**Christian Anti-Semitism in Academia:**

**The Legacy of Nazi Theologian Emanuel Hirsch**

Constance L. Benson, M.Div., M.Phil.

[constancebenson.com](http://constancebenson.com/)

*ABSTRACT: In light of anti-Semitism’s current resurgence in Europe and America, the continuing legitimacy and influence of Nazi Theologian Emanuel Hirsch (1888-1972) merits attention. A National Socialist Party member and enthusiastic Hitler supporter, Hirsch became dean of the Göttingen Faculty of Theology and a leader of the Deutsche Christen, the Nazi branch of German Protestantism. He refused denazification after World War II but continues to enjoy iconic status in mainstream German Protestantism today. This paper surveys Hirsch’s ideas and legacy.*

It is customary in psychohistorical research to begin with the investigator’s own relationship with her subject matter. I am a fourth generation descendent of Baptist clergy. My study of Biblical languages and literature at Harvard Divinity School convinced me that the fundamentalist belief system I inherited was untenable. For example, I learned to understand Jesus in his Jewish context and to read both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures in their original historical contexts.

The liberal Protestant and secular traditions I first encountered at Harvard, however, had problematic baggage of their own. I later learned, for example, that Gerhard Kittel, one of the German scholars who had done so much to restore Jesus to his Jewish context, also viewed post-Biblical Judaism as degenerate and became a leading Nazi theologian.[[1]](#footnote-1) My doctoral research at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary on Ernst Troeltsch—an early 20th Century Protestant icon—uncovered further connections between liberal academia and the German right. The controversy and repressive tactics with which my research was greeted—which became the subject of a major academic scandal in the 1990s—made it clear to me that fundamentalists have no monopoly on authoritarianism. My research was eventually published by a peer reviewed press under the title *God and Caesar*, with a foreword by Cornel West.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Among other things, I learned that the Ernst Troeltsch Society—a major force in mainstream Protestant academia today on both sides of the Atlantic—was founded in 1981 largely by admirers of Emanuel Hirsch, who, like Kittel, had been a prominent theologian under Hitler. Further, as I showed in my research, Troeltsch’s own work was influenced by right wing, anti-Semitic 19th century religion scholarship and played a major role legitimizing such ideas in the religious and academic mainstream. After the Holocaust, it was not politically acceptable in Germany to espouse such unvarnished ethnocentrism, but in Troeltsch the religious right had found a suitably subtle and sophisticated champion.

All of this can hardly be more timely and sheds light on Alternative for Germany (the AfD), the leading far right party in that country today. While liberal Americans imagine that xenophobia and anti-Semitism are afflictions of the less educated working class, the AfD harbors such ideas under a liberal-sounding discourse and enrolls highly educated members. In fact, more than 60% of the party’s nearly eighteen thousand founding members in 2013 held doctorates, earning it the moniker, “the professors’ party.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Indeed, such sophisticated right wing ideology was a major force in many mainstream German churches and universities before, during and after the Third Reich, and is now simply taking the form of an explicitly political movement. With this background, let us now turn to the topic of Emanuel Hirsch and his legacy.

**PART I: Emanuel Hirsch, the Third Reich, and German Protestantism**

This section examines the thought and historical context of Emanuel Hirsch. This Nazi theologian was a leader of the *Deutsche Christen*, or the “German Christians,” as the pro-Hitler wing of German Protestantism called itself. The story of the *Deutsche Christen* is unfamiliar and even shocking to most Americans, due to what historian Shelley Baranowski called “the myth of resistance” that arose after World War II.[[4]](#footnote-4) In this conventional view, pastors such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemoeller—leaders of the “Confessing Church” that resisted Hitler—are seen as typical of German Protestantism under the Third Reich. In reality, such heroes were a small minority. By making them the face of the German Protestant Church, however, Western cultural elites conveniently legitimized West Germany as part of the U.S.-led Cold War alliance.

It is also widely assumed that the Nazis eschewed Christianity and embraced “paganism,” for example in the form of Richard Wagner’s and Friedrich Nietzsche’s works. However, this Christian / pagan dichotomy is not tenable. Wagner, for example, combined Christian and pagan symbols in some of his operas, most notably Tannhäuser and Parsifal.[[5]](#footnote-5) Similarly, 19th century Protestant mystic and Biblical scholar Paul de Lagarde, who laid foundations of what later became Nazi religious ideology, also combined Christian and pagan themes.[[6]](#footnote-6) The extent of the symbiosis between Nazism and German Protestantism should therefore not be so surprising.[[7]](#footnote-7)

At the outset of the Third Reich, Emanuel Hirsch had just published a major study of Kierkegaard, which became a landmark of his career along with his Luther and Biblical scholarship. He signed the 1933 statement “Loyalty Oath of German Professors to Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist State,” joined the Nazi Party in 1937, and became a Patron Member of the SS. Hirsch traced the roots of his nationalism and anti-Semitism back to Martin Luther, who wore two hats as Protestant reformer and precursor of modern German identity.

After the War, Professor Hirsch chose to retire rather than go through the “denazification” program established by the Allies. Although remaining committed to Nazi ideology until his death, he was allowed to continue living in the university-owned house he had occupied as dean and professor at Goettingen University, to meet with students in his home, and to publish. In 1963, on his 75th birthday, his friends and admirers unveiled a Hirsch *Festschrift* entitled *Wahrheit und Glaube*, or *Truth and Faith*.[[8]](#footnote-8) Contributors to the collection included founding leaders of the Ernst Troeltsch Society, Troeltsch being a prominent Protestant academic and influence on Reinhold Niebuhr. In the second part of this paper, I discuss one of the essays contained in this collection dedicated to Hirsch. I discuss the role of the Troeltsch Society in mainstreaming the legacy of Hirsch today in the introduction to my book, *God and Caesar: Troeltsch’s Social Teaching as Legitimation*.[[9]](#footnote-9)

In this paper, I build on untranslated primary sources as well as Robert P. Ericksen’s book *Theologians Under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, Emanuel Hirsch*, which provides a review of Hirsch’s life and writings.[[10]](#footnote-10) While recognizing him to be a staunch Nazi, Ericksen does not have an ideological critique of his theology. Noting Hirsch’s acceptance of humanistic criticism of the Bible, Ericksen classifies him theologically with Paul Tillich and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, both of whom actively opposed Hitler. Ericksen concludes that “none of those [reactionary] elements [in Hirsch’s politics] necessarily determined his [theological] stance.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

Applying a similar logic, Troeltsch Society officer Hartmut Ruddies told me in Augsburg in 1988, “[Hirsch] had a terrible politics, but he was an excellent theologian.” What I find odd about this view—that Hirsch’s theology was independent of his politics—is that Hirsch was a systematic theologian whose political and anthropological ideas were an integral part of his system. Indeed, one year after the 1963 *Festschrift,* eminent Biblical scholar William F. Albright wrote that Hirsch and his fellow Nazi theologians had the “grim distinction of making extermination of the Jews theologically respectable.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Ericksen considers this condemnation to be unduly harsh, but my own assessment aligns with Albright’s.

How did Hirsch rise to prominence, to a point where on the occasion of his death in 1972, he was eulogized as “the last prince” of Protestant theologians?[[13]](#footnote-13) Following political theorist Quentin Skinner, who examines how ideas function ideologically within their own time and place, I argue in this paper that Hirsch’s ideas legitimized German fascism and anti-Semitism for the Protestant churches, and he enjoyed institutional support during the Third Reich precisely because his ideas functioned in this way.[[14]](#footnote-14) It is a separate question why the cult of Emanuel Hirsch continued to prosper after the collapse of Hitler’s regime, which I address below in part II.

At a time when every professor of theology in Germany was pressured to join the Nazi party, Hirsch brought Christian teaching into full alignment with the Nazi agenda. This is nowhere more apparent than in Hirsch’s 1934 manifesto, *Deutsches Volkstum und Evangelischer Glaube* or *German Folk and Evangelical Faith*.[[15]](#footnote-15) In this section, I will paraphrase this work, where Hirsch explicitly addresses the question: Hitler’s God or the Christian God?

Regarding terminology, when Hirsch uses the term “Evangelical,” he is referring to the Protestant state church in Germany, which has amalgamated Calvinist and Lutheran traditions since the 19th century and has nothing to do with the word “evangelical” as used in the United States today. Hirsch’s writing is permeated with references to the “*Volk*,” [pronounced “folk”] which is a racialist concept based on ties of blood. He often uses the first person, for example, referring to God speaking to “me,” and writes specifically to the German reader. Accordingly, I will be shifting between first and third persons as I paraphrase his arguments.

In his first chapter, Hirsch takes on German Protestant critics of the Nazi movement. It is not possible to set Christian faith against the German *Volk* without losing historical perspective, he says. The Protestant Reformation came about through a German of Saxon blood (that is, Martin Luther) and embodied German folkways.[[16]](#footnote-16) Since the Reformation, nearly all the great German figures arose out of Evangelical Christianity, and the state church has continued to embody the German ethos.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Hirsch begins his second chapter with Nazi philosophical anthropology, in which humanity only exists in particular communities formed by ties of blood.[[18]](#footnote-18) Every such community has its own spirit, or *Geist*, represented by its local deity. Standing over all this [*über alles*], however, is the universal God of pure spirit. Hirsch then develops a specifically Christian Nazi theology in which this universal God is not a myth but “reality” [*Wirklichkeit*] itself, and becomes manifest historically in two ways—in the activity of the Nazi movement and in the revelation of Jesus Christ.[[19]](#footnote-19)

The real and universal God does not remain hidden, Hirsch says, but reveals himself to me. First, I have sensed him in the immense history of my *Volk*, which I am allowed to see in the present, in the call to the war [World War I], in the curse of defeat and betrayal, in the storm [*Sturm*] of the present movement [*Begegnung*], and in the joy of the new breakout [*Aufbruch*]. Everywhere He was really there--the majestic Lord [*Herr*] and Presider [*Walter*] over history.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Second, the universal God reveals himself through Christ and the Church. This second mode of revelation, in fact, is what raises the divine manifestation in the German *Volk* above the level of mere paganism. God as revealed through Christ is not a deity of German blood, but rather a universal and eternal reality that has taken hold of us Germans today and called [*ruft*] and sent [*sendet*] us, so that we carry out His Will as His obedient co-workers.[[21]](#footnote-21) Notwithstanding this universality of God in his abstract essence, however, Hirsch in other writings presents a complicated theory purporting to show that the historical Jesus was racially an Aryan.[[22]](#footnote-22)

While Hirsch does not set forth his position on Jews in this monograph, he had already done so in October 1933 by offering written support of the Aryan paragraph, a *Deutsche Christen* policy effectively defrocking Protestant clergy of Jewish descent. He finds a sophistic way to relegate German Jews to “guest status” while still paying lip service to the Christian ethic of love. He views the German Jews as foreigners, in fact more foreign by race and history than many of Germany’s neighbors. As long as Christians accept this fact, it is acceptable for them to be friends with Jews.[[23]](#footnote-23)

In Chapter Three, “The God of Honor,” Hirsch relates his Nazi Christian concept of God to the ethos of German feudalism.[[24]](#footnote-24) Here Hirsch answers Nietzsche’s argument that Christianity is a slave religion geared to inferior humans. On the contrary, authentic Evangelical Christianity is a manly belief, and the surrender that it demands is like that of a knight or vassal who puts himself in the service of a feudal lord. Martial values render subordination honorable.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Nevertheless, in being open to everyone who accepts the Gospel, doesn’t Christianity necessarily end up admitting degenerate peoples? This would appear to be an especially vexing problem for a Nazi. Hirsch solves it much as Ernst Troeltsch did twenty years earlier. On the one hand, differences in human worth that are so important to humans mean nothing to God. On the other hand, however, God himself is the author of inequality, giving some the talents to be kings or mayors and calling others to be servants.[[26]](#footnote-26) This provides justification for Hirsch to dismiss individualism and democracy. Rather than a community of social equals, the *Volk* community and Christian society, are comprised of leaders and followers.

Chapter Four addresses Nietzsche’s criticism of the Christian values of suffering and love. Contrary to passive and effeminate notions, Hirsch construes suffering as a form of discipline and sacrifice, a way to develop manliness, toughness and qualities of heroism. To illustrate authentic Christian suffering, he touts men of the National Socialist movement who endured crises, social contempt and physical danger in their struggle for ascendency.[[27]](#footnote-27)

As suffering is misunderstood, so also is Christian love. It should not be confused with charity and welfare or relegated to men [*Männer*] who are unpolitical and unfit for combat duty and to women [*Frauen*].[[28]](#footnote-28) Again, invoking feudal values, Hirsch argues that authentic Christian love possesses a royal character [*koniglichen Charakter*]. His model is the noble warrior or knight whose love for the *Volk* is constitutive of the national community. Through love, the Lord of History confers His honor and glory upon His chosen people.[[29]](#footnote-29) For Hirsch the love of God sanctifies the German *Volk*. In His love, God once again brought alive the ancient mode of the Prussian kings in our Führer*’s* nation [*Führungsstaat]*.[[30]](#footnote-30) Hirsch’s tone, which began the section on a discursive note, ends in a rhapsody to his divinely beloved *Volk*.

In his final chapter, Hirsch says, “What have we found? Hitler’s God or the Christian God? Hirsch’s answer: German Folk and Evangelical faith are woven together in the inseparable community of destiny in the past history and present hour of our *Volk*. The Evangelical Christian hears one and the same God . . . in the God of the Gospel, and . . . in the great holy storm of the present *Volk* events. . . . It is one God, who speaks to us then and now.[[31]](#footnote-31) The one eternal God, in Jesus Christ, as He stood before our forefathers and will stand before our descendants, is a living God. Those who recognize the call of God in the German *Volk* and in German Evangelical Christianity, do not limit Him with outdated customs, but confess that God is living, in the new day, where faith is steadfast.[[32]](#footnote-32) Hirsch’s passion and personal engagement emulates that of his *Führer* enthralling the crowds in Nüremberg.

This concludes my paraphrase of Hirsch’s 1934 book *German Folk and Evangelical Faith.*

The seamless interweaving in this monograph of Nazi ideology and Christian faith invalidates any attempts by commentators to separate Hirsch’s theology from his politics. Hirsch converts the Christian God into a masculine warrior ruling his universal empire, who demands total devotion from his vassals, and who selects only the best, the brightest and racially superior German *Volk* to be co-rulers in his domain. God’s love for the *Volk* engenders a narcissistic love within the *Volk* community, since they are the privileged subjects of salvation history [*Heilsgeschichte*].

In conclusion, Hirsch exemplifies the fact that Nazis, even Patron SS members, could be Christian or pagan. Indeed, German feudal traditions combined both, as seen in Hirsch’s theology no less than in some of Wagner’s operas. That said, Wagner did not purport to be an ethical and theological spokesman for German Protestantism. In light of the racism, xenophobia, androcentrism, anti-Semitism, and authoritarianism that pervade Hirsch’s philosophical anthropology, images of God, and understanding of Christian community, I find Robert Ericksen’s classification of his theology with those of Tillich and Bonhoeffer to be superficial and misleading.

Further, the ideological content of Hirsch’s theology, as seen in the brief survey above, explains much about his ascendancy in the German Church and theological establishment during the Third Reich. I turn now to the prestige his ideas continued to enjoy in German Protestantism after the collapse of Hitler’s regime.

**PART II: “Haman’s Gallows” and the Legacy of Emanuel Hirsch**

After World War II, Martin Niemoeller, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and others who risked or gave their lives to oppose Hitler were duly honored. However, former Nazi clergy and theologians, after the ritual purification of “denazification,” were typically reinstated in their previous church and university positions. Niemoeller himself, recently released from prison, complained to a high ecclesial official in June 1946 that, “in the territorial churches there prevails everywhere a scarcely concealed politics of restoration and reaction, not the Word of God.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Indeed, Hirsch, who had been an active opponent of Niemoeller and the Confessing Church, continued to exert considerable influence during the post-War years despite refusing even the fig leaf of denazification.

German Protestantism for the most part had been a bulwark against socialism and communism since the beginning of the twentieth century and played this role during the Third Reich and to a large extent after it.[[34]](#footnote-34) The post-War American empire, though formally democratic at home, enlisted the support of fascist dictatorships throughout the world, even in Europe (i.e. Spain, Portugal, Greece, and Turkey).[[35]](#footnote-35) This authoritarian, Cold War environment proved fertile ground for the theological ideas of Emanuel Hirsch, which is evident from the abovementioned 1963 *Festschrift*. This collection of essays on Martin Luther, Biblical texts, and other sources was dedicated to Hirsch on his 75th birthday and is very much in the spirit of his work.[[36]](#footnote-36)

In the remainder of this paper, I will examine one of the essays in this *Festschrift*, “Haman’s Gallows and Christ’s Cross,” by Hirsch’s contemporary Ernst Haenchen (1894-1975).[[37]](#footnote-37) While the book by Hirsch that I discussed above did not address Judaism in a developed way, Haenchen presents an interpretation of the Hebrew Bible’s Book of Esther that bears directly on the Holocaust and post-War Christian-Jewish relations.[[38]](#footnote-38) Like Hirsch, the author had been a member of the Nazi Party and the *Deutsche Christen*, but unlike Hirsch presumably went through denazification. Haenchen’s contribution to the *Festschrift* therefore provides a revealing glimpse into the thinking of the Hirsch circle in its post-War incarnation.

By way of background, the Book of Esther is a text from the Hebrew scriptures (part of the *Ketuvim*, or “Writings”), probably dating from 4th Century BCE Persia and explaining the origin of the holiday of Purim. It is a historical fiction in which a young Jewish woman becomes Queen of Persia and with her relative Mordecai, a high official in the Persian court, foils a plot to annihilate the Jewish population of the kingdom. Haman, the king’s chief minister and architect of the plot, is executed and in the ensuing battle between the Jews and Haman’s allies, the tables are turned and it is Haman’s forces who are annihilated.

In approaching Haenchen’s *Festschrift* paper on this topic, there are two major questions that need to be answered. First, of the more than sixty books in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament and innumerable other texts besides these scriptures, why would a former Nazi Biblical scholar and theologian choose this particular story? This question is especially significant considering that the author’s scholarly specialization is the Christian and not the Hebrew scriptures.[[39]](#footnote-39) Second, given his selection, what does the author do with this subject matter?

As for Haenchen’s decision to write about the Book of Esther less than twenty years after the Holocaust, it cannot be coincidental that this is a historical fiction about a genocide of Jews that was averted and in fact ended up instead as a slaughter of the enemies of the Jews. For centuries before the Holocaust, Christian anti-Semitic interpreters had played down the threatened genocide in the story and the defensive context of the Jewish killing and instead interpreted the Book of Esther as a warning about the menace to Gentiles of Jews getting into positions of political power.[[40]](#footnote-40) Was Haenchen’s intention perhaps to finally confront this history of anti-Semitism and its contribution to the very real genocide against the Jews recently committed by the Nazis? Unfortunately, there is nothing of the sort in Haenchen’s essay; so much for “denazification.”

On the contrary, the essay appears to be a theological polemic against a 1937 monograph that interpreted the Book of Esther sympathetically from a Christian perspective. In this monograph, Swiss Protestant pastor and Biblical scholar Wilhelm Eduard Vischer (1895-1988) viewed Queen Esther as a Christ-like redeemer figure.[[41]](#footnote-41) By contrast with this effort to see the theological value of this Jewish story from a Christian perspective, Haenchen construes its message as “materialistic” and antithetical to Christianity, as will be discussed below. In fact, after spending the bulk of his essay attacking the story’s historicity, the author invokes Martin Luther to argue that it does not belong in the Christian Bible. It is too Jewish (“*Juditze*”) and with its fairy tale qualities, also contains too much paganism. Regretting that he cannot be more edifying, Haenchen concludes, “But it is so.”[[42]](#footnote-42)

In order to understand Haenchen’s essay, we must know more about Vischer’s sympathetic Christian interpretation of the Book of Esther that is the object of his polemic. To do so, it is necessary to review some additional details of the Biblical narrative. According to the text, Esther did not disclose her Jewish ethnicity to the Persian king before he chose her to be his consort.[[43]](#footnote-43) Now, with his minister Haman plotting an annihilation of all the Jews in Persia,[[44]](#footnote-44) Mordecai asks Esther to intervene with the king on behalf of her people.[[45]](#footnote-45)

In an earlier part of the story, this same king had dismissed his previous consort because she did not show him the deference he expected, and now Mordecai is asking Esther to upend a major policy initiative of the king’s chief minister. If she reveals her Jewish ethnicity to the king now, he will also learn for the first time that she was not forthcoming with him before and during their marriage. It is not hard to imagine the king becoming infuriated by such a belated revelation, siding with Haman, and dismissing Esther as he did the previous queen and permitting her to be killed with all her kin.

Confronted by Mordecai’s plea, Esther might easily have put her own comfort and safety above the plight of her fellow Jews, an especially seductive resolution given her cultural assimilation in the Persian court. Instead, she identifies with the community from which she came in their hour of need, makes herself completely vulnerable before the king, and risks everything by disclosing who she is.[[46]](#footnote-46) This willingness to sacrifice all out of love is undoubtedly why Vischer viewed Esther as a Christ-like figure. The fact that she triumphs in the end while Jesus was actually put to death is irrelevant for Vischer; the essence of the matter for him is that both were willing to give up everything, even their lives, out of love for others.

Haenchen will have none of this. For him, the anguish of the Queen in deciding whether to risk her life on behalf of her people is of no account and the fact that she does not die and triumphs in the end invalidates any similarity with Jesus. For Haenchen, with his androcentric theology, the Book of Esther is all about “the conflict between Haman and Mordecai. . . . Who will hang on the fantastically high gallows—the Jew or the enemy of the Jew?”[[47]](#footnote-47)

One does not have to be a Biblical scholar or professor of literature to see that this is a highly impoverished reading of the text. How can a narrative in which a queen risks everything out of love be reduced to a grim power struggle between two alpha males? It cannot, which reveals how threatening this Nazi theologian found this Jewish story and Vischer’s interpretation of it as a parable about the love of God. Nor does Haenchen account even for the bare elements of the story, since Haman’s and Mordecai’s fates are not in their own hands but are determined by the king, Queen Esther, and the relationship between them.

Haenchen then goes further, creating a dichotomy and contradiction between the Jewish “materialism” that he reads into the story and Christianity. Having decreed that the character and decision of the Queen are of no importance and the story is entirely about earthly victory or defeat, as symbolized by the gallows, Haenchen draws the logical conclusion of this materialism: “Would not Jesus on the cross be the godless one, receiving his just punishment?”[[48]](#footnote-48) Is this not the same doctrine that Job’s friends used to torment him, he asks?

In other words, according to Haenchen, the Jews may celebrate the earthly victory of Mordecai and defeat of Haman, but Christians must reject this way of thinking. By the materialistic logic of the Jews, the crucifixion of Jesus proves his guilt, just as Job’s diseases proved, according to his friends, that Job must have done something wrong. But the one who ends up on the gallows, or the cross, is not necessarily the guilty one.[[49]](#footnote-49)

What is wrong with this picture? Leaving aside that the materialism Haenchen attributes to the text is a projection of his own psyche, there is something profoundly twisted here. The author is correct in saying that bad things can happen to good people. But who is the victim, in his view? Not the Jews, apparently, even after their recent loss of six million in the Nazi genocide. Rather, it is the Nazis themselves, who have suffered the material defeat of World War II. Like Haman’s plot in the Book of Esther, their effort to annihilate the Jews, horrendous though it was, did not succeed. Instead, it was the Nazis who were annihilated.

Don’t internalize this defeat, Haenchen seems to be telling his fellow acolytes of Emanuel Hirsch. We are good people and the fact that we lost the War is not a reflection on our worth or the validity of our theological ideas. We are like Haman on the gallows, or better still, like Christ on the cross. The Jews may have triumphed over us in the Nüremberg Tribunal, but don’t accept their logic of victor’s justice. Don’t succumb to their materialistic way of thinking. Be true to the spiritual legacy of the *Deutsche Christen* and our theological leader Emanuel Hirsch. This answers my second question—having chosen to write about the Book of Esther, what does the author do with this subject matter? He uses it to rationalize former Nazis’ feelings of defeat and victimization in the post-War era.[[50]](#footnote-50)

In the process, Haenchen also reasserts pre-War theological ideas of the Hirsch circle, such as Jews are materialistic and German Protestants embody a universal spirituality that stands outside and above history. Psychoanalytically, this dichotomy sounds very much like dissociation, or what Robert Jay Lifton called “doubling.”[[51]](#footnote-51) In his interviews with former Nazi doctors, Lifton noted the disconnect between the material, earthly genocidal project to which they devoted themselves and the lofty ideology about healing the nation of “life unworthy of life” by which they rationalized their grotesque deeds. So too, the Nazi theologians were engaged in the most materialistic and earthly of power pursuits, even while professing a disembodied spirituality and projecting their unconscious materialism onto Jews.

While the authoritarianism of the Cold War era provided fertile ground for the German religious right, the latter has continued to flourish even after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Anti-Semitism is one continuing mainstay of this ideological complex, but new scapegoats have also arisen to take the place of socialism and communism, most notably immigration and Islam, as seen in Alternatives for Germany and other far right European political parties. The psychological and political-economic sources of these movements are beyond the scope of this paper. But if we have learned something from this paper about the German religious right in the 20th Century, I hope such insights will help us understand and respond to similar resurgent forces confronting us today.

1. Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. C. Benson, *God & Caesar: Troeltsch’s Social Teaching as Legitimation* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Stephen Evans, “Germany’s New Anti-euro AfD Party causes Political Stir,” *BBC* (27 August 2013) //www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-23847838; Thomas Rogers, “Demands of Far-Right Party Unsettle Artists in Germany,” *The New York Times* (17 July 2019) //www.nytimes.com/2019/07/19/arts/afd-germany-culture.html. The AfD is asking for the nationality of artists performing at publicly funded institutions in Germany; Kate Connolly, “AfD Tells Germany Pupils to Denounce Teachers Who Discuss Political Views,” *The Guardian* (11 October 2018) //www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/11/AfD; “Alternative for Germany”: 1. History, 6. Public Image, *Wikipedia*, [//en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative\_for\_Germany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_for_Germany); [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Shelley Baranowski, *The Confessing Church, Conservative Elites and the Nazi State* (NY: Edwin Mellon, 1986), 105f. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Barry Millington, *Wagner: Revised Edition* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 256-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As a 19th century Biblical scholar teaching at Goettingen University, Lagarde proposed a mystical Germanic religion of the pure German folk anticipating the German Christians of the Nazi era. He also called for the extermination of the Jews two generations before Hitler. Lagarde, *Deutsche Schriften*, 4th ed. (Goettingen: Lueder Horstmann, 1903); Lagarde, “Juden und Indogermanen,” *Ausgewaehlte Schriften*, ed. Paul Fischer, 2nd ed. (Muenchen: Lehmanns, 1934), 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Susannah Heschel writes that Jewish religious scholars also bought into the “postwar myth” that Nazis revived anti-Christian paganism, with the result that these scholars underestimated Christian complicity with the Nazi regime. S. Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008), 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Wahrheit und Glaube: Festschrift für Emanuel Hirsch zu seinem 75. Geburtstag*, edited by Hayo Gerdes (Munich: “Die Spur,” Itzehoe Herbert Dorbandt KG, 1963). Neither Ericksen nor Heschel mention the Hirsch *Festschrift* or the continuing post-War legitimacy of the Hirsch circle that it indicates; see Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler*; idem, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012); Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Benson, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler.* [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler*, 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. William F. Albright, *History, Archaeology and Christian Humanism* (NY: McGraw Hill, 1964), 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Wolfgang Trillhaas, “Repraesentant und Aussenseiter einer Generation: Nach dem Tode von Emanuel Hirsch,” *Evangelische Kommentare, Monatsschrift zum Zeitgeschehen in Kirche und Gesellschaft*, 5 (1972), 602. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Quentin Skinner, Preface to *The Foundations of Modern Thought*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), ix-xv. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Hirsch, (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlag, 1934). Subsequent references to this text will use the acronym, DVEG. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. DVEG, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. DVEG, 5-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. DVEG, 10-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. DVEG, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. DVEG, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. DVEG, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Heschel cites Hirsch’s 1939 book, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, where he argues that Jesus was Aryan. Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 115. Also see Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler*, 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler*, 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. DVEG, 17-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. DVEG, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. DVEG, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. DVEG, 29-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. DVEG, 34-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. DVEG, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. DVEG, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. DVEG, 39-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. DVEG, 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. H. Kamick, *Niemoeller (*Frankfurt, 1986), 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Max Weber, *Gesamelte Aufsaetze zur Religionssoziologie*, vol. 1 (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1920-21); Shelley Baranowski, *The Confessing Church, Conservative Elites and the Nazi State* (NY: Edwin Mellon, 1986), 105f; C. Benson, *God & Caesar: Troeltsch’s Social Teaching as Legitimation* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1999), pp. 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. and C.I.A. Interventions since World War II*, 2nd ed. (Common Cause, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *Wahrheit und Glaube: Festschrift für Emanuel Hirsch.*. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Haenchen, “Hamens Galgen und Christi Kreuz,” *Wahrheit und Glaube: Festschrift für Emanuel Hirsch,* 113-133. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Haenchen, “Hamans Galgen,*”* 113-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. His commentaries are still in print in both English and German. For example, Ernst Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles* (John Knox Press, 1971; idem, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Fortress Press, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Tricia Miller, *Jews and Anti-Judaism in Esther and the Church* (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke and Co., 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Wilhelm Vischer, “Esther,” *Theologische Existenz Heute*, 48 (Munich, 1937). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *“*No, Luther was right when he passed judgment on the Book of Esther based on his theology of the cross. It is too Jewish and has a lot of negative pagan features. Of course, that is not edifying. But it is true.” (Translation mine.) *“Nein, Luther hat schon recht gehabt, als er von seiner* theologia crucis *aus über das Estherbuch urteilte, es juditze zu sehr und habe viel heidnische Unart. Das ist freilich nicht erbaulich. Aber es ist wahr.”* Haenchen*, “*Hamans Galgen*,”* 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. *Esther* 2:10, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. *Esther* 3:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. *Esther* 4:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. *Esther* 4:15-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Haenchen, “Hamans Galgen,” 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Haenchen, “Hamans Galgen,” 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Haenchen, “Hamans Galgen,” 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. In his essay, Haenchen makes an explicit analogy between the Book of Esther and the Holocaust, making it clear the latter was on his mind but also leaving unanswered to what extent he considers it fictional like the Hebrew story. Specifically, he writes that in Auschwitz and Meidanek, it is Haman who triumphs. But then he goes on to reject the “materialistic” logic he claims underlies the story of Esther. “In this way, however, the Esther book does not differ from Auschwitz and Meidanek, although Haman triumphed there.” (Translation mine.) “In dieser Weise aber unterscheidet sich das Estherbuch nicht von Auschwitz und Meidanek, obwohl dort Haman triumphierte.” Haenchen, “Hamans Galgen,” 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors* (Basic Books, 1988), 418. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)