did so fully only under the forced circumstances of a lost war and the Versailles peace. The sudden political ascendance of the Social Democratic Party and a few Jewish politicians, coupled with the legal defense of pluralism implicit in democratic theory, thus produced more than the normal amount of resentment. These elements of democracy have discomfited representatives of the establishment in all democratic nations, but in Germany the discomfort came quickly and could be blamed on outsiders, the Western powers, who forced an inappropriate system on the German people. The humiliation of a lost war, economic chaos and disaster, political and economic uncertainty, and resentment were all part of the mixture of public attitudes in
Germany during the Weimar years. (p.4)

Eriksen also describes an intellectual crisis during this period, and explains this as resulting from the failure of the ideas of the Enlightenment to retain their validity under the test of historical development. He summarizes that "Positivists in the nineteenth century believed that empirical analysis of the real world would produce reliable knowledge. For a brief period the prestige of scientific method was so great that virtually all human thought was pushed into the categories of science." (p.2-3) This epistemological outlook lost its legitimacy, however, when it's application to knowledge concerning values was challenged. Eriksen cites Weber as one who "could not eliminate subjective, relativistic premises as his starting point," and therefore could not uphold the scientific objectivity of his studies concerning values. It was partly because of the consequences of this concession to relativism that Nietzschean philosophy became influential:

The lost inheritance of Nietzsche and his disciples was not only traditional Christian culture and values, which Nietzsche rejected altogether, but also any hope of finding a real world beyond the symbolic and relativistic world perceived by our senses. With no ultimate reality by which to judge our values, Nietzsche had to proclaim the death of God. And he thereby captured much of the desperate mood of the generation which followed him. (Eriksen p.3)

Finally, Eriksen points out that the outcome of World War I contributed to the "crisis in modernity" because through it, the "intellectual pessimism of the pre-war era was more than substantiated. Technology had somehow gone astray and become hideous. Weapons of destruction gave lie to material, technological progress. And the concept of rational man was shaken by the unreason of the war, both in its inception and in its conduct." (p.5)
The collateral between the decline of values and the progress in technology is seen by many as a central cause of the catastrophe in Germany which resulted from Hitler's ascension to power. Irving Greenberg's comments on the value crisis of the modern world characterize it as one which:

- grows out of the intellectual framework of science, philosophy, and social science, of rationalism and human liberation, which created the enterprise of modernity. [...]
- Modernity fostered the excessive rationalism and utilitarian relations which created the need for and susceptibility to totalitarian mass movements and the surrender of moral judgement. (Fleischner, p.28)

Greenberg understands the dissolution of moral values in the Hitler era as resulting in a "secular absolutism," where there is a total lack of restraint of human self-assertion and moral qualifications, and consequently a predominance of human evil:

- The absence of limits or beliefs in a divining judge, and the belief that persons could therefore become God, underlay the structure of "l'universe concentrationnaire." [...] I will argue [...] that the need to deny God leads directly to the assumption of omnipotent power over life and death. The desire to control people leads directly to crushing the image of God within them, so that the jailer becomes God. (From Locke, 1986 p.124)

The lack of glory at the end of the First World War also contributed to the disillusionment of religious believers. At the beginning of the war, religion had taken on the role of providing the "higher purpose" for one nation attempting to assert itself over and against other nations. Germans understood their cause in the war as corresponding to the teaching of the Bible and the preservation of the Church. For the vast majority, "the union of Christianity, nationalism, and militarism was taken for granted." (Cochrane, p.50) At the end of the war, when the rationalization of the righteousness of their cause was unsubstantiated, the basis of their belief was made insecure. The attempt to maintain the correlation between a righteous nation and a righteous God had been
a failure. It was clear from the background of social, economic, political, intellectual, and theological crisis that nations had to re-evaluate their positions and provide a new alternative to the increasingly unstable situation.

The year 1917 brought the opportunity for religious institutions in Germany to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of Luther's Ninety-five Theses. In a lecture at Princeton, Beate Ruhm von Oppen points out that this celebration

[...] on the one hand did produce some genuine renewal of interest in Luther and new study of his life and work, but on the other hand became the vehicle of a great deal of idolatry of Luther as a German hero, the incarnation of the German spirit, the savior of the European mind from Popery and the enslavement by Rome and the doctrine of salvation by works as well as faith. [...] There were those who saw Hitler as the heir of Luther and the man who would complete his work. (p.23-4)

This dichotomy of approaches determined the theological and political directions of the period starting with the end of the first world war. It was generally recognized that Germany needed help, but the attempts to put a stop to the deterioration tended towards fascism: they were the outcome of extreme anti-communism, extreme anti-Semitism, extreme frustration, and extreme fear that Germany would never emerge from its present crisis. One of these ideologies was characterized by extreme self-promotion of the German nation and race to the extent of replacing the God of the Bible with the god of the Nazi movement. It was referred to as "Positive Christianity."

Hitler introduced the concept of "Positive Christianity" in his Party Program of 1920 (which he claimed irradicable in 1926) in the twenty-fourth article, which concerned religion:

We insist upon freedom for all religious confessions in the state, providing they do not endanger its existence or offend the German race's sense of decency and morality. The Party as such stands for a positive Christianity, without binding
itself denominationally to a particular confession. It fights against the Jewish-materialistic spirit at home and abroad and believes that any lasting recovery of our people must be based on the spiritual principle: the welfare of the community comes before that of the individual. (Matheson p.1)

Around this time, several groups formed which were enthusiastic about Hitler and wanted also to back Nazi ideology with religious fervor. The advocates of "Positive Christianity" considered Christian faith to be perverted by a Pauline interpretation, which placed too much emphasis on self-deprecation and humility.

The whole scape-goat and inferiority-type theology of the Rabbi Paul should be renounced in principle, for it has perpetrated a falsification of the Gospel, of the simple message: "Love your neighbour as yourself"—regard your neighbour as your brother and God as your father. [...] Theology has always tried to separate God and man, tried again and again to justify its own existence by proving that man is fallen, weighed down with original sin, and therfore in need of the salvation the church can offer. We recognise no God/man division, except when man deliberately sets himself apart from God. (Matheson p.39-40)

The Nazis were able to draw support in the religious sphere from the failure of the churches to provide spiritual guidance that its members felt pertained to their immediate situation. Inherent in the affect of the disintegration of a sense of shared values which Eriksen described was a sense of the passiveness and inattentiveness on the part of the Church towards building a conscientious Christian community. The consequent "Positive Christianity" movement emphasized this negligence in their attempts to attract larger numbers, and people responded.

One of the most extreme groups, formed in 1924, was called the Türingian "German Christians." They felt that during World War I, the Church had failed to be involved in the central issue in Germans' lives at that time, which was nationalism. Therefore it was partly due to the Church's passiveness that the Germans failed in their war efforts. Consequently, they suggested developing a
thoroughly nationalistic force through the Church, its function being to promote religious reverence for the nation and its causes.

Another similar group was the Christian Germans Movement, founded in 1930. It believed that "God had created the nations of the earth, each with it special stamp," (Cochrane p.77) and that the stamp of the German nation was not to remain in its dismal post-war situation, but rather to rise to victory over all other nations. Cochrane explains that this group did not receive particularly strong support from the Nazis because its definition of nationality did not include race. (Cochrane p.77)

Both of these groups were basically engulfed by the definitive Faith Movement of "German Christians," the group based in Berlin that most effectively appealed to Hitler. In their Guiding Principles of May, 1932, they stated,

The aim of these guiding principles is to indicate to all believing German men how and why the church should be restructured. These guiding principles are not intended to be or to replace a confession of faith, or to challenge the confessional basis of the Protestant church. They are a confession of life. [...] We stand on the basis of positive Christianity. Ours is an affirmative, truly national faith in Christ, in the Germanic spirit of Luther and of heroic piety. We want to make the recovery of the German sense for life a reality in our church and to give our church real vitality. In the fateful struggle for the freedom and the future of Germany the leadership of the church has proved to be too weak. (Matheson p.4)

Also included in this statement are strong admonitions concerning the danger of Marxism, of inter-racial mixing, of a Home Mission to the Jews, of "Christian cosmopolitanism," i.e. an internationally ecumenical church, and of freemasonry. During the time when the Faith Movement of "German Christians" was formed in 1932, the National Socialist Pastors' League was organized, whose function it was to rid the Church governments of all of those opposed to Nazism. "The Nazi slogans were carried into the Church: repudiation
of the liberal spirit, of Jewish Marxism, internationalism, and pacifism." (Cochrane p.81) By November, this faction had won one-third of the votes in the elections of the Old Prussian Union Church, which was the largest division of Protestant Churches in Germany.

The Rengsdorf Theses, a document listing seven statements describing the theological perspective of the "German Christians" in 1933, is a clear illustration of how many Germans felt that the Church had not given them adequate religious guidance. The document describes the shortcomings of the Church and the "new Church's" reactionary conclusions: It begins by claiming that the traditional Church "does not conform to reality," and that Christianity as a universal religion, as opposed to German Christianity, is "an unreal abstraction." Therefore, the State must now take for itself the devotion that formerly was given to Christian faith. It claims that there is no contradiction between having an "unreserved position in favor of German nationality" as well as "an unreserved position in favor of the gospel." Then it states that-- because of the "character of the German people"-- by means of the Reformation "the gospel has been brought into close contact with us Germans," and that the "uniform attitude" "stamped upon the German" by the Nazis does justice to faith. It follows with the assertion that "the good things" which merit life sacrifice are "healthy family life, blood and soil, loyalty to nation and State, and all in obedience toward God." Finally, the last thesis claims that, in a conflict between Church and State, "the Church owes obedience to the State in all temporal matters." (Cochrane, p.120)

The New Guiding Principles of the "German Christians," issued one year after the original ones, capitalized on the elevated
status the movement had gained through Hitler's official transition to power as Chancellor of Germany in January, 1933. These principles also functioned as an emphatic appeal to those who wanted to re-enforce Nazism through a new church:

[...] a German church merely co-existing with the German people is nothing but an empty institution. It will only be a Christian church in the midst of the German people when it is a Church acting on behalf of the German people, helping the German people in selfless service to recognise and carry out its God-given calling. [...] The new state wants the church. Not to make a pliable tool of her, but because it knows where the foundations of a people are laid. As a result the tasks confronting the church as well as the state have grown stupendously. In their present form the German churches are incapable of carrying out these tasks. The aim of the "German Christians" is to provide the German churches with a form which will enable them to serve the German people in the specific way the Gospel of Jesus Christ lays upon them for the service of their own people. To achieve this we demand:
1. A new church constitution which will appoint the church authorities not by a democratic electoral process, but on the basis of their proven suitability in congregational service;
2. A supreme spiritual authority to take and be responsible for the key decisions;
3. Unification of the evangelical provincial churches into one German Evangelical Church ensuring, however, that special historically based rights will be respected and retained. (Matheson p.22)

The extent to which the promoters of "Positive Christianity" had infiltrated the German Evangelical Church is evident in the "Memorandum on the Present Situation in Germany with Special Reference to the Jewish Question" which was sent to various countries as a statement of the Federation of Protestant Churches. Although the president of the Federation, who sided with those who would later form the opposing "Confessing Church," did not sign or approve the letter, it was nevertheless sent and it did represent the opinions of a significant portion of the Protestants. Its explanation of the "Jewish Problem" brings to mind Eriksen's summary of the condition of values and morality at that time in Germany. The letter describes the situation of the Jews in Germany as follows:
[...] after the coup d'etat of 1918 the Jews, thanks to their good relations with the Marxist parties, gained for themselves a disproportionately high number of public offices and other important positions in public life....Then there was the further fact that the governments after 1918 threw open the Eastern frontiers to Jewish immigration and countless culturally inferior Jews from the East were able to settle in Germany or even secure German citizenship. Hand in hand with this went the Jewish infiltration of scholarship, journalism and literature, of theatre and film, while in many cases German scholars and artists were pushed into the background.... But it was not only the disproportion between the total number of Jews and the number of important positions which they held which aroused such deep feeling in the nation; people began to realise that the Jewish mentality, so evident in literature, theatre and films, was undermining the Christian faith and ethic, family life and the national culture, indeed all those primal bonds without which it is impossible to ensure the survival of nation and state. One cannot stress too much the threat to Christian culture in particular which was mounted under the pretext of intellectual freedom.... One should not, however, look only at the negative aspects; there should, rather, be a recognition that anti-semitism is only the reverse side to much deep reflection about what is truly German and of a determination to structure the German state and destiny in a manner appropriate to this specifically German character... (Matheson p.14-5)

Beginning in the summer of 1933, the new church government launched into a series of extreme measures to promote "Positive Christianity." Now that this movement had gained a large number of supporters from the German people, the Nazi government tried to take a thorough hold over it. Already in April, 1933, Hitler had appointed Müller, who had become the head of the "German Christians" in the previous year, to be his advisor and a deputy in Church affairs, with the goal of establishing a Reich Church. (Cochrane p.89) In May, Müller took the office of "protectorate" for the "German Christians," which meant that he was a representative of a party within the Church as well as a government official.

From this point Müller directed his efforts toward attaining the post of Reich bishop, but even after he tried to attain this office through illegal means, the regional churches voted not him,
but von Bogelschwingh into office of Reich bishop. At this, the Nazi government took extreme action. In June, the Prussian Minister of Education, Bernard Rust, appointed a State commissar, August Jäger, (incidentally a "German Christian") for the Evangelical Church of Prussia. According to Cochrane,

Rust explained that the situation in the nation, State, and Church required that the prevailing confusion and unrest be ended and that the State's action was an emergency measure which had to do simply with "the earthly organization of the Church and its relation the the State... The Church's faith and Confession are in no way affected." (p.98-9)

Jäger then fired members of the Church government who had been previously elected, and in the name of his own authority replaced them with "German Christians." He explained his unsolicited actions by saying,

Since the State in the interest of itself, the nation, and the Church cannot tolerate opposition of any kind, any effort to resist will be regarded as treason. I demand that strict care be taken that my decrees and those whom I have publicly authorized be not sabotaged. Any such attempt would be rebellion against the authority of the State and would be immediately suppressed. (Cochrane p.99)

At this, von Bogelschwingh resigned, and Müller, with the help of the SA troops, took over the chairmanship of the Council of the Federation of Churches, the Kirchentag, the Committee of the Church and its subcommittees. In August, the Church senate of the Prussian Church elected him president of the consistory and granted him title of bishop. On September 27, 1933, he was elected Reich bishop at the National Synod in Wittemberg.

Also in September of that year, the Prussian Church had a general synod at which they started making changes in the Church government structure which furthered their new ideology. Those who "on the basis of their previous activity do not guarantee that they will at all times unreservedly support the national State and the German Evangelical Church" had their positions in the Church
government taken away from them, as did those ministers and
officials who were either non-Aryan or married to a non-Aryan.
(Coch 107) The same group met again in November of that year in
Berlin, with twenty thousand supporters, and agreed on the changes
that they would implement in the Church: The scriptures needed to
be edited of all elements which were inconsistent with the "German
Christians'" teaching of Christian Faith; all Church members who
were not pure Aryans had to be separated into their own Jewish
Christian Church. (Cochrane p.113)

It was in this assembly that Dr. Krause, the head of the
Berlin "German Christians," expressed his intentions for the future
of the church that were even too extreme for Hitler-- not because
of any moral restraints, but because he realized there would be too
much opposition. Krause commented on the recent transformations of
the church:

What Protestants really wanted was not so much a new
constitution for the church or new church authorities but the
completion of the national mission of Martin Luther by a
second German Reformation. [...] The first priority is to win
over the flood of those who are returning to the church. This
requires a feeling for the homeland, and the first step
towards the church becoming at home in Germany is the
liberation from all that is un-German in liturgy and
confession, liberation from the Old Testament with its Jewish
recompense ethic, from all these stories about cattle-dealers
and pimps. This book has been characterised quite rightly as
one of the most questionable books in the world's history.
[...] Our provincial church will also have to see to it that
all obviously distorted and superstitious reports should be
expurgated from the New Testament [...] (Matheson p.39-40)

After this speech, Krause was removed from his position of
leadership and, because of widespread condemnation of the extreme
claims of the German Christians, Müller had to protect his
political position by withdrawing his official connection with the
movement. This was the turning point for the "German Christians,"
in that now the Hitler government realized that associating with
them would do it more harm than good.

Another way in which the Nazis consolidated their power in the religious sphere is by encompassing the Evangelical Youth movement. This was an attempt to firmly establish Nazi enthusiasm into the next generation.

In June of 1933, von Schirach was appointed as Youth Leader of the Reich. Müller assured those Protestants who were concerned about this move that the Reich Youth would remain separate from the Church youth groups. However, in November of that year, the more than seventy thousand members of the Evangelical Youth were officially put under the control of the Reich bishop. Von Schirach announced this with the explanation,

We claim that all other youth organizations in Germany no longer have any right to exist. These organizations have to disappear in favor of the Hitler Youth. I would like to solemnly stress that we do not wish to accomplish this by force but by the magnitude of our efforts. For us it is an intolerable situation that under the pretext of certain special Church interests youth organizations are set up and still stand aloof. (Cochrane p.117)

This action was soon followed by a law that unless someone under eighteen years old was a member of the Hitler Youth, he or she could not join the Evangelical Youth.

Another sign of the extent of the Nazis' effectiveness in that period is the reaction of some of the university faculties to the "German Christians'" inclusion of the Aryan paragraph, (which I will discuss later) into the Church constitution, which prevented non-Aryans from participating in the Church government. In 1933, both the faculties at Erlangen and at Berlin approved of the measure: the Erlangen faculty specifically agreed with the contention that Jews are alien to the church and the Berlin faculty gave its support to the 28 Theses that were the most extreme document the "German Christians" had published, in 1933. Although
by this time many people had realized the danger that the Church was in, and the Pastors' Emergency League had been founded, the position of these educational institutions shows how deeply the ideas of the "German Christians" had infiltrated into German culture.

These measures taken by the Nazi government and the "German Christians" did not go unopposed by the Protestant Church. As an institution, the Protestant Church did not begin protesting against the changes in the church toward the implementation of "German Christian" ideology until it became clear that these were a serious threat to the Church's faith and Confession.

The church had for a long time been plagued with problems of disunity. The Reformation in the sixteenth century was followed by a division of the churches in Germany so that even when the German states were united into a nation under Bismark in 1870, the churches remained as separate regional churches with different denominations. The Prussian Union church had been formed under Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia in 1817 (the three hundredth anniversary of the Ninety-five Theses) in an unsuccessful attempt to unify the Reformed and Lutheran churches. Later, in 1903, the twenty-eight Protestant state churches joined to form a German Evangelical Church League, but this unity was more formal than practical, and the churches remained fundamentally connected to their individual states. (Locke, 1984, P.37)

In 1919 the constitution of the German Reich officially instituted freedom of religion and declared the church to be no longer a State Church, although it provided for the payment of church taxes through the state. Three years later in Wittemberg, the German Evangelical Federation of Churches was formed with the
goal of being able to deliver a unified message which represented the various regional churches, mainly on issues related to the increasing number of social problems. Still, it is obvious from the success that the "German Christians" had in promising a new church that would finally be relevant to the social concerns of the masses, that the church failed to provide a social message which drew the people to a rigorous faith. Church attendance and involvement were at a low point. (Locke, 1984 p.32) Religious thought in that period, as shown by the example of "Liberal Theology," de-emphasized the potential effectiveness the proclamation of the Word of the Bible, and felt that it needed "editing," in the form of qualification and application to specific, individual causes. Cochrane summarizes that in that period, "Theology had become so systematic and academic, so far removed from the spiritual life of the Church, that it had little in common with true dogmatics." (p.76)

The church also resisted reacting to the political events and changes that were taking place during Hitler's acquisition of power. It felt compelled to maintain very closely the Reformation teaching on the relation between Church and State. Cochrane explains that "it wanted to be a 'people's Church,' but the weight of tradition prevented it from abandoning its neutrality in social and political matters and its fastidiously correct relations with the government." (Cochrane, p.54) Once members of the church realized the seriousness of the threat of the "German Christians," however, they countered this group's actions with a consistent effort to try to convince the whole Evangelical Church of these heretical ideas.

Barth had recognized the dangerous elements in the "German
Christian" ideology from the beginning. His Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans came out in 1918 with a second edition in 1921 which was considered to be the return to "Dialectical Theology," which was virtually the opposite teaching of "German Christian" ideology on every point. These early works included a warning against the very ideas that the "German Christians" were advocating. In autumn of 1922 Barth, along with Gogarten and Thurneyson, founded the periodical "Between the Times," which aimed at bringing attention to the necessity of scrutinizing the current problems in theology and reflecting on the problems of the Church.

Besides Barth and his few "Dialectical Theology" friends, resistance against the growth of the "German Christians" was limited to individual protests between the end of the first World War and the early thirties. Otto Dibelius questioned whether serving in the military could be related to the will of God. Later, in 1928, Günther Dehn drew public attention when he questioned the self-righteousness with which nations warred against each other in the name of God. He caused an uproar by advocating the restriction of the honoring and glorification of those killed in war to the civil community rather than the Church. He was refused professorships by several universities and was discharged by Hitler and even temporarily imprisoned.

Actions by organised groups within the Protestant Church started in about 1932, when the Evangelical Alliance published two volumes called, "The Church and the Third Reich: Questions and Demands of German Theologians." (Cochrane, p.79) However, because it was fairly well-balanced between supportive and critical articles, it was not a very extreme act. The later Altona Statement
of January, 1933 was more clearly outspoken as a resistance to Nazi ideas in the Church. It stated clearly the unacceptableness of pastors involving themselves in the promotion of a particular state or ideology and of the possibility that any worldly institution could have a redeeming function or could deserve devotion. It included such strongly resistant statements such as, "We reject any divinisation of the state. If state authority lords itself over the conscience, it becomes anti-Christian..." (Matheson, p.8)

Another sign of the Church's growing consciousness of the danger of the Nazis to its existence and function is Hermann Sasse's article in the 1932 Church Year Book, which comments on the ramifications of Article 24 of the Nazi Party Program (cited above):

About this article, however, no discussion at all is possible... For the Protestant church would have to begin such a discussion with a frank admission that its doctrine constitutes a deliberate, permanent insult to the "German race's sense of decency and morality," and hence that she can have no expectation of tolerance in the Third Reich. [...]

According to the Protestant doctrine of original sin, "the newborn infant of the noblest Germanic descent, endowed in body and mind with the optimal racial characteristics, is as much subject to eternal damnation as the genetically gravely compromised half-cast from two decadent races." And we must go on to confess that the doctrine of the justification of the sinner sola gratia, sola fide, is the end of Germanic morality just as it is the end of all human morality.... We are not much interested in whether the Party gives its support to Christianity, but we would like to know whether the church is to be permitted to preach the Gospel in the Third Reich without let or hindrance, whether, that is, we will be able to continue undisturbed with our insults to the Germanic or Germanistic moral sense, as with God's help we intend to do... (Matheson, p.1-2)

The Church again was compelled to issue a statement clarifying its position when it saw that Müller was intending to use his governmental power to gain influence within the Church, and to change the constitution and governmental structure of the Church. At this point, it started rallying its opposition. In May, 1933,
the Westphalian ministers at the Synod of Bielefeld drew up a
Confession of Faith which expressed its disapproval of Müller's
acquisition of the "protectorate" office.

Shortly after this, Barth made a public commotion with his
pamphlet, "Theological Existence Today," which awoke more people to
the issues involved in the growing conflict between what was
emerging as the "Confessing Church" and the "German Christians." It
was a call for clarity in thinking about the Church conflict which
had reached a critical point. Barth exhorted his readers to devote
their energies toward developing a scripturally-based understanding
of the message of Christian faith as the basis of decision-making
and to think of God in the comprehensive role as Creator,
Reconciler, and Redeemer.

In this essay Barth shows his superior understanding of the
Church's responsibility toward the State. He criticizes the "New
Reformers," a group which tried to compete with the "German
Christians." The New Reformers did not flatly reject the "German
Christians," but disagreed with them on specific points and
presented themselves as having a better program for a new role of
the Church. They agreed with the "German Christians" on the
importance of having a Reich Bishop, which Barth thought was
unacceptable. Barth's major criticism was that they were part of a
general misconception concerning the true function of the Church,
and were not aware of those things which are clearly incompatible
with the Church:

In order to have a particular importance the demand for an
independent Church must contain a positive, confessional,
theological content. This, at any rate, was lacking in the
mouths of the New Reformation men. (1933, p.68)

What was actually needed at this time was a confession of the
Church; a clarification of the true priority and function which the
Church had lost sight of; a re-establishment of the all-encompassing nature of Christian faith, which is required in order not to be confused and vulnerable to the forces of National Socialism.

Bonhoeffer was also a distinctive voice in emphasizing the urgency of rejecting Anti-semitism. He lectured in April of 1933 on the importance of a Christian effort to reverse the prejudice against the Jews. His following on this issue was relatively small. Many more people were willing to take action to save the church Confession than to save the Jews.

This conflict between the increasingly extreme actions of the "German Christians" and the Protestants who opposed them led to the decision to hold Church elections in July of 1933 in order to finally determine whether the "German Christians" had the support of the majority, and if so, to allow them to make changes in the constitution of the Church. The Nazi party made it very clear that they supported the "German Christians" and encouraged every loyal citizen to vote for them. They published very coercive exhortations in the newspaper for this cause and in addition, Hitler gave a radio speech the night before the elections, asserting that

Since the state, after all, is prepared to guarantee the inner freedom of religious life, it has a right to hope that within the confessions those forces will gain a hearing which are resolutely determined to make their own contribution to the freedom of the nation. This latter, however, will not be brought about by the unrealistic forces of religious ossification—unable to grasp the importance of contemporary phenomena and events—but only by the enthusiasm of a dynamic movement. This enthusiasm appears to me to be located primarily in that part of the Protestant population which has set itself firmly on the basis of the national socialist state—the German Christians... (Matheson, p.28)

With this propaganda, many more people voted in the elections than at any previous time (Coch.107); the "German Christians" won by a large majority, and Müller began immediately to increase his power.
It was the formation of the policy against the Church membership of non-Aryans that the "Confessing Church" really solidified its commitment to stop the "German Christians."

Niemöller took the initiative in sending a circular letter to all German pastors to join an Emergency League to save the Church and to uphold the importance of the Reformation Confessions and the Holy Scriptures. After having encouraged pastors not to accept the "Aryan paragraph" and having pointed out the injustice of the numerous dismissals of opposing Church officials which the "German Christians" had carried out, he ends his letter with this salutation:

I am well aware that this alliance [of concerned pastors] will neither redeem the church nor shake the world; but I am equally aware that we owe it to the Lord of the church and to the brethren to do what we can; in these days a prudent retreat to the role of a mere spectator amounts to betrayal, for those under stress have no assurance of our brotherly solidarity. So let us act! (Matheson, p.38)

There was a strong response to this call to action: by the end of September, two thousand three hundred people had joined, and this membership grew to more than seven thousand by January, which amounted to approximately half the Protestant pastors in Germany (Erick p.51). The fact that such a significant number joined and took the pledge shows a clear change in the awareness of the Hitler threat among Protestants. The pledge for membership states:

1. I pledge myself to exercise my office as a servant of the Word under the sole authority of Holy Scripture and the confessions of the Reformation as the correct interpretation of Holy Scripture.
2. I pledge myself to protest against any violation of this confessional stance with all the strength at my command.
3. I recognise my responsibility to do all in my power for those who suffer persecution because of this confessional stance.
4. Acting on this responsibility I testify that with the application of the Aryan paragraph to the realm of the church of Christ the confessional stance has been violated. (Matheson, p.38)
Another attempt to re-assert what the actual teaching of the Christian message is, in opposition to the "German Christians" was Heinrich Vogel's Eight Articles of Evangelical Doctrine, which was written in November, 1933, "because of present-day heresy to serve as instruction for the erring, as consolation of the afflicted, on the basis of Holy Scripture." (Cochrane, p.126)

These examples of the many protests that came from members of the Protestant church point to the difficulty the "German Christians" were having in maintaining solid leadership in the church. In an attempt to suppress the opposition, Müller issued what is called the "Muzzling Decree" in January, 1934:

The controversies about church politics are destroying the peace and retarding the unification of the church; they undermine the necessary bond between the evangelical church and the National Socialist state, thereby endangering both the proclamation of the Gospel and the newly-won national unity. [...Therefore I decree the following:]

1. The church service is for the proclamation of the pure Gospel, and for this alone. The misuse of the church service for controversies about church politics, in whatever form, has to cease. The release or use of churches or other church premises for any kind of meetings about church politics is forbidden.

2. Any one holding office in the church who circulates publications, especially pamphlets and circulars, directed against the leadership of the church or its constitution or who attacks them in public is in breach of the duties attached to his office...

3. Any one holding office in the church who contravenes the stipulations of paragraphs 1 and 2 will be automatically suspended from office and a formal disciplinary process will be initiated immediately with the aim of removing him from office... (Matheson, p.41-2)

This decree also reinstated the legal status of the Aryan Paragraph, which had previously been suspended because so many people had opposed it.

If this move was a test by Müller to see to what extent the members of the Pastors' Emergency League were willing to risk their own positions, they took him up on his call: They read a statement from their pulpits rejecting the decree, and even though more than
two hundred pastors lost their positions or were subject to "disciplinary measures" in the first three months of 1934, they continued to criticize Müller and began the movement to revoke his legal authority as head of the church. (Cochrane, p.132)

During the first half of 1934, a series of church synods were organized throughout Protestant Germany for the purpose of clarifying where the church stood on the issue of the "German Christians'" leadership of the church government. In January, a Reformed synod met in Barmen-Gemark which adopted the "Declaration of the Right Understanding of the German Evangelical Church of the Present" which Karl Barth had written. Other synods in February and March did the same.

The first section in the document is titled "The Church in the Present," and calls for repentance and reflection leading to action concerning the "error" in the understanding of the Christian message, which "consists in the opinion that beside God's revelation, God's grace, and God's glory, a justifiable human arbitrariness also has to determine the message and form of the Church, that is to say, the temporal way to eternal salvation." (Cochrane, P.230) It continues,

In view of the unanimity with which this error manifests itself today, the congregations that have been united in the one German Evangelical Church are called upon to recognize anew, in spite of their Lutheran, Reformed, or United origins and responsibilities, the majesty of the one Lord of the one Church and therefore the essential unity of their faith, their love, and their hope, their proclamation by preaching and sacrament, their Confession of Faith and their task. (Cochrane, p.230)

The second section, "The Church Under Holy Scripture," emphasizes the exclusiveness of God's revelation through Christ as opposed to his revelation in current events, which is false doctrine. It asserts the legitimacy of both the old and the New
Testaments in the understanding that "the view is [...] rejected that the Biblical writings are to be understood as witnesses from the history of human piety; that the New Testament is preponderantly or exclusively the standard for Christian piety; that therefore the Old Testament could or should be depreciated, repressed, or eliminated altogether in favor of the New." (Cochrane 231).

The following section, "The Church in the World," states that an "unreserved trust" or an "unreserved obedience" to worldly laws contradicts the devotion which is required of those who commit themselves to Christianity. It is clearly a response to the "German Christians'" Rengsdorf Theses.

In keeping with the instruction of God's word, the Church gratefully acknowledges that changes in the history of mankind and of nations, the political, philosophical, and cultural experiments of men, are subject to the disposition (Arordnung) of the divine command and the divine patience. It therefore follows such experiments with its prayers of intercession in a sober recognition of their temporal, finite, and limited justice, and also recalling God's Kingdom, law, and judgment, setting its hope in Him who guides all things in order to make all things new. (Cochrane, p.232)

This section concludes with the assertion that since each Christian's primary obedience is to God, it is unacceptable for the church to change the content of its belief out of conformation to a worldly institution.

"The Message of the Church" follows. This again clarifies the primacy of God's, and not of an institution's or a movement's revelation, and this includes the church: "The view is thereby rejected that the Church could or should utter the Word of God the Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer as its own word instead of serving the Word, and therefore, instead of proclaiming free grace, could or should act 'dynamically.'" (Cochrane, p.232)

The last section is called "The form of the Church." It
re-establishes the definition of the church, and emphasizes its claim to have God as its authority, which makes it unique among institutions. "The view is thereby rejected that the Church receives its temporal and visible form at its own discretion or in virtue of external necessities, like a religious society whose purpose could be realized just as well in one form as in another." (Cochrane, p.233) It also clarifies the relation of church and state:

On the basis of the instruction of God's Word, the Church sees in the State an ordinance (Anordnung) of the divine command and divine patience, in virtue of which man may and should strive, within the limits of his understanding of reason and history and in responsibility to the Lord of lords, to discover justice and to administer and maintain it by force. The Church cannot deprive the State of this its special office. At the same time, however, it cannot allow the State to deprive it of its own office; it cannot permit its message and its form to be determined by the State. Bound to its commission, it is in principle a free Church in a State which in principle is likewise free in being bound to its commission. (Cochrane, p.234)

The wide-spread support of this document and the clarity it offered for people to express their objections to the "German Christian" administration of the church led to a conference in April at Ulm, consisting of representatives from churches throughout Germany, at which they withdrew from the "German Christian"-led Reich Church and declared the "Confessing church" to be the true Evangelical Church of Germany. This conference led to another meeting in Berlin on May 2, where the "Council of Brethren" of the Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church wrote a letter to the Reich Secretary of the Interior saying, "A compromise between the differences of the "German Christians" and the Confessional Church is impossible. On the one hand, there is a movement of power politics which is uneclesiastical in its ideas and actions; on the other there is the will to renew the Church
according to its own nature." (Cochrane, p.140). They then called for the revocation of laws that the Reich bishop and the Reich Church had made which were unacceptable to the true, i.e. Confessing, Church, and, as far as possible, for the reversal of the disciplinary measures taken against protesters against the Reich church. At this meeting they also planned for the Confessional Synod to take place later in May in Barmen and for Barth, Asmussen, and Breit be on a Theological Committee to write a draft for the synod. (Cochrane, p.142)

The Barmen Declaration (in Cochrane, p. 237-243), which was the outcome of this synod on May 29,30, and 31, of 1934, is considered by many to be the most important church document of this period. It sought to show the illegality of the actions of the church government under the "German Christians" according to the German Evangelical Church Constitution of July 14, 1933. It professed to object specifically to the "German Christian" leadership rather than the Hitler regime, but at the same time it made clear that some of the violations of the "German Christians" were based on their misunderstanding of how much the state can interfere with the church.

This document represents the the common convictions of the members of the Confessing Church and is therefore to some extent a minimal statement. In asserting itself as the rightful German Evangelical Church, the goal of this Declaration was to find the issues which the one hundred thirty-six delegates-- fifty-three of whom were laypeople-- from eighteen regional churches, representing three different Confessions, could agree on. Therefore, all the extreme opinions were filtered out and several compromises were made. But the synod was still able to produce a positive document
based on scriptural passages which asserted what they believed to be corrections to the recent errors of the church on Christian doctrine. The core of the document is Barth's writing, and is similar to his "Declaration Concerning the Right Understanding of the Reformation Confessions of Faith."

Later on, Barth wrote stronger statements directed against National Socialism, such as the ones in "The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day" (which I will discuss in another section). But in 1934 his main concern was to set up the Church in a position of resistance to the false Church which was administered by the Nazi Party and to produce a unified confession of faith based on Scripture.

The first evangelical truth which it confesses is:

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." (John 14:6) "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber....I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved." (John 10:1,9)

Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation.

This statement is basically a re-assertion of the first commandment, and therefore is not a new message for Christians. However, it is considered in light of the attempts to deify Hitler and Hitler's undertaking which had gained huge momentum in Germany at the time. It cites the first commandment as a tacit rejection of Hitler's deification.

The second statement is based on the verse from I Corinthian 1:30, "Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption." It stresses the teaching that
Christ is "God's mighty claim upon our whole life," and that there cannot be "other lords" through whom we could be justified and sanctified. This is again the application of a very fundamental Christian truth to a current misunderstanding: Apparent in this article is the refutation of the Rengsdorf Theses' claim that devotion to the Gospel does not preclude devotion to the State.

The third statement follows closely Barth's earlier "Right Understandings" which define the church's purpose and cites the passage: "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body [is] joined and knit together." (Eph. 4:15-16). It calls attention to the error involved if the church were to "abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions."

The fourth evangelical truth is:

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant." (Matt.20:25-26)

The various offices in the Church do not establish a dominion of some over the others; on the contrary, they are for the exercise of the ministry entrusted to and enjoined upon the whole congregation.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church, apart from this ministry, could and were permitted to give to itself, or allow to be given to it, special leaders vested with ruling powers.

This statement was necessary to clarify the unacceptableness of the "German Christians" actions in unsolicitedly firing elected members of the church government who they did not approve of. At Barmen, there was a conscious effort to be democratic. They voted on each addition to the document and made an effort to reach a consensus. At the conclusion of the synod they formed an eleven-member "Council of Brethren" to lead the church in its newly declared independent status.
Article five, based on the scriptural passage, "Fear God. Honor the emperor" (1 Peter 2:17), first posits the New Testament definition of the function of the State, and the comments,

We reject the false doctrine, as though the State, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the Church's vocation as well. We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church, over and beyond its special commission, should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the State, thus itself becoming an organ of the State. (241 Cochrane)

Article six is based on two passages: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matt. 28:20) "The word of God is not fettered." (II Tim. 2:9) It defines the New Testament definition of the function of the Church and comments,

We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church in human arrogance could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans.

This Declaration is not ostensibly a political statement, because it leaves out any specific criticism of the Nazi Party. However, by clarifying the Church's priorities within the political sphere, it sets up a situation for the Church to act politically in order to defend its claims. The introduction to the articles states, "[...] the Confessional Synod calls upon the congregations to range themselves behind it in prayer, and steadfastly to gather around those pastors and teachers who are loyal to the Confessions." The Barmen Declaration functions, therefore, as the "enabling act" of political intervention by the Church.

Barth's ability to formulate the basic points of the Barmen Declaration and to play a leading role in defending the Confessing Church against the "German Christians" had its source in his thorough knowledge of Scripture and his clear understanding of Protestant Christianity. The cultivation of this understanding
began with his project of writing his first major work, the 
Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, which was the 
outcome of his effort to view his culture from a Scriptural 
perspective. Because of this effort, he was able to recognize that 
"German Christian" ideology obscured the God of the Bible in order 
to replace his authority with their own.
Barth's commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans first appeared in 1918, during the period of his pastorship in the Swiss industrial village of Safenwil from 1911 through 1921. Before this, he had worked as a vicar in a church in Geneva, where he was able to observe the poverty among the proletariat and the degenerate social conditions in the city which were the products of industrialization. At this point, he was considered to be a activist in the "religious-socialist" movement; he spoke critically of capitalism and discussed the Biblical ideas within a social democratic view of how society should be constructed. He criticized the church for its historical position regarding social misery: "She [the church] has accepted social misery as an accomplished fact in order to talk about the Spirit, to cultivate the inner life, and to prepare candidates for the kingdom of heaven. That is the great, momentous apostacy of the Christian church, her apostacy from Christ." (in Hunsinger, p.26)

Barth's concern at this time was to convey the idea that if one considers Christ's message and allows himself to be affected by the message of the Gospel, he will consequently be concerned with an improvement of society, towards the model that democratic socialism prescribes.

[Jesus] worked from the internal to the external. He created new men in order to create a new world. In this direction the present-day social democracy still has infinitely much to learn from Jesus. It must come to the insight that we first need men of the future to create the state of the future, not the reverse. But regarding the goal, social democracy is one with Jesus: It has taken up the conviction that social misery ought not to be with a vigor which has not been seen since the time of Jesus. (in Hunsinger, p.28)

Toward this end, Barth worked actively to further a more socialist organization of the community: he organized strikes, helped form
labor unions, was for a period a member of the Social Democratic Party, and spoke publicly with the intention of stirring up debate over the moral legitimacy of a system of capitalism and private property.

While carrying out this political activity, Barth undertook to write a theological work. The fact that this work emerged from his politically active period is no indication that he gave up his concerns about the social conditions of his time in order to study theology. Rather, it shows how thoroughly Barth considered the Bible to be entirely relevant to his times. Although he chose to write about Paul, this project included the recognition of the importance of thoroughly studying the Old and New Testaments. In the introduction to his later *A Shorter Commentary on Romans*, Barth cites Luther's remark about the letter and agrees with him:

> [...] it appears as if in this Epistle Saint Paul desires to give a short summary of the whole of Christian and evangelical doctrine and provide an access to the whole of the Old Testament. For there is no doubt that he who carries this Epistle in his heart carries the light and power of the Old Testament with him. Every Christian ought therefore to know this Epistle and study it persistently. (1963, p.12)

Barth's commentary, which he appropriately concedes to be a "preliminary undertaking," (1932, p.2) is the outcome of a close reading of and thorough attempt at understanding Paul's teaching, which leads to the conclusion that "As a Prophet and Apostle of the kingdom of God, he veritably speaks to all men of every age. [...] If we rightly understand ourselves, our problems are the problems of Paul; and if we be enlightened by the brightness of his answers, those answers must be ours." (1932, p.1)

This realization can be recognized in Barth's other writing of that period. In September of 1919 he gave a lecture called "The Christian's Place in Society" at the Conference of Religious and
Social Relations in Tambach. Here one main emphasis was on the understanding the current social and political situation in the context of faith:

We must understand our times and their signs, and also understand ourselves in our own strange unrest and agitation. To understand means to have the insight of God that all of this must be just as it is and not otherwise. To understand means to take the whole situation upon us in the fear of God, and in the fear of God to enter into the movement of the era. [...] For we know that it is in this God-given unrest which brings us into critical opposition to life that the most constructive and fruitful work conceivable is done. God judges the world by setting over and against it his own righteousness. [...] To understand the meaning of our times in God, to enter into God-given restlessness and into critical opposition to life, is to give meaning to our times in God. For giving contrasts with all the theories which attempt to palliate and explain a reality; it is the power of God upon earth; it makes new." (1928, p.294)

This "critical opposition to life" is a perspective which does not consume the individual with himself, but rather leads him to the question of his role and responsibility in a larger context; in his community. It confronts him not with the issue of his personally alienated situation, but with all of humanity's alienation. "There can be no awakening of the soul which is anything but a 'sympathetic shouldering of the cares of the whole generation.' This awakening of the soul is the vivifying movement of God into history or into consciousness, the movement of Life into life." (1928, p.290)

This emphasis on social activity does not, however, bring theology "down" to the same level as political thought and organization, and the two do not merely supplement each other. The broader depth of theology is affirmed:

We shall have to remember that the relation between God and the world is so thoroughly affected by the resurrection, and the place we have taken in Christ over against life is so unique and pre-eminent, that we cannot limit our conception of the kingdom to reform movements and social revolutions in the usual narrower sense. A protest against a particular social order, to be sure, is an integral moment in the kingdom of God.
But it is also a blundering and godless time when Christ is thought of as a Savior, or rather Judge, who up to that hour for some incomprehensible reason has kept himself concealed, and is now emerging into this sin-striken world for the first time. The kingdom of God does not begin with our movements of protest. It is the revolution which is before all revolutions, as it is before the whole prevailing order of things. (1928, p.298)

For this reason, a contribution to the correct handling of theology is at the same time a contribution to an improved society. Barth's preface to the second, thoroughly re-written edition of the commentary on Romans in 1922 explains this.

The book does not claim to be more than fragments of a conversation between theologians. [...] Those who urge us to shake ourselves free from theology and to think-- and more particularly to speak and write-- only what is immediately intelligible to the general public seem to me to be suffering from a kind of hysteria and to be entirely without discernment. Is it not preferable that those who venture to speak in public, or to write for the public, should first seek a better understanding of the theme they wish to propound? [...] Some of us [...] are persuaded that the question, What are we to say? is an important one, particularly when the majority are prepared at any moment to lift up their voices in the street. [The readers...] must expect nothing but theology. If, in spite of this warning, it should stray into the hands of some who are not theologians, I shall be especially pleased. For I am altogether persuaded that the matters of which it treats and the questions which it raises do in fact concern everyone. [...] If I be not mistaken [...] we theologians serve the layman best when we refuse to have him especially in mind, and when we simply live on our own, as every honest laborer must do. (1932, p.4)

Barth was conscientious in his theological method. In 1919 a pamphlet called Christentum und Kultur was published in Germany which included writings by Franz Overbeck, who had died in 1905. Hoskyns (the translator of Barth's revised edition of Romans into English) summarizes the thesis of this pamphlet to be, "All Christian theology, from the Patristic Age onward, is unchristian and satanic, for it draws Christianity into the sphere of civilization and culture, and thereby denies the essentially eschatological character of the Christian religion." (Barth, 1932, p.3) Barth, along with Thurneyson, took this criticism seriously,
and says, after rewriting the first edition of the book, "This warning I have first applied to myself, and then directed upon the enemy," (1932, p.3) referring to those who obscure the study of theology by asking questions which further a misunderstanding of Christian faith. This conflict among theologians in that period regarding the purpose and appropriate application of theology was intensified by Barth's project of writing about Romans with Overbeek's contention in mind. He comments on it retrospectively in his 1932 preface to the English edition:

Theology is ministerium verbi divini. It is nothing more nor less. The conflict in which we have been engaged in Germany for the past ten years revolves round the apprehension of this truth. My purpose in permitting this commentary upon the Epistle of Paul to the Romans to appear in English is to summon an ever increasing number of men to engage themselves in this conflict. (1932, p.x)

The objections to the book demanded a clarification of Barth's purposes in biblical commentary. In the preface to the third edition, Barth responds to the historical biblical criticism school of approaching a text with the intention of evaluating the biblical author's exposition of ideas. He refers to the "Either/Or" which determines a commentator's approach to a biblical passage: either the commentator is completely "loyal" to the author or he is suspicious and stands apart from him and must develop a system of deciphering in which places the author is "correct." Barth rejects the validity of, the possibility of success in, and the meaningfulness of the latter approach. "Anything short of utter loyalty means a commentary ON Paul's Epistle to the Romans, not a commentary WITH him-- even to his last word." (1932, p.18) He then explains this view:

[...] can the Spirit of Christ be thought of as standing in the Epistle side by side with "other" spirits and in competition with them? It seems to me impossible to set the Spirit of Christ-- the veritable subject-matter of the
Epistle-- over against the other spirits, in such a manner as to deal out praise to some passages, and to depreciate others where Paul is not controlled by his true subject-matter. Rather, it is for us to perceive and to make clear that the whole is placed under the KRISIS of the Spirit of Christ. The whole is litera, that is, voices of those other spirits. The problem is whether the whole must not be understood in relation to the true subject-matter which is-- The Spirit of Christ. This is the problem which provides aim and purpose to our study of the litera. (1932, p.16-17)

This relation between human speech and the absolute Word of God is one which the "Dialectical theologians" of the period addressed rigorously. Their goal was to make more people realize that the Biblical God who is separated from man by an inconceivable abyss, is-- despite the separation and the unknowableness-- all-encompassingly relevant and existentially urgent for us. In "The Christian's Place in Society" Barth says,

Our concern is God, the movement originating in God, the motion which he lends us-- and it is not religion. [...] The so-called "religious experience" is a wholly derived, secondary, fragmentary form of the divine. Even in its highest and purest examples, it is form and not content. Our interpretation of the Bible and of the history of the church has too long directed its efforts to the consideration of types of godliness. We shall turn away today entirely from form. The Immediate, the Original, is never experienced as form. (1928, p.285)

Barth exerts himself to communicate that this God must be unknown and that the only way God can be the legitimate God is if he defies human attempts to make him into the advocate of their ambition. He warns against the assumptions that people make as a consequence of having to use conventional language to speak about God. This situation requires strong admonition against what God is not.

No divinity remaining on this side of the line of resurrection; no divinity which dwells in temples made with hands or which is served by the hand of man; no divinity which NEEDS ANYTHING, any human propaganda, --can be God. God is the unknown God, and precisely because He is unknown, He bestows life and breath on all things. (1932, p.35)

The independence, the freedom of God to be the judge, instead
of the tool, of humanity, is what enables God to have a confrontational relationship to humanity, instead of functioning merely as a sanction from "above," which does nothing to counteract the condition of original sin.

For Barth, there is perhaps no more inescapable fact concerning our existence than our fallen state. The fact that it is discussed most often in the context of religion does not mean that it is merely a concept limited to the field of religion: "Sin is not one possibility among others. We do not escape from sin by removing ourselves from religion and taking up with some other and superior thing— if indeed that were possible." (1932, p.241)

Our condition is reflected not only in each individual but also in the history of human civilization.

There is no arrangement of affairs or deportment of behavior, no disposition of mind or depth of feeling, no intuition or understanding, which is, by its own virtue, pleasing to God. Men are men, and they belong to the world of men: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." (1932, p.56) "Fleshiness" is inescapable, and, in the end, impossible to ignore. All of humanity's production must by definition be pervaded by it, and therefore "the righteousness of men is vulnerable even in its own home." (1932, p.76). Because of this fact, human beings cannot be in a proper relationship to God unless they first abandon their own personal pursuit of righteousness apart from God. "Since power belongs only to God, it is the tragic story of every man of God that he has to contend for the right of God by placing himself in the wrong. This must be so if the men of God are not to usurp the place of God." (1932, p.57) This is what Barth calls the "Krisis" of man's relationship with God. If God is not to be merely a construct based on human characteristics, then the real God can not be consistent with human characteristics. By acknowledging the
righteousness of God, individuals relinquish the possibility of their own achievement of an equivalent righteousness.

Barth cites Jesus' sacrifice as the ultimate example of the relinquishment of self-attained righteousness, in that

[...] there is no conceivable human possibility of which He did not rid Himself. [...] His greatest achievement is a negative achievement. [...] "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Nevertheless, precisely in this negation, He is the fulfilment of every possibility of human progress, as the Prophets and the Law conceive of progress and evolution [...]. (1932, p.97)

It is assumably these such passages in Barth's commentary on Romans that caused some to react defensively to Barth's exposition. In the preface to the third edition, we learn that "the literary organ of the Dutch Reformed Church is outraged by the 'negative' character of the book, and its readers are warned to 'exercise great care in using it,' since it is 'foreign to their piety.'" (1932, p.20)

It is this "piety," however, which causes one to remain content with his religiousness instead of being shaken and provoked by it, which Barth rejects as false belief. "'Faith' is never identical with 'piety,' however pure and delicate." (1932, p.40) When piety and other signs of righteousness serve as expressions of religiousness, religion becomes unconfrontational. It functions merely as a condonation of humanity's tendency not to face the problem of its relation with God. Barth is suspicious of all outward appearances pointing to "religiousness." Anything which is primarily an "experience" or a "feeling" of some supposedly holy reality can not be called Christianity. These experiential phenomena can be psychologically explained away. The life of Jesus Christ can not.

The consequences of the loss of awareness of the dialectical
nature of faith are serious. Barth's comment on Paul's verse, "Even as they refused to have God in their knowledge," follows, "That is to say, they became no longer capable of serious awe and amazement. They became unable to reckon with anything except feelings and experiences and events. They think only in terms of more or less spiritual sophistry, without light from above or from behind."

(1932, p.53)

This pseudo spiritualism is destructive in two ways: First, when individuals are not affected by the presence of an objective and absolute judging God, they lack an ultimate value according to which they must maintain their integrity. "Men have imprisoned and encased the truth-- the righteousness of God; they have trimmed it down to their own measure, and thereby robbed it of its significance." (1932, p.45) They lack the ability to consider the "truth" as being something which extends beyond their lives. Second, it inevitably leads to the disintegration of the social organization.

Principalities and powers, formerly but seldom exalted to the throne, are soon established there, encircled with a halo of everlasting power and divinity (i.20). The Creator, the eternal Archetype, meanwhile grows ever more and more "abstract," "theoretical," insignificant, and unloved. [...] The only reality, the unknown, living God, appears nebulous, problematical, and unreal, whereas the world, separated from Him, and men, unbroken by any memory of Him, appear in a nimbus of security, necessity, and reality. The world is worshipped and served-- if it be necessary, quite apart from its Creator. (1932, p.52)

When one thinks of the language and the propaganda of the "German Christians," one can appreciate in the above quotation Barth's success in attempting to understand his times through a reading of Paul.

Another factor that points to the confrontational role of God is that he cannot be rationally constructed or explained. "The true
God, Himself removed from all concretion, is the Origin of the KRISIS of every concrete thing, the Judge, the negation of this world in which is included also the god of human logic." (1932, p.82) This attitude toward reason put an end to the trend in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of making Christian faith amenable to those who only accepted propositions which could be reasonably explained. Included in Barth's rejection of the interpretation of Christianity as a rational school of thought is a rejection of the ultimate rationality of human beings. Barth bases this rejection on his understanding that faith, which is irrational, is the ultimate act of human life. Humanity has no justification of its own; it's only possible justification comes from God, whose will is completely free and is undecipherable by human logic. To concern oneself with rational systems and explanations is to misunderstand the uniqueness of Christianity.

Their [i.e. the men who wrote the Bible, and those who agree with them and quote their words] theme-- and it is the proper theme of history-- is not connected with denying or affirming what men are IN THEMSELVES; it is concerned with the perception of the uncertainty of men in relation to what they are not, that is to say, in their relation to God who is their eternal Origin. (1932, p.87)

One reason why a refutation of God's limitation to rational definition also implies a rejection of human rationality is that the one real connection we have to God is based on an irrational human act:

Only for those who believe is it [the Gospel] the power of God unto salvation. It can therefore be neither directly communicated nor directly apprehended. Christ hath been appointed to be the Son of God-- according to the Spirit (i.4). "Now, Spirit is the denial of direct immediacy. If Christ be very God, He must be unknown, for to be known directly is the characteristic mark of an idol." (Kierkegaard) So new, so unheard of, so unexpected in this world is the power of God unto salvation, that it can appear among us, be received and understood by us, only as contradiction. The Gospel does not expound or recommend itself. It does not negotiate, plead, threaten, or make promises. (1932, p.38)
Again, the confrontational aspect, the newness of the message of the Gospel is not like a new, foreign experience which might only grasp us in a moment when we are willing to be spontaneous and pursue the exotic. It is rather the discovery of what Barth calls our "Primal Origin," which affects us existentially.

We know that God is He whom we do not know, and that our ignorance is precisely the problem and the source of our knowledge. [...] The recognition of the absolute heteronomy under which we stand is itself an autonomous recognition; and this is precisely that which may be known of God. When we rebel, we are in rebellion not against what is foreign to us but against that which is most intimately ours, not against what is removed from us but against that which lies at our hands. (1932, p.46)

Here Barth formulates the basis for the claim that Christianity is the only true religion and that its precepts are pertinent to all people's lives. Human beings were created by God with the ability to recognize that their lives apart from God are insignificant. Human nature was formed with the recognition that human limitation is bridged by God's extension. This is the source of humanity's innate religiousness.

The fact that the object of our faith is objective allows for it to be a "stumbling block" (1932, p.98), but this does not by any means make it obscure. On the contrary, it is the penetration of God's presence which stirs people to take a more active responsibility toward their life.

The more men are aware of their own insecurity and find themselves, under the poignant influence of Christianity, unable to kick against the pricks and to forget that they are men, the more is their attention fixed upon the world by which they are encompassed, the more certainly do they recognize their solidarity with it, and the more passionately do they seek to penetrate its secrets. (1932, p.306)

Barth takes pains to eliminate misconceptions about faith. He deals with the contradiction inherent in the idea that an eternal God can be related to a human being restricted by temporality. The
incompatibility of these two vantage points requires that human beings extend their understanding of conventional temporal schemes, and view faith as a non-temporal "Moment," which "does not belong in any causal or temporal or logical sequence." (1932, p.112)

Importantly, "[..] no comparison between the 'Moment' and works which are done either before or after it is possible. The Being and Action of God are and remain wholly different from the being and action of men." (1932, p.111)

Barth comments on the verse from chapter seven, "For apart from the law sin is dead. And I was alive apart from the law once."

The words I was alive can no more refer to the historical past than can the words we shall live (vi.2,&c.) to some historical future; the reference is to that life which is primal and non-historical, just as the previous reference was to that life which is also final and non-historical. There is no question here of contrasting a particular epoch in the life of a single individual, past or future. The passages refer to that timeless age to which all men belong. (1932, p.248)

From this it is clear that attitudes and works can never determine or further the occurrence of the "Moment" of revelation, but there is a basic requirement on the part of humanity: death. Not physical, temporal death, but the termination of the possibility that we can live other than in God.

When we ask what it is that directs us towards that lost, but recoverable life in God, standing as we do within the world of time and things and men, there is but one possible answer: we are directed by the commandment, by our capacity for religion, by a vast critical negation-- in fact, by the recognition that we must die. (1932, p.251)

And it is because of this requirement that "religion is an abyss: it is terror." (1932, p.253)

Is it because of the morbidity of this perspective that the Dutch were so taken aback? Is such a morbid perspective really necessary? It is neccessary if the Gospel is not to be merely a religion among religions, to have the status that Barth claims for
it-- the "question-mark against all truths." (1932, p.35) If its purpose is to scream out the ultimate existential questions which affect all people, everywhere, in every historical period, then it must speak penetratingly about death.

Abraham believed. [...] As a believer Abraham is what he is. In what he is-- seer, spiritual and moral hero-- his faith-- that is to say, what he is not-- miracle, the new world, God-- is made manifest. If the line of death-- his human disestablishment through his establishment by God-- be removed from Abraham's faith, its whole significance is removed. For faith would then become no more than a subjective human act, and would be depressed to the level of other relative and precarious human actions. Abraham ceases to be Abraham, if his life be not the consequence of his death. (1932, p.121)

Any initial offence at the apparent severity of this language must be followed by the realization that it is a more positive attitude to think of religion being terror and God being merciful, than the other way around. Even though we are unrighteous, our "discord" is "penetrated by the undertones of the divine melody 'Nevertheless'" (Romans 95) This is what gives Christians a sense of hope.

The Barthian meaning of Christian hope can be understood in relation to the doctrine of "Double Predestination"-- God from his eternal standpoint having the power to elect and reject. Barth explains this doctrine more as an illustration than an actual demonstration of God's free status-- as unaffected by human occurrences, actions, and intentions. His position as the ultimate judge who is beyond human influence, is what moves humans to worship God. His measures of eternal predestination are the expression of his impenetrability, and "thereby all our religious and moral ideas are thrown about headlong, like trees in a futuristic painting." (1932, p.349) This aspect of God is the constant reminder that we can not have our way with him, we can not figure him out so as to be capable of using him to our advantage.

This condition is, however, a frustration or a disappointment
only for someone who is "wedded to his own righteousness." (1932, p.350) It forces us to recognize that God's righteousness in eternity is more than just a glorified extension of our own finite ideas about righteousness. "The will of God is not some good thing, operating independently, to which God is subject. His will is rather the source and sanction of all good, and it is good only because it is what he wills," (1932, p.350) -- not because it is consistent with our definition of good.

Eternal predestination is another reminder that we have to be aware of our limited perspective of temporality. Outside the framework of the "Moment" of revelation, one must resort to the categories of election and rejection. However, when considered with regard to the "Moment," the dichotomy is not as simplified. "The secret of eternal, twofold predestination [...] concerns not this or that man, but all men. By it men are not divided, but united. In its presence they all stand in one line-- for Jacob is always Esau, and in the eternal "Moment" of revelation Esau is also Jacob." (Romans 347) It is in this way that one must understand eternal predestination, rather than wrestle with the problem that an eternal condition can be applied to a finite subject. Because of the way God has revealed himself to us, we know of the "victory of election over rejection [...], but this victory is hidden from us in every moment of time." (1932, p.347)

It is again the rejection that we perceive from our vantage point that leads us to the awareness of the justice of God. "He rejects, IN ORDER THAT He may elect." (1932, p.350) He rejects our righteousness only to remind us of his superior righteousness. "[...] yet we obey, because this harsh God is much more than harsh." (1932, p.351) Resting on this, the hope of Christian faith
is a unique hope, and is well-grounded because it has first been rigorously tested.

Men encounter the possibility of election only in the form of a promise. Adventurous belief is required of them. They possess no guarantee or earnest, save the earnest of the Spirit and of faith, which is itself the hazard. Isaac means "Laughter". At what, then, do men laugh? And why? Laughter is scepticism with regard to the impossible possibility and enthusiasm for the possible impossibility. (1932, p.344)

In addition to his discussion of faith, Barth also clarifies the meaning of religion and the role of the church. Religion is both the means by which we are led to God and the means by which we are prevented from acknowledging the true God. Religion and revelation are two entirely different things, and only when one realizes the particular limitation of religion over and against revelation, is he exposed, through the perception of that limitation, to the full implications of revelation.

The true reality of all impressions of revelation consists in their being signs, witnesses, types, recollections, and sign-posts to the Revelation itself, which lies beyond actual reality. Abraham participated also in this typical concrete world: in Circumcision, in the Church, and in Religion. Circumcision appeared necessarily, as a physical reminder to Israel of its divinely appointed particularity. Israel was purified and sanctified as the elect people of God. Religion is the unavoidable reflection in the Soul-- in experience-- of the miracle of faith which has occurred to the soul. The Church, from which we can never escape, is the canalization in history of that divine transaction in men which can never become a matter of history. The distinction between the moral and actual content of religion and the divine form by which it is given character and meaning is absolute and final. (1932, p.129)

Barth emphasizes these thing as signs, as reminders, as things which lack any extraordinary ontological status. Religion, circumcision, and the church are all annihilated at the point of the establishment of the kingdom of God. They are fundamentally incompatible with revelation, but without them, we would be unattuned to our dependence on God.

Here we have reached the meaning of religion. In the
inexorable reality (vii. 7b-11) of this supreme human possibility sin is shown forth as the power which reigns within the closed circle of humanity. Nevertheless, its power is bounded by the freedom of God, of God Himself, and of God alone. But it has no other boundary. This is the meaning of the law: it sharpens our intelligence that we may perceive (vii. 6) the sheer impossibility of our attaining that freedom from the law, that service in newness of the spirit, at which we have gazed-- outside the frontiers of religion. (1932, p.257)

The church has an especially complex function and value, because, on the one hand, it cannot avoid offering itself in its "thingness." The immediacy of God is lost when it is communicated through the earthly church, where "faith, hope, and love are directly possessed, and the kingdom of God directly awaited, with the result that men band themselves together to inaugurate it, as though it were a THING which men could have and work for." (1932, p.332) Typically, the church functions "for the benefit of those who cannot live with the Living God, and yet cannot live without God (the Grand Inquisitor!)." (1932, p.332) It is the compensation in the world for the ungraspableness of the free God.

The tendency of the church to remain too heavily grounded in this-worldly conceptions in its proclamation of the Word is not a reason to disavow its potential to function as a unique institution. It has a responsibility to a divine calling, but it is constituted of human beings who tend to cling to their conventional framework. "Characteristic of men is a tenacious, profitless opposition to God. And this also is characteristic of the church." (1932, p.390) This is inescapable. We are fallen and are unable to adequately speak about the truth. However, this does not mean that we should cease to speak at all. "The bearer of revelation himself lives of the recognition that God is declared [by him] to be God by his [own] inadequacy." (1932, p.80) The authors of the Bible speak in spite of this, and attempt to accommodate for their inadequacy by
using parables.

The paradox of the final, despairing inadequacy of human speech as a medium for expressing the Truth is a parable of the absolute miracle of the Spirit. Our almost intolerably one-sided and narrow-minded presentation of the thought of eternity, which we can avoid only by talking about—something else, is, nevertheless, a parable of the violent and direct claim eternity imposes upon us. (1932, p.333)

Because we know that, even including faithful men, "evey man [is found to be] a liar" (1932, p.80) when his words are set against the Word of God, we have no authority to condemn the church for being guilty and not living up to its responsibility of adequately communicating the message of God's revelation. We must accept the church because it is a reflection of ourselves. Given all of its "tribulation" and all of its "guilt," the church is also that institution which is able to point beyond itself. This is why it deserves our participation.

Barth conceives of the church as divided into two parts: the "Church of Esau" and the "Church of Jacob," the first being the worldly, historical church and the second being the non-historical, ideal church, which the historical church can only try, inadequately, to reflect. The supreme expression of this inadequacy is the crucifixion of Christ. "The Church seeketh after God; and when it meets Him, Being unable to comprehend Him, it rejects Him. But when this catastrophe is recognized, the reconciling of the world with God occurs." (1932, p.406)

Our activity within the church must center around the ramifications of the complexity, rather than the simplicity, of the difference between Jacob and Esau.

The very life of Esau, questionable as it is, depends upon Jacob; and he is Esau only because he is not-Jacob. This being so, all problems concerned with the purification of the Church of Esau from its many corruptions are altogether secondary; [...] Only one thing can cause us great sorrow and unceasing pain (ix. 2): and that is the rugged problem as to whether the
theme of the Church does anything more than disclose the
deceitfulness of men. Does it also disclose the Truth of God?
Have we lost the Church of Jacob? Or do we possibly, in some
way or other, actually belong to the impossible, unknown, and
invisible Church? [...] our duty is to take seriously to heart
the known tribulation of the Church, and to wrestle with God,
the God of Jacob: I will not let thee go, except thou bless
me. (1932, p.343)

Instead of rejecting the church as unpure, we give it our
reserved affirmation and commitment. We acknowledge our own
tribulation and guilt in accepting that of the church, but also
submit ourselves and the church to the judgment of God. "This it
is-- and here the Church is handled most severely-- which frees
from guilt the man who proclaims the Word of God in the Church
against the Church. For in acting thus, he is himself most hardly
hit of all." (1932, p.371)

Barth's concluding statements about the church are important
in regard to his further work for which his commentary on Romans
was a basis and an introduction. Because this book was largely a
protest about the way theology had been considered for many
generations preceding Barth, it might have risked being only a
criticism without a positive alternative. But Barth succeeds in
expressing the "No!" in his understanding without being paralyzed
by it. He offers a view of the purpose of the Church and religion
which is pregnant with admonitions but which nevertheless is a
recognition of the potential good which it might realize. He does
not lose sight of the goal of human beings to dispossess themselves
of their illusions. By maintaining a positive attitude of hope, he
offers a description of Christian faith which is fulfilling.
Barth's 1938 essay, "Church and State," of which the literal translation is "Justification and Law," explains the basis on which all of his political work is founded, and gives the reasons for his actions against the Nazi State. The essay is a response to what he considers to be a shortcoming in the literature of the Reformation concerning the Church's relationship to the State, which, as he understands, resulted from an attitude toward the relationship between church and state in terms of human justice rather than divine justification. Barth considers the Reformers' perspective of the state and church to be "side by side," that they conceived of "sterile and dangerous separations" (Herberg, p.105) between these two realms. Barth's main criticism of the Reformers is that they based their understanding "not on the Gospel but on the law." (p.104) His claim is that the Reformers only dealt with the easy questions regarding this relationship:

The fact that both realities exist: divine justification and human justice, [...] -- all this has been clearly and powerfully emphasized for us by the Reformers. And they took great pains to make it clear that the two are not in conflict, but that they can very well exist side by side, each being competent in its own sphere. [...] Clearly we need to know not only that the two are not in conflict, but first and foremost, to what extent they are connected. (p.102)

In trying to compensate for the lack of attention to this issue on the part of the Reformers, Barth begins with the question, "Is there an actual, and therefore inward and vital, connection between these two realms?" (p.106) Being the conscientious theologian that he is, he looks to the New Testament for an answer.

He considers the Jesus-Pilate episode as an example of the relation between justice and justification. The state-- the administer of justice, rightly has jurisdiction over Jesus-- not to
decide whether he is the true Son of God, for "to the question of truth, the State is neutral," (p.110) but to decide whether he is disturbing the law and order, whether he is a menace or criminal who needs to be controlled. The state has a right, granted by God, to this authority. However, the State's criteria for measuring whether or not someone is justified are not sufficient for all situations, and the scene of Jesus' persecution is an example of the shortcomings of the state in dealing with a matter of a complex truth. In Pilate's opinion, Jesus was not a guilty man, and did not deserve to be crucified, but because of the pressure from the throngs, because he felt no one else agreed with him, he allowed the crowds to decide, and gave up his right to use his God-ordained State power to assert what he considered to be true justice.

In this encounter of Pilate and Jesus the "demonic" State does not assert itself too much but too little; it is a State which at the decisive moment fails to be true to itself. Is the State here an absolute? If only Pilate had taken himself absolutely seriously as a representative of the State he would have made a different use of his power. Yet the fact that he used it as he did could not alter the fact that this power was really given him "from above." (p.113)

But the State is not capable of asserting true justice. That is where the corresponding act of God comes, and must come only from God. If the State were capable of upholding true justice, there would be no need for God. However, the events of revelation point to the shortcomings of the state and of human justice.

Even at the moment when Pilate (still in the garb of justice! and in the exercise of the power given him by God) allowed injustice to run its course, he was the human created instrument of that justification of sinful man that was completed once for all time through that very crucifixion. (p.110)

Because of this, the role of the state in carrying out justice is closely connected with God's acts of justification.

The ability of the state to judge any given situation is
limited by its lack of the knowledge which God has. But as the formal representation of the sinfulness of man, as the institutionalization of man's separation from God, it provides the situation to which God then responds. In releasing Barabbas and in crucifying Jesus, the crowd was only carrying out their strongest human characteristic, to which the State conformed. But this led, with the mercifulness of God, to the redemption of all humanity. Therefore Barth sees the authority of the State as closely connected to the acts of God: "[...] humanly speaking, the Roman governor became the virtual founder of the Church," (p.111) because it was Pilate's restriction of the State's potential supremacy in maintaining justice which led to the intercession of divine justice.

This is also a reflection of the fact that justice can not lead to justification. It is again the confrontational aspect, the revolutionaty aspect of divine revelation which calls into question human justice. Given the confrontational aspect of the Gospel, it would have been impossible for the crowds to do anything else besides reject Jesus and feel compelled to put a stop to his preaching. Jesus' role includes his inability to be compatible with the system of justice in the world. It is because human justice is not pure that divine justification is made manifest.

Barth goes on to comment on the relationship between Church and State from the creation to the coming of the kingdom. One problem he sees with having too narrow a perspective on the simple separation between Church and State is the consequent misunderstanding of the eschatology of the state. Barth considers the concept of the final "annihilation" of the state to be false, and based on a non-contextual translation of 1 Corinthians 15:24:
"Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power." Barth points out that "[…] immediately afterwards, in verse 25, the passage runs: 'He must reign till He hath put all His enemies under His feet'-- that is, till He has sovereign power over them." (p.116)

Partly what is meant by these enemies of Christ are the "rebellious angelic powers" (p.116) behind the State, which are part of creation but "may indeed become wild, degenerate, perverted, and so become a 'demonic' power," (p.115) as exemplified by Pilate's state. But because they are created by God and are therefore forever affected by this relationship, "from the first, […] they do not belong to themselves. From the first they belong to Jesus Christ." (p.117) This means not that the rebellious angelic powers can be objects of divine justification, but that "in Christ the angelic powers are called to order and, so far as they need it, they are restored to their original order." (p.117)

Because the state is considered from this perspective as being fundamentally and ultimately dependent on God, it is not a realistic possibility for the state to gain any fulfillment through itself. The attempt to reach this goal would correspond to a human being's attempt to be independent of God. "[…] The State becomes 'demonic' not so much by an unwarrantable assumption of autonomy--as is often assumed-- as by the loss of its legitimate, relative independence, as by a renunciation of its true substance, dignity, function, and purpose, a renunciation which works out in Caesar worship, the myth of the State, and the like." (p.118)

Because of this fluctuation of the State between its more demonic and more angelic periods, it is the duty of the Church to
decide whether the State is acting more or less rebelliously.

According to 1 Corinthians 12:10 the Church receives, among other gifts, that of "discerning the spirits." If by these "spirits" we are to understand the angelic powers, then they have a most significant political relevance in preaching, teaching, and in pastoral work. (p.120)

The reason why the Church has such an urgent interest in the State and must always be concerned with the degree of the State's rebelliousness according to its origin in God, has to do with the fact that the Church's ultimate destination is its annihilation. It's role and existence is dependent on the separation between God and man, whereas with the return of Jesus it will be the State which is realized into the "real" State: the kingdom of Heaven. Barth considers this to be unambiguous: "Of one thing in the New Testament there can be no doubt: namely, that the description of the order of the new age is that of a political order. [...] The Church sees its future and its hope, not in any heavenly image of its own existence but in the real heavenly State." (p.124)

However, the only thing the Church can do to prepare the way for the new age is to proclaim the Word of God, to teach the Gospel. This mission is directly related to the State, according to Barth: "[...] since it is our duty to pray for all men, so we should pray in particular for kings and for all in authority, because it is only on the condition that such men exist that we can 'lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.' (1 Timothy 2:2)." (p.128) This peacefulness is necessary as a condition for the spreading of the Word, because peacefulness implies that all members of the community are free—free to accept the Gospel and free to act on its teaching. If the state maintains peace, the people will be more free to preach and to hear the Word of God. The prayer of the Church for the State and the State's
maintenance of peace is the "mutual guarantee" (p.129) between the Church and State-- a guarantee which is, however, limited to this age.

If the Church hopes for and relies on the peaceful order of the State, it must also have an order. For Barth, the "authority of the apostolate" (p.133) is extremely important: "How could it [the Church], and how can it, live out the teaching with which it has been entrusted and yet, in its own realm, dispense with law and order, with the order that serves to protect the teaching?" (p.133)

This is another factor which draws together the Church and the State, and shows that these two institutions are not clearly separated according to their function. "The fact that the Church has had to assume a 'certain' political character is balanced by the fact that the Church must recognize, and honor, a 'certain' ecclesiastical character in the State." (p.134)

Barth elaborates on ecclesiastical law in Church Dogmatics (IV/2). (1958 p.716-26) The Church government must function primarily for the people outside the institution of the Church, rather than for its own self-promotion. One of the main purposes for having a good order within the Church is to show people outside the Church that guidance from the Gospel produces a better community.

The fact that the Church government has the Word as its focal point does not insure that it will flawlessly carry out a legal order that is superior to that of the State. The institution of the Church, being administered by human beings, can turn away from God and lose sight of its divine authority. But its effectiveness in general is not belittled because this possibility-- of the Church falling away from God-- is something the Church must in all cases
constantly work against. The Church is reconciled to deal with this problem, and has a sense of hope despite its limitations.

It is not a question of setting up the law and therefore the kingdom of God on earth. For this has been set up already, and its manifestation is the work neither of the world nor of the Church. More modestly, it is a question of clarifying and deepening, of simplifying and differentiating, of loosening and strengthening, in short of correcting the law which obtains in the world. This is genuinely necessary at every point. (1958, p.725)

Even though the Church is faulty, because of its primary purpose it can bring to attention its own as well as the State's divine origin. In "The Civil Community and the Christian Community," Barth writes, "if the Church takes up its share of political responsibility, it must mean that it is taking that human initiative which the State cannot take; it is giving the State the impulse which it cannot give itself; it is reminding the State of those things of which it is unable to remind itself." (1954, p.33)

Given this significant connection, it is inappropriate for the Church to refrain on principle from any action towards the State. At this point Barth further develops the concept of prayer: The Church cannot do anything to directly influence the State in better reaching its ideals, but it can pray for the success of the State. "Far from being the object of worship, the State and its representatives need prayer on their behalf. In principle, and speaking comprehensively, this is the essential service which the Church owes to the State." (Herberg, p.136) This prayer for the State can and must lead to actual intercession in the case of the State's not allowing the Church the freedom to preach the Word freely. Since it is the duty of the Church to pray for the State, -- a duty that has its authority from God -- then if the State does not allow the Church to do this, the State is unknowingly going against what is best for itself, and the Church should not allow
the State to act so self-destructively.

Christians would, in point of fact, become enemies of any State if, when the State threatens their freedom, they did not resist, or if they concealed their resistance—although this resistance would be calm and dignified. [...] If the State has perverted its God-given authority, it cannot be honoured better than by this criticism which is due to it in all circumstances. For this power that has been perverted, what greater service can we render than that of intercession? (Herberg, p.139)

Barth goes on to clarify what is required of the Church in its responsibility toward the State beyond merely complying with its fundamental demands. The commitment of prayer and the guarantee to support the State consists in "[...] positive political action, which may and must also mean political struggle." (p.144) Because we give ourselves the task of praying, we must be willing to act on what we pray for. "Can we ask God for something which we are not at the same moment determined and prepared to bring about, so far as it lies within the bounds of our possibility?" (p.145) This action must include even revolutionary action— the overthrowing of a State in the case that it prevents the proclamation of the Word of God.

Barth's own political involvement was exemplary in so far as he made concrete political commitments without ever losing sight of the status of political causes compared with the status of faith. He explains his membership in the German Social Democratic Party in a letter to Paul Tillich of April 2, 1933:

Membership in the SPD does not mean for me a confession to the idea and world view of socialism. According to my understanding of the exclusivity of the Christian confession of faith, I can "confess" myself neither to an idea nor to a world view in any serious sense. Hence I also have no necessary intrinsic relation to "Marxism" as such. [...] As an idea and world view, I can bring to it neither fear nor love nor trust. Membership in the SPD means for me simply a practical political decision. Placed before the various options that confront a person in this regard, I consider it right rebus sic stantibus to espouse the party (1) of the working class, (2) of democracy, (3) of antimilitarism, and
The implications in Christian theology of political activism is a theme that Barth considered very important in his publications about the danger to the Church of political movements in Europe in the time of Hitler's rise to power. In his post-war essay, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community" (1946), he writes,

This gospel which proclaims the King and the Kingdom that is now hidden but will one day be revealed, is political from the very outset, and if it is preached to real (Christian and non-Christian) men on the basis of a right interpretation of the Scriptures it will necessarily be prophetically political. (1954, p.46)

The correct interpretation of Scripture is fundamental to an approach to political activism because it allows one to make decisions about whether the State to which Christians have responsibility is using its authority to carry out justice. The God of the Scriptures functions as the measure for the exemplification of good power. In 1946, Barth said in a lecture in Bonn, You remember well how Hitler, when he cared to speak of God, called him the "almighty." But the "almighty" is not God; who God is is not to be understood with reference to the ultimate embodiment of power. And whoever calls God the "almighty," is not talking about God at all, for the "almighty" is evil, as is "power as such." The "almighty" is chaos, [...] it is the devil [...]. Where power-as-such is honored and respected, where power-as-such seeks to establish the law, there we also have the "revolution of nihilism" (Hermann Rausching) [...]. Power-as-such is evil, it is the end of everything. The power of God, real power, stands in contradiction to this power-as-such. (Locke, 1986, p.131)

Because the Church is the only institution which perceives the State in terms of its origin in God, it is unique in its ability to judge the State and to encourage it to better conform to the "real" State which will ultimately replace it. And this ability to judge is again the source of the Church's respect for and "subjection" to
the State. The Church must "place their stakes" on the justice of the State if it is to depend on and pray for a just State. It is consistent with this that all Christians should pay taxes, obey the laws, and comply with the military service requirements of the State; it is in the interest of their own freedom.

Only when the State tries to gain a human commitment which belongs exclusively to the Church, then it must be refused. One example is taking an oath which would infringe on the freedom of the proclamation of the Word. Another example is accepting an ideology that has certain doctrines pertaining to the "inward" (Herberg, p.143) life of human beings. "When the State begins to claim 'love,' it is in the process of becoming a Church, the Church of a false God, and thus an unjust State." (Herberg, p.143)

Barth saw in the National Socialist State precisely that State which the Church must resist. In his 1939 essay, "The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day," he describes how National Socialism has none of the characteristics of the New Testament definition of the office of the State: "As a political experiment it has been revealed as a supreme destruction of all order, all justice and all freedom, and of all authority as well." (1939, p.52) He backs this statement by citing the Nazis' use of a regulated press, of falsified elections, of terror methods, and persecutions without trials.

The other and even more seriously threatening aspect of National Socialism, which should provide the impetus for the Church to resist and intercede and prevent its accession to power, is that it makes totalitarian demands on its members which directly conflict with the Christian faith: it "does not merely limit human freedom, but it annihilates it!" (1939, p.38) It makes a claim to
be an all-encompassing ideology, to be a sufficient philosophy of life for its followers.

National Socialism dares to come forward and act as a totalitarian and radical dictatorship because it has exalted itself and its own fundamental principles, to be a myth--principles which are first of all and per se political--Germany, nationality, Aryan race, the idea of "leadership," and of dependence on leaders, and the ability to defend oneself, etc. [...] National Socialism is a proper Church, a very secular one, but one which from its whole inventory should be recognized as such; a Church of which the real and ardent affirmation is only possible (with or without the Rosenberg Doctrine) in the form of faith, of mysticism, and of fanaticism. (1939, p.43)

Because the National Socialist State makes these claims, it is impossible for Christians to live as responsible Christians without taking action to stop this false church which is an immediate threat to the true Church.

Barth concludes "Church and State" by emphasizing the importance of the Church first having a conscientious existence according to its internal function in order to act constructively in its relation to the State. This primary function is to teach "the gospel of justification by faith alone; [...] its action consists in true scriptural preaching, and teaching, and in the true and scriptural administration of the sacraments. When it performs this action the Church is, within the order of creation, the force which founds and maintains the State." (p.147) Again the connection exists that if the Church is conscientious in its particular territory, the State will not be able, in its destructive form, to seize this territory-- it would not have the opportunity to become a false Church if the real Church were adequately fulfilling its function.

Barth's recognition of the importance of the Church to be rigorous in its assessment of its own actions, and the destructive consequences of its failure to do this, had a significant effect on
his views concerning the East-West conflict.
The Responsibility of the Church in the East-West Conflict

Barth's leading role in Barmen reinforced his importance as a theologian which had begun with the publication of the second edition of his book on Romans. At the end of the war, many expected him to repeat his exhortations for church resistance in the new struggle which the church faced during the rise to power of the Soviet State. However, instead of seeing the Communist challenge to the Church as a parallel of Nazism and therefore as a heretical threat to replace the true Evangelical Church, he saw it as an affront to the Church which provided the opportunity for critical reflection and reconstructive action.

Barth understood the power of fear to cause rash reactions in such a conflict. During the period of the build-up of the Cold War and the Iron Curtain, Barth abstained from the common practice of intense anti-Communist propaganda. His reflections on the conflict express a perspective which is objective enough to weigh the weaknesses of both sides, and therefore to perceive the futility of either side's pointing its finger at the other, thereby claiming its own blamelessness. Barth's detachment from this conflict is rooted in the primacy of his Christian faith. None of the issues involved in this conflict were weighty or urgent enough to merit the conviction which adherence to Christian dogma requires.

In Barth's 1949 essay, "The Church Between East and West," he reduces the conflict on the one hand to a power struggle between the United States and Russia. In this respect, the conflict was not the attention Christians, or any other segment of the population, because it does not have to do with the values which each system embraces, but merely revolves around the competition of two
governments. "What they have in common is, finally, this: that they are both afraid of the other, because they both feel encircled and threatened by the other." (1954, p.129) The problem as he sees it lies in the refusal of both sides to realize this. Each in its own insecurity disregards criticism by the other. Each rallies for defense and further convinces itself of its faultlessness. For its own security, it calls for thorough support from its citizens in its self-assertion. Theologians like Emil Brunner responded to this summons and aligned themselves with the Western against the Eastern cause and called on others, like Barth, to join them.

However, Barth refrained from asserting the superiority of one side over the other. He thought that members of the Church should not become involved in such a conflict, and tried to direct attention to more important issues:

It would be a great gain for the whole discussion of the East-West problem if we were to become quite clear as Christians, at any rate, that fear must not be allowed to be our counsellor in this matter. That is one thing which we have to tell ourselves and our fellows today. (1954, p.131)

He recognized the conviction of each side that the other has totally wrong assumptions about the function of government. Here again he reminds Christians that the Church, in regard to its function, is unaffected by these differences. The Christian Community cannot let its viewpoints be limited by geo-political boundaries. "[...] we must be all the more on our guard against regarding our Western judgement as the right and Christian judgement. We have, precisely because we are here in the midst of the Western world, every reason to remember our duty and our freedom as Christians." (1954, p.135)

Barth's opinions about the Western economic system were very critical and they allowed him to view the Soviet project with more
tolerance. In *Church Dogmatics* (III/4) he criticizes the kind of society which capitalism fosters as amoral: A society "cannot delegate its responsibility to others, particularly its responsibility for so much mean, dependent, and mechanical work, and for the fact that so much of it is not only badly paid but is meaningless and nonsensical work which poisons and undermines society at its roots by rendering man's very existence meaningless and nonsensical." (1961, p.533) In this statement, Barth uses Marxian language and acknowledges Marx's understanding of the problems with a capitalist society as insightful. But Barth's views are not primarily Marxist; they are Biblical: The valuable components of Marx's socialist theory are the ones which Barth sees as consistent with the descriptions of social justice included in the Bible.

For Barth, Marx touched on a truth that was expressed in the Bible and which he himself reaffirmed in his observations of social misery. During the period of his pastorship in Safenwil, he was indignant about the quality of life for the industrial workers and also loudly criticized the moral shortcomings of a system of private property. A system based on competition and unconstrained profit-seeking was repulsive to him. Therefore, although Communism was not a solution and was also an objectionable form of State, it was nevertheless an attempt to find an alternative to a horribly unjust system.

What has been tackled in Soviet Russia-- albeit with very dirty and bloody hands and in a way that rightly shocks us-- is, after all, a constructive idea, the solution of a problem which is a serious and burning problem for us as well, and which we with our clean hands have not yet tackled anything like energetically enough: the social problem. (1954, p.139)

In Barth's discussions about the dangers of Western
narrow-mindedness, he also calls into question the shortsightedness of the East. In this sense, Barth is not only acting as a critic, but he is urging for constructive changes by both sides.

Barth's emphasis is that instead of seeing the "Communist threat" as a threat which pertains to the existence of the Church, one should think of it as an opportunity to reconsider the integrity of the church, to consider the possibility that the Communists arrived at their criticism and negative attitude toward the Church because of a real lack of integrity on the part of the Church.

We are being asked about our own faith: where, then, is the Christian West that could look straight into the eyes of the obviously un-Christian East even with a modicum of good conscience? Whence has the East derived its godlessness if not from the West, from our philosophy? [...] Whence does it draw its sustenance, this non-Christianity, if not from the offence that has been given to it by the fragility of Orthodox, of Roman and of Protestant Christianity? And are we Christians in the West being asked not to notice that, or to act as though we had not noticed it? Where is our justification for talking about a "Christian West" and all of a sudden wanting to come to the aid of this "Christian West" with a summons to an intellectual, political and one day even a military crusade? What fools or hypocrites we should have to be to stoop to that! (1954, p.141)

It is because Barth recognizes the tremendous weakness of the Western Church in being true to its proclaimed purpose that Barth is especially wary of any crusading movement which directs attention away from its own unrighteousness.

One important factor involved in Barth's composure about the "Communist threat" is that he does not think that Communism has particularly dangerous elements in it which could ever threaten to replace the Church. This is the primary reason why he considers it a completely different issue than that which was at stake in the Church struggle with the Nazis.

[...] please note that, in its relationship to Christianity,
Communism, as distinguished from Nazism, has not done, and by its very nature cannot do, one thing: it has never made the slightest attempt to reinterpret or to falsify Christianity, or to shroud itself in a Christian garment. It has never committed the basic crime of the Nazis, the removal and replacement of the real Christ by a national Jesus, and it has never committed the crime of anti-Semitism. There is nothing of the false prophet about it. It is not anti-Christian. It is coldly non-Christian. It does not seem to have encountered the gospel as yet. It is brutally, but at least honestly, godless. (1954, p.140)

Because Communism focuses on the inherent corruption of the Church, it refrains from offering itself as an alternative church, which was the danger of the Nazis. In this sense the totalitarianism of the Communists is much more limited than that of the Nazis. Barth was confident that the Communist State ideology, because of the nature of its content, could never be sufficiently alluring to spiritual conversion. Therefore it does not pose a serious claim on the spiritual beliefs of the people.

Barth elaborates on his understanding of the limited totalitarianism of Communism in his "Letter to a Pastor in the German Democratic Republic." Here, as in other writings, Barth's exhortations concern the lack of a basis for true fear in this situation.

God above all things! Sovereign even over the legalistic totalitarianism of your state! You fear it? Fear it not! The limits of that system where its representatives must halt or else be destroyed is set not by its totalitarianism, but by its legalism which makes the state totalitarian in an ungodly and inhuman way. "Totalitarian" also, in a way, is the grace of the gospel which we all are to proclaim, free grace, truly divine and truly human, claiming every man wholly for itself. To a degree the Communist state might be interpreted and understood as an image of grace-- to be sure, a grossly distorted and darkened image. Indeed, grace is all-embracing,

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1This article appeared in June and July of 1949 in the Berlin periodical Unterwegs. The view that the Soviet Communist government was not anti-Semitic is debatable. But within the context of comparing Communism, which is not by definition anti-Semitic, with Nazism, which is by definition anti-Semitic, this view is justifiable.

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totalitarian. But it is totalitarian grace as free and freeing action and not as law; not as a spider's web of theses and antitheses, and surely not coercingly pressing for their recognition and realization, or overwhelming and crushing opposition wherever it appears— and where would that not be? The grace of the gospel, free in its divinity and in its humanity, conquers, overpowers, and rules from within outward and not vice versa. [...] Do you believe in God's free grace? Of course you do. Then you must be able to discern the decisive weakness of the system under which you live (and of ours as well), which resides in its legalism. (in Brown, p.58-59)

Barth's views on the position of the Church in Hungary under Communist rule were also characterized by a composure about the extent of danger that the Communist State posed to the Church. His message to the many Westerners who were joining together in a unified condemnation against Communism and to McCarthy mentality, was,

Something quite different is required here, namely the "patience and faith of the saints," joyful perseverance and fearless profession. If the Church achieves that, it stands on a rock; it can laugh at the whole godless movement, and whether they hear it or not— one day they will hear it-- it has something positive to say to to the godless. (1954, p.141)

Barth realized that to say this, and to recognize the primacy in this situation of the Western Church's duty to re-evaluate its own integrity, is the most rigorous way of approaching the East-West conflict. To do otherwise, to go "with the stream," would be "cheap, idle, and useless talk," (1954, p.142) in that it "demands no self-sacrifice"; in that a criticism of the Communist system would offer nothing which is not "obvious"; and in that such criticism "would be helping no single man or woman suffering there under the wild man." (1954, p.142). The rigor, in contrast to this, of criticizing our own side in the conflict and seeing our own faults, and of speaking against the majority view, offers a positive alternative which is much farther reaching than the practice of embracing the Western ideology as opposed to the
Eastern.  

Not a crusade but the Word of the Cross is what the Church in the West owes to the godless East, but above all to the West itself, the Word through which the Church itself must allow itself to be rebuilt completely afresh. (1954, p.142) 

The willingness to "lose something" by adhering to personal faith is what allows Barth to be open to the possibility, which is unheard of for others, of the Church giving up its traditional status in Europe of being backed by the establishment. In his "Letter to a Pastor in the German Democratic Republic," Barth cites Günther Jacob's phrase, "The end of the Constantinian Era" and remarks,

No, the continuance and victory of the cause of God, which the Christian Church is to serve with her witness, is not unconditionally linked with the forms of existence which it has had until now. Yes, the hour may strike and has perhaps already struck when God, to our discomfiture, but to his glory and for the salvation of mankind, will put an end to this mode of existence because it lacks integrity and has lost its usefulness. (in Brown, p.64)

This is not to imply that Barth is naive about the possibilities of a complete reform of the Church. In the same letter he responds to the question, "[...] has the hour struck for an extensive reconstruction of the church?" with the understanding that the most likely improvement of the Church will occur "not with great spectacular strides, but with small and therefore assured steps [...] ." (in Brown, p.75) This qualification acknowledges the Church's status as functioning within this world and therefore being faulty:

[...] the Christian Church, as far as I can see, has at all times been well-disposed toward sweeping, if possible "eschatological," meditations and reflections, but frequently very reluctant indeed courageously to engage in specific and concrete venture, because she has been lethargic and afraid. She has let pass many of those moments in which not everything but at least something could and ought to have been done and ought to have been accomplished. (in Brown, p.75)
It is clear from this statement that Barth's principle concern is not in the preservation of the established Church, but in the closer adherence of the historical Church to the "Real Church."
The Political Responsibility of the Free Christian

After having considered Barth's political views on the East-West conflict, it is now appropriate to evaluate Niebuhr's criticism of Barth. Niebuhr claims that Barth's opinions about politics are unfounded because he is a theologian rather than a politician. Because Barth is so much more concerned with the Word of God than with political systems, he "disavows political responsibility."

Contrary to Niebuhr's assessment, Barth insists on the importance of political involvement for members of the Christian community. It does not recognize that Barth can qualify the importance of political systems for Christians in terms of their worthiness of loyalty and commitment, but at the same time he can consider Christians' qualified involvement in politics to be of fundamental importance. For Barth, there is a difference which Niebuhr ignores between being aware of the limitations of political systems and being uninvolved in political activity.

According to Barth, Christians understand political systems as being attempts to improve on a given, present system with a better, but essentially temporary and replaceable system. Political systems are necessarily makeshift, because they are confined to the middle era of the Creation which begins and ends with God; in themselves, they do not lead to any finality.

In "The Christian Community in the Midst of Political Change," Barth claims that "the concrete form in which the Christian gratitude for God's gift and ordinance is expressed is its sharing of political responsibility." (1954, p.81) The intensity of this involvement, however, must be qualified because of the inadequacy of political movements to be totally consuming. Political systems
can never acquire the commitment which an "absolute" deserves because it is always an approximation of a just order. This is why Barth describes such systems as "political experiments." (1939, p.31) This is decisive in Barth's distinction between the relative danger of National Socialism and of Communism because the latter is still a political experiment, while the former was no longer a political experiment but a "religious institution of salvation." (1939, p.41) Political experiments are limited in their accomplishment of good as well as evil:

If they [i.e. people involved in politics] have to remember on the one hand that it would be pure foolishness to expect any political system to be the Kingdom of God, they must not forget that "the devil has already lost his ancient right to the whole human race," so that, much as he would like to, he does not in fact stand any chance of incarnating himself in any political system. (1954, p.81)

Therefore, change in political systems can never be important enough to infringe on the truth of the Gospel: "[...] every such change takes place between the death and the second coming of Jesus Christ and under His dominion." (1954, p.83). A Christian's obedience is always directed ultimately toward the true kingdom of God, and only reservedly toward the secondary political system. This reserve allows him to accommodate for change in political developments. Barth notes that at first, it was appropriate to see whether the Nazis had a viable political experiment, even though it seemed from the outset to be based on a corrupt morality. The appropriate time for Christians to take action was when it became apparent that the Nazi State was no longer just a political experiment.

The involvement of the Christian Community in politics must to a certain extent be detached. It is in this context that Barth discusses political revolution. He claims that both revolution and
restraint are among the responsibilities of the Christian Community. However, resistance in the form of firm restraint as opposed to revolution is the preferred method for the Church. The intensity of political revolution is too likely to obscure the only possible true revolution; the revolution of God's grace, of the Incarnation. In promoting a revolutionary cause, people tend to elevate the new system to a status of true justification and forget its expedient character. The enthusiasm which revolution requires is also too often combined with a loss of perspective on individual unrighteousness.

In his commentary on Romans 12:21-13:7, Barth focuses on the verse, "be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." He uses a metaphor to discuss the difference between the revolution of God's revelation and the revolution of a political cause. The former is represented by "the great divine minus sign outside the bracket." (1932, p.483) Within the bracket is the equation which represents events in the world. These worldly events can be changed either by small minus signs, which are political revolutions, or small plus signs, which are "legitimizing," conservative forces, but regardless of which of these forces are at work, the "great divine minus sign" outside of the bracket is unaffected. "Let every man be in subjection means, therefore, that every man should consider the falsity of all human reckoning as such. We are not competent to place the decisive minus sign before the bracket; we are only competent to perceive how completely it damages our plus and our minus." (1932, p.483) This metaphor serves as a reminder that God's freedom of judgement always confronts human concerns. Even if we are convinced of the righteousness of our revolutionary cause, this cause can never be exempt from the judgement of God.
People must realize that ultimate changes in the world cannot be
effected through political revolution; the changes established here
will eventually be disestablished.

Barth discusses the issue of revolution extensively
because he perceives that a close reading of Paul's Epistle to the
Romans "may foster a contempt for the present order and an action
of negation toward it." (1932, p.481) But he warns about the danger
of poorly-understood, un-reflected action. Political reconstruction
by individuals is not the fulfillment of God's Word.

The revolutionary aims at the Revolution by which the true
Order is to be inaugurated; but he launches another revolution
which is, in fact, reaction. The legitimist, on the other
hand, himself also overcome of evil, aims at the Legitimism by
which the true Revolution is inaugurated; but he maintains
another legitimism which is, in fact, revolt! And so, as
always, what men do is the judgement upon what they will to do
(vii. 15, 19). (1932, p.481)

This statement points to the danger of elevating a political cause
to the point where one considers it to be the culmination of all
political experiments. Implicit in this conviction is a
relinquishment of the belief in the Coming Kingdom as it is
described in the Bible. The reason why revolution is dangerous to
the integrity of an individual's faith is because, being the
assertion of something new, it comes too close to imitating the
message of the "Good News" of the gospel, which must not be
imitated.

What man has the right to propound and represent the "New,"
whether it be a new age, or a new world, of even a new--
spirit? Is not every new thing, in so far as it can be schemed
by men, born of what already exists? The moment it becomes a
human proposition, must it not be numbered among the things
that are? What man is there who, having proposed a novelty,
has not proposed an evil thing? Far more than the
conservative, the revolutionary is overcome of evil, because
with his "No" he stands so strangely near to God. This is the
tragedy of revolution. Evil is not the true answer to evil.
(1932, p.480)

The final message of Romans 13 for Barth is that the restraint
which is appropriate for us to practice is rooted in our conscience, which arises from our awareness of God's Word.

Our conscience prevents us from supposing that the evil we encounter is merely obstruction and fate. It reminds us that we are evil; but it also recognizes in the sword that is drawn upon us the righteousness of the hand of God. Conscience sees in the evil that is done against us the minister of good. It interprets our judgement, not to our advantage, but to our salvation. It makes of the injury done to us, not our justification, but our hope. Conscience, therefore, does not allow us to rise up from the severity of our lives—embittered and ready to revolt; rather, it pronounces the end of the grim cycle of evil unto evil. (1932, p.490)

At the point when people can perceive the limited evil in existing orders, and therefore the absence of a legitimate call for revolutionary action, they are acting in faith. At this stage, "being in subjection is also no temporal human action. And yet, to know that we have no Right, even when we are in the right, is a knowledge in time. It is this knowledge which reveals that we have a hope-- the hope of the Coming World where Revolution and Order are one." (1932, p.191)

This hope allows us to have patience with the present situation, and to comply with its requirements. Christians must recognize that, even if the government falls short of exemplifying the qualities of a just State, it can fill a constructive function. "For their [the Government officials'] whole existence and authority, their whole strange being-justified-before-you, loudly proclaims the One-- the unrighteousness of men and the Goal which is God's World." (1932, p.491)

The freedom which we receive through our subjection allows Christian involvement in politics to be "against the stream," and to have a unique insight into political situations which those who do not perceive everything in terms of the greater significance of the Word of God do not have. This beyond-establishment perspective
is edifying: "[...] the Church never thinks, speaks or acts 'on principle.' Rather it judges spiritually and by individual cases. For that reason it rejects every attempt to systematise political history and its own part in that history." (1954, p.114) This freedom from the compulsion to be consistent within an ideology or set of principles is a positive quality: "Christian politics are always bound to seem strange, incalculable and surprising in the eyes of the world-- otherwise they would not be Christian." (1954, p.92)

From this perspective, it is clear that Niebuhr's criticism of Barth is unsubstantiated. One claim of Niebuhr's was that Barth should place more weight on the consensus view that Nazism and Communism are equivalent, and that one who resisted the Nazis is acting irresponsibly and inconsistently in not resisting the Communists. This criticism is misdirected in two ways: First, it does not acknowledge that Barth did not condone Communism. He did in fact disapprove of Communism, but was more reserved in his condemnation of it because he also recognized the West as being an irresponsible power. Whether or not he was correct in his assessment of Communism, is debatable. However, it is not debatable that he was more perceptive in his understanding of his own Western perspective than Niebuhr was.

The second way in which Niebuhr's criticism of Barth is misdirected is in his presumption in thinking that to chide Barth for refusing to join in the unanimity would be at all meaningful to him. For Barth, differences within the Christian Community on political subjects are constructive in maintaining the integrity of the Church. In "Political Decisions in the Unity of Faith," Barth describes the process by which Christians approach political
issues:

[...] this is where he [the Christian] will differ from his fellow-citizens— he will do so [i.e. consider political issues] not in a space apart from his Christian faith, but before God—and not before any god, but before the God who speaks to the world, to the Christian community and therefore to the individual Christian, in the gospel of Jesus Christ. He will look for a decision which is not arbitrary or just clever in a human sense, but which is made in the freedom of obedience to God's command. (1954, p.152)

The outcome of this process is that Christians will arrive at different conclusions. However, these differences do not have to threaten the "unity of faith." Rather, in the dialogue that these differences produce, they offer more individuals an "invitation to examine themselves" (1954, p.158) and they contribute to the "dynamic character" (1954, p.157) of the Evangelical faith, which is the force that preserves it. Barth's conclusion of this essay is:

What a strange kind of responsibility before God it would be which was only allowed to take place in the form of an empty recognition of the principle of responsibility, but never-- or only in the "exceptional case" -- in the shape of concretely responsible political decisions!

What a strange unity of the faith it would be in which Christendom condemned itself to such impotence! (1954, p.164)

Niebuhr misses the point that Barth's theology, by definition, cannot limit his ability to evaluate events which he is confronted with in life. Niebuhr's criticism assumes the possibility of the separation of political activity from Christian faith, which for Barth is unheard of. The man who has an existence independent of God when he makes political decisions is not a man of faith, and therefore is not part of the Christian Community. For members of the Christian Community there can be no presupposition besides that of God's revelation.

The final issue involved in Niebuhr's criticism of Barth is the limitation of the theological framework compared with the
limitation of other frameworks. When Niebuhr claims not to be a theologian, he is assuming that he has a broader outlook than Barth in interpreting his culture. However, Barth would argue that those who have a theological perspective on their own culture are less narrow-minded than those who see their culture as a self-contained framework.

The chapter in Church Dogmatics (III/4) (which appeared in German in 1951) titled "Freedom for Life" is particularly relevant to the issues which Niebuhr raises. Barth discusses the idea of activity based on freedom in the section, "The Active Life." Individuals within the Christian Community are free because they do not feel restricted specifically by their society and culture; they are able to see beyond this framework to the coming of the kingdom of God. Their community is not defined by the "Christian West," but rather consists of a particular people, "existing in dispersion among all nations with its special task and purpose. It is [not restricted to] [...] any kind of great or small historical dominion." (1961, p.488) In this statement, one can clearly recognize Barth's consideration of Overbeck's rejection of any theology which is inherently linked to culture.

Barth does not claim that culture is unimportant, but the "enterprise of culture," when elevated to an abstract level, must be recognized as a false god.

It is plain enough that this construction conceals God Himself, so that man thinks he sees in culture with its vital individual existence the God whom he must serve. It is thus tempting to understand and assess man's work as though participation in the enterprise of culture were participation in the divine work. [...] What is not true [...] is that as man expresses himself in his work he is confronted by a kind of higher essence, and that human culture is an independent cosmos with its own laws and dignity and life. This is sheer mythology. (1961, 522)

The freedom of Christians, which comes from their disavowal of
the "God of Culture," enables them to center their activity around the components of Christian faith: the love of God and the love of their neighbor. Their faith allows them to be constantly aware of the appropriate "response" to God, which consists of responsible activity in light of his activity of Creation and the ramifications of this.

Each [member of the Christian community] must reflect that passivity in relation to the upbuilding of the community necessarily means passivity in respect of his own Christian life, just as passivity in the latter inevitably carries with it a slowing to a standstill of the activity of the community. [...] It should be constantly pondered that the responsibility of each for his own particular action is of such tremendous weight and importance because it derives from his faith, and his faith from his perception of the kingdom of God. (1961, p.494)

Barth's conviction is clear in these passages that it is impossible to discuss different activities of a person of faith in a framework outside of their faith. It is also impossible to discuss "levels of frameworks" the way Niebuhr does, because this way of thinking ignores the inherent purpose of every framework within the teleology of Christian faith.

Barth himself offers a preclusion to Niebuhr's criticism in Against The Stream-- the same book which Niebuhr finds so precocious. "The Christian Message and the New Humanism" is a lecture which Barth gave at an international conference devoted to the subject of a "new humanism" in Geneva in 1949. Barth begins by warning of the "risk" that the conference faced-- which was mainly constituted of non-theologian intellectuals-- by inviting a theologian. His views would most likely be "disturbing" and "would seriously hamper a profitable discussion on the question of the new humanism," (1954, p.183) because Christian faith calls into question and disposes itself of every possible humanism which is not that of God. The theologians would "have to regard the subject
from our own standpoint," (1954, p.183) which claims that Christian humanism is not "one of the many theoretical, moral, or aesthetic principles or systems, as one 'ism' in agreement, in harmony, or in conflict with other 'isms.'" (1954, p.184) Barth again refers to the depth of faith:

Above all, we shall not be able to conceal the fact that this very question of the "actuality" of the Christian message of the humanism of God is one which has this paradoxical quality: that positively or negatively it can be answered only in the form of a highly comprehensive personal and responsible decision. (1954, p.184)

Nothing in Niebuhr's criticism about Barth's theological bent on politics is contrary to what Barth would openly confirm. In Church Dogmatics (III/4), he states his view of the God-centered orientation of Christian activity and concedes, "This statement may seem to be intolerably narrow, extremely presumptuous and even alien and impractical. But it is unavoidable." (1961, p.483) But what he goes on to show, in this and his other writings, is that his faith is limiting in specific ways, but it also is emancipating. Barth is not as concerned about the preservation of the establishment as other people are, and this is where Niebuhr's critique of Barth's narrow-mindedness is particularly weak.

Barth's adherance to this freedom is in the tradition of the attempt to maintain the integrity of the Church.

It [the message of the missionary Church] is not infallible. It may well have things to learn or to correct. But if it were really to co-ordinate its witness with the voice of the world, if it were constantly to correspond and conform to the average judgements of the world, its witness would not be prophetic. (1954, p.512)

The final difference between Barth and Niebuhr is that Barth has a more Protestant understanding of the function of the Church.
Conclusion

The criticism which Niebuhr directed toward Barth is similar to Tillich's objection to Barth's theology as being too "supernatural." Like Niebuhr, Tillich thinks that by focusing on the Word of God, one perceives human culture too peripherally.

Tillich generalizes that for Barth,

Fundamentally, his entire theology is contained in the first commandment, "I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt not have any other gods beside me." Every single sentence of his writings can be understood as the application of this notion to a particular phase of the relation between God and the World. (p.129)

Tillich considers Barth to be too narrowly centered on this aspect of Christian faith. Tillich's conception of faith is a less paradoxical, and therefore less devotional, less momentous act than Barth's, because Tillich's is more rationalized. He sees Barth's theology as an overly irrational reaction against liberal theology. He thinks of his own method of dialectical theology as a resolution of the conflict between the extremes of idolatry and the "supernaturalism" of Barth's thought. Tillich's theory about the dialectical process provides a way to explain the human source of human beings' religiousness.

But this rationalization is one of the primary factors which Barth criticized in liberal theology as being inconsistent with Christian faith. Tillich's theological method contains some of the same oversights regarding the nature of Protestant Christianity which Barth recognized in liberal theology. Barth's method is distinct from these other methods because he first develops an understanding of the God who is described in the Bible and then understands how this biblical God relates to human beings. Tillich, on the other hand, first tries to understand human beings and then
develops a way to conceive of their relationship to God.

Tillich's theory of religion is a solution to the philosophical problem that Christianity poses by describing God as eternal and transcendent. Barth considers the very attempt to solve the problem to be the basis for an anthropocentric construct rather than a revealed truth. His understanding of Protestant Christianity dictates that one cannot begin to talk about human beings without first talking about God. Anthropological issues are encompassed by theology. The primary fact about human beings is a theologically-based fact: their existential status in this world is conditioned by the severance of their original relationship with God. They are inherently corrupt. Therefore, there is no possibility for human culture to develop from a "more-erring" to a "less-erring" knowledge about God. There is no such process of dialectic in which real development of our knowledge can occur, resulting in a higher form of consciousness.

The sphere of religion cannot lead to the event of revelation: because it is a human sphere, it stops at the understanding of the limitation of humanity without going beyond this to the assertion of a positive truth. "Religion possesses no solution of the problem of life; rather it makes of the problem a wholly insoluble enigma. Religion neither discovers the problem nor solves it: what it does is to disclose the truth that it cannot be solved." (1932, p.258)

Barth charges Tillich with using an abstraction to conceive of the relation between an eternal God and a finite world. The abstraction is based on a method of reconciling two seemingly inconsistent propositions so that they are given logical coherence. However, to develop a concept of God according to a logical system is to assume that God is included within the sphere of human logic.
Such a concept of God is limited: it can not call human systems of logic into question. This is where Tillich's God is not as complex as the biblical God, which is described as having absolute freedom. The Bible describes God as not being subject to human rationalization. The story of Abraham and Isaac tells of a God whose demands are completely irrational from a human perspective. In this story, faith requires the believer's readiness to give up his rational basis for decision-making in place of his obedience to God's will. Tillich's God would never require such a sacrifice. It is more consistent with human will. The revelation of this more intelligible God is not as different from the religion which is formulated around it. Tillich's conception of revelation as "the ultimate answer" is not particularly revelatory; it is not confrontational.

The revelation of the biblical God, which Barth conceives of as being beyond the limitations of religion, is teleologically complex. The Bible conceives of an eternal God who is Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer. Compared with this, Tillich's "ultimate answer" to our all too human questions is a vapid negative abstraction. Barth, as an Evangelical theologian, could obviously never take such a concept seriously:

[Perhaps] we cannot be content to make the word "God" our final, or perhaps even our basic, term. Far too often this word is used simply as a pseudonym for the limitation of all human understanding, whether of self or of the world. Far too often what is meant by it is something quite different, namely, the unsubstantial, unprofitable and fundamentally very tedious magnitude known as transcendence, not as a genuine counterpart, nor a true other, nor a real outside and beyond, but as an illusory reflection of human freedom, as its projection into the vacuum of utter abstraction. (1961, p.479)

This quotation is taken from Barth's 1951 (German edition) volume of Church Dogmatics; therefore Tillich would not have read it when he wrote the critique which we are dealing with in 1935, but it is
not unfair to use it in showing how Barth differed from Tillich. Certainly Barth discussed this issue many times prior to 1935. He raised it in a 1922 lecture on "The Problem of Ethics Today." The subject of this lecture is whether or not one can develop a system of Christian ethics, but it is also relevant to a discussion of a system of logic in theology.

For the moment I simply warn you against taking refuge in dialectic, for all that it would seem to make for logical symmetry and completeness. I simply ask whether the process actually corresponds with reality. Who can transform the No of the ethical problem in which we find ourselves today into a Yes? Who is bold enough and omniscient enough to resolve our difficulty from a height above the Yes and the No? (1928, p.151)

The importance of adhering to a definition of God based on Scripture, rather than on philosophical argument, is that Scripture contains the description of God's unqualified free will, while any diversion from Scripture is likely to obscure it. One must remember that the New Testament describes the story of God's incarnated, worldly form being crucified by human beings, precisely because it is so confrontational to them.

The concept of a truly free God gives a paradoxical aspect to Christian faith. Any theory about Christianity which does not account for God's absolute freedom verges on the assumption that God's will corresponds to human will. It does not stress the equal possibility of his damnation and redemption, and therefore it loses sight of the fact that, "From the height of the Pauline dialectic this is all we really see-- the landscape of an eternal predestination which stretches out not only toward redemption but in the opposite direction as well." (1928, p.178)

Given his definition of the limitations of human beings to arrive at knowledge, Barth can not accept the kind of method which Tillich devises. According to Barth's view, human beings can only
receive knowledge from God; they cannot attain it. He considers it inconsistent with Christian dogma that men are able of themselves to develop the dialectical process which leads to the knowledge of the transcendent God. This view is also partly due to the influence of Kant on Barth's understanding of the limitations of human consciousness.

The possibility of comprehending human possibility to be, as such, limited, is manifestly an altogether unheard of, new possibility; especially so, if, in agreement with Kant, we deny ourselves every prospect beyond that by which we are limited. The man who not only criticizes, disapproves of, and deplores himself, but is able finally to set his whole being in question and to be appalled at himself (vii.24), is, at any rate-- not I! If we go on to ask: "Who then?" "What then?", we must be quite clear that, the moment we have-- even though carelessly or half in fun-- asked such questions, there has already entered within our horizon something radically foreign to us. (1932, p.271)

Barth does not accept Tillich's claim that a certain questioning process can lead to knowledge, because then he would have to concede that knowledge is attained rather than received. The questions posed by human beings which Tillich thinks "lead to answers" do not in effect culminate in anything: rather, they go in circles:

What, then, is the meaning of my protesting hatred of myself and my action? It has clearly no further meaning than that an abyss is disclosed between myself and-- myself. Can this really be regarded as a satisfactory starting-point for answering the question: "If God be God, who then am I?" The EGO which practises what I-- the other EGO-- contemplate with evident horror, cannot be an EGO capable of surviving the question. (1932, p.262)

Barth considers pure dialectic, which Tillich is so enthusiastic about, to be incomparably less valuable than a dialectic based on Paul, because the former requires so little personal rigor. He warns against the assumption that individuals have solved the problem of their relation to God. This is why Scripture is so important, because it describes God's revelation as
confrontation rather than compromise. When the conflict between God and the world is "accepted and embraced," that is the "middle way of compromise and resignation." (1932, p.262) This middle way is to be avoided, because by it, one does not face the truly paradoxical aspect of faith.

Barth explains the source of human religiousness not by a philosophical construct but rather by an exposition of Christian dogma. The transformation of our consciousness by awareness of God "has not taken place in time, but in that eternity which is the frontier of time," (1932, p.272) through the working of the Spirit and therefore beyond all human processes. Through the Spirit, and not through some cultural dialectical process, "men are related to their Primal Origin and placed within its light. [...] Comprehended in the dissolution of the man of this world, which is revealed in Jesus as the Christ, we are established as new men and pass from death to life. This is the meaning of the words-- in Christ Jesus." (1932, p.272)

Barth's theology places the philosophical problem of the separation between God and the world in the context of the life of Jesus Christ. His focus on the Incarnation allows him to avoid the kind of philosophical system which Tillich devises, and to develop a rigorously non-abstract theology. He does away with the elevation of things of the world and human culture to an abstraction, and he eliminates vague, empty conceptions about God which arise from the abstraction of human qualities. He bases his understanding of God on the accounts of his revelation in the Bible. Barth's oft-cited "NO!" is the jarring reminder of human baseness: it is God's commandment that human beings not elevate themselves to his level or forget his unqualified freedom.
The criticism of both Niebuhr and Tillich can be reduced to the refusal to recognize God's freedom without qualifying it in some way. For Tillich, Scripture is part of the basis of his system of theology, but his system has a certain self-sufficiency: its logic replaces its complete dependence on Scripture. For Niebuhr, a system of morals must have an absolute status which is not subject to being negated through revelation. Each has built into his system of Christian thought a qualifier which removes the condition of whole-hearted acceptance of double predestination for the person of faith. For them, faith does not require the readiness to call all human thought into question and to subject it to total unsubstantiation. Barth insists on this possibility of total unsubstantiation through revelation. Because Scripture contains the accounts of God's revelation, nothing can replace the primacy of Scripture and of new insights into its meaning.

Barth can do away with qualifying systems because through his study of Scripture, he is consumed with the image of the Incarnation. Without this consideration, Barth's conception of Christian faith might seem to lack a positive aspect, or to overwhelmingly emphasise the "NO!". But in light of the centrality of Jesus Christ, Barth's theology, with its emphasis on the unqualified freedom of God, becomes coherent. The Incarnation is the expression of God's freedom which we know. Therefore, the emphasis on God's possible condemnation is contained within the context of God's actual mercy. The primacy of God's mercy makes possible a deeper appreciation of our paradoxical situation: "Laughter is the scepticism with regard to the impossible possibility and enthusiasm for the possible impossibility." (1932, p.344) For Barth, genuine hope emerges out of a rigorous
deconstruction of human pretension.
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