

Digitale Bibliothek des Kirchenkampfes

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It's a strange feeling to talk just here about our project "Digitale Bibliothek des Kirchenkampfes" – digital library of the so called church struggle of the protestant churches during the national socialist period in Germany between 1933 and 1945.

On this square called Reichstagsgelände celebrated the national socialist movement and government itself. Thousands of young people stood here [Folie 1], mostly dressed in uniform (and sometimes naked [Folie 2]), listening to the speeches of the Leader Adolf Hitler.

Let's now make together a little journey to those times ... (It's the sense of this institution here, to make such journeys.)

[Film: Hitler speeches with accurate English subtitles.mp4]

Not rarely ended Hitler his speeches with a prayer like this:

Herr, du siehst, wir haben uns geändert. Das deutsche Volk ist nicht mehr das Volk der Ehrlosigkeit, der Schande, der Selbstzerfleischung, der Kleinmütigkeit und Kleingläubigkeit.

Nein Herr, es ist wieder stark in seinem Willen, stark in seiner Beharrlichkeit, stark im Ertragen aller Opfer. Herr, wir lassen nicht von Dir! Nun segne unsern Kampf um unsre Freiheit und damit unser deutsches Volk und Vaterland!

Lord, You see, we have changed. The German people is not anymore the people of dishonourableness, of shame, of self-flagellation, of pusillanimousness and scepticism.

No, Lord, it is strong again in its will, strong in its insistence, strong in bearing all sacrifices.

Lord, we don't let You! Now bless our fight for our freedom and with it our German people and home country!

(Adolf Hitler, 1.5.1933)

On the picture beside the prayer you see St. Michael killing the dragon. This was the vision of Adolf Hitler in the view of the "Deutsche Christen": a saint send by God to save the German people from all evil things and all enemies.

The tenor of this prayer is, as the president of the United States would say: Make Germany great again! We here in Germany are horrified, when we watch TV and see and hear Donald Trump cry to his supporters: "Make America great again!" We here in Germany have experienced what can happen if a country is only fighting for its own interests and has in addition no problem to use military means to reach its goals. The problem of the national socialism was not the socialism, as conservative people in America think, but the nationalism. Nationalism implicates almost always a conflict with the other nations. And today – because of globalization – not only with the nations in the neighborhood, but with the nations all over the world.

We often ask us: How could it happen? How was it possible, that a civilized society was transformed in only a few years in a kind of military machinery? How was it possible, that the protestant churches didn't oppose a war against almost all countries in the neighborhood. How was it at least possible, that the protestant churches could accept the elimination of all European Jews?

Hitler used in his speeches the word God and, how we have seen, he said prayers. As you probably know, Hitler was as an Austrian a member of the Roman-Catholic Church. He was a baptized Christian. He believed in God. No doubt. (If you want to know more about the belief of Hitler, you can read the book "Hitlers Gott" from Michael Reißmann, published 2001.)

And the young people standing before him on this square and listening to his speeches. Raising their right arm and crying: "Heil Hitler!" What's about them? I suppose that almost all of them have also been baptized Christians and members of a church, more than 50 percent of them member of a protestant church.

In the National Evangelical Synod 1934 said a Dr. Kibler from Schwäbisch Hall: „Ich bin Laie, ich bin Arzt. Ich gehöre keiner kirchlichen Gruppe an. Ich bin Nationalsozialist.“¹ „I am a layman, I am a doctor. I belong to no group in the church. I am national socialist.“

(You can already read this text in our digital library. It is digitized.)

We have to realize and to accept that Christian people can have and normally have in their mind Christian and other thoughts, Christian and other convictions.

It's quite easy to differentiate theoretically between state and church. But the critical frontier is not in those institutions but inside the single person. Inside everybody of us is a Christian and ... A Christian and a son or a daughter for example. A Christian and a citizen! Or let us use the other word: A Christian and a national!

¹ Die Deutsche Evangelische Nationalsynode am 9. August 1934. München : Deschler, [1934], S. 25

We all here are baptized Christians. We all read (almost) the same Bible, but in spite of this there are more or less differences in our belief and thinking. And there are not only theological differences which led to the building of different confessions or denominations, as we all know. There are also differences founded on our family background, national background, professional background, historical background and so on. There is a kind of individual and collective mix of thoughts, opinions and convictions in our head.

If I have learned anything from the literature of the so called church struggle of the protestant churches in the Third Reich, it is this: It's almost unimaginable what people can have in their mind at the same time!

"You shall not kill!" Could you imagine, that a Christian, who knows the Ten Commandments, as all Christians do, can accept or even support the killing of millions of Jewish people in an industrial manner? I can't! But millions of German Christians could!

Who have been those strange Christians? My own parents – for example! My parents have been living in a little village on a little farm. In this village didn't live Jewish people, but my parents knew Jewish people (for example the cattle dealer or owners of shops in the near little city). I don't know exactly what my parents thought about the systematical killing of the Jews, but I know that they knew about it and that they didn't oppose to it. They didn't like Jews, but first of all they did what most Germans did in those times: they tried not to attract attention. Because this could mean: prison or death. My father could even speak a little bit Jiddish and he knew several Jewish wise sayings. It was quite normal to have contact with Jewish people in the Germany of those time because there lived a lot of Jewish people in Germany in the 30's. Today live only a few Jewish people in Germany. So I have had only once in my life the opportunity to have direct contact with a Jewish person. (I have been the taxi driver for Ruth Lapide. She visited our college for a lecture a few years ago.)

Not until the last years of the war a lot of German Christians began to believe that the bombing of German cities by the Allies was a punishment of God for the permanent disrespect against the 5th Commandment.

Therefore Theophil Wurm, the Bishop of the Evangelical Church in Württemberg, wrote a letter to Hitler on 16th July 1943, in which he asked the Chancellor to stop the killing of the Jews. He got no answer. So he sent a second letter to Hitler's chief secretary Lammers on 20th December 1943.

Those letters – motivated by an in our view very strange and archaic view on historical events and by a bad conscience – are two of the very rare papers documenting a very careful form of opposition to one project of the nationalsocialist government.

Why not more opposition from the churches to the nationalsocialist movement?

A question: If you would have the chance to change everything, not only in your personal life but also in the life of your whole country, if you would have the chance to make everything new and better. Wouldn't you take this chance to be part of a real revolution? Or would you persist in your old and boring viewpoint?

I have tried to make a little compilation of the subjects of the literature of the so called church struggle. As we can see mostly it was a struggle between old and new, a question of compatibility between the old church and the new political movement and its convictions.

In the view of the national socialists there was now a new Germany, which was great again and strong, military, willing to make sacrifices, following uncompromisingly the Leader. Was the church not an institution producing weak people, permanently needing absolution? Did Christians possibly follow the wrong Leader? The new Germany wanted heroes and soldiers, not men praying on their knees. Pastors who didn't consequently follow these ideas often had to suffer under malice and chicaneries. So argued a lot of authors that Christians can absolutely be strong persons and especially Martin Luther was stylized to be a convicting example for this type of a strong German protestant hero, even opposing the Pope and the Emperor. [Folie. Folie]

In the times of the Third Reich a lot of the works of Martin Luther have been reprinted. Some of them have had a terrible history of reception. Most of all his writings "Von den Juden und ihren Lügen" (1543) [Folie.], which the national socialists used as a justification for their strategy against the Jews (and especially the "Reichsprogromnacht") and "Ob *Kriegsleute* auch im *seligen Stande* sein können" (1526) [Folie.], which was used to motivate young people to become soldiers.

Here you see an example of a little pamphlet of Wilhelm Koller, the mission inspector of the mission center in Neuendettelsau, where I live. He motivated all the pupils of the mission center to become soldiers and members of the SA. Here and today I have no words for such a behavior. As a spiritual leader he motivated young men to kill and to be killed.

I am a Lutheran Christian because I was born in a Lutheran region of Germany. And I am working today in a Lutheran church. If I look on such historical facts, I am not proud to be a member of a Lutheran church in Germany. Maybe I would prefer to be a reformed Christian in the South of France. But we cannot choose the place where we have been born.

One of the most important ideas of the national socialist movement was "ONE".

One people, one leader, one fatherland ... and – in the consequence – of course also one church. Okay, one protestant church and one roman-catholic church. Not even national socialists could really imagine to unify the two big confessions.

In particular two questions have been discussed in the literature of the so called church struggle:

- Can the different protestant confessions be unified in one church? Can this "Reichskirche" be really one church or must it be not more than an association of at least two independent confessional churches, a Lutheran church on one side and a Reformed church on the other side?
- A more fundamental question was: Who can build this new "Reichskirche"? The state? A special group in the church, the "Deutsche Christen"? Or the existing churches, the "Landeskirchen"? Is building a new structure of the churches a spiritual act or a political act? And if it is a spiritual act who has the spiritual power to do it?

Finally the biggest and most difficult subject: the race theory of the national socialists and their idea to eliminate all Jewish influence on the German people. (In the beginning of the so called church struggle the Holocaust didn't still start.) The German society should be pure German.

It's evident: There are Jewish influences on the church:

- The Old Testament is the Bible of the Jews, written by Jewish authors. Can such a Jewish book be essential for a German church?

- Is not Jesus himself a Jew? How can German Christians believe in a Jew as their God?

One author argued that it is a scientific fact that the people living in Nazareth in New Testament times have not been members of the Jewish race. Many other authors argued that Jesus was indeed a Jew by race but not by thinking. (You have heard that it was said ... but I say ...). He was an enemy of the Jewish spirit.

- Didn't even Jews work in the church as pastors?

The national socialist government eliminated the public influence of Jews on the administration of the state by eliminating the Jews themselves from positions in the administration by the so called "Arierparagraph". Jews were no longer allowed to work in institutions of the public administration. The church should follow this example and fire all pastors with Jewish roots.

This led to a violent controversy about the theological question if a baptized Jew is still a Jew or not. Is race more fundamental in the church as belief, as baptism?

The "Deutsche Christen" said: Yes, of course. A Jew cannot work as a pastor in a German church.

Some authors argued that it should give separated Jewish-Christian communities, a kind of second-class Christianity.

A theologian from Erlangen said, that Jewish pastors should voluntary suspend their office because of the special times and the peace in the church.

And there has been the position that a baptized Jew is a full member of the Christian church with all rights, even the right to be a pastor.

There have been persons in the protestant churches saving Jews from being killed by the Nazis, but not Jews at all but "only" baptized Jews. Today is often said, those protestants saved Jews – they have been good ones -, but in their own view they saved Christians.

- And what's about Paulus? Was he not a Jewish scholar? Didn't he falsify the Jews-critical teaching of Jesus?

- And at least: Is Christianity at all the right religion for the German people. Have the German tribes not been forced to become Christians? Must we not go back to the religion of the German tribes before the Christianization of Europe? Don't we need a new paganism?

There are several historical publications who want to show, that the German tribes have become Christians by choice. In this one point the members of the "Bekennende Kirche" and the members of the "Deutsche Christen" and similar groups have been unified. These groups have not been

interested in a non-Christian Germany. They all wanted to have a German Christian church in the new Germany.

After this journey to the past let's have a short look now on the actual situation of our project Anja presented to you in Zagreb.

There are two progresses since then.

The first progress is: We have begun to record articles from the most important periodicals of that time.

The periodical "Junge Kirche" was something like the newsletter of the "Bekennende Kirche". It was founded in 1933. There have been several restrictions for the editors in the following years and 1941 the periodical was definitely forbidden. After the war, in 1949, it was founded again and is published until now.

In thousands of articles you can find in this periodical detailed informations about events and opinions between 1933 und 1941 concerning the so called church struggle.

On the other hand we have the periodical "Evangelium im Dritten Reich", a Sunday newsletter for "Deutsche Christen". Here you can read and see all this unbelievable things we could watch on our journey to the Third Reich.

The second progress is: We have now money to buy licenses, which allow us to publish several thousands of digitizations in the near future. (At the moment we have about 250 links to digitizations in our catalogue.)

The licensing process is quite easy: You look for titles you are interested in in the catalogue of the German National Library. If you have found the title and if it has the status "Vergriffen" ("out of print"), you can click on the shopping cart icon. In the next step you open the shopping cart and click on "Antrag nach VGG § 51". Your request will then be processed and a few weeks later you get an invoice from the VG Wort (the "VG Wort" is an association representing the [financial] interests of authors). In your account you can meanwhile see the actual status of your requests.

If you want to get licenses for a big number of titles, there is a possibility to send a title list to the DNB (GNL). The DNB (GNL) will then start an automatic search process.

If you have paid the invoice you are allowed now to digitize and publish the book – unless there is an objection by the owner of the copyright. If there would be even a claim for compensation by the owner of the copyright, the VG Wort will handle this. You would have no stress and no costs.

So we hope that in only a few months it is possible for everyone to read directly on the display a big part of the literature of the so called church struggle and to have an own view on this extraordinary period in our history.

A very little number of the literature of the so called church struggle is translated in other languages. Many people think, this historical chapter is only a matter of the Germans. It's their history, not ours. But if we look around today, we watch a growing nationalism all over the world. If you would have asked me one year before, if I could imagine that it's possible, that the transnational institutions built after the Second World War to create a peaceful world could be cancelled sometimes, I would have answered: "Never! That's impossible!" But now we see, that the future of the European Union, of the NATO and the United Nations is not guaranteed. It was one of the first steps of the German Reich in foreign politics to leave the Völkerbund (League of Nations) on 14th October 1933.