

University of Cambridge

Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages

Department of German and Dutch

**Between Defiance and Compliance:
The Lutheran *Landesbischöfe* of Hanover, Bavaria and
Württemberg in the Third Reich**

Diana Jane Beech

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DECLARATIONS

This dissertation does not exceed 80,000 words, including footnotes and references but excluding the bibliography.

This dissertation is written and formatted in compliance with the *Style Guide* of the Modern Humanities Research Association.

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration.

**Diana Jane Beech - 'The Lutheran *Landesbischöfe* of Hanover, Bavaria and
Württemberg in the Third Reich'**

ABSTRACT

While much is known about the polarities of the Protestant 'Church Struggle' (*Kirchenkampf*) in Nazi Germany, comparatively little is understood about the complex and collective dynamic of the *Landesbischöfe* of the only three 'intact' churches to escape incorporation into the Nazi-dominated *Reichskirche*. Traditionally, literature on the *Kirchenkampf* has taken a simplistic 'good-versus-evil' approach to the conflict and, arguably inspired by a moral need to come to terms with the less-than-glorious past of the German Protestant Church, has been unable to locate the *Landesbischöfe* of the 'intact' churches neatly within the conventional historiographical paradigm.

By taking as its subject *Landesbischöfe* August Marahrens of Hanover, Hans Meiser of Bavaria and Theophil Wurm of Württemberg, this dissertation examines the contribution to the *Kirchenkampf* of three men, who, to ensure the continued existence of German Protestantism in the Third Reich, were ultimately forced to find ways to respond to National Socialism that lay somewhere between the parameters of defiance and compliance. In order to demonstrate the collective contribution of the *Landesbischöfe* to maintaining the status of the German Protestant Church amidst heightening Nazi tyranny, this dissertation traces how, with reference to external personal, political and socio-cultural conditions, the bishops moved from a seeming commonality of cause to display increasingly varied responses to the manifestations of both political and ecclesiastical National Socialism. By tracing the development of their moderate but nonetheless disparate positions, this dissertation not only questions the traditional historiographical assumptions that *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm failed to resist National Socialism effectively or were, at best, collectively neutral in the conflict, but also seeks to delineate, for the first time, the crucial parts played by each of the *Landesbischöfe* during three distinct stages of the *Kirchenkampf*.

In devoting each of its three central chapters to a particular phase in the conflict, this dissertation demonstrates how each of the *Landesbischöfe* in turn steered the 'intact' ensemble through the Third Reich as a modest yet effective force of opposition to Nazi despotism. Seen as a whole, this investigation ultimately demonstrates how, through their respective turns at national Church leadership, *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm did not undermine the wider Church resistance effort but, rather, saved the Church from subjugation to Nazism more effectively than would have been possible had they stood alone.

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When deciding to entitle this investigation ‘Between Defiance and Compliance’ I had no idea how those four words would also come to serve as the perfect epigraph for my own experience in producing this dissertation. On the one hand, the very fact I have completed such a significant piece of work is in defiance of my own belief in just how far circumstance has allowed me to pursue my academic ambition. Yet, on the other, the very completion of this dissertation serves as the ultimate compliance with my hopes and aspirations of someday doing justice to the remarkable opportunities that have been afforded to me.

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use the remainder of these acknowledgements first to remember the members of Peterhouse Graduate Society past and present and my colleagues at the *FU Berlin*, whose friendship over the course of this investigation has greatly contributed to a positive working environment. I should also like to pay particular mention to Kristian Buchna of the *Universität Augsburg*, whose passion and dedication for his own research inspired me through my never-ending piles of manuscripts and microfiches. Furthermore, I reserve a special ‘thank you’ for Anna Duch, Emrys Jones and Viviana Mollica, whose companionship over recent years has most definitely defied the demands of the dissertation writing process and most certainly complied with my perception of true friendship.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ApU	Altpreußische Union
AzGK	Arbeit zur Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes
BVP	Bayerische Volkspartei
CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union
DEK	Deutsche Evangelische Kirche ('Reichskirche')
DEKB	Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchenbund
DEKK	Deutsche Evangelische Kirchenkanzlei
DNVP	Deutschnationale Volkspartei
EKD	Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland
EKApu	Evangelische Kirche der altpreußischen Union
ELKB	Evangelisch-lutherische Kirche in Bayern rechts des Rheins
ELLKH	Evangelisch-lutherische Landeskirche Hannovers
ELLKW	Evangelisch-lutherische Landeskirche in Württemberg
GDC	Glaubensbewegung Deutscher Christen
Gestapo	Geheime Staatspolizei
GVR	Geistlicher Vertrauensrat
JB	Jungreformatrische Bewegung
KFA	Kirchenführerausschuss
KFK	Kirchenführerkonferenz
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands
KTSW	Kirchlich-theologische Sozietät in Württemberg
KZ	Konzentrationslager
LKA	Landeskirchenausschuss
LWB	Lutherischer Weltbund
LWK	Lutherischer Weltkonvent
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei

PNB	Pfarrernotbund
RELKD	Rat der Evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche Deutschlands (‘Lutherrat’)
RKA	Reichskirchenausschuss
RMfKA	Reichsministerium für kirchliche Angelegenheiten
SA	Sturmabteilung
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
VELKD	Vereinigte evangelische-lutherische Kirche in Deutschland
VKL	Vorläufige Kirchenleitung

EPIGRAPH

“A balanced study that neither excoriates Confessional Lutherans for distancing themselves from the Niemoeller-wing of the Confessing Church nor extols them for their rigid adherence to the principles of Lutheran Confessionalism is needed now more than ever.”

(Matthew D. Hockenos)¹

¹ ‘Review of Lowell C. Green’s *Lutherans Against Hitler: The Untold Story* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007)’, in the electronic newsletter of The Association of Contemporary Church Historians, June 2008, Vol. XIV, no.6.

PREFACE

The 'Intact' Predicament

Nun machst du abermals einen Einwand: »Ja, weltliche Gewalt zwingt nicht zum Glauben, sondern verhindert nur äußerlich, daß man die Leute nicht mit falscher Lehre verführe. Wie könnte man sonst den Ketzern wehren?« Antwort: Das sollen die Bischöfe tun; denen ist dieses Amt übertragen (Tit I, 9ff), und nicht den Fürsten.

(Martin Luther)²

In 1523 Martin Luther wrote a text which would henceforth define the role of secular authority in Christian eyes, as well as determine Christian responses towards temporal demands. Although relatively uncontroversial at the time of publication, the social ethics prescribed by Luther's *Von weltlicher Obrigkeit* were to have profound ramifications over four hundred years later during the course of the German *Kirchenkampf* (1933-1945). In the face of Adolf Hitler's *Machtübernahme*, those active in the German Protestant Church of the time were forced to reconsider Luther's sixteenth-century characterisation of the world as comprising two parallel and coexistent kingdoms: that of the secular and that of the spiritual. As the totalitarian ambitions of Hitler's National Socialist (Nazi) dictatorship became evermore apparent, Protestant clergymen throughout Germany began to reassess the inter-relation of his new tyrannical regime with their time-honoured Christian duty to God. In light of Luther's *Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*, which rapidly became the *locus theologicus* for the thinking of academics and churchmen alike, questions arose as to whether it was more appropriate to view these two parallel modes of governance as existing in an antagonistic rather than a complementary relationship as previously thought. When political National Socialism (Nazism) began, in particular, to threaten the sanctity of Christian scripture with its own pseudo-religiosity, leading figures within the German Protestant Church had no choice but to prioritise either their national loyalty or their religious convictions or, indeed, to attempt to reconcile the two through a new brand of ecclesiastical Nazism.

Although many pastors clearly proclaimed themselves either for or against the Nazi renewal of the German Protestant Church, it ought to be recognised that not all of the interpretations of Luther's *Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*, which arose as a result of this impromptu re-examination of his theology, were so dualistic in nature. A lesser-acknowledged 'third way'³

² Luther, 1965, p.44.

³ This idea draws on Per Frostin's allusion to "three different attitudes", which he describes as having prevailed in Nazi Germany in reference to Luther's *Zwei-Reiche-Lehre* (Frostin, 1994, p.8).

was, in fact, also pursued by those in the so-called *Kirchenkampf* ‘middle’, who rejected extreme allegiance to either the Church⁴ or the State,⁵ whether this was because they were unwilling to polarise themselves in the debate or, indeed, an inevitable result of circumstance. Three men who were to find themselves pushed into this middle ground once their regional churches (*Landeskirchen*) were spared seizure by the Nazis, were the Lutheran state bishops (*Landesbischöfe*) of the only ‘intact’ *Landeskirchen* - those of Hanover, Bavaria and Württemberg.⁶ With the added pressure upon them of the Lutheran teaching that it was the specific responsibility of the bishops to thwart heretical doctrine and thereby maintain equilibrium between the secular and spiritual kingdoms, it ought to come as no surprise to discover that *Landesbischöfe* August Marahrens, Hans Meiser and Theophil Wurm respectively had no choice but to use the complex situation afforded to them by the fact that their churches remained ‘intact’ to uphold the status of institutional Protestantism in Nazi Germany.

⁴ For clarity, the word ‘Church’ will be capitalised in this dissertation when it is used to refer to institutional Protestantism in Germany in its broadest sense. Un-capitalised uses of the term ‘church’ will thus be used to refer to the constituent *Landeskirchen* of the wider German Protestant Church.

⁵ In the same way as this dissertation distinguishes between the dual meanings of the term ‘church’, the word ‘State’ will be capitalised throughout this dissertation when referring to the political and territorial entity of Germany or, indeed, its instrument of secular governance. This is to avoid confusion with the un-capitalised use of the term ‘state’, which refers to the individual constituent *Länder* of Germany.

⁶ In keeping with the language of this inquiry, this dissertation shall refer to the regions of Hanover and Bavaria using the English spellings. When citing works in German, it will, however, revert to the German terminology of *Hannover* and *Bayern*. Variations in the spelling of these terms within this investigation are thus intentional and ought not to be seen as inconsistencies.

INTRODUCTION

a) Preliminary Remarks and Research Objectives

As my preface indicates, this dissertation is concerned with the predicament of the three Lutheran *Landesbischöfe* of Hanover, Bavaria and Württemberg during the Third Reich and their distinctive contribution to the Protestant struggle against the demands of the Nazi regime. Although much has already been written about this struggle,⁷ this inquiry comes about as a result of a desire to uncover and understand the previously neglected and, arguably, often undervalued response to National Socialism epitomised by *Landesbischöfe* August Marahrens of Hanover, Hans Meiser of Bavaria and Theophil Wurm of Württemberg, who found themselves at the helm of the only three Protestant *Landeskirchen* in the Third Reich not to fall under the control of Nazi authorities.

To understand thoroughly the origins of the bishops' predicament, it should be noted that at the start of the Third Reich institutional Protestantism in Germany comprised twenty-eight provincial churches, which were loosely united under the umbrella organisation of the *Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchenbund* (DEKB). Having lost their traditional *summi episcopi* with the abdication of the German princes in 1918, the Protestant *Landeskirchen* had felt vulnerable under the various coalition governments of the Weimar Republic and had not only provided themselves with individual constitutions but had also established the DEKB as a means to enhance their authority against the dominance of liberalism and Roman Catholicism under the Republic. When Adolf Hitler and his *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP) came to power in January 1933 with a pledge to uphold an undefined form of

⁷ Although part b) of this 'Introduction' details the specific titles which have inspired this particular investigation, reference ought to be made here to the seminal works on the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, which range from early theoretical writings dealing solely with the clash of the Nazi and Christian ideologies (cf. Duhm, 1934; Gurian, 1936; Duncan-Jones, 1938; Frey, 1938; Bendiscioli, 1939) to retrospective 'compendious' studies covering the full twelve years of the conflict (cf. Hermelink, 1950; Zipfel, 1965; Conway, 1968; Scholder, 1977, 1985; Helmreich, 1979; Meier, 1976-1984). During the past sixty years, the *Kirchenkampf* has been, inevitably, covered from a range of different perspectives which include, amongst others, the specific contribution to the conflict of: the *Bekennende Kirche* (cf. G. Niemöller, 1959a&b; W. Niemöller, 1958a, 1960, 1969; Helmreich, 1970; Besier and Ringshausen, 1986), the *Glaubensbewegung Deutscher Christen* (cf. Meier, 1967; Sonne, 1982; Bergen, 1996; Siegele-Wenschkewitz, 1994; Heschel, 2008; Steigmann-Gall, 2003), confessional Lutherans (cf. Tiefel, 1972; Green, 2008), conservative elites (cf. Baranowski, 1986; Weiling, 1998), parish churches (cf. Jantzen, 2008), women in the Church (cf. Thomas, 1995), and also intra-Protestant groups such as Methodists or Baptists (cf. Strahm, 1989; Strübind, 1995). More specifically for this investigation, regional studies have also been conducted into how the *Kirchenkampf* played out within the *Landeskirchen* of Hanover (cf. Besier, 1986; Grosse et al., 1996; Lindemann, 1998), Bavaria (cf. Baier, 1968, 1979, 1999; Baier and Henn, 1969; Kremmel, 1987; Maser, 1990; Mensing, 1998) and Württemberg (cf. Hermelink, 1949; Lernser, 1958, Dipper, 1966; Schäfer, 1971-1986). The only official bibliography on the history of the *Kirchenkampf* covers all work published before 1958 (cf. Diehm, 1958) and the only formal attempt to categorise the historiographical styles of *Kirchenkampf* literature remains Conway, 1964.

“positives Christentum”,⁸ it was thus understandable that the Protestant churches saw in Germany’s new Nazi-dominated government a means to revive the union of “nation and altar” of the pre-Weimar years.⁹ However, with the Nazis taking the earliest opportunity to subordinate every aspect of German life to their *Führer*-orientated State, two opposing camps emerged within the DEKB: The first of these, known loosely as the ‘German Christian Movement’ or *Glaubensbewegung Deutscher Christen* (GDC), strove to incorporate Nazi principles into the Church,¹⁰ whilst the other, eventually known as the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*), sought to reject the heresy of the GDC and foster a national Church based solely on the concept of the *sola Scriptura*.¹¹

As a way of evading conflict as well as political interference in ecclesiastical affairs, a three-man committee of non-GDC churchmen took the initiative to devise a constitution for a unified Protestant Church in early 1933.¹² Under Hitler’s orders, however, prominent GDC member Ludwig Müller oversaw the work of the committee,¹³ thereby causing Nazi principles to infiltrate into the design for the new national Church, or *Reichskirche*. Following major disagreements between church officials and the Nazi State as to who should head the *Reichskirche*, and subsequent intervention from the State on behalf of the GDC in church elections, Ludwig Müller was eventually installed as *Reichsbischof* of the newly established *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (DEK) on 27th September 1933, supported by a national Church governing committee of the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirchenkanzlei* (DEKK), comprising largely ‘German Christian’ clergy.¹⁴

⁸ Cf. Article 24 of the Party Programme, dated 24th February 1920, in Zipfel, 1965, p.1. For a discussion of the many interpretations of “positives Christentum”, cf. ‘Positive Christianity or Nazi Cult: The Ideological Conflict’ in Conway, 1968, pp.140-167.

⁹ Tiefel, 1972, p.330.

¹⁰ It is important to note that the GDC was never a unified movement within the DEKB but, rather, a collection of groups advocating differing degrees of radicalism towards the churches’ assimilation to Nazism. For details on the discrepancies and practices within the GDC, cf. ‘Die Deutsche Christen (1931-1933)’ in Scholder, 1977, pp.239-276; Helmreich, 1979, pp.78-81; as well as Sonne, 1982; Bergen, 1996; Heschel, 2008.

¹¹ It should be noted that the *Bekennende Kirche* began life as the *Jungreformatrische Bewegung* (JB) and the *Pfarrernotbund* (PNB). The ‘Confessing Church’ was established in the ‘Barmen Declaration’ of May 1934. For details on the theology of the *sola Scriptura*, cf. Kistler, 1997.

¹² This committee was known as the *Kapler Ausschuss*. It was headed by Dr. Hermann Kapler of the United *Evangelische Kirche des Altpreußischen Unions* (EKApU) and included *Landesbischof* August Marahrens of Hanover and Dr. Hermann Hesse as representatives of the Lutheran and Reformed churches respectively (cf. Helmreich, 1979, pp.133-135). It should also be noted here that alongside the efforts of the *Kapler Ausschuss*, *Landesbischof* Hans Meiser of Bavaria had also begun talks to foster a union of specifically Lutheran churches in Germany (cf. *ibid.*)

¹³ For details on the life, work and personality of Müller, cf. Schneider, 1993.

¹⁴ For in-depth accounts of the beginnings of the *Reichskirche*, cf. ‘The Seizure of Power’ in Conway, 1968, pp.1-44; ‘Protestantische Kirchenreform’ in Scholder, 1977, pp.355-387; ‘The Establishment of the German Evangelical Church’ in Helmreich, 1979, pp.133-156.

Although institutional Protestantism in Germany may be seen to have taken on its first nationalised structure since the Reformation at this point, in truth the *Reichskirche* was not a completely nationalised Church at all. Not only did tensions grow between the intra-Church factions of the GDC and the *Bekennende Kirche*, as the latter quickly established its own rival system of Church governance in the form of the first *Vorläufige Kirchenleitung* (VKL) but, more significantly for this investigation, the GDC had also failed to capture the three Lutheran *Landeskirchen* of Hanover, Bavaria and Württemberg. As leaders of the only Protestant *Landeskirchen* to remain free from Nazi domination, the *Landesbischöfe* of these churches found themselves with a freedom that brought with it liabilities as well as advantages.

As heads of Lutheran *Landeskirchen*, *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm already faced a complex predicament of owing loyalty to the secular leadership on the one hand, yet being obligated to stand up against it in defence of traditional Christian orthodoxy on the other. After finding themselves pushed into the middle ground of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* as a result of their respective leadership of the so-called ‘intact’ *Landeskirchen*, the capacity of the three *Landesbischöfe* to fulfil their dual Lutheran obligations to the State was further problematised by the challenging conditions emanating from the *Intaktheit* of their churches, which had collectively come to represent the only section of the German Protestant Church truly free from the harmful influence of ‘Nazified’ Christianity. In line with their obligation as bishops to warn against any potential heretical practices of both the Church and the State, Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm were thus obligated to find ways to do so which would not jeopardise the only remaining undistorted example of institutional Protestantism in the Third Reich.

This investigation is therefore based on the recognition that *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm were forced to grapple with two distinct forms of Nazism in the Third Reich: the political, which was employed by the NSDAP in its escalating policies of violence, tyranny and discrimination, and the ecclesiastical, which was practised by the GDC in its efforts to incorporate Nazi precepts into the Church. Due to their unspoken responsibility to maintain the status of institutional Protestantism in Nazi Germany, then, it must be appreciated that the bishops could neither fully embrace the influx of ecclesiastical Nazism into the Church nor completely object to developments brought about by political Nazism in the wider secular arena. As the histories of the so-called ‘destroyed’ *Landeskirchen* already show, any attempt to do so would inevitably have put German Protestantism at risk of

complete annihilation by Nazism, as well as provoked revenge attacks from the State.¹⁵ In view of the bishops' unique 'intact' predicament, which saw them having to devise ways to preserve the essence of German Protestantism within the precarious totalitarian context of the Third Reich, this investigation therefore recognises that Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm were ultimately forced to position themselves in the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* somewhere between the extremes of direct defiance and complete compliance.

In its acknowledgement of the fact that Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm were forced to respond to the manifestations of both political and ecclesiastical Nazism in a manner quite distinct from the rest of the Protestant clergy in the 'destroyed' *Landeskirchen*, who were compelled to choose between the polarities of the pseudo-religious Nazi *Weltanschauung* and the original Christian confessions, this dissertation seeks not only to show how the three *Landesbischöfe* responded to both political and ecclesiastical Nazism between 1933 and 1945, but also to explain why they chose the particular responses they did. Without an additional focus on the motivations of the three *Landesbischöfe*, which draws upon circumambient developments in their private lives, in their respective *Landeskirchen* and in the wider national political arena, their responses to both manifestations of Nazism risk appearing to highlight the personal will of each of the *Landesbischöfe* and not to reflect the complex web of structural obligations and limitations imposed on them by their unique 'intact' predicament.

Moreover, in recognition of their shared responsibility to preserve not only the *Intaktheit* of their own churches but, by extension, also the sanctity of Protestant Christianity in the Third Reich, this dissertation is further concerned with investigating the interdependency between the three *Landesbischöfe* and their mutual reliance upon each other's responses to Nazism. Despite being theoretically free to govern their own churches as they saw fit, Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm nonetheless shared an unwritten, collective aim to resist the influx of Nazi policies into their respective churches, since the loss of any one of their *Landeskirchen* threatened to weaken the ability of German Protestantism to withstand Nazism. At the same time, however, in order not to endanger the ecclesiastical *Intaktheit* of their churches unnecessarily, the *Landesbischöfe* needed to mask every effort they made to defy Nazism with a simultaneous attempt to pacify Nazi authorities, both within the Church and within the State. One of the key findings of this dissertation is that, whilst the bishops were obligated to appease proponents of both extreme Christocentrism within the Church and

¹⁵ This claim is best supported by the case of Pastor Julius von Jan of Oberlenningen, who gave a sermon on 16th November 1938, preaching of the injustice of the *Reichskristallnacht*. In response to this sermon, he was brutally attacked, tortured and imprisoned by the Nazi authorities (cf. Dipper, 1966, p.263; Conway, 1968, pp.375-376).

political Nazism within the State, one of the bishops at any one time had to assume the central role of a force for moderation within their collective ‘intact’ dynamic.

It is by looking at the lives of bishops together in this way and reconciling their changeable displays of pro- and anti-Nazi sentiments in connection with their peculiar interrelationship that this investigation hopes to provide a new perspective on the bishops’ conduct in the Third Reich. The chapters that follow therefore assess the bishops’ individual contributions to the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* with reference to the structural requirements of their unique ‘intact’ situation, and aim to demonstrate how the bishops’ respective responses to the manifestations of both political and ecclesiastical Nazism ensured the continuous presence of an important, albeit intermediate, strand of resistance in Nazi Germany, which was to preserve the essence of German Protestantism through to the end of the Third Reich and beyond.

b) Historiographical and Methodological Contexts for Research

In order to formulate an account of the lives of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm in the Third Reich, this dissertation has to grapple with two distinct sets of historiographical and methodological concerns: the first of these relates to the narration of Germany’s Nazi past in its widest sense, whilst the other specifically affects the historiography of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* within this broader context. In order to demonstrate the basis on which this dissertation contributes to the particular historiography of the Protestant Church Struggle, there follows a description of the two levels of historiography which have shaped the investigation.

i) The Historiography of the Third Reich

As Ian Kershaw remarks in his work on *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*,¹⁶ any attempt to write about an aspect of Germany’s Nazi past must not only take account of the polarisation of opinion affecting all areas of historical study as political agendas change, new generations emerge, and fresh routes of investigation are explored; it must also deal with what he calls “the inevitable merging of three dimensions”.¹⁷ The first

¹⁶ London, New York: Routledge, 1993.

¹⁷ Kershaw, 1993, p.1.

dimension, the “political-ideological”, concerns the politicisation of the historiography of the Third Reich and the tension between historiographical investigation and political or ideological agendas.¹⁸ The second dimension, the “moral”, deals with the trivialisation of the darker aspects of Third Reich history and the need to strike a balance between a sympathetic understanding of complex historical developments and an acknowledgement of the wider brutal historical context.¹⁹ Finally, the third dimension, the “historical-philosophical”, relates to differences in historical approach to Germany’s Nazi past and the requirement to find an appropriate perspective between the normalisation and the overt moralisation of the history of the Third Reich.²⁰ Using Kershaw’s terminology to distinguish the three dimensions in question, I shall now explain how each dimension plays into my particular investigation into the lives of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm in the Third Reich, and how this dissertation has sought to address the points of contention which these dimensions raise.

The Political-Ideological Dimension

As the first of the dimensions to be taken from Kershaw, the political-ideological dimension of Third Reich historiography relates to the various ways in which political and ideological differences shape patterns and practices of writing the history of Germany’s Nazi past. As Kershaw explains, this dimension particularly originated in the conflict of agendas between the two Germanies between 1949 and 1989, when historians of the German Democratic Republic used the history of the Third Reich to warn against the barbarity of Western capitalism, whilst their counterparts in the Federal Republic of Germany employed the Nazi past to ward off any recurrence of totalitarianism in the future. Even though these competing ideological agendas no longer predominantly influence the historiography of the Third Reich, the political-ideological dimension has not ceased to affect historiographical practices in this area; only nowadays it tends to manifest itself in the form of philosophical disputes between historians of different kinds of liberal-democratic persuasion. Modern-day political-ideological disputes as to how the history of Nazism should be best narrated thus evaluate whether present-day social and political values should influence historical writing or whether

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, pp.10-14. It should be noted that I have reversed the order in which Kershaw analyses these dimensions in order to convey a sense of the rising importance of these issues for this particular investigation.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp.14-16.

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, pp.5-10.

historians ought to abandon these tendencies in pursuit of ‘value-free’ and ‘objective’ historical accounts.²¹

In its investigation into the lives of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm in the Third Reich, then, this dissertation encounters the political-ideological dimension primarily because it deals with the highly-politicised legacies of at least one of its subjects, as can be illustrated by the recent *Meiserstraße* disputes throughout Bavaria.²² As recently as 2006, predominantly left-wing democratic parties in Bavaria began to call for the renaming of buildings and streets which had originally been dedicated to *Landesbischof* Meiser after his death to honour his leadership of an ‘intact’ church.²³ To justify these calls, the campaigners referred to an essay which Meiser had written in 1926 in response to the request of church authorities that he take a position on the so-called ‘Jewish Question’. In this essay, entitled ‘Die evangelische Gemeinde und die Judenfrage’,²⁴ Meiser frequently spoke of Jewish members of German society as the ‘others’ and primarily criticised them for putting themselves and the purity of their people first, together with their zeal for making money.²⁵ Even though Meiser penned his words long before the term “*Judenfrage*” became associated with the Nazi death camps, and forgetting the fact that the Nazis in fact persecuted Meiser in 1934 for the generosity they considered him to have shown toward German Jews in the very same essay,²⁶ the campaigners ignored the integrationist nature of Meiser’s message, which encouraged the assimilation of Jewish people into German society, and instead interpreted it as being in line with the ‘exclusionist-expulsionist’ anti-Semitism of the Nazis,²⁷ branding Meiser a “Nazi-Bischof”, “ein glühender, unverbesserlicher, bekennender Antisemit” and “ein geistiger Wegbereiter des Holocausts”.²⁸

²¹ Ibid., pp.10-14.

²² Cities affected included Ansbach, Nuremberg and Munich.

²³ In Nuremberg, members of the SPD, the Greens and *die Linken* voted for the renaming of the *Bischof-Meiser-Straße* in 2008 (cf. *Welt Online* article, 21/02/2008, last accessed on 06/01/2011 and accessible at: http://www.welt.de/regionales/muenchen/article1703958/Neuer_Name_fuer_die_Meiserstrasse.html). In Munich, members of the SPD and the Greens succeeded in pushing through the renaming of the *Meiserstraße* as recently as 2010, rejecting as they did so the attempts of CSU members to defer the decision to a later date (cf. *Evangelischer Presseverband für Bayern* article, 20/02/2008, available at: <http://www.epv.de/node/3898>, last accessed 06/01/2011).

²⁴ *Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt*, Nuremberg, Nr.33/34/35, 22.08/29.08/05.09.1926, pp.394-419. Available at the *Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern* (LKAB), Bestand 506.

²⁵ Ibid., pp.394-395.

²⁶ Cf. pp.40-41 of this dissertation.

²⁷ These classifications are based on those of Donald Niewyk who, when describing continuity and change in German anti-Semitism between 1871 and 1945, drew distinctions between “expulsionist and genocidal Juedophobia on the one hand and the less extreme solutions of integration and segregation on the other” (Niewyk, 1990, p.338).

²⁸ Cf. H.C.Meiser, 2008, p.10.

As the recent politicisation of Meiser's personal history demonstrates, then, any attempt to foreground the efforts of him and his counterparts in the 'intact' churches to protect German Protestantism has come to be associated with the agenda of the democratic right, whilst any attempt to foreground their alleged affinity to Nazi policies of discrimination relates to the agenda of the democratic left. Since these different social and political agendas have been shown to have a profound influence on the way in which the lives of the bishops are perceived, this investigation must necessarily take into account the political-ideological perspectives of both sides in its quest for objectivity. It is therefore to be expected that this dissertation will elicit political-ideological judgements from its readers as it seeks to bring out those efforts of the bishops which helped to defy Nazi hegemony as well as identify those which could be seen to be complicit in wider Nazi crimes against humanity. For this reason, I find it necessary to clarify in the next section the moral dimension of Third Reich historiography, which concentrates specifically on the need to contextualise individual narratives of achievement with reference to the darkest aspects of Germany's Nazi past, and explain how this dimension plays into this particular inquiry.

The Moral Dimension

Nazi Germany will forever be remembered as a regime of terror that brought about the Second World War and carried out the systematic murder of millions throughout Europe. Any historiographical attempt to reach a sympathetic understanding of the lives of subjects operating within the Third Reich is therefore inherently problematic. As Ian Kershaw details, in the immediate post-war era it was customary for historians to make explicit their revulsion towards the barbarism of Nazism. As time progressed, however, historians began to depart from the indignation and blanket condemnation of these early historiographies and turned, instead, to formulating historical accounts which empathised with those members and sections of German society who lived and functioned 'normally' in the Third Reich. As a result of its turn away from the moral content of Nazism, this historical writing has in turn come under criticism from historians such as Karl Dietrich Bracher and Klaus Hildebrand for downplaying and even trivialising the brutal reality of Germany's Nazi past.²⁹ The charge of trivialisation stresses the importance of ensuring that accounts which seek to reach a

²⁹ Cf. Kershaw, 1993, pp.14-16. For the origins of the 'trivialisation' debate, Kershaw refers to Karl Dietrich Bracher's *Zeitgeschichtliche Kontroversen. Um Faschismus, Totalitarismus, Demokratie* (Munich: Piper, 1976), and Klaus Hildebrand's 'Geschichte oder "Gesellschaftsgeschichte"? Die Notwendigkeiten einer politischen Geschichtsschreibung von den internationalen Beziehungen' in *Historische Zeitschrift*, 233 (1976), pp.328-357.

sympathetic understanding of certain historical phenomena within the Third Reich do not, by consequence, underestimate the totalitarian dimension of Nazism and ignore its inherent savagery.

There is indeed a risk that this dissertation, in its effort to understand the actions of the *Landesbischöfe* of the ‘intact’ churches between 1933 and 1945 and to demonstrate the interdependency between the three men, might appear to trivialise Nazi brutality: after all, *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm neither did anything tangible to stop Nazi crimes against humanity nor, with the exception of *Landesbischof* Wurm in the latter years of the Third Reich, did they even formulate clear positions towards the Nazis’ rapidly escalating persecution of the Jews. It must be borne in mind, however, that it is difficult to comment on the bishops’ true attitudes toward Nazi anti-Semitic policies due to a lack of documentary sources – a result of both the bishops’ fear of State reprisals and the peculiar nature of their situation, which caused them to view Nazi violence as peripheral to their immediate aim of protecting the autonomy of German Protestantism.³⁰ It is for this reason that the only section of this dissertation to deal explicitly with the bishops’ responses to Nazi terror covers the years 1939 to 1945: this is the period when documentary evidence shows that one or more of the *Landesbischöfe* were compelled to take position openly on Nazi atrocities.

Since Nazi policies of persecution and discrimination are known to have escalated rapidly from 1933 onwards, however, it is important that the structure and design of this dissertation does not overlook the relative silence of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm on the subject of Nazi anti-Semitism and injustice in the period prior to 1939. For this reason, the first two chapters of this dissertation acknowledge the wider context of Nazi brutality in which the Protestant struggle played out and make reference to those acts of Nazi violence which the bishops failed to condemn or prevent. In doing so, it is hoped that this dissertation will be seen as having heeded the warnings of historians such as Bracher and Hildebrand against trivialising Nazi brutality and will not be viewed as presenting an account of the bishops’ lives which risks over-glorifying their particular contribution to the historical development of Nazi Germany or even acting as an apology for the bishops’ own ‘blinkered’ vision of their rightful function in the Third Reich. The historical-philosophical dimension of Third Reich historiography, which deals with the ways in which different historical methods either normalise or moralise Germany’s Nazi past, also addresses the concern for the

³⁰ A more detailed discussion of the limitations of documentary sources used in this investigation can be found on pp.24-25 of this dissertation.

trivialisation of Nazi barbarity. I have therefore chosen to discuss the impact of the historical-philosophical dimension on this investigation in the next section.

The Historical-Philosophical Dimension

In addition to the political-ideological and moral concerns which surround the historiography of the Third Reich, Ian Kershaw also acknowledges that any attempt to recount an aspect of Germany's Nazi past must also reconcile differences of opinion between competing schools of historical-philosophical approaches. On a basic level, this involves squaring the tradition that puts a heavy emphasis on both the uniqueness of Nazi Germany as a historical phenomenon and the importance of individual – and primarily Hitler's – will in determining its outcome, with a more recent social history approach. This seeks both to integrate the history of the Third Reich into the wider pattern of Germany's past and to attribute its historical development to continuities or changes emanating from existing social structures.³¹ Most notably, these differences of opinion were played out in the so-called 'historicisation' debate of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In short, the 'historicisation' debate began when German social historian Martin Broszat revolutionised the way in which the history of the Third Reich had previously been narrated. Through his work on the so-called 'Bavaria Project', Broszat focused on retelling the history of 'everyday life' (*Alltagsgeschichte*) in Nazi Germany in the hope of creating a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the Nazi regime and the society it attempted to control. In examining the various 'conflict spheres' which emerged between the Nazi rulers and pre-existing sections of German society, Broszat most notably introduced the concept of *Resistenz* into the historiography of the Third Reich to describe partial opposition to Nazi hegemony, as opposed to *Widerstand* which categorised resistance efforts that were intended to thwart Nazism in its entirety. Although Broszat fully acknowledged that, on the whole, 'functional' *Resistenz* was incapable of preventing the realisation of the wider Nazi aims of war and genocide, he nonetheless recognised its ability to prevent Nazism's claim to total power, regardless of the motives or intentions behind it.³²

³¹ Kershaw, 1993, pp.5-10 and pp.59-68.

³² Ibid., pp.181-183. For Broszat's 'Bavaria Project', Kershaw refers to Broszat et al. (eds.), *Bayern in der NS-Zeit*, 6 vols. (Munich: 1977-83).

In a chain of correspondence addressed directly to Broszat,³³ however, Israeli historian Saul Friedländer voiced concern that Broszat's efforts to 'historicise' Germany's Nazi past ran the risk of overlooking the most brutal aspects of Nazi history and were thrusting toward "some kind of overall relativisation of the moral problems specifically raised by Nazism".³⁴ The historical-philosophical differences between Broszat and Friedländer, then, are clearly located in their respective treatment of those social institutions and agents which operated within the conventional parameters of defiance and compliance in the Third Reich. While Broszat used these case histories to demonstrate how they served to maintain old German traditions, to the extent that he interpreted their supposed non-participation as a form of rebellion, Friedländer drew on the very same subjects to exemplify how, conversely, their passivity to Nazi policies served to stabilise the Nazi system. Whilst Broszat's approach to the historiography of Germany's Nazi past obviously allows for attention to be paid to the much-neglected actions of "those personalities who cannot readily be categorised as belonging either to the regime or the opposition",³⁵ Friedländer's critique of Broszat's methods nonetheless reinforces the importance of maintaining a continual awareness of the moral dimension of Third Reich history, particularly to avoid overlooking and offending the victims of Nazi Germany's horrific crimes and to prevent them from becoming, in Friedländer's own words, "a static and abstract element of the historical background" to the Third Reich.³⁶

To the extent that it focuses on the social continuity of German Protestantism in the Third Reich and the particular *Resistenz* displayed by the *Landesbischöfe* of the 'intact' churches to maintain this, this dissertation clearly draws upon Martin Broszat's methodological approach to the history of Nazi Germany. However, in doing so, it does not lose sight of the criticisms which this approach has provoked. In adopting social history methods in this dissertation, I, like Broszat, do not intend for this methodology to imply "any softening of the political-moral judgment on the unjust character of the Nazi regime".³⁷ In fact, by explicitly recognising at the outset that the *Resistenz* displayed by the *Landesbischöfe* of the 'intact' churches did not prevent the NSDAP from carrying out its definitive aims of expansion and mass murder across Europe, I hope to have provided this dissertation with a different trajectory from that which is traditionally associated with the conventional concept of *Widerstand* and the question of whether the bishops' resistance efforts might have hindered Nazi Germany from

³³ Cf. Broszat and Friedländer, 1988.

³⁴ Ibid., p.104.

³⁵ Schlie, 2000, p.563.

³⁶ Friedländer, 1997, p.2.

³⁷ Broszat and Friedländer, 1988, p.98.

engaging in war and genocide. Instead, by focusing my investigation on the specific struggle for the control of the Protestant Church in the Third Reich, and examining the extent to which the *Landesbischöfe* of the ‘intact’ churches were able to fend off the Nazi domination of German Protestantism with *Resistenz*, I intend for this dissertation to demonstrate how the actions of the *Landesbischöfe* during the Third Reich had a limiting effect on the reach of Nazism into the Church only, and thus successfully contributed to preventing the totality claim of the Nazi regime over the original Protestant confessions. In order to address as best possible potential concerns regarding the normalisation and trivialisation of the darker aspects of Third Reich history, however, and to go some way to achieving the “synthesis of polarised interpretations” surrounding Germany’s Nazi past called for by Kershaw,³⁸ the historical significance of both the bishops’ *Resistenz* and the preservation of ‘intact’ Protestantism in the Third Reich is kept in check throughout this investigation by a consistent acknowledgement of the moral dimension of wider Nazi history.

ii) The Historiography of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*

The existing historiographical literature on the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* can be seen to uphold one of two contrasting positions regarding the significance of the actions of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm in the Third Reich. On the one hand, until now, generalised historical accounts of the *Kirchenkampf* have tended to downplay the collective contribution of the three *Landesbischöfe*, either in favour of the more spectacular modes of resistance to Nazism offered by radical members of the *Bekennende Kirche*,³⁹ or to exemplify them as typical Church agents who did “too little, too late and for the wrong reasons”.⁴⁰ On the other hand, (auto-)biographical accounts, which deal with the life and work of any one of the three bishops, have thus far failed to offer anything other than hagiographical narratives which, in their endeavour to establish a positive legacy for their chosen individual protagonist, continually focus on his respective successes whilst excluding or, at best, excusing his obvious errors.

Similarly, it may be said of the newest contribution to *Kirchenkampf* literature which specifically focuses on the response to Nazism of confessional Lutherans - namely Lowell C.

³⁸ Kershaw, 1993, p.1.

³⁹ These radical members came to be known as ‘Dahlemites’ after the Berlin-Dahlem parish of Pastor Martin Niemöller, the instigator of the church resistance movement.

⁴⁰ Mommsen, 2003, p.2.

Green's *Lutherans Against Hitler: The Untold Story*⁴¹ - that, while it constitutes the first attempt to evaluate the collective contribution to the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* of the 'intact' churches, it nevertheless remains biased in its focus only on their displays of resistance which were clearly inspired by Lutheran logic and its underlying intention to undermine the confessional scruples of the 'Dahlemites'. As the opening to this dissertation suggests, however, my investigation seeks to offer a more "balanced" account of the contribution to the Protestant struggle of the three *Landesbischöfe*, chiefly by placing itself between the polemical narratives of existing historiographies, which either condemn the bishops for their moments of seeming compliance or eulogise them for their most prominent displays of defiance. Thus, in order to establish the need for the balanced narrative that this dissertation seeks to provide, there now follows an analysis of the texts on the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* which best represent each polemical position that this dissertation intends to re-visit and correct.

The Historical-Philosophical Bias

The first way in which the lives of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm in the Third Reich have been previously interpreted relates directly to the wider 'historicisation' debate and is best demonstrated by reference to overarching historiographical accounts of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, which have attempted to fit the contribution of the three bishops to the development of the Church Struggle within narratives that were ultimately designed to prove that the German Protestant Church actively resisted Nazism in its widest sense, both inside and outside its traditional ecclesiastical confines. Due to the initiatives of Martin Niemöller to establish the first Church resistance movement,⁴² the ability of Karl Barth to re-interpret Christian scripture to formulate the anti-Nazi *Barmer Theologische Erklärung*⁴³ and, of course, the involvement of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the well-known 1944 assassination

⁴¹ St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007.

⁴² Namely the PNB. For details cf. W. Niemöller, 1958b; and 'The Establishment of the Pastors' Emergency League' in Helmreich, 1979, pp.146-148.

⁴³ Considered to be the most explicit declaration of Church resistance to the Nazi State, the 'Barmen Declaration' rejects the intrusion of earthly principles into the sacred space of the Christian Church. For details of its construction, cf. G. Niemöller, 1959a, 1959b; Locke, 1984; Scholder, 1985. For the theses of the 'Barmen Declaration', cf. the official website of the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (EKD) at: <http://www.ekd.de/bekenntnisse/142.html> (last accessed: 04/06/2010).

attempt on Hitler,⁴⁴ it is the actions of Niemöller, Barth and Bonhoeffer which came to dominate early interpretations of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*.

The most notable examples of such historiographies are contained within the *Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes* (AzGK) series,⁴⁵ which was originally a product of the *Kommission für die Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes in der nationalsozialistischen Zeit* (KGK), founded in 1955 specifically to give voice to the contribution to the Church Struggle of “viel[e] unmittelbar Beteiligter”.⁴⁶ Although it remains the largest compendium of works on the *Kirchenkampf* to date, which covers studies of national Confessing Church synods⁴⁷ as well as more regional-specific inquiries,⁴⁸ not a single title from the AzGK series specifically documents the unique predicament of the bishops of the ‘intact’ *Landeskirchen*, either individually or collectively. Moreover, with eight of the titles from the series having been written by Gerhard and Wilhelm Niemöller, the brothers of the Confessing Church leader Martin Niemöller, the partiality of the series towards the more obvious resistance efforts of the Church against the immorality of Nazism is only to be expected.

It is nonetheless important to recognise that such partisanship to the ‘Dahlemitic’ cause is not just typical of German-language titles of the early post-war era, whose inherent bias could at least be explained by the efforts of KGK historians to rebuild the morality of their shattered nation and its Church.⁴⁹ Victoria Barnett’s more recent English-language study, entitled *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler*,⁵⁰ also seeks to expose the contribution of the German Protestant Church to the wider anti-Nazi resistance movement in Germany and, in doing so, is ultimately forced to concede the supremacy of the *status confessionis* of Bonhoeffer, which led to “a basic commitment to political activism”.⁵¹ Although Barnett acknowledges the individual contributions of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens,

⁴⁴ For more on the July 1944 attack, cf. Zimmermann and Jacobsen, 1969. For specific information regarding Bonhoeffer’s theological justification of the assault, cf. Rasmussen, 1972; Mengus, 1992; Barnett, 1995; Retter, 2008. For further details on Bonhoeffer’s ethics in general, cf.: Robertson, 1966; Bethge, 1967, 1975; Barnett, 1995; De Gruchy, 1999.

⁴⁵ Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958-1984.

⁴⁶ Cf. ‘Vorwort der Herausgeber’ by Heinz Brunotte, Ernst Wolf and Kurt Dietrich Schmidt, in Diehn, 1958, pp.5-6, (p.5).

⁴⁷ Cf. G. Niemöller, 1959a, 1959b; W. Niemöller, 1958, 1960, 1969.

⁴⁸ Cf. Middendorf, 1961; Heine, 1961; Ehrenforth, 1968; Fischer, 1972. All titles from this series are clearly marked in the ‘Bibliography’ with the abbreviation AzGK.

⁴⁹ This idea builds upon the original suggestion of Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer that post-war German historians attempted to deal with their “shattered past” by formulating and propagating an illusory, almost singular version of their national history which served the national agenda to come to terms with its difficult past (Jarausch and Geyer, 2003, pp.10-11).

⁵⁰ New York, Oxford: OUP, 1992.

⁵¹ Barnett, 1992, p.289.

Meiser and Wurm to the Church Struggle within their “cautious course” in the Church middle,⁵² the underlying intention of her narrative to portray the Church as a legitimate instrument of resistance to the barbarity of the Third Reich meant that the bishops’ own *Resistenz* efforts were always going to be overshadowed by the *Widerstand* of the more radical ‘Dahlemites’. Furthermore, by posing the rhetorical question as to “what early, public resistance by men of Meiser’s and Wurm’s stature might have achieved”,⁵³ Barnett’s study leaves the final contribution of the *Landesbischöfe* to the wider resistance efforts of the Protestant Church shrouded in an air of unmistakable inadequacy.

It is such acknowledgements of the bishops’ comparative failure to act more convincingly in the face of Nazi atrocities that have led to a second wave of historiographies which completely overlook the *Resistenz* efforts of clergymen to protect the Christian confessions and seek, instead, to demonstrate the decisive failure of German Protestantism to act as an effective force of *Widerstand* against Nazi brutality. The most striking example of such a work is Wolfgang Gerlach’s *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*.⁵⁴ In his aim to demonstrate that the Church remained inactive in the face of Nazi crimes, Gerlach makes use of the structural limitations of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm to portray them as having been concerned purely with preserving calm within Church circles,⁵⁵ and to have done nothing more than to object to the ideological encroachment of the State into the realm of ecclesiastical affairs.⁵⁶ By emphasising, for example, that Marahrens “continued to praise the *Führer* for his constructive work” whilst many were being sent to their deaths in Nazi extermination camps,⁵⁷ Gerlach makes no attempt to understand the full array of structural constraints upon Marahrens during the latter stages of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, or even acknowledge the subtle benefits of Marahrens’ continual appeasement of the Nazi State for the work of those better positioned to act, like his counterpart Theophil Wurm as this dissertation will show. Although Gerlach does raise the possibility that Wurm’s own praise for the Nazi State and inclusion of anti-Semitic remarks may have been “a strategic benevolent gesture, to preserve the Christians and their church from the flames of terror”,⁵⁸ by infusing his narrative with continual references to the number of lives that were lost during the deliberations of the *Landesbischöfe*, Gerlach

⁵² Ibid., pp.49-50, (p.50).

⁵³ Ibid., p.72.

⁵⁴ Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000.

⁵⁵ Gerlach, 2000, p.44.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.108.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.127.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.149.

ultimately renders it impossible for his readers to see anything positive in the bishops' moderate *Resistenz*.

As the works of Wolfgang Gerlach and Victoria Barnett jointly show, then, a historiographical approach which emphasises that German Protestantism either actively resisted or failed to oppose the scourge of Nazism provides an inadequate framework in which to portray the restricted contribution to the *Kirchenkampf* of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm. On the one hand, studies such as that of Gerlach draw on the bishops' moments of ambivalence to Nazi anti-Semitism and violence to create a negative perception of the conduct of German Protestants in the Third Reich. On the other hand, although works such as that of Barnett recognise the bishops' *Resistenz*, they nevertheless cannot avoid comparing their moderate *Kirchenkampf* activities with the more direct displays of *Widerstand* emanating from the 'Dahlemitic' strand of the *Bekennende Kirche*. Since both approaches take too little account of the bishops' specific *Kirchenkampf* predicament, this dissertation seeks rather to assess the bishops' apparently vacillating responses to Nazism with a view to understanding what motivated their alternating displays of modest defiance and reasonable compliance.

The (Auto-)Biographical Bias

Arguably arising out of an attempt to correct the less-than-glorious portrayals of the three *Landesbischöfe* in *Kirchenkampf* historiographies with clearly weighted historical-philosophical persuasions, biographical and autobiographical accounts of the bishops' lives in the Third Reich have also been published. These accounts document the personal contribution of the individual bishops to the Protestant struggle, both on the level of their respective *Landeskirchen* and also with regard to the wider national arena of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*. Conceived with the express intention both to amend "falsche Perspektive"⁵⁹ and to respond to the derogatory "Vorwürfe" of the bishops' critics,⁶⁰ these particular accounts of the bishops' lives in Nazi Germany are intrinsically predisposed to selecting and highlighting those aspects of their careers which best display their 'Confessing' credentials. Although the majority of these narratives are biographical in nature, having been written by dedicated scholars,⁶¹ contemporaries⁶² or even relatives⁶³ of the individual bishops, Theophil

⁵⁹ Klügel, 1964, p.ix.

⁶⁰ H. C. Meiser, 2008, pp.8-11.

⁶¹ Cf. Duensing, 1935, 1947; Ködderitz, 1952; Klügel, 1964; Sautter, 1960.

Wurm's own post-war memoirs can also be seen to display the same bias, since he gave as his motive for writing his own life story a desire that his particular interpretation of history be not forgotten.⁶⁴

Despite being the most impartial example of (auto-)biographical literature on the three bishops, Eberhard Klügel's *Die Lutherische Landeskirche Hannovers und Ihr Bischof 1933-1945*,⁶⁵ which is supported by a supplementary volume of *Dokumente*,⁶⁶ nonetheless reveals its inherent selectivity when failing to address Marahrens' controversial utterances regarding racial discrimination against the Jews.⁶⁷ By disregarding important and widely-accessible documentary material which shows Marahrens to have considered the matter a purely secular affair and not an immediate concern of the Church, Klügel manifestly undermines his own declared intention to produce an objective "mit Dokumentation verbundene Darstellung der hannoverschen Landeskirche im Kirchenkampf".⁶⁸

At the other end of the spectrum to Klügel's intensive academic study, however, sits Hans Christian Meiser's *Der Gekreuzigte Bischof: Kirche, Drittes Reich und Gegenwart. Eine Spurensuche*.⁶⁹ Having been written by the grandson of *Landesbischof* Meiser in response to recent claims that his grandfather was a pronounced anti-Semite who therefore does not deserve to have streets named after him throughout Bavaria,⁷⁰ *Der Gekreuzigte Bischof* does not hide its intrinsic partiality. From his initial insinuation that any disparaging attacks on the legacy of Meiser are, by extension, also assaults on his own integrity,⁷¹ H. C. Meiser leaves no doubt that his publication is intended to combat the claims of all those who seek to undermine the reputation of his family's name. Presented in a judicial fashion, H. C. Meiser's work forcefully defends *Landesbischof* Meiser's actions in Nazi Germany against the claims of his critics.⁷² Moreover, through his inclusion of original documentation which pits the NSDAP's denunciation of Meiser against evidence of the protest writings of Meiser and his

⁶² Cf. Schmidt-Clausen, 1989. He claims he spent "fast ein halbes Jahr lang in enger Tischgemeinschaft" with Marahrens whilst at university (p.7).

⁶³ Cf. H. C. Meiser, 2008, written by Hans Meiser's grandson.

⁶⁴ Wurm, 1953, p.8.

⁶⁵ Berlin and Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1964.

⁶⁶ Berlin and Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1965.

⁶⁷ This sentiment is corroborated in Gerlach, 2000, p.127, who confirms that Wilhelm Niemöller has also criticised Klügel's work for its omissions in 'Corrigenda zur neusten Kirchengeschichte', in *Evangelische Theologie*, 28 (1968), pp.594-95.

⁶⁸ Klügel, 1964, p.ix.

⁶⁹ München: München Verlag, 2008.

⁷⁰ See the description of the *Meiserstraße* controversy on p.7 of this dissertation.

⁷¹ H. C. Meiser, 2008, pp.5-6.

⁷² Cf. 'Die Vorwürfe und ihre Entgegnung', in *ibid.*, pp.48-66.

Württembergian colleague Wurm, thereby portraying Meiser as a clear opponent to Nazism,⁷³ H. C. Meiser uses the moral dimension of Third Reich history to his own advantage and reaffirms the function of his book as being purely to portray the positive about his grandfather.

Despite the various degrees of bias inherent in biographical accounts, as exemplified by those of Klügel and H. C. Meiser, it should be noted that other works on the *Landesbischöfe*, which may not necessarily be biographical in character, display a similar penchant for projecting an overly positive image of the bishops. Examples to note in this context are Hans Meiser's *Kirche, Kampf und Christusglaube: Anfechtungen und Antworten eines Lutheraners*⁷⁴ which, while presenting Meiser's actual sermons, first had its contents selected by Meiser's relatives and then displayed in such a way as to present a particularly positive vision of their ancestor. Similarly, Gerhard Schäfer's *Landesbischof D. Wurm und der nationalsozialistische Staat 1940-1945: eine Dokumentation*⁷⁵ portrays Wurm as standing "an der Spitze" of the German Church.⁷⁶ Despite containing a wealth of invaluable documentary sources on Wurm's contribution to the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, the publication concentrates solely on Wurm's most pronounced stage of resistance to Nazi crimes between 1940 and 1945, and avoids mentioning his earlier ambivalent attitude to Nazi anti-Semitism, which Schäfer alludes to only in passing.⁷⁷

Although the above books are only a handful of examples of the (auto-)biographical literature that has been produced to date on the individual bishops,⁷⁸ their intrinsic favouritism towards their protagonists nonetheless highlights the need for an account of the bishops' lives in the Third Reich which is influenced neither by a personal need to reformulate opinions on a close relative nor by a professional desire to revise the legacy of a representative of a particular German region and its associated sense of provincial identity. In this context, it should also be noted that not a single biographical work specifically dedicated to the lives of the individual bishops has yet been produced by a non-German, thus further highlighting the necessity for the impartiality which this dissertation seeks to provide, as well as exposing an obvious gap in English-language literature on the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*.

⁷³ Cf. 'Anhang 1: Originaldokumente', in *ibid.*, pp.115-136.

⁷⁴ München: Claudius Verlag, 1982.

⁷⁵ Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1968.

⁷⁶ Schäfer, 1968, p.9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.10.

⁷⁸ Other collections of academic essays and primary documentation have been published on Marahrens (cf. Grosse, Otte and Perels, 1996; Goldbach, 2002; Kück, 2009), Meiser (cf. Heiwik, 1956; Haberer, 1996; Herold and Nicolaisen, 2006) and Wurm (cf. Wurm, 1950; Thierfelder, 1975).

The Confessional Bias

In addition to broad *Kirchenkampf* historiographies and narrower (auto-)biographical accounts of the lives of the three *Landesbischöfe* in the Third Reich, a further strand of historiographical writing has emerged, which has seen scholars begin to investigate in more detail the complex predicament of the so-called Church ‘middle’.⁷⁹ Particularly relevant for this investigation is the historiographical focus on the response to Nazism of confessional Lutherans, which was first conducted by Hans Tiefel in his 1972 journal article, ‘The German Lutheran Church and the Rise of National Socialism’.⁸⁰ In recognising the specific predicament of confessional Lutherans in the Third Reich as being caught somewhere between “a temptation and a crisis”,⁸¹ Tiefel observed that the response of confessional Lutherans to the manifestations of both political and ecclesiastical Nazism was restricted by varied sentiments of “nationalism and conservatism, coupled with a predisposition to obedience to the state”, all of which were “further accentuated by traditional pietism”.⁸² Tiefel twice mentions the actions of Hanoverian *Landesbischof* Marahrens in Nazi Germany, calling them “a [...] sample of the Lutheran chorus supporting Hitler”,⁸³ as well as a demonstration of how Lutheran theology prohibited its adherents from making “any politically critical judgements in the name of Christ”.⁸⁴

Despite Tiefel’s valuable insights into the theological quandary of prominent confessional Lutherans, however, his findings remain limited in their applicability, since the subjects of his inquiry were either obligated to strictly employ Lutheran logic in the Church like Marahrens, or were academics of the ‘Erlangen School’ of theology which was considered to be representative of the staunchest Lutheran position in Nazi Germany.⁸⁵ Tiefel’s failure to account for the more relaxed demonstrations of confessional Lutheranism of *Landesbischof* Wurm, for example, ultimately renders his study a purely theoretical reflection on the attitudes of confessional Lutherans rather than a convincing qualitative

⁷⁹ Prominent examples of this newest wave of historiographical writings are Shelley Baranowski’s numerous studies into the specific predicament of conservative elites within the Protestant Church (cf. Baranowski, 1986, 1987, 1996).

⁸⁰ In *Church History*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Sep. 1972), pp. 326-336.

⁸¹ Tiefel, 1972, p.326.

⁸² Ibid, p.330.

⁸³ Ibid., p.327.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.334.

⁸⁵ The most prominent members of the Erlangen School include Friedrich Gogarten, Emmanuel Hirsch, Werner Elert and Paul Althaus. For details on its general theology, cf. Beyschlag, 1993; for details on how it specifically applied its theology to Nazi Germany, cf. Rieske-Braun, 1993.

analysis of the drastically disparate Lutheran predicaments represented by the ‘intact’ and the ‘destroyed’ *Landeskirchen* alike.

Virtually taking over from where Tiefel left off thirty years previously, Lowell C. Green’s *Lutherans Against Hitler: The Untold Story*⁸⁶ represents the first attempt to apply Tiefel’s findings to a wider spectrum of confessional Lutherans, which includes all three bishops of the ‘intact’ *Landeskirchen*⁸⁷ as well as representatives of the ‘Erlangen School’ of Lutheran theology.⁸⁸ Contrary to Tiefel, however, who did not hesitate to highlight the readiness of confessional Lutherans to support Nazism alongside their displays of moderate theological resistance, Green’s study focuses solely on the contribution of confessional Lutherans to the resistance and conciliation efforts of the wider Protestant Church. Likely as a result of his express intention to respond to “the denunciations by those living in an easy post-Hitler era who were scolding those who did their best in dark and cloudy times”,⁸⁹ Green continually intersperses his narrative with declarations of the supremacy of confessional Lutheranism⁹⁰ and jibes at the other Reformed and United Protestant confessions.⁹¹

Moreover, Green’s distinct preference for confessional Lutheranism⁹² compels him to give account only of the bishops’ clearest displays of defiance which were firmly grounded in Lutheran principles. As such, his entire narrative on the three bishops focuses exclusively on their respective struggles to keep the manifestation of ecclesiastical Nazism out of their three *Landeskirchen*.⁹³ Most strikingly, Green devotes the largest section of his narrative to the staunchest confessional Lutheran of the three men, Meiser, whilst only attributing three pages of his book to the *Kirchenkampf* activities of Wurm. Whereas Wurm is usually the only one of the three bishops to be acknowledged for his eventual displays of unequivocal resistance as a result of his later protestations to the Nazi State against its persecution of the Jews,⁹⁴ Green

⁸⁶ St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007.

⁸⁷ Cf. ‘The Struggle of the Intact Lutheran Land Churches against Hitler’, in Green, 2007, pp.299-324.

⁸⁸ Cf. ‘The Erlangen Theological Faculty during the Third Reich’, in *ibid.*, pp.325-358.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁹⁰ Cf. His use of superlatives when describing the Lutheran statement at Bethel as being “the best reply written against Nazi ideology” (*ibid.*, p.63).

⁹¹ Green even goes as far as to vilify Karl Barth, the founder of ‘unionistic’ theology, and often compares him and his confessional stance to Hitler and the ideology of the NSDAP (cf. *ibid.*, p.102, p.113, p.236).

⁹² It should be noted that Green also “sees himself as a Confessional Lutheran” (*ibid.*, p.25), which would, logically, enhance his penchant for its theology.

⁹³ For Marahrens’ struggle, cf. *ibid.*, p.300-308; for Wurm’s struggle, cf. *ibid.*, p.308-311; for Meiser’s struggle, cf. *ibid.*, p.311-323.

⁹⁴ This is best demonstrated by the fact that Wurm is the only *Landesbischof* of the ‘intact’ churches to be named amongst the “Angehörige der Bekennende Kirche” by the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* (cf. <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/nazi/innenpolitik/bekennende/index.html>, last accessed 28/03/2010) and to have his efforts recognised by the *Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand* in its ‘Bibliographies’ of Nazi opponents (cf. http://www.gdw-berlin.de/bio/ausgabe_mit-e.php?id=298, last accessed 29/05/2010).

downplays Wurm's more heroic moments and remarks that "Confessional Lutherans found Wurm's unionistic tendencies regrettable".⁹⁵ Thus, even though Lowell C. Green may have taken the important step of recognising the *Landesbischöfe* of the 'intact' churches as having collectively represented a "bulwark and an emblem of hope for people in the destroyed churches",⁹⁶ he does so at the cost of overlooking their individual responses to Nazism which were either too closely associated with displays of compliance or could be seen to have emanated from a theological awareness outside the constraints of confessional Lutheranism.

As a result of the studies of Tiefel and Green, then, any overt incorporation of the confessional bias into accounts of the lives of the three *Landesbischöfe* in Nazi Germany can be seen to be just as constraining to the bishops' legacies as the historical-philosophical bias of broader *Kirchenkampf* works and the (auto-)biographical bias of individual inquiries. What this overview of existing literature on the bishops of the 'intact' churches has hopefully done, therefore, is demonstrate that their particular response to Nazism requires investigation not only by a non-partisan author, but also by one who is willing and able to investigate equally the influence of personal, socio-cultural, geo-political and religious factors on the bishops' eventual contribution to the *Kirchenkampf*, and successfully weigh up their eventual intra-Church *Resistenz* against their lack of wider *Widerstand* against Nazi atrocities.

c) Relevance and Intended Contribution

In order to make clear the relevance of this particular investigation for the field of *Kirchenkampf* historiography in particular, it is ultimately important to demonstrate how this dissertation intends to redress the legacies which the above narratorial tendencies have created for *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm. Taken collectively, there can be no doubt that existing historiographical works, which have used the *Landesbischöfe* either to prove or to disprove the mobilisation of the wider German Protestant Church against the violence of the Third Reich, have resulted in a shared legacy for the three men which renders their *Kirchenkampf* efforts insignificant. Having been shown to lack both the theological rationale and moral understanding of the 'Dahlemites' and to have remained relatively silent about the plight of the Jews in Nazi Germany, the bishops' lives during the Third Reich have been left with an air of unmistakable inconsistency.

⁹⁵ Green, 2007, p.308.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.324.

Despite challenging the view established by broad historiographies, principally by exposing the individual sentiments behind the bishops' collective activities, the (auto-)biographical bias in *Kirchenkampf* literature on the three bishops has nonetheless led to considerable discrepancies between the bishops' collective and personal legacies. In the case of Marahrens, readers are left to correlate the positive image of the *Landesbischof* conjured up by the biographies of Walter Ködderitz, Eberhard Klügel and Kurt Schmidt-Clausen with the findings of investigations like that of Wolfgang Gerlach, which portray Marahrens as a pro-Nazi who was ultimately reluctant to help the Jews.⁹⁷ Similarly, readers of H. C. Meiser's claims that his grandfather helped to save the lives of "mindestens 126 Menschen nichtarischer Abstammung"⁹⁸ will be at a loss to reconcile this with Wolfgang Gerlach's declaration that Meiser "never made a statement about the Jewish question during the Third Reich".⁹⁹ Finally, readers of Wurm's letters of protest against the Nazi euthanasia programme and the Holocaust during the latter years of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, detailed in Gerhard Schäfer's *Dokumentation*,¹⁰⁰ will have difficulty connecting these heroic acts to Wurm's earlier anti-Semitic statements outlined by Wolfgang Gerlach.¹⁰¹ The positive biographies of Wurm also create a further problem for unsuspecting readers, who have to reconcile his eventual acts of resistance with the knowledge that Wurm nonetheless remained a man of the Church "middle"¹⁰² and not a 'Dahlemite' of the ilk of Bonhoeffer, Niemöller and Barth.

In short, as a result of these contradictory interpretations of the bishops' lives, two clearly established views have come to exist about the three men: the collective and the individual. Collectively, the *Landesbischöfe* have been left with an unfavourable legacy, which is critical of their unwillingness and inability to do more against Nazi violence and anti-Semitism. Individually, however, (auto-)biographical historiographies have done much to correct the legacy of Wurm in particular, who has inevitably come to be known as the most heroic of the three *Landesbischöfe*, owing to the wealth of documentary sources available on him that testify to his eventual protestations against Nazi atrocities. The legacy of Marahrens, conversely, has fared less well, with Marahrens' tendency to mollify the Nazi State and express anti-Semitic sentiments having been further highlighted by studies devoted specifically to exposing his pro-Nazi credentials.¹⁰³ Somewhere in the middle of the

⁹⁷ Cf. Gerlach, 2000, pp.126-127.

⁹⁸ H. C. Meiser, 2008, p.5.

⁹⁹ Gerlach, 2000, p.95.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Schäfer, 1968, pp.113-146 and pp.156-171.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Gerlach, 2000, pp.148-150.

¹⁰² Barnett, 1992, p.49.

¹⁰³ Cf. Besier, 1986; Lindemann, 1996, 1998.

commendable individual legacy of Wurm and the lamentable personal legacy of Marahrens, however, lies that of Meiser, who has been scorned for his anti-Semitic remarks in the Weimar years, yet praised for his co-founding of the Confessing Church, his steadfast Lutheran scruples, and his ‘underground’ efforts to save the lives of Jewish members of his *Landeskirche*. The disunity behind the bishops’ initially presumed unanimity within the Church ‘middle’ has thus been thoroughly exposed.

Although the confessional bias in existing literature on the *Landesbischöfe* seems to have done much to re-establish a connection between the individual legacies of the three bishops, which goes further than merely recognising them as part of the Church ‘middle’, it has thus far worked on the assumption that all of the bishops translated their Lutheran confession into *Kirchenkampf* action in the same way. Through their consistent focus on the staunch Lutheranism of the ‘Erlangen School’, the narratives of both Hans Tiefel and Lowell C. Green have, in fact, left no room to explain Wurm’s more flexible Lutheranism and, as a result, have ended up either downplaying his more courageous protests against Nazi brutality or dismissing him entirely from their accounts. Thus, despite their efforts to narrate the lives of the *Landesbischöfe* in Nazi Germany as a collective, such confessional narratives have only ended up shattering the unity which they originally sought to convey and, more significantly, dispelling the idea that the bishops ever worked as a coherent group.

This dissertation, by contrast, seeks to overcome the singular focus of existing historiographies and provide a much-needed integrative narrative on the bishops’ lives in the Third Reich. It aims, therefore, to bridge the bishops’ incongruous personal and collective legacies by demonstrating how their individual actions impacted upon their shared ‘intact’ dynamic. In order not to produce an explicit hagiography for the bishops, however, this dissertation attempts to balance their ecclesiastical successes with their general failure to effect substantial change on wider Nazi policies of violence.

d) Structure and Approach

In line with the above explanation of the aims and intended contribution of this dissertation to *Kirchenkampf* historiography, my investigation has been conducted in such a way so as to make best use of available source material, and executed and structured in a way that not only befits the three subjects of this inquiry but also the three distinct stages of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* in which each of the bishops in turn can be seen to have assumed leadership

over their peculiar ‘intact’ dynamic. In order to justify the operational approach of this investigation, there now follows an explanation of both the sources and the format used in the dissertation to make a case for the bishops’ significant contribution to the historical development of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*.

i) Sources

In writing this dissertation, I not only had to regard the strikingly divergent concerns of the different historical ‘schools’ as to how the history of Germany’s Nazi past should be best narrated, but I also had to address problems arising from the inadequacy of available source material. Although the central chapters of this dissertation draw predominantly upon primary documentation consulted in archival collections, it must be borne in mind that, due to the climate of fear induced by intense *Gestapo* surveillance, critiques and criticisms of the Nazi regime are scarcely found amongst the documentation of the churches from the Third Reich. Further to this, many sources relating to *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens and Meiser in particular have also been lost or remain inaccessible.

In the case of Marahrens, the majority of his personal documents were destroyed during the Allied bombing raids on Hanover, meaning that the only surviving source material to give insight into the bishop’s position is his official correspondence in the form of *Wochenbriefe* to his *Landeskirche*, held in the *Landeskirchliches Archiv Hannover* (LKAH), as well as official records relating to his various executive roles in the first VKL, the *Lutherrat* and the eventual *Geistlicher Vertrauensrat*, housed in the *Evangelisches Zentralarchiv* (EZA) in Berlin. Even though the personal *Nachlass* of Meiser fared better and survived the destruction of the Second World War, access to its contents remains strictly controlled today by Meiser’s family. Since I was ultimately unable to gain permission to inspect Meiser’s private documentation, as I could not promise to use the materials in such a way as to project a purely positive image of the *Landesbischof*, I was once again forced to base my interpretation of Meiser’s place in the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* on the public holdings of both the EZA and the *Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern* (LKAB), based in Nuremberg.

Compensating only slightly for the deficiency of sources relating to Marahrens and Meiser is the comparative wealth of surviving material on the life and work of Württembergian *Landesbischof* Wurm in the Third Reich. Since the holdings of the

Landeskirchliches Archiv Stuttgart (LKAS) include copies of Wurm's personal writings as well as private correspondence with his counterparts in Hanover and Bavaria, such sources at least offered further indications of the positions held by Marahrens and Meiser during Germany's Nazi dictatorship. Further to this, I was also able to draw on existing publications of primary sources on all three of the *Landesbischöfe*, such as those collections of documents edited by Eberhard Klügel, Fritz and Gertrude Meiser, and Gerhard Schäfer respectively.¹⁰⁴

ii) Chapter Outline

In order to construct a narrative for *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm, which deals with both their individual and their collective responses to Nazism, as well as their respective successes and failures in preventing Nazi hegemony, this dissertation advances its argument over the course of three distinct chronological stages. I have chosen this tripartite chapter structure specifically to reflect the configurations in the bishops' shared 'intact' dynamic that were characteristic of each stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*. For this reason, the chapters of this dissertation take their titles from the shifting patterns in the bishops' unique alliance and do not conform to milestone events in the history of the Confessing Church.¹⁰⁵

Despite dealing with different stages of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, however, each chapter in this dissertation is structured around the same fundamental questions. The first of these asks how the *Kirchenkampf* affected the lives of the three bishops during the specific timeframe being discussed, and the answers to this are hopefully made clear by the sub-headings of each chapter. These sub-headings have been designed to display the chief concerns of the bishops during each period and to allow for a discussion of their individual positions toward each topic or event. This approach has been primarily inspired by Hans Otte's call for historiographies of the *Kirchenkampf* to incorporate and develop "konkrete Forschungsthemen", from which it is possible to paint "ein zutreffenderes Bild vom Verhältnis der Landeskirche[n] zum Nationalsozialismus".¹⁰⁶ To enhance this picture of the

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Klügel, 1964; Meiser, 1982 and Schäfer, 1968.

¹⁰⁵ The tendency of existing *Kirchenkampf* literature to narrate the conflict with regard to particular developments within the *Bekennende Kirche* can be demonstrated with reference to Klaus Scholder, whose two-volume account on the *Kirchenkampf* is divided according to the 'epiphanic' moment of Barmen (cf. Scholder, 1977, 1985). Similarly, the majority of titles in the AzGK series are devoted to narrating the individual synods of the Confessing Church, taking no account of developments within the Church 'middle' (cf. G. Niemöller, 1959a, 1959b, 1963, 1975; W. Niemöller, 1958a, 1960, 1969, 1970).

¹⁰⁶ Otte, 1996b, p.555.

bishops' lives in Nazi Germany even further, then, the second question asks to what extent the positions of the *Landesbischöfe* with regard to the individual "Forschungsthemen" of this inquiry were influenced by the various levels of church administration on which they operated. Each chapter therefore takes account of regional administration (including local Nazis as well as regional GDC and 'Confessing' clergy), national governance (including the *Reichskirche* leadership, the Confessing Front, the national Lutheran community and the Nazi government) and, finally, international administration (including the wider ecumenical and political arenas), in order to expose how the bishops personally juggled the demands of various Church factions with a range of regional, national and international expectations. It is only once the precise mediating roles of each of the *Landesbischöfe* have been exposed in this way that the summaries at the end of each chapter can finally ask, and subsequently demonstrate, how the attempts made by the *Landesbischöfe* to reconcile their individual multilateral concerns specifically served to protect the 'intact' Protestantism that they were collectively obliged to defend.

It is also worth noting at this point that, in order to display consistency between the findings of each chapter and the overarching structure of the argument, this dissertation tends to analyse, where possible, the Hanoverian predicament first, the Bavarian situation second, and the Württembergian condition third.¹⁰⁷ This sequence should not, therefore, be seen as either reflecting the respective importance of each *Landeskirche* or, indeed, the personal preferences of the author.

Since the beginning of this 'Introduction' has already provided necessary historical contextualisation for this investigation, which is sufficient to explain both the origins of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* and the particular 'starting positions' of the three bishops at the beginning of the Third Reich, the first of these central chapters focuses immediately on 'The Marahrens Years' of 1933 to 1935. It demonstrates that Marahrens' prominent status in the alternative national Church administration initially served to confer an air of defiance on the 'intact' dynamic, albeit of a moderate variety. While the first two sections of this chapter establish the contradictory nature of the bishops' responses to the manifestations of both political and ecclesiastical Nazism, the final section of the chapter, which focuses on the bishops' responses to the intra-Church opposition movement of the *Bekennende Kirche*, is nonetheless designed to demonstrate how the bishops' collective membership of the outlawed

¹⁰⁷ The only exceptions to this are in Chapter Three, when the actions of *Landesbischof* Wurm often dominated Church policies.

Church government under Marahrens' headship served to establish them as opponents to the encroachment of Nazism into the Church.

The second chapter concentrates on 'The Meiser Years' of 1935 to 1939 and it details how Meiser assumed necessary leadership over the 'intact' dynamic from Marahrens once the years of *staatliche Kirchenpolitik* set in. In recognition of the structural interplay between the development of Meiser's *lutherischer Flügel* and the advances in *staatliche Kirchenpolitik* in this period, the first two sections of this chapter detail how the 'intact' dynamic and the Nazi State actively engaged with each other, before an intensification of State measures caused the bishops to seek refuge in Meiser's *lutherischer Flügel* and revert to passivity instead, as the final section of the chapter explains.

Finally, the third chapter is designed not only to show how Wurm took over the reins of the 'intact' dynamic from Meiser during the Second World War, rendering 'The Wurm Years' of 1939 to 1945 firmly his own, but also to trace to their peak the underlying tendencies in the trajectory of the three bishops, originally established in the earlier chapters. The intention behind Chapter Three, then, is not only to show Wurm's eventual headship of the 'intact' dynamic as the logical corollary of his underlying tendencies during the first two stages of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* but also to show the decline from prominence of Marahrens and Meiser to be an inevitable consequence of their parallel leadership roles in the national Protestant and specifically Lutheran Churches.

Although each of the three chapters of this dissertation could theoretically be developed into self-sufficient monographs to demonstrate the significance of each individual *Landesbischof* in each period, the content of each chapter is nonetheless linked together throughout by continual references to the development of wider Third Reich history, as well as by an overarching desire to weave the findings of the three chapters together to form one expansive narrative that details how the bishops' respective turns at leadership worked in harmony to preserve the status of institutional Protestantism in Nazi Germany. The 'Conclusion' to this dissertation hopefully brings the strands of the three chapters together and makes these interconnections clear. A concluding reflection on the historical significance of the bishops' efforts to preserve the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany in relation to the wider context of war and genocide in the Third Reich should, however, serve to relativise the bishops' contribution to the development of Germany's Nazi past as well as explain their eventual ambiguous 'end positions', placed firmly between the polarities of defiance and compliance.

Finally, this dissertation closes with a brief ‘Epilogue’ devoted to the post-war careers of the *Landesbischöfe*. Although its content admittedly falls outside the chronological remit of this investigation, the ‘Epilogue’ is intended to indicate the role the bishops played in the post-war history of institutional Protestantism in Germany and to provoke thought on how they were viewed and treated during the closing years of their lives.

e) A Note on Confessional Lutheranism

Since this dissertation is predominantly concerned with the *Landesbischöfe* of the specifically Lutheran churches of Hanover, Bavaria and Württemberg, its central chapters frequently allude to the notion of confessional Lutheranism and associated Lutheran logic. However, primarily because this investigation has arisen as a result of a desire to revisit and correct historiographical accounts of the bishops’ legacies, and is not concerned with the theological justification for their actions, it should be emphasised from the outset that any reference to the term ‘confessional Lutheranism’ in this inquiry is used purely to denote the bishops’ collective adherence to the basic principles of Lutheran theology as outlined below. Even though the following explanation of the central principles of Lutheran theology provides only a basic introduction to confessional Lutheranism, it is nonetheless sufficient for the parameters of this inquiry.

To begin, therefore, it is important to recognise that Lutheran theology rests upon a series of seemingly inconsistent dualities, three of which are relevant for the purposes of this dissertation.¹⁰⁸ The first and most fundamental of these dualities is referred to as the ‘Dual Revelation of the Law and the Gospel’, which dictates that God reveals his presence to us on earth via two parallel systems, namely that of the Law (which functions to reveal the corruption of human nature and discloses divine punishment) and that of the Gospel (which serves to provide forgiveness for violations of the Law for those who believe in God’s mercy).¹⁰⁹ The applicability of this teaching to the Nazi context of this investigation can be seen on two levels: Firstly, an acknowledgement of the Law as a means of God’s Revelation meant that confessional Lutherans were more likely than exponents of Reformed and United Protestantism to support unquestioningly the policies and punishments emanating from the Nazi State. Secondly, even once the injustices of the State had become clear, a supreme belief

¹⁰⁸ Kyle Jantzen uses the same “three emphases in the German theology of the day” (Jantzen, 2008, pp.27-32). This reinforces the sufficiency of the three concepts listed here for the pending investigation.

¹⁰⁹ Gritsch, 2002, p.33.

in receiving redemption from God for having lived knowingly under the immoral principles of Nazi Law nonetheless prevented many confessional Lutherans from attempting to resist Nazi policies and put at risk their jobs, communities and even lives.

It is upon the ‘Dual Revelation of the Law and the Gospel’ that the most crucial Lutheran teaching for this investigation builds, namely that of the *Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*. Just as Luther believed God to have revealed Himself through the Law and the Gospel, so too did he believe that God ruled the world via two separate realms, or kingdoms. As well as perceiving God to rule directly over the spiritual kingdom through Christ and through the Gospel, Luther also wrote that God ruled the secular kingdom indirectly through the State and through the Law. Adhering, in effect, to “a fused paradox”,¹¹⁰ confessional Lutherans have traditionally come to view the secular and the spiritual kingdoms as mutually reinforcing, whereby the secular realm serves the spiritual realm through the promotion of peace and justice and, in turn, the spiritual realm serves the secular realm by providing it with a Christian basis for its Law and Order. However, due to Luther’s original instruction that neither realm should be seen to encroach on the other, even though both realms remain mutually reinforcing, confessional Lutherans have developed a tendency both to object to the State’s encroachment into the spiritual affairs of the Church and to refrain from comment on the political affairs of the State. Translating this into the specific context of Nazi Germany used in this investigation, then, the Lutheran doctrine of the *Zwei-Reiche-Lehre* can be used to explain the paradoxical propensity of confessional Lutherans for supporting political Nazism yet simultaneously rejecting ecclesiastical Nazism. This has often proved a point of contention in interpreting the responses to Nazism that are characteristic of the Lutheran bishops.

Finally, the last Lutheran teaching which needs to be understood for the context of this investigation is his doctrine of the Orders of Creation, which distinguishes between the absolute power of God and the ordained power of God; the former is transmitted via the Spirit of God and the latter is implemented via His people, whom He created and thereby empowered.¹¹¹ Translating this into the modern world, then, Lutheran teaching tells us that God’s ordained power can be seen to be displayed through both the clergy and the government, the first of which have been appointed to spread His spiritual Word and the latter to enforce His secular Order. Putting this belief into play in the specific context of the Third Reich, it should be easier to understand why confessional Lutherans in Nazi Germany were

¹¹⁰ Lomperis, 2009, p.39.

¹¹¹ Green, 2007, p.201.

reluctant to criticise the national leadership which they saw as carrying out God's secular rule. Moreover, this particular doctrine of the Orders of Creation also explains why Hitler and the NSDAP were ultimately able to play on the Christian conscience and almost claim to be legitimately fulfilling the work of God.¹¹²

In summary, then, whenever reference is made to the Lutheran credentials of the three bishops or, indeed, to the Lutheran logic behind their respective responses to Nazism in the central chapters of this dissertation, this inquiry is bringing into play one or all of the three central Lutheran teachings outlined above.

¹¹² Cf. Hitler's insistence that he was operating "in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator" and "defending the work of the Lord" (Hitler, 1939, p.66), as well as Goebbels' description of Hitler as "an instrument of divine will shaped by history" (Steigmann-Gall, 2003, p.21). Göring also expressed his "deep and unshakable faith, that he [Hitler] was sent [...] by God to save Germany" (Synder, 1989, p.7).

CHAPTER ONE – 1933-1935: THE MARAHRENS YEARS

Since the origins of the Protestant struggle in the Third Reich have already been outlined in the ‘Introduction’ to this dissertation,¹¹³ this chapter focuses on how the struggle specifically developed for the *Landesbischöfe* of the ‘intact’ churches from 1933 until July 1935. After that point the temperament of the conflict altered dramatically when the Protestant churches began to cooperate with the Nazi State via church committees, as Chapter Two will discuss. As the structure of this chapter is designed to demonstrate, however, the initial years of the Protestant struggle were dominated by the ambiguity of the NSDAP’s position toward German Protestantism and the subsequent attempts of the GDC to translate the supposed will of the Nazi State into the ecclesiastical policies of the *Reichskirche*.

Although the NSDAP had not formulated a clear policy toward German Protestantism at the beginning of the Third Reich, it was already resolute in its decision to persecute and discriminate against Jewish citizens and other selected minorities under its jurisdiction. Not only did the NSDAP open its first concentration camp in Dachau as early as 22nd March 1933 in an effort to sanitise German communities from beggars, criminals, and the homeless but, from April 1933, it incrementally began to incorporate into its laws a so-called ‘Aryan Paragraph’ which forced the exclusion of Jews from various areas of German society. By the beginning of 1935, the Nazis had stripped the Jews of their rights to own land, to participate in the Arts and to serve in the military or as editors of public newspapers.¹¹⁴ With the Nazis widely implementing the ‘Aryan Paragraph’ to prevent German Jews from holding prominent positions in the workplace or from becoming members of cultural or social establishments, it was unsurprising that the GDC sought to enact the same racial laws within the Church in an effort to appease Germany’s secular leaders. At the synod of the EKApU, held on 5th and 6th September 1933 in Berlin, the GDC therefore enacted the so-called *Arierparagraph* into the legislation of the DEK in an attempt to exclude all ‘non-Aryans’ or those married to ‘non-Aryans’ from the service of the Protestant Church.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Cf. pp.1-3.

¹¹⁴ For details on the beginnings of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, cf. ‘The New Ghetto’ in Friedländer, 1997, pp.113-144.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Helmreich, 1979, pp.144-145. It should also be noted here that, although the Nazis used the term ‘Aryanism’ to denote the presumed supremacy of the ‘White’ Germanic race, the frequent use of the highly controversial term ‘Aryan’ in this dissertation is necessary to express Nazi biological and racial distinctions. In no way does it reflect the views of the author.

In spite of the fact that the NSDAP never explicitly ordered the GDC-led *Reichskirche* to implement racial laws into the DEK during the early years of the Third Reich, it nonetheless assisted the GDC in its nationalistic and anti-Semitic design for the *Reichskirche*. Most notably, the Nazi government appointed August Jäger as *Rechtswalter* of the DEK in July 1933, and in addition to immobilising ‘Confessing’ candidates during the *Reichskirche* elections of the same month, a year later he set about putting pressure on the ‘intact’ churches of Hanover, Bavaria and Württemberg to assimilate into the DEK. For *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm in particular, then, the boundaries between the political Nazism of the NSDAP and the ecclesiastical Nazism of the GDC became increasingly more blurred as the State revealed its support for ‘German Christian’ ambitions to oust them from office.

Although the intra-church resistance movements had been steadily attracting new members during first year of the Third Reich as a growing number of clergymen took aversion either to the heresy of the GDC or to the intrusion of the Nazi regime into Church affairs, it was not until *Landesbischöfe* Meiser and Wurm jointly proclaimed the formation of the *Bekennende Kirche* from Ulm Münster on 22nd April 1934 that a credible alternative to the leadership of *Reichsbischof* Müller and the DEKK emerged. Equipped with its first VKL led by *Landesbischof* Marahrens, the *Bekennende Kirche* strove to find ways to combat the encroachment of Nazism into the Church. With *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm all proving instrumental to the establishment and administration of the *Bekennende Kirche* in the early years of the Third Reich, this chapter seeks to explain the bishops’ eventual turn toward an early policy of defiance by first clarifying their positions toward the NSDAP and the GDC. In this way it should become clear that, due to his steadfast aversion to Nazism within the Church and his executive positions on both the *Kapler Ausschuss* and the first VKL, August Marahrens of Hanover steered the ‘intact’ dynamic which he shared with Meiser and Wurm onto an initial course of *Resistenz* to Nazi hegemony.

In order to lay the foundations for this discussion, it should also be noted that in this period, whilst the *Landesbischöfe* of the ‘intact’ churches were busy establishing their opposition to Nazism in the Church, *Landesbischof* Hans Meiser of Bavaria was also preoccupied with attempts to foster closer union between the German Lutheran *Landeskirchen*. In addition to summoning together Lutheran leaders throughout the DEKB on 14th May 1933 in the hope of devising a constitution for a national Protestant Church based specifically on confessional Lutheranism, Meiser also established the *Lutherischer Rat* on 25th August 1934 as a means to ensure Lutheran opinions were not overpowered by the

‘Dahlemitic’ strand of the *Bekennende Kirche*. Having become increasingly more convinced of the power of confessional Lutheranism to defy the ecclesiastical Nazism of the GDC and thus foster an alternative church union, Meiser subsequently encouraged the formation of the *Lutherischer Pakt* on 12th February 1935 as a means to establish consistency between the legislation and the administration of the three ‘intact’ *Landeskirchen*. Further to this, he also actively promoted the *Lutherischer Tag* that took place in Hanover between 2nd and 5th July 1935 and was intended to strengthen Lutheran identity through its resemblance to a mass rally. It is therefore against this backdrop of ongoing Lutheran unification efforts amidst intensifying policies of racial discrimination from the NSDAP that this chapter commences its investigation into the lives of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm during what it presents as the ‘Marahrens Years’.

The *Landesbischöfe* and the National Socialist State

No attempt to analyse the conduct of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm in the Third Reich could effectively begin without an investigation into how each of the bishops regarded Germany’s new Nazi government and its hyper-nationalist *Weltanschauung*. For the context of this chapter in particular, it is important to continue to regard the political Nazism of the NSDAP and the heretical, ecclesiastical Nazism of the GDC as two distinct entities, not only because ‘German Christianity’ was never endorsed as the official Party religion,¹¹⁶ but primarily since *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm generally welcomed Germany’s new secular regime during the early months of the Third Reich and recognised the benefits that it brought to the social standing of their churches. For this reason, the bishops were only openly concerned about the escalation of Nazism within the Church in this period. The bishops’ partial opposition to Nazism already leaves their integrity open to question, but their position is further problematised by the fact that the NSDAP had begun translating its anti-Semitic manifesto into concrete policies of racial discrimination as early as July 1933,¹¹⁷ sweeping away the influence of Christian morality in Germany at large and replacing it with

¹¹⁶ In fact, the NSDAP never formulated a conclusive policy toward German Protestantism as a result of intra-Party indecision as to whether the Christian confessions ought to be merged with Nazism or instead be superseded by Nordic mythology as per the thinking of Alfred Rosenberg (cf. Rosenberg, 1938; Chandler, 1945; Pois, 1970). For details on the differing attitudes toward Christianity within the NSDAP, cf. Steigmall-Gall, 2003.

¹¹⁷ On 14th July 1933, the NSDAP enacted the so-called ‘Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring’ in an attempt to reduce expenditure on what it deemed “inferior and asocial individuals” and marking the start of its process of social selection and eradication (cf. Evans, 2005, p.507).

pseudo-scientific principles of eugenics. Since they tended to support political Nazism in as far as it was beneficial to the status of German Protestantism, yet failed to speak out against the NSDAP when it threatened to destroy fundamental Christian ethics outside the Church, the attitudes of the *Landesbischöfe* to the NSDAP stand in urgent need of clarification. By investigating the hazy positions of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm with regard to the wider political backdrop of Nazism in Germany, then, this sub-chapter seeks to demystify the ambiguity behind the bishops' responses to the NSDAP with reference to both their own personal predicaments and the distinctive socio-cultural contexts of their respective *Landeskirchen*.

To begin, it should be noted that the *Evangelisch-Lutherische Landeskirche Hannovers* (ELLKH) served a predominantly industrial workforce, which had been so deeply affected by the Great Depression of the Weimar years that its voters turned to the NSDAP in their masses in 1933 in hope of economic reform. Prior to this, Hanover had been a stronghold of the left-wing *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD) but, as electoral results show, the NSDAP first began to attract votes from the conservative-national parties in the area in the late 1920s, before also winning industrial workers round to its tenuous form of specifically 'German Socialism' in the early 1930s.¹¹⁸ It was thus against this backdrop of dramatic political change that August Friedrich Karl Marahrens was appointed first *Landesbischof* of the ELLKH in 1925. Reflecting upon the specific demographics of his *Landeskirche* in 1934, Marahrens explained, "Wer mein Haus kennt, weiß, daß nicht nur die Jugend meines Hauses, sondern auch die Eltern dieser Jugend längst vor dem Januar 1933 das nationalsozialistische Gedankengut vertreten haben".¹¹⁹ As well as drawing attention to the general enthusiasm of Hanoverians for Nazism, Marahrens' words, which conjure up an image of a cohesive religious community, also characterise his own position in relation to that community. As part of the ecclesiastical 'house' of which he speaks, it can reasonably be inferred that Marahrens too counted himself amongst the adherents to Nazi ideology in his *Landeskirche*. Adding to this the assertion of Hanoverian historian Hans Otte that Marahrens was an explicit product of his time, who belonged firmly to a "Generation, die den Aufstieg des Deutschen Reichs miterlebt hatte",¹²⁰ it becomes apparent that Marahrens was deeply influenced by the particular Nazi *Zeitgeist* which had overcome the economic crisis and the supposed ills of the Weimar period. If we recognise Marahrens as part of the cohort of Germans who had

¹¹⁸ For electoral results in Hanover, cf. Schröder, 2008b.. For details of the appeal of the NSDAP to both the working class and the conservative-national elements of German society, cf. Fritz, 1987.

¹¹⁹ Letter from Marahrens, 31/05/1934 [Nr. 2834], LKAH, HI 513, Nr.107.

¹²⁰ Otte, 1996a, p.181.

ultimately welcomed and enthusiastically contributed to the coming to power of the NSDAP, then, it becomes understandable that Marahrens, particularly as a self-proclaimed “schwerblütiger Niedersachse”,¹²¹ shared in the ardour for political Nazism in a region in which the NSDAP received far more votes than the national average.¹²²

In addition to his regional and generational reasons for welcoming the onset of Nazism in Germany, Marahrens was also indebted to the Nazis for contributing to the revival of community in his *Landeskirche*. The NSDAP had, after all, particularly reinvigorated church life for Lutheran *Landeskirchen*, since it repeatedly manipulated the image of “Luther the German” in its early propaganda. This had the effect that Lutheranism suddenly appeared to many to be the ‘true’ German confession.¹²³ For this reason, the early years of the Third Reich saw a dramatic increase in church attendance and activity. This, together with the Nazis’ emphasis on a “Gemeinschaftsideologie”,¹²⁴ had the effect that the churches suddenly found themselves back in their traditional position as the focal point of German communities.¹²⁵ The religious renaissance of the early years of the Third Reich had particular benefits for the predominantly working-class ELLKH, since the religious facade of the NSDAP managed to inspire previously agnostic Hanoverians to become regular churchgoers.¹²⁶ Moreover, the ELLKH had long sought ways to differentiate itself from its Reformed counterpart in the region, namely the *Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche der Provinz Hannover*,¹²⁷ so the Nazis’ distinct preference for the Lutheran tradition only enhanced the ELLKH’s deep-rooted sense of separatism and boosted its claim to confessional superiority over its Reformed and United neighbours.¹²⁸ In view of these dramatic changes to the societal standing of the ELLKH, therefore, it is apparent that Marahrens carried with him a great sense of gratitude to the NSDAP for the elevated status of his *Landeskirche* and its associated confessional identity in the early years of the Third Reich.

Beyond this, the onset of political Nazism in Germany had additional benefits for Marahrens’ *Landeskirche*, particularly when it began to obliterate the political-ideological

¹²¹ Cf. Klügel, 1964, p.115.

¹²² In 1933, the NSDAP received 43.9% of the average national vote. In Niedersachsen it achieved a overwhelming 48.6% victory (cf. Röhrbein, 1996, p.14). The voting preferences of the electorate in the ELLKH are also detailed in Schröder, 2008b.

¹²³ Gurian, 1936, p.67.

¹²⁴ Otte, 1996a, p.196.

¹²⁵ Jantzen, 2008, p.44.

¹²⁶ Röhrbein, 1996, p.16.

¹²⁷ For an account of the *Kirchenkampf* from the perspective of the Reformed church of Hannover, cf. Middendorf, 1961.

¹²⁸ Cf. Uhlhorn, 1988; Krumwieder, 1996.

forces of liberalism and communism that threatened to undermine the hold of the church within the region. Marahrens himself confirmed that the pastorate of his ELLKH had long been engaged in the fight against “Freidenkertum und Bolschewismus”,¹²⁹ which were particular concerns in areas of northern Germany like Hanover. Despite having come under the control of the NSDAP in 1933, these areas still had strong undercurrents of support for the political Left and were particularly susceptible to radical revolutionism.¹³⁰ Marahrens therefore had reason to be grateful to the NSDAP for enticing his parishioners away from these traditionally unchristian forces and eventually freeing his *Landeskirche* from its ideological enemies.

Moreover, with the NSDAP repeatedly declaring itself the secular protector of God’s Germanic *Volkstum* and *Vaterland*, and continually appealing to Christian customs and traditions, particularly during the first eight weeks of its leadership,¹³¹ Marahrens found that the political agenda of the Nazis seemed to complement his own ecclesiastical mission to preserve the traditional character of the society he served. Although the concepts of *Blut und Boden* quickly came to be associated with the racial and eugenic diatribe of the Nazis, it must be remembered that before they were appropriated by the NSDAP for its own pseudo-scientific mythology they were in fact “positive natural values” in Lutheran theology.¹³² On 10th February 1934, amidst confusion concerning how best to deal with the intrusion of Nazism into the Church, Marahrens released a statement to the ELLKH in which he proclaimed that, “Meine Arbeit soll wie bisher unter dem Leitwort stehen: für Kirche und Volkstum im Dritten Reich”.¹³³ In light of the original Lutheran origins of Marahrens’ motto, therefore, it can be appreciated that his initial reluctance to alter his ecclesiastical methods was because he viewed the missions of his *Landeskirche* and the NSDAP as forming two sides of the same coin. It is also in this context that we should consider Marahrens’ decision to display loyalty and appreciation to the NSDAP during the initial years of the Third Reich, including his adoption of the Nazi salutation “Heil Hitler!”¹³⁴

Finally, it should be borne in mind that, as the leader of a highly Lutheran *Landeskirche*, Marahrens was obligated under the central Lutheran doctrine of the *Zwei-Reiche-Lehre* to

¹²⁹ Letter from Marahrens to his *Amtsbrüder*, 17/09/1934 [Tagebuch Nr. 4502], LKAH, HI 611, Nr.14.

¹³⁰ For example, as the electoral results in Hanover of 1933 show, although the NSDAP received 48.8 per cent of the vote, the SPD still obtained 23.1 per cent, and the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD) 4.8 per cent of the vote (cf. Schröder, 2008b)..

¹³¹ Scholder, 1977, p.280.

¹³² Tiefel, 1972, p.327.

¹³³ ‘Rundschreiben’, 10/02/1934 [Nr. 830], LKAH, HII, 122A, Nr.9-11.

¹³⁴ Cf. Letter from Marahrens, 13/07/1934, LKAH, HII 121, Nr.93-96.

respect and honour the secular government. Providing insight into the specific nature of his commitment to the NSDAP is Marahrens' belief that, "Die uns gesetzte Obrigkeit ist Ordnung, unter der wir stehen mit unserem Leben. In diese Ordnung müssen wir hinein, da müssen wir uns einfügen".¹³⁵ Marahrens' words show that he did not revere the NSDAP purely because it practised a form of political order with which he could associate, but rather because his Lutheran scruples called on him to accept and to serve the secular government of his nation irrespective of its political orientation. Marahrens himself employed this very Lutheran logic when justifying his right to continue to govern the 'intact' ELLKH in 1934. His Lutheran obligation to serve the secular leadership provided him with a rhetorical means to indicate that he supported the rule of the NSDAP, but without declaring open allegiance to the politics it practised. In an address at Whitsun, Marahrens therefore stated that,

Immer war es mein ehrliches Bemühen, in dem mir anvertrauten Amt unserem Volk und seinem Führer zu dienen und mit dem der Kirche gegebenen Worte für Glück und Wohlfahrt meines Vaterlandes zu arbeiten.¹³⁶

Acknowledging Marahrens' strong sense of Lutheran obligation to serve the secular authorities, however, also calls into question his expressions of loyalty and dedication to the Nazi State since, under the *Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*, Marahrens was called to accept and to serve Germany's governmental leaders yet not to comment openly on political matters. Adding to this the particular tradition of his ELLKH, which was "betont unpolitisch"¹³⁷ and had long prohibited its *Pfarrerschaft* from displaying allegiance to any political party for fear of diminishing trust amongst the electorate and undermining its intention to serve the entire Hanoverian community,¹³⁸ it becomes clear that external pressures were at play in prompting Marahrens to abandon the practice of political neutrality that he had upheld without fail since assuming office as *Landesbischof* in 1925.

In view of Marahrens' previous reticence on political affairs in Germany, it can be asserted that it was the circumstances of 1933 that prompted him to refer to political developments more openly at the start of the Third Reich. In this respect, it must be appreciated that Marahrens' expressions of loyalty to the Nazi State were not simple reflections of his own political preferences but, rather, a result of a strategic endeavour to appease his pastorate and parishioners. Since the NSDAP had come by now to appeal to all levels of society in Hanover, it must be accepted that Marahrens only stood to gain from any

¹³⁵ Johannes Schulze paraphrasing Marahrens, in Hirschler, 1996, p.130.

¹³⁶ 'Rundschreiben für Pfingstfest 1934' [Nr. 2571/2], LKAH, III 122A, Nr.14.

¹³⁷ Klügel, 1964, p.5.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.7.

demonstrations of political allegiance which showed him to be in line with those of the people he served. This, together with the desire of Protestant clergymen to curry favour with the NSDAP at the very start of the Third Reich in the hope of achieving closer cooperation between the Church and the State,¹³⁹ can be seen to have led Marahrens to relax his policy of silence towards political developments.

Moreover, once the brutal nature of Germany's new Nazi government became apparent and a failure to be seen to be willing to participate in its specific *Volksgemeinschaft* risked reprisals and even a loss of authority, the nature of Marahrens' expressions of loyalty to the NSDAP changed significantly. From this point onwards, it must be appreciated that he needed to maintain a certain degree of cordiality with the Nazi State in order to protect his bishopric from undue pressure. The need to defend his *Landeskirche* with an outward appearance of being willing to embrace Nazism became all the more immediate once the GDC assumed leadership over the *Reichskirche* and the ELLKH was at risk of forcible assimilation into the DEK at any time. This risk was especially high due to the position of the ELLKH amidst the Nazi heartlands. In order to divert suspicion away from his desire to continue to keep the 'intact' ELLKH independent of the *Reichskirche*, then, Marahrens was ultimately obligated to demonstrate to Nazi agents that he was not an adversary of Nazism per se. As Matthew Hockenos explains, Marahrens' support for the NSDAP may well have been more restrained than that of the GDC in this period but his "political quietism was no less political".¹⁴⁰ Marahrens therefore acted in full awareness of his responsibility as a *Landesbischof* of an 'intact' church to employ any measure necessary to ensure the survival of the original Protestant confessions, even if this appears in retrospect to align him with Nazi policies of discrimination in the wider secular arena.

In the same way as Marahrens initially had many personal reasons to welcome the onset of Nazism in Germany, *Landesbischof* Hans Meiser of Bavaria also had much to be thankful to the NSDAP for. Since his own instatement as *Landesbischof* of the *Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Bayern rechts des Rheins* (ELKB) came about on 4th May 1933 as a result of his predecessor Friedrich Veit's dual disenchantment with the policies of both the NSDAP and the GDC, Meiser owed his recent personal advancements within the ranks of the ELKB completely to the onset of Nazism and its early interference in church affairs. Not only did Meiser's readiness to assume leadership of the ELKB after the NSDAP had already come

¹³⁹ Robert P. Erickson demonstrates the Protestant endeavour to correspond to and support Nazi policies in Erickson, 1985.

¹⁴⁰ Hockenos, 2007, p.16.

to power demonstrate that he was not averse to the idea of working under the Nazi regime, but the fact that he was also known to be “[p]olitisch national und konservativ eingestellt” at heart¹⁴¹ suggests that his preferences for a nationalistic and patriotic political backdrop were, at the very least, accommodating of the Nazis’ agenda.

Hitler’s *Machtübernahme* brought more than just personal benefits for Meiser however. As early as 1927, Meiser had informed fellow members of the Bavarian pastorate of his belief that, “Wir müssen in der Kirche ein rechtes Gemeinschaftsleben haben, um von da aus dann auch das Volksleben neu aufbauen zu können”.¹⁴² It can therefore be appreciated that, when the Nazis reinvigorated German Protestantism at the start of the Third Reich, Meiser could be particularly grateful to the NSDAP for doing so in the way he had long desired. For this reason, it has been claimed that Meiser welcomed the onset of Nazism in Germany specifically “weil er in ihm eine religiöse Kraft sah, vor der sich die Kirche nicht verschließen durfte”.¹⁴³ This claim also becomes all the more applicable in the specific context of Meiser’s own *Landeskirche* which, being positioned in a highly Catholic *Land* and serving just under one third of the Bavarian populace, had long found itself subjugated by both the confessional and political dominance of Roman Catholicism in the region.¹⁴⁴ With the NSDAP achieving landslide victories in 1933 in Bavaria’s northern territories of *Ober-* and *Mittelfranken*, which were also the strongholds of the ELKB,¹⁴⁵ Nazism had therefore already proved itself to Meiser to be a convenient means to diminish at least the political clout of the Catholics.

Meiser’s deep-felt sense of antagonism toward Roman Catholicism, which arose from the particular geo-political positioning of his *Landeskirche*, nonetheless restricted the extent to which Meiser was able to embrace Germany’s new political leader, Adolf Hitler. As a result of Hitler’s own, albeit dubious, claim to be a practising Catholic, Meiser explicitly regarded Hitler “als Katholik”, and as someone who “[das] Wesen der evangelischen Kirche nicht kennen kann”.¹⁴⁶ In view of the implicit risk that Hitler might someday put Catholic interests first, Meiser was hesitant to give his full support to a political movement that ultimately

¹⁴¹ Nicolaisen, 2006, p.33.

¹⁴² Meiser, ‘Gegenwartsaufgaben der Kirche’, in *Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt für die Gemeinden des Dekanats Altdorf*, Nr. 1, Januar 1927, pp.1-4, (p.4), reproduced in Schulze, 2006, p.25.

¹⁴³ Nicolaisen, 2006, p.33.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Böttcher, 2009. For details of the tensions between the ELKB and its Catholic counterpart, cf. ‘Die Konfrontation des Staates mit konfessionellen Spannungen und innerkirchlichen Problemen’ in Körner, 1977, pp.182-195.

¹⁴⁵ As demonstrated in Schröder, 2008a, and Noakes and Pridham, 1974, p.114. The voting preferences of the electorate of the ELKB are also detailed in ‘Landeskirche und politische Optionen des »Kirchenvolks« in der Weimarer Republik’ in Zorn, 2002, pp.273-276.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Betrifft Antwort des Führers an Bischof Meiser, mitgeteilt im Rundschreiben von Dr. Kinder an die evangelischen Geistlichen’, EZA, Fiche 50/185, Nr.14.

boasted a self-confessed Catholic as its figurehead. Even though the NSDAP's tendency to invoke Lutheran principles in its early manifestos and campaign platforms was enough to prove to Marahrens in Hanover that the Party upheld specifically Protestant precepts, it is only natural that Meiser, who had been brought up in a *Landeskirche* with a strong history of both confessional and political subjugation by its Catholic counterpart, viewed the NSDAP under Hitler's headship with some suspicion.

Another factor which caused Meiser to remain apprehensive toward the NSDAP was his early recognition that the Extreme Right was at risk of turning the national political movement into a "religiöse[-] Ersatzform", tarnishing the purity of a 'Christianised' society through its idolisation of the Nazi "Volkstum" or "Staatgedanken", and evoking the "Bestifikation des Menschen" through its deification of the State.¹⁴⁷ Although the GDC was eventually to come to embody the specific threat to the sanctity of the Church that Meiser initially feared, there can be no doubt that his early detection of the dangers of overt support for Nazism served to keep Meiser's response to the NSDAP as cautious and professional as possible. Bearing in mind the highly Lutheran character of the ELKB, which prompted Meiser to instruct his pastorate to pay to the State only "den Dienst, den wir ihr tun sollen",¹⁴⁸ it can be asserted that Meiser did not allow his initial enthusiasm for the potential of Nazism to subdue political Catholicism to interfere with his personal policy of "parteipolitisch[e] Neutralität",¹⁴⁹ which he had practised within the church throughout his ecclesiastical career.

Finally, Meiser also had personal reasons to distrust the NSDAP once it began to employ a hate campaign against him in April 1934 with the intention of ousting him from office. The NSDAP's campaign against Meiser began when Nazi *Gauleiter* Karl Holz published an article in the *Fränkische Tageszeitung* which described Meiser as "volksverräterisch" and a "Hauptthetzer", owing to the supposed compassion he showed toward the Jews in his essay on the so-called '*Judenfrage*' of 1926.¹⁵⁰ Likely enraged at a letter Meiser had written to Nazi authorities in Ansbach only a month previously, in which he advised the NSDAP against "die gesellschaftliche und wirtschaftliche Schädigung der Juden",¹⁵¹ the Nazis resurrected excerpts from Meiser's 1926 essay to prove that his attitude towards the Jews was too lenient for their current political agenda. Since the Nazis had already imposed tight controls on the German

¹⁴⁷ Meiser, 'Not und Verheißung: Eine Neujahrsbetrachtung', in *Korrespondenzblatt für die evangelisch-lutherischen Geistlichen in Bayern*, Nr. 1, 56, Jg. 1931, pp.1-4, (p.2), in Schulze, 2006, p.26.

¹⁴⁸ Meiser quoted in Scholder, 1977, p.447.

¹⁴⁹ Meiser, 'Not und Verheißung', in Schulze, 2006, p.26; also cf. Klatt, 1987.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. H. C. Meiser, 2008, p.29.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Meiser's protest letter, in *ibid.*, p.125.

press by this point, it was easy for them to select and propagate only those parts of Meiser's essay in which he explicitly encouraged the Germans to show respect and affability towards the Jews. Although Meiser's failure to respond to the NSDAP's public condemnation of his attitudes and defend his position may appear a missed opportunity to restate more clearly his desire to see the Jews assimilated into German society, and therefore to stand up for German Jews who had by now lost many basic rights at the hands of the Nazis, it must be borne in mind that Meiser was ultimately forced to adopt a policy of silence to ensure that he avoided making any further comments which could be misconstrued by the Nazis and, thereby, give them cause for his dismissal. Since the GDC had already taken control over the *Reichskirche* and was looking for any means possible to add to this the remaining 'intact' *Landeskirchen*, Meiser was prompted to put his 'love' for his *Landeskirche* first in this period¹⁵² to ensure that Nazi insurgents did not oust him from office and destroy the essence of 'intact' Protestantism both in Bavaria and in Nazi Germany at large.

Contrary to Marahrens and Meiser, who had both traditionally refrained from political comment, *Landesbischof* Theophil Wurm of Württemberg had a long history of involvement in the political affairs of his region. During the early years of the Weimar Republic, Wurm had actively campaigned for the regional branch of the moderately conservative *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (DNVP) – namely the *Württembergische Bürgerpartei* – which had resulted in his own election to the *Stuttgarter Landtag* on 12th January 1919.¹⁵³ In his post-war memoirs, Wurm retrospectively justified his overt involvement in politics by explaining that, "...so hielt ich die Freihandelspolitik der bürgerlichen und sozialdemokratischen Linken für völlig verkehrt und war einer agrarfreundlichen Wirtschaftspolitik eher zugeneigt".¹⁵⁴ Wurm's disdain for left-wing politics did not, however, only stem from a personal affinity to bourgeois interests but also from ecclesiastical concerns. Even during Wurm's early career as a parish pastor, he had been openly critical of the democratic Left for its lack of sympathy for German Protestantism. To this end, he had once expressed concern that,

Christentum und Arbeiterbewegung stehen in Deutschland nicht in normalem Verhältnis zu einander. Auf der einen Seite hat das Christentum zu wenig Einfluß auf die Arbeiterbewegung, auf der anderen ist die Arbeiterbewegung zu eng mit den religiösen Kämpfen verflochten.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Phrase coined from Heiwik, 1956 and Haberer, 1996.

¹⁵³ Cf. Wurm, 1953, p.67.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.56.

¹⁵⁵ 'Leitsätze von Pfarrer Wurm: Christentum und Arbeiterbewegung', dateless (presumed late 1920s-early 1930s), LKAS, Bestell-Nr.28.4.

Taking a holistic view of German society, then, Wurm interpreted the relationship between the Christian clergy and the political Left as one which risked subjugating the role of religion and, by extension, also the status of institutional Protestantism in Germany. Although Wurm did not become *Kirchenpräsident* of the ELLKW until 1929,¹⁵⁶ he had long made his aversion to left-wing politics clear. It can thus be appreciated that the NSDAP with its anti-leftist and seemingly Christian agenda appealed to Wurm's own conservative preferences and hope for future cooperation between the Church and the State. It is also important to note in this context that the *Evangelisch-Lutherische Landeskirche in Württemberg* (ELLKW) was the first Protestant church to break free from the Weimar Republic in 1924 by providing itself with its own self-governing constitution. The tendency to view the political Left with caution, therefore, was not simply a character trait unique to Wurm, but rather one that was shared by the entire ecclesiastical community he served.

In addition to opposing the political Left, the pastorate of the ELLKW also boasted a long tradition of resentment towards the power of political Catholicism in its region. In spite of the fact that the ELLKW served a Protestant community which comprised roughly two-thirds of the regional population,¹⁵⁷ the Catholic Church had long subjugated its Protestant neighbour in Württemberg politically, with Eugen Bolz of the Catholic *Zentrumspartei* successively heading coalitions in the region from 1928 until the onset of Nazism in 1933.¹⁵⁸ As can be demonstrated by Wurm's own involvement in the *Württembergische Bürgerpartei*, clergymen of the ELLKW conformed to the conclusion of Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham in so far as they had "long resented the dominance of the Catholic Centre in their area" but had traditionally split their vote amongst several conservative-national parties which rendered them less able to influence political events.¹⁵⁹ Faced with the situation in which a vote for the political Left threatened to endanger German Protestantism with 'godless' Bolshevism and a vote for the moderate Right risked prolonging the subjugation of the Protestant voice under the authority of political Catholicism, it can be appreciated that Wurm saw in the NSDAP an effective, albeit not ideal, means to bring to an end more than a decade of Protestant oppression by political Catholicism.

It is in this context that it is important not to interpret Wurm's early warning to the ELLKW not to bring political preferences into the realm of the Church as an indication that

¹⁵⁶ Wurm's title was changed to that of *Landesbischof* in 1933 in an effort to bring the administration of the ELLKW in line with wider structural changes within the *Reichskirche*.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Moser, 2006, pp.1-3.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Schröder, 2009.

¹⁵⁹ Noakes and Pridham, 1974, p.115.

Wurm had given up on trying to influence political developments in Germany. This, after all, would be surprising given his strong personal history of political engagement. Instead, it should be accepted that there were strategic benefits to be had for Wurm by appeasing the NSDAP as it grew in popularity in the early 1930s. In a letter to the pastorate of the ELLKW as the Nazis were gaining ground in Germany in 1932, Wurm perhaps surprisingly stressed that,

Es besteht die ernste Gefahr, daß unter den jetzigen Verhältnissen, durch die parteipolitische Tätigkeit von Geistlichen das Ansehen und seelsorgerliche Wirken des Pfarramts aufs schwerste geschädigt wird.¹⁶⁰

With the popularity of the NSDAP on the rise at this time, it must be appreciated that Wurm could not afford to run the risk of allowing his traditionally conservative-national pastorate to dissuade the citizens of Württemberg from voting for the only party that looked set to work to the advantage of the ELLKW, namely by quelling the influence of both political Catholicism and the anti-Christian Left. Adding to this the fact that Wurm publicly maintained hope for “eine ganz neue Harmonie zwischen Kirche und Staat” in the early years of the Third Reich,¹⁶¹ it becomes clear that his decision to warn his pastorate to refrain from expressions of political allegiance from the pulpit was also a way of preventing his colleagues in the ELLKW from openly endorsing other moderately conservative parties and, thereby, jeopardising relations with the NSDAP. For these reasons, Wurm’s initial positive response to the NSDAP can be seen to be in line with Theodore S. Hamerow’s conclusion that Protestant clergymen did not endorse the NSDAP because it met exactly with their political preferences but, rather, because it signified “the victory of traditional authority over destructive revolutionism” as well as “the triumph of national religious faith over alien spiritual influence”.¹⁶²

Further supporting the above is Wurm’s instruction to the ELLKW in 1934 in which he exclaimed, “...laßt uns nie vergessen, was wir als Kirche bis heute dem Staat an Förderung und Schutz verdanken. In alter Treue stellt sich unser württembergisches Kirchenvolk fürbittend und mitarbeitend hinter die Regierung unseres Staates”.¹⁶³ The gratitude which Wurm displays to the NSDAP here can be seen, in part, to be for the furtherance and protection which the Nazis had afforded to his *Landeskirche* by obliterating its traditional political enemies. It is nonetheless also important not to read Wurm’s declaration of loyalty to

¹⁶⁰ Letter from Wurm to his “sämtliche Dekanatämter“, 29/09/1932, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.28.1.

¹⁶¹ ‘Predigt über Hebr. 12.11’, 03/10/1934, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.1.

¹⁶² Hamerow, 1997, p.151.

¹⁶³ ‘Kanzelansprache des Landesbischofs D. Wurm an sämtliche Gemeinden der württembergischen Landeskirche’, 22/04/1934, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.3.3.

the Nazi State without appreciating the dictates of his Lutheran confession. As early as March 1933, Wurm saw it as the “Pflicht” of his *Landeskirche* to stand “in erster Reihe” with Germany’s new Nazi government.¹⁶⁴ Without appreciating that, under Lutheran logic, clergymen were obligated to support the rule of the secular authorities, it may appear that Wurm was breaching his own instruction to the pastorate of the ELLKW not to display political preferences in the Church.

The extent to which Wurm’s confessional scruples can be considered honourable is however undermined by the fact that he continued to adhere to the Lutheran instruction to honour the State even whilst the NSDAP was enacting its policies of racial and societal discrimination. Even whilst the Nazis were using their first concentration camp in Dachau to ‘clean up’ German society, for example, Wurm gave a sermon in September 1933 in which he encouraged his audience to think of Hitler as the God-given *Führer* of Germany, “der sein Bestes daran setzt, [...] alle Unsauberkeit aus Verwaltung und öffentlichem Leben zu entfernen”.¹⁶⁵ In recognition of Wurm’s passion for political change, it was highly likely that, when employing the controversial term “Unsauberkeit”, Wurm was referring to the political adversaries of the church that the NSDAP had ousted from power. Nevertheless, the resemblance of Wurm’s words to the rhetoric of ‘uncleanliness’ used by the Nazis to describe the Jews is strikingly apparent.¹⁶⁶ Even at the start of 1935, when the NSDAP had already enacted numerous laws against German Jewry, Wurm still continued to stress the opinion that, “In staatlichen Dingen hat nur der zu entscheiden, der zum Führer berufen ist. Ihm gehört Vertrauen und Gerhorsam”.¹⁶⁷ Although Wurm’s reluctance to interfere in ‘earthly’ matters can be seen as being in line with the biblical lesson of Romans 13, which teaches churchmen not to meddle in the affairs of the State regardless of the brutality of its measures,¹⁶⁸ there can be no doubt that his early silence on the Nazis’ persecution of the Jews gave the NSDAP a free licence to intensify its violent policies in the ensuing years of the Third Reich. In his strategic endeavour to curry favour with the NSDAP in the initial stages of Nazi Germany,

¹⁶⁴ ‘Schreiben des Kirchenpräsidenten an die Geistlichen der württembergischen Landeskirche’, 30/03/1933, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.3.3, p.50.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Auftrag, Not und Ziel der Kirche’, Predigt zur Eröffnung der ersten Nationalsynode in der Schloßkirche zu Wittenberg, 27/09/1933, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.1, p.4.

¹⁶⁶ For an analysis of Nazi rhetoric, cf. Rash, 2006.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Unser Verfaß und unsere Verantwortung’, Predigt in Tuttlingen, Troffingen und Schwenningen, 10/03/1935, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.1, p.8.

¹⁶⁸ Peter Weiner also adds that the specifically Lutheran Protestant tradition, when employed in its strictest sense, teaches that “even against the most unjust ruler the people have never a right to revolt” (Weiner, 1999, pp.87-88).

then, Wurm problematically proved himself prepared to compromise wider Christian standards in German society in order to elevate the status of his *Landeskirche*.

Wurm's early reluctance to protest about the State's discriminatory policies against the Jews must also be set against the fact that he did not hesitate to protest to the NSDAP once Nazi precepts began to infiltrate into the Church. In a *Denkschrift* that was also signed by *Landesbischof* Meiser, the two men expressed their "schärfste[n] Protest" directly to Hitler about the conduct of *Reichsbischof* Müller, whom Hitler had not only personally endorsed but whose "Eingliederungsaktion" within the DEK he clearly facilitated and supported.¹⁶⁹ To criticise the encroachment of Nazism into Church affairs and the subsequent attempts of the NSDAP to silence Church complaints, Meiser and Wurm paid homage to Nazi values and stated that,

Aus der Verantwortung für die Evangelische Kirche wie aus innerster Verbundenheit mit dem Schicksal unseres Volkes und Staates und im Einvernehmen mit angesehenen Gliedern unserer Landeskirchen bitten wir den Herrn Reichskanzler, Alles zu tun, um einem Zustand ein Ende zu machen, der nicht bloß die Volksgemeinschaft stört und schädigt, sondern auch dem Ansehen Deutschlands und der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche in den Kreisen der Auslandsdeutschen Eintrag tut.¹⁷⁰

As has already been demonstrated by the earlier discussion in this sub-chapter of Marahrens' desire to work for the benefit of German *Volkstum*, Meiser and Wurm's plea to Hitler to preserve the German *Volksgemeinschaft* is in line with the Lutheran ambition to protect the traditions of the German nation and should not be interpreted as them adhering to the same racial and eugenic goals as the Nazis. In spite of the bishops' best intentions to adhere to the constraints of their Lutheran confession, however, their failure to campaign for justice in the wider German society nonetheless leaves the bishops with a dubious interpretation of Christian morality.

To summarise the responses of *Landesbischofe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm to Nazism, it ought to be noted that, although all three bishops generally responded positively to Germany's new Far Right government, their reasons for doing so were not exclusively attributable to personal enthusiasm for Nazi ideology. Politically, Marahrens welcomed the move since the NSDAP had overpowered the anti-Christian liberalism that was particularly prevalent in northern Germany and re-inspired his working-class parishioners with its seemingly Christian agenda. Meiser and Wurm were similarly pleased with the NSDAP's ability to suppress political Catholicism in Germany and thereby to raise the profiles of their *Landeskirchen* in their predominantly Catholic regions. In particular, Meiser was indebted to

¹⁶⁹ For details on Müller's relationship to Hitler, cf. Schneider, 1993, pp.80-94.

¹⁷⁰ EZA source, 50/185, Nr.13.

the NSDAP for his promotion to the position of *Landesbischof* of the ELKB when his predecessor objected to Nazi policies, whilst Wurm was appreciative of the NSDAP for destroying German Protestantism's political adversaries which he had himself once tried to defeat through his own political activism. Confessionally, however, all three bishops shared the Lutheran obligation to honour the secular government and refrain from political action against it. Although this goes some way toward explaining their generally positive reception of the NSDAP, it nonetheless poses questions about the bishops' wider Christian scruples, since none of the men commented on the Nazis' escalating discrimination against the Jews during this period.

Although all three bishops shared a professional obligation to advise the secular government against breaches of Christian morality, it must be appreciated that, after the establishment of the GDC-led *Reichskirche*, the bishops' immediate priority to preserve the *Intaktheit* of their respective *Landeskirchen* meant that they had to ensure that they did not overly infuriate Germany's new political leaders and give them cause for their dismissal. *Landesbischof* Meiser, in particular, already had personal experience of Nazi aggression after being subjected to a Nazi hate campaign in 1934. He and his 'intact' colleagues had already experienced, therefore, the power of the Nazi machinery to determine their fate in the Church. Moreover, in light of the bishops' personal indebtedness to the NSDAP for the elevated status of their *Landeskirchen*, together with their shared Lutheran duty to honour the secular government, it must be accepted that the *Landesbischöfe* had more reason to respond positively to the NSDAP in the early years of the Third Reich than to reject it.

The *Landesbischöfe* and the *Deutsche Christen*

Even though it is problematic enough that *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm initially showed general appreciation for the NSDAP in the early years of the Third Reich, the bishops' lack of unanimous condemnation for the specifically ecclesiastical Nazism of the GDC is even more dubious in view of their shared Lutheran duty to guard the Church from heresy. Although the three bishops were theoretically united in their disdain for the unorthodox practices of the GDC, they were not immune to outside pressures either to compromise or to reinforce their theological positions. These pressures emanated in particular from the respective socio-cultural and geo-political surroundings of the bishops' *Landeskirchen*. Since the bishops were therefore caught between a doctrinal duty to resist the

influx of the GDC into the Church and a strategic, nationalist desire to improve the reputation of their respective *Landeskirchen*, this sub-chapter examines the individual reactions of the bishops to the GDC with a view to clarifying their sometimes contradictory responses to ‘German Christian’ heresy at the very beginning of the Third Reich.

To take the case of *Landesbischof* August Marahrens of Hanover first, then, it is important to recognise that, unlike his counterparts in the southern ‘intact’ churches, Marahrens initially responded unenthusiastically to the ecclesiastical Nazism of the GDC. Despite often being depicted as an ardent pro-Nazi in broad sweeping historiographies of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, Marahrens was clear from the outset that he did not wish to see the politico-ecclesiastical practices of the GDC infiltrate German Protestantism. Long before the GDC had the chance to realign German Christianity with Nazi policies, Marahrens involved himself in the *Kapler Ausschuss* in the initial months of the Third Reich in an attempt to formulate a Christocentric constitution for a national German Church. Even after Ludwig Müller had imbued this constitution with Nazi precepts, however, Marahrens continued to work against the heresy of the GDC and cast his vote in the intra-church *Reichsbischof* elections of May 1933 for ‘Confessing’ candidate Friedrich von Bodelschwingh. Although the NSDAP was not happy with von Bodelschwingh’s landslide electoral victory and quickly proclaimed the result invalid, announcing instead public re-runs of the election on 23rd July 1933, Marahrens nonetheless remained steadfast in his adherence to undistorted Protestantism and voted for von Bodelschwingh yet again in the public polls.¹⁷¹ This was an extremely courageous decision for Marahrens, particularly in light of the growing ‘brownshirt’ congregations that were typical of his ELLKH at the time. After all, even by this early stage in the Third Reich, Marahrens’ ELLKH comprised the largest proportion of pro-Nazi parishioners, if not pro-Nazi pastors, out of all three ‘intact’ *Landeskirchen*.¹⁷²

Marahrens’ honourable decision to reject the ecclesiastical Nazism of the GDC from the outset was in accordance with his spiritual vocation to protect the Church from heretical practices. Testifying to the strength of his commitment to Christocentrism in this period is a letter Marahrens wrote to Hitler on 17th July 1933, advising him to remove all forces that “die Kirche [...] zur unfreien oder staatlich beeinflussten macht”.¹⁷³ As Gertraud Grünzinger suggests, however, Marahrens’ steadfast aversion to the GDC also arose from personal

¹⁷¹ Grünzinger, 2009.

¹⁷² As confirmed by election results detailed in Schröder, 2008a, 2008b and 2009,

¹⁷³ Reproduced in Klügel, 1965, p.15.

reasons,¹⁷⁴ and should be traced back to his own experience as part of the *Kapler Ausschuss* in the initial months of the Third Reich. After Hitler forced the original three-man commission to allow Ludwig Müller to contribute to its negotiations as his personal *Vertrauensmann*, it is apparent that Marahrens had more experience than most of both Müller's personal character and his intentions for German Protestantism at large. In the first instance, then, Marahrens' daily dealings with Müller caused him to characterise the *Reichsbischof* candidate as an overly militaristic man who had no appreciation of the essence of the original Christian confessions.¹⁷⁵ In addition to his personal distaste for the figurehead of the GDC, Marahrens' participation in the *Kapler Ausschuss* also allowed him to come to the early conclusion that a *Reichskirche* under the leadership of the GDC was "bekenntniswidrig". Although Marahrens was involved in the *Kapler Ausschuss* primarily because he wanted to bring about "die Einheit der DEK", his dealings with Müller made him realise that he was striving for "eine wirkliche Einheit" for the Church which would ensure the sanctity of the original Protestant confessions.¹⁷⁶ By contrast, Marahrens saw that Müller desired for German Protestantism a national Church, led by "eine bekenntnismäßig nicht gebundene Kirchenbehörde" that failed to acknowledge the *status confessionis* of each of its constituent *Landeskirchen*, and instead adopted ecclesiastical Nazism as the cornerstone of its unification process.¹⁷⁷ Since Marahrens truly desired to create a unified German Church based on the principles of the *sola Scriptura*, it was only logical that Marahrens twice vetoed Müller's claim to power by voting instead for his rival von Bodelschwingh. This was Marahrens' means of displaying his deep-seated aversion to both Müller and the heretical practices of his GDC.

It is also important to note that, even once the vast majority of Protestant *Landeskirchen* had been assimilated into the GDC-led *Reichskirche* in the wake of the second round of Church elections, Marahrens still did not yield to the influence of Müller and his GDC. Although Marahrens' ELLKH became one of the only three 'intact' *Landeskirchen* not to come under the control of the GDC, this was purely due to the actions of Marahrens himself. In spite of a convincing victory for the GDC in the second round of elections in the Hanoverian church senate, Marahrens decided, on his own accord, to retract his signature from the contract that had been drawn up to hand over supreme authority of the ELLKH to

¹⁷⁴ Grünzinger, 2009.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Otte, 1996a, p.191.

¹⁷⁶ LKAH SI HI 513, Nr.80, Point 7.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., Point 1-5.

Reichsbischof Müller.¹⁷⁸ This Marahrens was able to do since, on 23rd May 1933, he had been bestowed with the power of *Bevollmächtigung* in his role as *Landesbischof* of the ELLKH. This power enabled him to suspend the constitution of the ELLKH in the case of an emergency and, in its place, impose his own leadership over the *Landeskirche* with unlimited and unquestionable authority.¹⁷⁹ For this reason, when it came to signing the ELLKH over to the GDC, Marahrens was able, by law, to follow his gut instinct and impress his own anti-GDC convictions over his entire *Landeskirche* by enacting his power of *Bevollmächtigung*.

Even once Marahrens had managed to secure control over his *Landeskirche*, however, the GDC did not cease to be an issue for the ELLKH. Since the majority of the ELLKH's senate had voted in favour of assimilation to the GDC-led *Reichskirche* and many Hanoverian parishioners were staunch supporters of Nazism, the dynamics of Marahrens' opposition to the GDC had to change once he had overruled its authority to govern in his church. In order to stay on side with his predominantly 'German Christian' senate and Nazi officials in his region to ensure that future insurgencies or attacks on his leadership did not arise, Marahrens was ultimately compelled to accept and to work with the presence of Nazi agents in his *Landeskirche*. This did not mean that Marahrens' original aversion to the GDC-led *Reichskirche* and to Ludwig Müller had softened in any way after 1933, however. Rather, Marahrens' reaction to ecclesiastical Nazism simply altered in line with the elevated status of the GDC, which had suddenly moved from being a force that Marahrens had no choice but to oppose in order to retain his leadership of the ELLKH to become a force that he then had to appease for the very same ends.

In this respect, Marahrens' subsequent declarations of commitment to Nazism in general can be seen as a strategic means to appease his highly Nazi bishopric and prove his ideological credentials in the face of his rejection of the GDC. To illustrate this, Marahrens justified his denial of the GDC's right to rule over his *Landeskirche* by claiming that he was nonetheless willing to conform to the wider societal demands of the NSDAP. In an undated statement to the ELLKH, Marahrens explained,

Der Entschluß von Landesbischof D. Marahrens ist um so bemerkenswerter, als er von Anfang an für eine starke und feste Geschlossenheit der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche eingetreten ist. Er bekennt

¹⁷⁸ Cf. the statement of the Hanoverian *Bekennnisgemeinschaft*, 04/05/1934, LKAH, SI HI 513, Nr.80. It should also be noted here that there has been great deal of discussion as to whether Marahrens refused to sign the document outright or whether he initially signed the document then withdrew his signature after realising his mistake. For details, cf. Klügel, 1974, pp.122-124, and Green, 2007, p.302.

¹⁷⁹ Klügel, 1964, pp.28-29.

sich damit zum Willen des Führers und hat dies bereits wiederholt unter Beweis gestellt. Er hält es für eine unabweisbare Pflicht, für eine in sich fest gegliederte evangelische Kirche einzutreten...¹⁸⁰

Marahrens attempted, therefore, to shroud his rejection of the GDC-led *Reichskirche* by emphasising his Lutheran duty to recognise the secular authority of the NSDAP. Adding to this his commitment to devise an alternative means by which to unify German Protestantism, it can be seen that Marahrens protected his position as *Landesbischof* from potential reprisals from the Nazi State, which may have otherwise interpreted his specific opposition to ecclesiastical Nazism as an aversion to its wider political aims.

In the same vein, it must be appreciated that, by keeping members of the GDC in prominent positions of governance within his 'intact' ELLKH, Marahrens was not only able to avoid giving the GDC cause for revenge attacks on his leadership but was also able to manipulate the presence of 'German Christian' clergymen to his own benefit. Even though it was inevitably difficult for Marahrens to cooperate with 'German Christian' members of his senate after he had defied their demands for assimilation into the *Reichskirche*, his intra-church collaboration with the GDC was essential to raising the profile of the ELLKH in the eyes of the Nazi State, which would not have looked kindly upon any attempt by Marahrens to exclude from church administration the ecclesiastical agents which it had once publicly endorsed. By accepting the presence of moderate *Deutsche Christen* in the administration of the ELLKH, then, Marahrens was able to demonstrate to the NSDAP that he was not completely opposed to Nazi precepts and was willing to work with the GDC to bring about the creation of a unified German Protestant Church that was more amenable to the ambitions of both the Church and the State. Marahrens demonstrates this very logic in a *Rundschreiben* of 18th July 1933, in which he states,

Zahlreiche Aussprachen zum Beispiel mit maßgebenden Vertretern der Glaubensbewegung "Deutscher Christen" haben mir Einblick in diese gegeben, und ich erkenne deren wertvolle Kräfte und volksmissionarische Ziele, soweit unsere hannoversche Landeskirche in Betracht kommt, durchaus an. Ihre Mit-/arbeit wünsche und erwarte ich auch in unserer Landeskirche in weitestem Maße.¹⁸¹

Before condemning Marahrens for not abiding by the complete rejection of the GDC which he displayed during the *Reichsbischof* elections of 1933, however, it is important to recognise the multiple pressures upon him which drove him not to lose favour with either the moderate *Deutsche Christen* or the Nazi State at this point. Although Marahrens continued to emphasise that his objection to the "Kirchengesetz" of the GDC-led *Reichskirche* should in no

¹⁸⁰ 'Eingliederung der hannoverschen Landeskirche in die DEK. Die Stellungnahme des Landesbischofs D. Marahrens', LKAH, SI HI 513, Nr.93 (undated).

¹⁸¹ 'Landesbischof gedruckte Rundschreiben', 18/07/1933, LKAH, SI HII 121, Nr.54-56, (Nr.55-56).

way be viewed as a denunciation of the wider policies of the NSDAP,¹⁸² it ought to be acknowledged that he at least had to maintain an appearance of accepting wider Nazi ideology in order to ward off potential reprisals from both the GDC and the Nazi State, and to maintain the trust of his predominantly Nazi bishopric. Without such strategic appeals to Nazism to justify his rejection of ‘German Christianity’, Marahrens’ rebuttal of the GDC risked losing him the support of his parishioners and pastorate, as well as the respect of the national NSDAP government itself. Marahrens’ tendency to resort to any means necessary to preserve ‘intact’ Protestantism in Germany in this period nonetheless remains questionable since it included supporting, or at the very least accepting, Nazi policies at large, which already included unchristian policies of discrimination in the wider German society.

Contrary to Marahrens’ initial steadfast objection to the ecclesiastical Nazism of the GDC, however, *Landesbischof* Hans Meiser of Bavaria did not offer convincing resistance to ‘German Christian’ heresy during the *Reichsbischof* elections at the start of the Third Reich. Despite casting his first vote in the intra-church elections in favour of the Christocentric candidate Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, like Marahrens, Meiser nonetheless changed his voting preferences in the public re-run of the elections only two months later. After the initial intra-church ballot had taken place, it was revealed that the heads of three major Protestant *Landeskirchen* had voted against von Bodelschwingh, including *Landesbischof* Theophil Wurm of Württemberg¹⁸³ whose voting tactics will be discussed in the final part of this sub-chapter. Although Meiser had originally opted to see von Bodelschwingh at the helm of the newly established *Reichskirche*, he was quickly influenced by the rationale of the three defectors and soon joined their intra-church opposition movement to call for von Bodelschwingh’s resignation. Since it was highly unlikely that Meiser had fallen for the politico-ecclesiastical policies of the GDC within such a short period of time, particularly in light of his early concerns over the establishment of a “religiöse[-] Ersatzform” discussed in the previous sub-chapter, Meiser’s subsequent decision to vote for Ludwig Müller in the second round of Church elections raises the question of what prompted his sudden change of heart.

To begin to account for Meiser’s drastic change of opinion towards the GDC, then, we should first look to the particular geo-political positioning of his *Landeskirche*, which had

¹⁸² Cf. ‘Der Landesbischof und die Eingliederung’, Rundbrief (Evangelisches Pressedienst), 24/05/1934, LKAH, SI HI 513, Nr.94.

¹⁸³ Helmreich, 1979, p.136. The other two church leaders to vote against von Bodelschwingh were Bishop Heinrich Rendtorff of Mecklenburg-Schwerin and Pastor Simon Schöffel of Hamburg.

long been considerably overshadowed by the prominence of political and religious Catholicism. Not only did more than two thirds of the Bavarian populace belong to the Catholic Church but political Catholicism dominated the region through the local branch of the Catholic Centre Party; the *Bayerische Volkspartei* (BVP). Since Meiser's ELKB was visibly eclipsed by this confessional and political 'other' at the start of the Third Reich, it can be appreciated that Meiser came to see in the GDC a decisive opportunity to defy the Catholic forces that had long subjugated his Protestant *Landeskirche*. To understand this logic, it is necessary to remember that, even though the GDC had fewer members in southern Germany, it nevertheless had more clout in the predominantly Catholic south than it did in the particularly pro-Nazi north. This is because, whilst membership of the GDC in northern Germany generally signified commitment to the 'Nazification' of Christianity alone, in the southern German *Länder* allegiance to the GDC implicitly indicated alignment with Nazi politics at large. Since a vote for the GDC ostensibly gave Meiser an added opportunity to align his *Landeskirche* with the largest threat to the continuation of political Catholicism, it is understandable that he altered his voting preferences in favour of a convenient means to threaten the traditional dominance of the BVP. Moreover, since his Württembergian counterpart, *Landesbischof* Wurm, was already calling for the GDC to assume leadership over the new *Reichskirche*, Meiser was not impervious to the logic of his southern German neighbour, who, after all, had long been engaged in political endeavours to undermine the clout of the Catholics in his own region.

Further supporting this explanation of Meiser's sudden decision to support the GDC in the public Church elections of 1933 is the fact that, in essence, the nature of the GDC in the southern German *Länder* was not as radical as it was in its northern German strongholds. Although the southern German factions of the GDC still endorsed the same 'Nazified' Christianity as, for example, the staunchest Thuringian *Deutsche Christen*, their predominantly Catholic societal backdrop nonetheless meant that their members were more willing to accept the existing governing structures of their local *Landeskirchen*. This was because they saw in the existing administration the most effective means to protect their minority movement from potential attacks by their far more numerous Catholic counterparts.¹⁸⁴ Further to this, the geographical distance of the ELKB from the heartlands of 'German Christian' extremism inevitably rendered Meiser less aware of the destruction that the GDC could potentially cause to the northern German *Landeskirchen*, which ultimately had

¹⁸⁴ Baranowski, 1980, p.309.

no ‘free space’ for political or theological opposition. This line of thinking is in line with Klaus Scholder’s proclamation that,

Dem bayerischen Landesbischof, der erst kurz zuvor mit der festlichen Zustimmung von Staat und Partei in sein Amt eingesetzt worden war, / lag der Frieden in seiner Landeskirche näher als der Kampf für einen fernen, der Union verdächtigen Reichsbischof, der zudem unabsehbare politische Schwierigkeiten heraufbeschwören konnte. Man wird an dem Urteil schwerlich vorbeikommen, daß die Provinzialität der Landeskirchen ein wesentlicher Grund für den Sturz Bodelschwings war.¹⁸⁵

In respect of the drastically disparate demographics of the ELKB to the majority of the ‘destroyed’ *Landeskirchen*, then, it can be appreciated that Meiser did not realise the extent to which he was putting at risk his own *Landeskirche*, and German Protestantism at large, in his pursuit of political alignment with Berlin through the GDC. In light of the relative moderation of ‘German Christians’ in his own region, it can even be understood why Meiser concluded that he only stood to gain from the tactical manoeuvre.

In spite of his ignorance, Meiser was nonetheless careful to ensure that he kept the ‘upper hand’ in his relationship with the Bavarian GDC. Even though the movement had failed to earn enough votes in the ELKB to warrant the incorporation of Meiser’s *Landeskirche* into the GDC-led *Reichskirche*, Meiser continued to recognise the benefits that were to be had from continued co-operation with the GDC. In August 1933, Meiser publicly proclaimed himself tolerant of its ecclesiastical Nazism and specifically stated,

Solange die neue Bewegung keine Bedrohung unseres Bekenntnisstandes herbeiführt und solange sie gewillt ist, sich als aufbauender Faktor in unser gesamtkirchliches Leben einzufügen, soll sie auch in unserer Landeskirche Raum haben.¹⁸⁶

Before using this statement to identify Meiser as a laissez-faire supporter of the GDC, however, it is important to acknowledge the subsequent “Bedingungen” which he attached to its involvement in the ELKB; namely that “[d]ie unbedingte Wahrung des Bekenntnisstandes” of the ELKB must remain the main priority of the GDC, that the aim of the GDC must always be “innerkirchlich religiös”, and that those at the pinnacle of the movement must continue to respect Meiser’s “Führung” so that the unity of his *Landeskirche* would neither become threatened nor destroyed by “Einzelaktionen”.¹⁸⁷ Although Meiser may well have appeared to be openly welcoming of the GDC, in practice he was not tolerant of anything other than Christocentrism in his *Landeskirche*. His strict ultimatum to the GDC confirms the hypothesis that Meiser merely used the politico-ecclesiastical profile of the GDC to forge an outward alliance with the NSDAP and, thereby, to protect his *Landeskirche* from undue Nazi

¹⁸⁵ Scholder, 1977, pp.440-441.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Vertrauliches Rundschreiben’, 02/08/1933, LKAB, Bestand 506, Nr. 6095, p.3.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., pp.3-4.

aggression.¹⁸⁸ All the while, however, by emphasising his supreme authority over the church, Meiser ensured that the GDC could not, in turn, unleash its ecclesiastical Nazism in his *Landeskirche*.

Meiser's high-handed response to the GDC nevertheless had to alter once he no longer had to deal with the relatively 'mild' ecclesiastical Nazism of Bavarian 'German Christians' alone but with the brutality of the national *Reichskirche* leadership at large. On 3rd September 1934, *Reichsbischof* Müller, with the assistance of *Rechtswalter* Jäger, issued a directive to Meiser to surrender the autonomy of the ELKB to the GDC-led *Reichskirche*. Since Jäger's involvement demonstrated that the GDC was now supported by the Nazi State, Meiser's ability to object to the aims of the GDC must be seen as having been severely restricted by the danger that any criticism of its ecclesiastical Nazism could be interpreted as a parallel condemnation of the political ambitions of the NSDAP. For this reason, Meiser strategically responded to Müller's demands using Lutheran logic that was unique to the spiritual realm of the Church. In a statement of 15th September 1934, Meiser declared that, "Lutherische Landeskirchen können ihre Kirchengewalt nur einer Reichskirche übertragen, die selbst eindeutig an das lutherische Bekenntnis (die Augsburger Konfession) gebunden ist".¹⁸⁹ By characterising the structure of the *Reichskirche* as inadequate to allow for the confessional peculiarities of the ELKB, and insufficient to preserve the original Lutheran confession in Germany in general, Meiser found a purely spiritual method to respond to the unorthodoxy of the GDC without criticising Nazi ambitions at large.

It should also be noted here that the GDC's attempted subversion of the ELKB in September 1934 marked the start of Meiser's specific endeavour in the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* to protect the essence of confessional Lutheranism in Nazi Germany. Whereas Marahrens criticised the GDC for its inability to recognise the three distinct confessional identities of Lutheran, Reformed and United Protestantism,¹⁹⁰ Meiser began at this point explicitly to defend the status of confessional Lutheranism only. Evidently infuriated that the recent actions of the GDC had violated the original Lutheran basis of the DEK's constitution, Meiser proclaimed that, "Die Verfassung wurde nicht gehütet, sondern gebrochen. Das Recht wurde in Unrecht verkehrt und das Unrecht zum Recht gemacht".¹⁹¹ Meiser's turn towards an explicit rejection of the GDC in 1934 not only came about in defence of his own bishopric,

¹⁸⁸ Shelley Baranowski confirms that both Meiser and Wurm believed that a failure to elect Müller and endorse the GDC "would only arouse the antagonism of the new government" (Baranowski, 1980, p.309).

¹⁸⁹ 'Bekenntnisstand und Kirchengewalt', 15/09/1934, LKAB, Bestand 246, (v).

¹⁹⁰ Cf. LKAH, SI HI 513, Nr.93.

¹⁹¹ 'Bekenntnisstand und Kirchengewalt', 15/09/1934, LKAB, Bestand 246, (iii).

therefore, but also in defence of the traditional Lutheran underpinnings that he saw as integral to specifically German Protestantism.

Meiser's belated acceptance of the potential destructiveness of the GDC meant, however, that he was no longer able to respond to 'German Christian' ambitions with direct displays of hostility. For the sake of preserving the *Intaktheit* of his ELKB and, more specifically for Meiser, the essence of confessional Lutheranism which it epitomised, Meiser had to ensure that he was seen to be committed to both the concept of Protestant unification in general¹⁹² and the secular governance of the NSDAP. To this end, in a letter to his pastorate in November 1934, Meiser exclaimed,

Die Amtsbrüder wissen, daß der mir aufgezwungene Kampf frei von allen politischen Motiven allein um die unversehrte Geltung des Bekenntnisses und um ein wahrhaft geistliches Handeln innerhalb der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche geht und daß ich mich allezeit bemüht habe, ihn mit einem reinen und unverletzten Gewissen und so, wie es einem lutherischen Bischof gezieht, zu führen.¹⁹³

As well as dissociating his rejection of the GDC from a wider renunciation of Nazism in general, Meiser most notably justified his objection to 'German Christianity' on the grounds of his personal status as a Lutheran *Landesbischof*. By emphasising his professional obligation both to protect the Church from heresy and to guide Germany's secular government towards a more righteous path, Meiser ultimately found in confessional Lutheranism not only a cause for complaint over the heresy of the GDC but also a means by which to convey it tacitly. Although Meiser's turn towards the protection offered by Lutheran logic served to defy the intentions of the GDC in this period, however, the extent to which this decision can be considered honourable is nonetheless put in doubt by the fact that Meiser took it in the knowledge that it prevented him from commenting on the NSDAP's escalating policies of discrimination in the wider secular arena.

Even though *Landesbischof* Theophil Wurm of Württemberg headed a church with similar geo-political demographics to Meiser's ELKB, Wurm began his career in the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* in clear acceptance of the GDC. Whereas both Marahrens and Meiser initially wished to see Friedrich von Bodelschwingh assume leadership over the newly established *Reichskirche*, Wurm, as leader of arguably the most pietistic 'intact' *Landeskirche* in Germany,¹⁹⁴ did not hesitate to give his full support to Ludwig Müller in the initial intra-

¹⁹² Cf. 'Erklärung der bayrischen Landessynode', 23/08/1934, LKAB, Bestand 506 (III 2/57).

¹⁹³ 'Rundbrief', 08/11/1934, (pp.1-4), LKAB, Bestand 506 (III 267a), p.2.

¹⁹⁴ Lowell C. Green confirms the ELLKW's "devout Pietism and a conservative Biblicism" (Green, 2007, p.309). Due to the early influences of the Swiss Reformers Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin, it has also long been tradition for the services of the ELLKW to be conducted according to the more relaxed Reformed tradition (cf.

Church elections of 1933. Further to this, even once von Bodelschwingh had been appointed *Reichsbischof* of the DEK, Wurm continued to remain a part of an intra-Church opposition group that began to call for von Bodelschwingh's 'voluntary' resignation. Although we may reasonably expect Wurm to have rejected the GDC outright as a result of his traditional Württembergian pietism, an account of a conversation between Wurm and a fellow member of the Church council, Johannes Kübel, demonstrates that Wurm was well aware of the irregularity of his actions. When Kübel reportedly confronted Wurm with the words, "I, the Frankfurt liberal, am for the Pietist Bodelschwingh, and you, the Württemberg Pietist, are for Müller", Wurm is said to have shrugged his shoulders and dismissed Kübel with the reply, "Yes, right hand, left hand, all mixed up".¹⁹⁵ Wurm's own admission that his endorsement of Müller was not compatible with the confessional tradition of his *Landeskirche* suggests, therefore, that, as Shelley Baranowski reasons, subsidiary "regional factors"¹⁹⁶ must be at play in explaining why the bishop of one of the most devoutly Protestant *Landeskirchen* with one of the lowest proportions of NSDAP voters in Germany so enthusiastically endorsed the pro-Nazi GDC at the start of the Third Reich.

To investigate further Wurm's specific predicament at the beginning of 1933, then, it should be noted that Wurm's personal history of political involvement on behalf of the conservative-national *Württembergische Bürgerpartei* testified to Wurm's deeply ingrained sense of political scruples and responsiveness to political opportunities. Although Wurm was no longer actively involved in politics at the start of the Third Reich, it can be reasonably expected that he still possessed a strong political desire both to reinstate conservative-national values in Germany and to overturn Catholic political hegemony in his region. As a result of Wurm's overt political interests, then, it is only natural that he recognised earlier than most the unspoken profit that was to be had from endorsing the GDC. This in-depth knowledge of political tactics also explains why Wurm responded positively to the *Deutsche Christen* much earlier in the *Reichsbischof* elections than his southern German counterpart Meiser, who had always refrained from political comment in the name of staunch confessional Lutheranism.

It is in the context of Wurm's heightened political awareness, therefore, that it becomes possible to understand why Wurm attempted to fuse the two distinct manifestations of Nazism

the website of the *Evangelische Landeskirche in Württemberg*, accessible at: <http://www.elk-wue.de/landeskirche/international-information/>, last accessed: 03/06/2010).

¹⁹⁵ Conversation between Johannes Kübel and *Landesbischof* Wurm, recounted in English in Helmreich, 1979, p.136. Helmreich himself translated the account from Kübel's own *Erinnerungen* (Selbstverlag Johannes Kübel, 1973), pp.161, 165, 345-47.

¹⁹⁶ Baranowski, 1980, p.309.

represented by the NSDAP and the GDC respectively from the very beginning of the Third Reich. In order to re-establish the successful co-operation between the Church and the State of the pre-Weimar years, Wurm knew that the Church had to receive the endorsement of the State, and to do this the State needed to recognise the benefits that were to be had through partnership with the Church. For this reason, even before the prospect of a *Reichskirche* materialised, Wurm was careful to promote the idea of the Protestant Church working in accordance with and even enhancing the secular aims of the State through its spiritual provisions. Writing about Germany's new NSDAP leaders to the pastorate of his ELLKW on 30th March 1933, Wurm thus stated that,

Um so inniger und anhaltender muß die Fürbitte für diese Männer sein, daß der allmächtige und barmherzige Gott sie die rechten Wege und die rechten Mitarbeiter finden lasse und daß er dem bösen Geist der Zwietracht, des Eigennutzes und der Ungerechtigkeit wehre.¹⁹⁷

From Wurm's early implication that the Church ought to become an appropriate "Mitarbeiter" of the Nazi State it can be ascertained that Wurm wished to promote an image of institutional Protestantism in Germany that was willing to work in harmony with the secular administration of the NSDAP. Although Wurm did not specifically endorse or promote the 'Nazification' of Christianity to achieve this Church-State alliance, it can be appreciated why, once the GDC had gained ground in the DEKB and Hitler had publicly given Müller his personal backing, the GDC became the most convenient means for Wurm to achieve his original ends.

In spite of the fact that Wurm's initial enthusiasm for the GDC can be explained by the distance of his ELLKW from the northern Nazi heartlands, which meant that like Meiser he was less aware of the malevolence of the movement, Wurm's double vote for Müller in the summer of 1933 nonetheless puts Wurm in a problematic position today. After all, his desire to elevate the social standing of his *Landeskirche* by actively welcoming the pro-Nazi GDC as a means to foster closer relations with the NSDAP inevitably risked both the sanctity of the Protestant confessions and Christian morality in Germany at large. It was only the voting preferences of the wider ELLKW, which failed to vote for the GDC in the second round of Church elections, that gave Wurm the 'wake-up call' he needed to recognise the dangers inherent in close affiliation with the GDC. In spite of the fact that the GDC enacted the *Arierparagraph* in the DEK in September 1933, and had even held its infamous Berlin *Sportpalast* rally on 12th November 1933 in which Dr. Reinhold Krause expressed his desire

¹⁹⁷ 'Schreiben des Kirchenpräsidenten an die Geistlichen der württembergischen Landeskirche', 30/03/1933, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.3.3, Nr.7, p.50.

to rid German Protestantism of the “jüdische Lohnmoral” of the Old Testament,¹⁹⁸ only in April 1934 did Wurm’s position towards ‘German Christians’ begin to change. Months after the above violations of Christian precepts had occurred, Wurm penned a sermon to criticise the conduct of *Reichsbischof* Müller in allowing such infringements to occur under his supreme leadership over the DEK. In it, Wurm blatantly accused the GDC of having provoked Protestant clergymen in Germany to become involved “in schweren kirchlichen Kämpfen” which he described as follows:

Diese Kämpfe richten sich nicht gegen den Staat, der wiederholt erklärt hat, daß er die Verkündigung der Kirche unangetastet sein lasse; sie richten sich auch nicht / gegen die Deutsche Evangelische Kirche, deren Verfassung wir achten. Aber sie richten sich gegen eine kirchliche Gruppe, deren Führer oft genug zu erkennen gegeben haben, daß sie gar nicht merken, wie sehr sie das Evangelium abschwächen...¹⁹⁹

Although Wurm was careful not to attack the NSDAP in his criticism of the GDC, irrespective of whether he truly believed the Nazi State would keep to its word to leave the DEK to its own devices, his open condemnation of the nature of the GDC and its leader clearly demonstrated that, regardless of his previous opinions towards them, he had now become a clear opponent of ‘German Christianity’.

Likely contributing to Wurm’s change of attitude towards the GDC is the evident resurgence of his pietistic values, which the GDC’s violations of Christian principles had brought about. After all, the escalating heretical practices of *Reichsbischof* Müller during the initial months of his leadership over the DEK had brought Wurm to the conclusion that, “wer das Bischofskreuz trägt, darf auch das Kreuz nicht scheuen, das aus der unverkürzten Verkündigung der Wahrheit erwachsen kann”.²⁰⁰ For this reason, Wurm can be seen, in turn, to have become aware of his own duty as *Landesbischof* to thwart the unorthodoxy of his counterparts in the wider DEK. From this point on, then, Wurm used his supreme authority over the ELLKW to oversee ecclesiastical appointments on all levels of his *Landeskirche*. Not only did Wurm begin to snub those members of his clergy who professed to be active in the GDC but he also appointed ‘Confessing’ clergymen into prominent positions of church administration wherever possible.²⁰¹ By ultimately endorsing ministers whom he considered to convey the original Christian message, Wurm can not only be seen to have come round eventually to rejecting the GDC on pietistic grounds but also to have ensured the propagation of his regained pietism from the very grassroots of his *Landeskirche*. To a certain extent, then,

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Helmreich, 1979, pp.149-152.

¹⁹⁹ ‘Unser Hirte und Bischof’, Predigt, 15/04/1934, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.1, pp.1-14, (pp.11-12).

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p.13.

²⁰¹ Jantzen, 2008, p.70.

Wurm can be seen to have played the role of God in his ELLKW, as he personally selected those whom he saw as fittest to ensure the survival of the original Protestant confessions.

With his traditional pietistic values recovered by mid-1934, therefore, Wurm's responses to the ecclesiastical Nazism of the GDC only became more critical after this point. Like Marahrens and Meiser, however, Wurm had to ensure that he differentiated his rejection of the GDC from that of Nazism at large in order not to jeopardise the autonomy of his bishopric. For this reason, Wurm continued to appease Nazi agents with declarations such as his pledge that, "er [steht] fest und entschlossen auf dem Boden des heutigen Staates, unter seinem Führer Adolf Hitler".²⁰² In spite of such strategies of appeasement, Wurm nonetheless came to criticise the GDC in a way that was precariously close to condemning the racial policies of the NSDAP as well. On one occasion Wurm appealed to the original Christian parables to proclaim publicly that, "Wir können uns Jesus nicht konstruieren als nordlichen Menschen, sondern müssen es uns schon gefallen lassen, daß er im jüdischen Lande geboren ist und aus dem Hause und Geschlechte Davids war".²⁰³ As well as attacking the heresy of 'German Christianity', Wurm's words undoubtedly undermined the mythology of the NSDAP, which rested on the principles of Aryan superiority and Jewish inferiority. On the same occasion Wurm's condemnation for the GDC's decision to implement the *Arierparagraph* in the DEK came even closer to critiquing the racial fundament of Nazi pseudo-scientific mythology when he stated, "Es ist gut, wenn unser Blick auf das ganze Volk gerichtet ist; wir haben nicht das / Recht, irgend jemanden durch menschlichen Machtspruch auszuschließen".²⁰⁴ As well as allowing him to express objection to the unchristian practices of the GDC, Wurm's regained pietistic rationale also caused him to begin to question the morality of the NSDAP's rule, and the right of the State to discriminate against others in the society it governed.

By early 1935, therefore, Wurm's responses to the pro-Nazi GDC had moved from being motivated purely by political gain to being influenced by his desire to preserve the fundamental dogma of German Protestantism. Once Wurm had recognised the full potential of the GDC to destroy the original essence of Christianity epitomised by his 'intact' *Landeskirche*, Wurm was visibly compelled to fight the movement's heresy with the very pietistic traditions it sought to destroy. Wurm's rhetorical musings from the period show that his main grievance with the GDC was that it attempted to render the timeless image of God in

²⁰² 'Kanzelansprache', 22/04/1934, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.3.3.

²⁰³ 'Wie vermeiden wir den Anstoß am Evangelium?', Predigt, 20/01/1935, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.1, p.7.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pp.10-11.

line with current trends in the temporal arena; hence his question: “Was soll denn das heißen: Gott ist Geist? Es soll heißen: Gott ist kein körperliches Wesen, nicht abhängig von den Schranken der Zeit und des Raumes”.²⁰⁵ Although Wurm’s eventual opposition to the GDC was a result of his objection to its particular heretical doctrine, unlike the actions of Marahrens and Meiser, however, it cannot be denied that Wurm’s verbal protestations against the GDC also increasingly brought him into conflict with the discriminatory policies of the NSDAP. Even though the nature of Wurm’s disagreement with the policies of the NSDAP is obviously called into question by the fact that he did not object to Nazi political methods outright, but rather as a consequence of his opposition to the GDC, already at this early stage in the Third Reich, Wurm was evidently edging towards a more radical form of *Resistenz* to Nazi hegemony than his ‘intact’ counterparts in Hanover and Bavaria.

The *Landesbischöfe* and the *Bekennende Kirche*

Although the general support of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm for the NSDAP served to lessen the bishops’ respective degrees of opposition to the heretical practices of the GDC, the contribution of the three men to the historical development of the ‘Confessing’ cause is unmistakable. Even though the groundwork for the formation of the eventual *Bekennende Kirche* had already been laid as a result of the efforts of ‘Confessing’ clergymen such as Martin Niemöller, *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm were nonetheless instrumental in its establishment and initial administration. The aim of this sub-chapter, therefore, is to investigate the bishops’ individual reasons for joining the Protestant opposition movement in the early years of the Third Reich and to assess the extent to which the bishops were both willing and able to contribute to the development of intra-Church resistance to Nazism.

To take the case of *Landesbischof* August Marahrens of Hanover first, then, it must be appreciated that, even though Marahrens had a strong aversion to the unorthodoxy of the GDC from the very start of the Third Reich, the ‘German Christians’ also gave him good reason to resist actively their ecclesiastical rule in 1934. Almost immediately after Marahrens refused to sign the ELLKH over to the authority of the *Reichskirche*, August Jäger forced Marahrens into continuous negotiations over his right to continue to head the Hanoverian *Landeskirche*. Ludwig Müller also fiercely attacked Marahrens’ leadership of the ELLKH on

²⁰⁵ ‘Der Sieg der Wahrheit’, Predigt, 03/02/1935, Ulm Münster, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.1, p.8.

3rd September 1934 when he attempted to remove all power of administration from Marahrens and line up a replacement bishop to take over his regional powers of governance. To this end, Müller even made a personal visit to the territory of the ELLKH in order to incite the Hanoverian parishioners and pastorate against Marahrens.²⁰⁶ Marahrens, however, used his powers of *Bevollmächtigung* to ensure that he legally retained full authority over the ELLKH. His supporters within his *Landeskirche* also showed dedication to his cause by fighting off fifteen GDC insurgents who had broken into church offices.²⁰⁷ Not content with Marahrens' protestations, the GDC nevertheless made one last-ditch attempt to oust Marahrens from office when Hanoverian 'German Christian' Dr. Richter took Marahrens first to the Hanoverian *Land* court and then to the *Oberlandesgericht* in Celle to question his authority to continue to govern as *Landesbischof*.²⁰⁸ Although Marahrens came through all of these attacks unscathed and with his ELLKH still 'intact', these events marked only the start of his ill-treatment at the hands of Nazi agents. As Inge Mager confirms, from this point on, "Er wurde bespitzelt, telefonisch abgehört, einmal verhaftet, erhielt Predigt- und Aufenthaltsverbote und befand sich in permanenter Gefahr".²⁰⁹

The extent to which Marahrens was able to resist Nazi incursions on both his *Landeskirche* and his personal freedom was, however, limited by the particular socio-cultural conditions of his ELLKH. Since the population of the Hanoverian *Landeskirche* had increasingly become predominantly both pro-NSDAP and pro-GDC, any overt expression of opposition to either Nazi agency came with the risk of provoking reprisals and further endangering the *Intaktheit* of the ELLKH. Marahrens' need to appease Nazi agents was also particularly heightened by the proximity of his ELLKH to the Nazi administrative centre of Berlin. Since every action Marahrens made was at risk of being observed closely by those who were all too ready to denounce him as a traitor to the Nazi State, Marahrens had to exercise caution in any attempt to oppose 'German Christians' in his midst. Moreover, despite his abhorrence of *Reichsbischof* Müller and the heretical practices of the GDC in general, Marahrens was ultimately reliant on collaboration with his predominantly 'German Christian' church senate in order to be able to govern the ELLKH without excessive hindrance. Since between eighty and ninety per cent of Hanoverian *Kirchenvorsteher* belonged by now to the GDC,²¹⁰ therefore, Marahrens needed to frame his opposition to 'German Christianity' as

²⁰⁶ Green, 2007, p.304.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p.305.

²⁰⁸ Klügel, 1974, pp.152-155.

²⁰⁹ Mager, 1996, p.145.

²¹⁰ Schmiechen-Ackermann, 1996, p.227.

resistance to the methods and ambitions of the wider *Reichskirche* leadership only, rather than the intentions and operations of local GDC agents. In this context, it becomes possible to view Marahrens' headship of the eventual *Bekennende Kirche* as a means by which he was able to convey such 'partial' opposition, since it allowed him to oppose directly the official church leadership of *Reichsbischof* Müller and the DEKK, whilst still allowing him to remain affable to local 'German Christians' within his own *Landeskirche*.

There can also be no doubt that Marahrens was well equipped to join and lead the *Bekennende Kirche*. Firstly, his past experience on the *Kapler Ausschuss* meant that Marahrens possessed skills that were of immense value to an alternative Church government. Not only did Marahrens have familiarity with formulating a new structure and constitution for the DEK but his genuine determination to counter the leadership of *Reichsbischof* Müller rendered him a vital asset for the 'Confessing' cause. Moreover, since the ELLKH was the only 'intact' *Landeskirche* in northern Germany, Marahrens found himself in an advantageous position to contribute effectively to efforts which resisted the rule of the national GDC administration. After all, the geographical positioning of Marahrens' *Landeskirche* meant that he was close enough to the severely 'destroyed' churches of the EKApU both to understand the concerns of its 'Confessing' clergy and to travel easily to the heart of the action.²¹¹ Yet, he was also far enough from the Nazi capital so that any illicit operations taking place within the ELLKH did not risk attracting as much suspicion from the Nazi government as they risked if they continued to take place in Berlin and its immediate vicinity.²¹² The most vital asset that Marahrens possessed for the *Bekennende Kirche*, however, was his status as "dienstälteste[r] Landesbischof",²¹³ and also the most prominent *Landesbischof* of the 'intact' churches owing to his previous involvement in the *Kapler Ausschuss*. As a result of Marahrens' distinguished reputation within the Protestant Church, then, the 'Confessing' cause undoubtedly carried more theological weight against the GDC-led *Reichskirche* with Marahrens at its helm.

Fortunately for Marahrens in the midst of intense Nazi surveillance, however, his headship of the *Bekennende Kirche*'s first VKL also appeared the logical corollary of his recent history of high-profile positions within the Protestant Church. Since his primary

²¹¹ Wurm also confirmed, "Stuttgart und München lagen zu weit ab, der Bischof von Hannover konnte leicht hin und her kommen" (Wurm, 1953, p.127).

²¹² Although this point appears to counteract the previous argument that developments in the ELLKH may have been at risk of being observed by Nazi agents due to its proximity to Berlin, it should be noted that this ambiguity is reflective of the sentiments of the time. To illustrate this, we can look to a debate that arose over whether it would be better to move the meetings of the first VKL from their usual venue in Berlin to Hanover. The location of the ELLKH was used in the case both for and against the move (cf. an undated and anonymous list of pros and cons, EZA, 50/35, Nr.641, point 5).

²¹³ Helmreich, 1979, pp.207-208.

function in the first VKL was to oversee the establishment of a more appropriate structure and constitutional basis for the DEK than that offered by the GDC, Marahrens was able, at least, to render his function in the *Bekennende Kirche* as one of chief conciliator. After all, the ‘Dahlemitic’ strand of the ‘Confessing’ front was already showing signs of a desire to resist Nazism in its entirety and this approach obviously risked reprisals for German Protestantism at large. Since Marahrens was, by contrast, already co-operating with local GDC agents in his *Landeskirche* and showing loyalty to Nazi secular rule generally, he was ultimately able to frame his leadership of the first VKL as an attempt to steer the Church resistance movement onto a more amenable course for both the Church and the State. In this context, it must be appreciated that, because the NSDAP was engaged in establishing its tyrannical hold over the German nation during these early years of the Third Reich, it was not in its best interests to be seen to persecute the Church for its non-conformism; especially in light of the fact that the Party had so publicly based its ideology upon specifically Protestant precepts. For this reason, the glaring disparity between Marahrens’ moderate leadership style and the radical intentions of the ‘Dahlemites’ helped to save him from rebuttals from the Nazi State, which at the start of the Third Reich could not afford to be seen to punish him for efforts that were in line with what it was promoting as its ‘Christianised’ agenda.

Although Marahrens’ conciliatory approach to the leadership of the first VKL avoided confrontation with Germany’s Nazi regime, it nonetheless caused friction within the ranks of the *Bekennende Kirche*. Whereas ardent Nazis were always going to view Marahrens as the “Fürsprecher der Opposition”²¹⁴ once he became *Vorsitzender* of the first VKL, his leadership of the committee did not necessarily meet with the expectations of the more radical ‘Confessing’ clergymen underneath him. Not only did Karl Barth object to Marahrens’ open displays of support for the NSDAP,²¹⁵ but *Oberkirchenrat* Thomas Breit similarly grew increasingly frustrated with Marahrens’ leadership style, allegedly proclaiming, “Er legt alles aufs Eis!”²¹⁶ Further to this, it is known that the founder of the Church opposition movement, Martin Niemöller, also resented Marahrens’ deliberations and lack of radical action against the Nazis. Private correspondence on the tensions within the VKL only three months into Marahrens’ presidency illustrates that Niemöller and Barth were so unhappy with Marahrens’ tendency to compromise his opposition to the ecclesiastical Nazism of the GDC with unrelenting proclamations of support for the NSDAP that they both considered, “daß nun alles

²¹⁴ Cf. Letter to “die Landesleitung der Deutsche Christen, gez. Hahn”, 26/05/1934, LKAH, SI HI 513, Nr.99.

²¹⁵ Quash, 2008.

²¹⁶ Cf. Wurm, 1953, p.127.

verloren sei”.²¹⁷ Marahrens, nevertheless, remained committed to his role as chief conciliator and continued to stress that, “Es müssen jetzt überall Wege zu einer Aussöhnung gefunden werden”.²¹⁸ The fact that Marahrens proved himself solely concerned to achieve harmony between the national Church administration and the Nazi State at the expense of intra-Church conciliation, however, raises doubts about the intentions behind his *Resistenz*, since he only objected to the Nazi governance over German Protestantism and not to the NSDAP’s rule over Germany in general.

Marahrens’ decision to direct the *Bekennende Kirche* to display *Resistenz* against the heresy of the GDC only and not *Widerstand* to the NSDAP at large is also undermined by the fact that, by the time the *Bekennende Kirche* had been established, the aims and ambitions of both the NSDAP and the GDC had become closely entwined through the partnership of *Reichsbischof* Müller and *Rechtswalter* Jäger. Although Marahrens did not hide his aversion to Jäger, describing him as “brutal”, “kalt” and a “Gewaltmensch”,²¹⁹ his affability toward the NSDAP and his reluctance to criticise Nazi secular leaders nonetheless suggests that he did not consider Jäger’s actions to be representative of wider Nazi aims and ambitions in this period. Marahrens’ *Rundbrief* from 24th May 1934 confirms that he still continued to believe in the honourable intentions of the Nazi State. In it, he denied reports that he opposed the wider aims of the NSDAP by stating that, “Die in einer mir eben zugeleiteten Pressenotiz vorliegende ungeheuerliche Behauptung, daß der Widerstand gegen das Kirchengesetz betr. Eingliederung der Landeskirche ein Kampf gegen den Nationalsozialismus sei, entspricht nicht der Wahrheit”.²²⁰ Although this denial of political intent can be seen as a tactical manoeuvre to ensure that the Nazi State did not feel threatened by his participation in the first VKL, Marahrens’ reluctance to criticise the NSDAP nonetheless confirms that he was prepared to overlook Nazi barbarity even within the Church for the sake of avoiding conflict. Marahrens’ particular predicament of being caught between conflicting desires to oppose the administration of *Reichsbischof* Müller and the DEKK on the one hand, yet to pacify and avoid confrontation with the NSDAP on the other, can be seen, then, to have encouraged him to render the *Bekennende Kirche* under his headship a vehicle both to ensure the sanctity of the Christian confessions and to convince the Nazi State that there ought to be room for

²¹⁷ ‘Spannungen in der VKL über Marahrens’, letter from Koch to Asmussen, 14/12/1934, EZA, 50/226 Nr.33.

²¹⁸ ‘Aufruf des Landesbischofs an die Kirchenvorsteher’, 13/11/1934, LKAH, SI HI 611, Nr.30.

²¹⁹ ‘Handschr. Aufzeichnung des Landesbischofs Marahrens betr. Verhandlungen mit Rechtswalter Jäger in Berlin am 9. Mai 1934 über die Eingliederung der hannoverschen Landeskirche in die Reichskirche’, LKAH, SI HI 513 Nr.60.

²²⁰ ‘Der Landesbischof und die Eingliederung’, Rundbrief (Evangelisches Pressedienst), 24/05/1934, LKAH, SI HI 513 Nr.94.

original German Protestantism in its society. Although Marahrens prevented the *Bekennende Kirche* from adopting an early policy of *Widerstand* against Nazism in its entirety, which casts doubt on his sense of Christian scruples since he did not object to the escalating Nazi policies of discrimination in this period, there can be no doubt that he nevertheless led the ‘Confessing’ front onto a comparatively safe course of *Resistenz* in the initial years of the Third Reich in the face of ever closer co-operation between the GDC and the NSDAP.

Whilst Marahrens can be seen to have turned to the ‘Confessing’ cause as a response to attacks from the national *Reichskirche* administration, however, his Bavarian counterpart *Landesbischof* Hans Meiser had to contend instead with more local-level skirmishes, which included a notable attempt to seize his office by Wolf Meyer-Erlach. Having once been a “radio preacher” for the ELKB between 1931 and 1932, Meyer-Erlach had come to align himself with the radical branch of the Thuringian GDC during his subsequent position as professor of theology at the University of Jena in 1933. Inspired by the ideology of the *Deutsche Christen*, then, Meyer-Erlach publicly denounced Meiser in front of prominent GDC and NSDAP members in Nuremberg on 23rd May 1934,²²¹ as well as through a derogatory article in the Nazi newspaper, the *Fränkische Tageszeitung*, on 6th July 1934.²²² Only after these bottom-up attacks on Meiser’s bishopric had occurred did the *Reichskirche* leadership under Ludwig Müller attempt to unseat Meiser from the ELKB through an *Eingliederung* decree issued in September 1934. The decree not only demanded the assimilation of the ELKB into the GDC-led *Reichskirche* but also set out plans to divide the Bavarian *Landeskirche* into the two administrative districts of *Franken* and ‘Old Bavaria’, which were to be headed by two ‘German Christian’ *Kommissar* bishops.²²³ By the time this *Eingliederung* decree was issued, however, the assaults on Meiser’s leadership by the likes of Meyer-Erlach had already served to ‘harden’ him against Nazi brutality and demonstrate the need to oppose outwardly ‘German Christian’ demands on his leadership. For this reason, Meiser was in a strong position to dismiss Müller’s *Eingliederung* order but not without further enraging Nazi officials, who began to taunt Meiser by erecting placards against him,²²⁴ arranging protest parades and publishing scathing articles in the regional press.²²⁵ Unlike their Hanoverian counterparts, however, the Bavarian Nazis were temporarily successful in seizing Meiser’s office in Munich on 11th October 1934 and confining Meiser to house arrest the

²²¹ Green, 2007, p.312.

²²² The *Titelblatt* is reproduced in H. C. Meiser, 2008, p.119.

²²³ Namely Hans Sommerer and Hans Gollwitzer respectively (Green, 2007, p.317).

²²⁴ An example is reproduced in H. C. Meiser, 2008, p.120.

²²⁵ Green, 2007, p.318; Scholder, 1985, pp.314-316.

following day. Meiser remained captive until the end of the month and was only freed by Hitler himself as a result of the unwavering support of his *Landeskirche*.²²⁶

By contrast with Marahrens, who had a strategic imperative to pacify ‘German Christians’ on the local level of his *Landeskirche* if he was to continue to lead the ELLKH without undue objection, Meiser governed a *Landeskirche* without such a strong ‘German Christian’ contingent. Since the GDC had failed to achieve a majority in the ELKB during the Church elections of 1933 to warrant its dominance over the *Landeskirche*, a strong undercurrent of hostility, or at least distrust, for ‘German Christian’ precepts was already characteristic of the ELKB. For Meiser to act in accordance with the will of his *Landeskirche*, then, in order to cause the least controversy possible with both his pastorate and parishioners, it was only natural that he cemented the Church opposition movement in the form of the *Bekennende Kirche* to display common grievances over the GDC. Moreover, in this context, since Meiser had formerly supported the GDC in the *Reichsbischof* elections of 1933, there was no better way for Meiser to compensate for this past misjudgement and realign himself with the Christocentric preferences of the Bavarian populace than by showing himself to denounce the GDC outright. For these reasons, Meiser’s decision to join the ‘Confessing’ cause can be seen as the result of both necessity and strategy to ensure he retained control over his church.

Further to this, it should also be noted that, even though political Catholicism had by now been rendered inactive in the Third Reich, confessional Catholicism remained as strong as ever in the southern German *Länder*. For this reason, it cannot be assumed that Meiser’s desire to elevate the status of his *Landeskirche* against that of its more dominant Catholic counterpart had completely disappeared with the demise of the BVP. To counter Catholic supremacy in the region, however, it was no longer a viable option for Meiser after 1934 to form an alliance with the GDC in light of its intentions to oust him from power. Since Meiser also rejected a possible merger of the ELKB with the Bavarian Catholic Church and was openly opposed to the idea of “die heimliche Katholisierung der evangelische Kirche”,²²⁷ it was only natural that Meiser sought out another high profile establishment to which to align his *Landeskirche*. In the specific context of Meiser’s continuous endeavours to associate his ELKB with the stronger status of a national ecclesiastical organisation in an attempt to add weight to its position against the Catholic Church, then, it can be seen as only logical that

²²⁶ Green, 2007, pp.318-321. The effects of Hitler's intervention are discussed later in this sub-chapter.

²²⁷ Cf. Meiser’s letter to Herr Kirchenrat Sperl, 18/04/1935, LKAB, Bestand 506, Nr.5586.

Meiser, along with his southern German neighbour, Wurm, sought to consolidate the existing individual intra-Church resistance movements within German Protestantism into the more powerful nationalised structure of the *Bekennende Kirche*.

To this end, Meiser and Wurm can thus be seen to issue the *Ulmer Erklärung* on 22nd April 1934 as a rallying call to establish an alternative mode of Church governance that was not only designed to rival the GDC-led *Reichskirche* but also held the implicit advantage of providing their *Landeskirchen* with a broader framework that enabled them to rival the transnational nature of confessional Catholicism. In their call for a closer Christian community, the bishops proclaimed that,

Darum rufen wir auch alle Gemeinden, Älteste und Kirchengemeinderäte, Kirchenvorsteher und Pfarrer auf, mit uns zusammen zu stehen gegen solche Gefährdung der Kirche. [...] Ihr Christen deutscher Zunge, steht mit uns allen zusammen, fest gegründet auf Gottes Wort, unverrückt im Gebet, freudig im Glauben und in der Liebe!²²⁸

As well as explicitly condemning the GDC for the dangers it brought to the Church, Meiser and Wurm implicitly showed through their use of the formulation “Christen deutscher Zunge” that their allegiance to their Christian conscience took precedence over their shared Germanic identity. The bishops’ call to all levels of Church administration further testifies to their overarching desire to establish an alternative Church government that was based on a solid sense of Christian community and not the nationalistic and hierarchical *Volksgemeinschaft* of the Nazis.

Unfortunately for the ‘Confessing’ front, however, it quickly became apparent that Meiser and Wurm did not share the same idea of the Christian community that they envisaged for the *Bekennende Kirche*. Meiser’s ongoing efforts to consolidate the specifically Lutheran churches in Germany, as well as his recent turn to confessional Lutheranism as a means to convey objection to the GDC without risking comment on secular, political affairs, also appeared to influence his design for the ‘Confessing’ Front. Although Meiser’s desire to see confessional Lutheranism become the cornerstone of institutional Protestantism in Germany can be excused by the fact that his ELKB was so far removed from the United Protestant tradition common to northern Germany that he had little understanding of a working ecclesiastical structure that was based on confessional compromise, he soon began to declare openly that Lutheran underpinnings were a prerequisite for the Confessing Church. In a *Bekennniswort* to pastors and parishioners, Meiser outlined his vision of a specifically “lutherische Kirche deutscher Nation”, stating that,

²²⁸ ‘Ulmer Erklärung’, 22/04/1934, EZA, 50/185 Nr.11.

Die evangelisch-lutherische Kirche muß nach ihrem Bekenntnis allen Nachdruck auf die Reinheit der Lehre legen. [...] Weil es der lutherischen Kirche nur um die reine Lehre ging, darum wurde sie zur Bekenntniskirche.²²⁹

Although Meiser originally proclaimed the formation of the *Bekennende Kirche* on the basis that, “Das Bekenntnis ist in der deutschen evangelischen Kirche in Gefahr!”,²³⁰ his subsequent revelation that he sought only to protect the specifically Lutheran *Bekenntnis* of the Protestant Church revealed that his particular mission in the ‘Confessing’ cause was not to effect wider and pan-denominational conciliation like his Hanoverian counterpart, Marahrens, but rather to promote confessional Lutheranism as the basis for ‘true’ German Protestantism.

It is important to note, however, that Meiser did not only call for the *Bekennende Kirche* to adopt confessional Lutheranism as its basis during this period, but also the administration of the *Reichskirche* as well. Parallel to his efforts within the ‘Confessing’ Front, Meiser sent a letter to the *Reichsministerium des Innern* on 24th August 1934, putting forward a proposal for “die Befreiung der DEK” which was based on the adoption of Lutheranism as the main confession of the Church. In this proposal, Meiser revealed his belief that the main way for *Reichsbischof* Müller to gain credibility amongst the German *Landesbischöfe* was through the adoption of Lutheran precepts. He explicitly stated that,

Sollte die DEK etwa durch Annahme der Augsburger Konfession als ihres Grundbekenntnisses zur lutherischen Reichskirche werden, so könnte das Verhältnis des Reichsbischofs zu den Landesbischöfen grundlegend im Sinne einer Verstärkung der Stellung des Reichsbischofs geändert werden.²³¹

Meiser’s sermons from the same period also reveal that he sought to promote confessional Lutheranism as a means both to replace the “Pseudoluthertum” of the heretical *Reichskirche* administration and to prevent the DEK from becoming “eine religiös neutrale Kirche”.²³² The fact that Meiser tried to promote the Lutheran cause to both the *Bekennende Kirche* and the leadership of the *Reichskirche* in parallel, then, demonstrates that he was not exclusively committed to the ‘Confessing’ Front specifically to improve conditions for the ‘destroyed’ *Landeskirchen* but merely since it represented another vehicle through which he could attempt to effect the confessional change that would benefit his own Lutheran *Landeskirche*. For this reason, it is unsurprising that Meiser’s obvious Lutheran bias was met with criticism from the various ranks of the *Bekennende Kirche*. Reformed and United members of the Confessing Church in particular regarded Meiser’s efforts to push specifically German Lutheranism to the

²²⁹ ‘Lutherische Kirche deutscher Nation oder romfreie deutsche Nationalkirche? Ein Bekenntniswort an Pfarrer und Gemeinden von Meiser’, 29/09/1934, LKAB, Bestand 246, (ii).

²³⁰ ‘Kundgebung vorgetragen von Landesbischof D. Meiser’, 22/04/1934, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.3.3, (pp.6-7), p.7.

²³¹ LKAB, Bestand 220, Point I7.

²³² ‘Bekenntnisstand und Kirchengewalt’, Brief, 15/09/1934, LKAB, Bestand 246, Points vii-viii.

foreground of the movement as running the risk of creating yet another “Kirche von des Staates Gnaden [...], letztlich also eine Staatskirche”.²³³

Like Meiser, *Landesbischof* Theophil Wurm of Württemberg was also drawn to the *Bekennende Kirche* as a result of bottom-up challenges to his leadership of the ELLKW once the *Reichsbischof* elections of 1933 had left his *Landeskirche* ‘intact’. Following the Berlin *Sportpalast* scandal of November 1933 alluded to earlier in this chapter, the GDC lost a considerable number of members in the ELLKW.²³⁴ Local GDC leaders in Württemberg attempted, therefore, to take revenge on Wurm for these losses. To begin, they demanded that the *Oberkirchenrat* of the ELLKW comprise a ‘German Christian’ majority in a bid to rekindle the movement’s influence.²³⁵ Since Wurm refused this demand, the Württembergian faction of the GDC then attempted to unseat him from his bishopric on 14th April 1934 with the assistance of *Rechtswalter* Jäger. Yet, instead of achieving its aims, the GDC merely provoked public remonstrations from Wurm and his supporters, which culminated in the notorious protest gathering in Ulm *Münster* on 22nd April 1934, in which Meiser and Wurm together declared the official formation of the *Bekennende Kirche* and proclaimed it to be the “rechtmäßige evangelische Kirche Deutschlands”.²³⁶ Unperturbed by Wurm’s public declaration of opposition to ‘German Christian’ heresy, however, *Reichsbischof* Müller nevertheless went ahead and issued his *Eingliederung* decree to the ELLKW on 3rd September 1934. Further to this, to ensure that Wurm was not able to organise and conduct public remonstrations this time around, Müller sought the help of local Nazi agents to hold Wurm on two separate occasions under house arrest.²³⁷ Müller had, however, failed to reckon with the considerable amount of support that subsequently arose for Wurm within the ELLKW, which saw hundreds of pastors and parishioners take to the streets of Stuttgart in protest. Since Germany was already coming under scrutiny from other countries for its treatment of its Protestant clergymen during this period,²³⁸ however, Hitler personally intervened in the situation to put an end to the demonstrations. He was, after all, concerned about the “evidence

²³³ ‘Anonymus gegen Meiser-Wurms Verhandlungen mit der neuen Kirchenleitung’, Brief an Präses D. Humburg, 22/12/1934, EZA, 50/226, Nr.88.

²³⁴ Wurm, 1953, p.92.

²³⁵ Green, 2007, p.310.

²³⁶ This was subsequently enshrined in the *Ulmer Erklärung* of the same date, signed by both Meiser and Wurm, amongst others. For the full text, cf. EZA, 50/185, Nr.11.

²³⁷ On 14th September 1934, Müller ordered Wurm to go on leave and held him under house arrest for three days. Then, on 6th October 1934, Wurm was held under “protective custody” in his home whilst the GDC called for his immediate retirement. (Conway, 1964, p.99).

²³⁸ The Pope had summoned the German Ambassador to the Vatican on 11th October 1934, to express concern over the persecution of the Protestant Church and, in the same week, the British Bishops of Chichester and Canterbury had also expressed disgust over the State’s use of coercive measures against church dignitaries (ibid., pp.100-101).

of mass resistance” in two of his core provinces and its subsequent reception by the outside world.²³⁹

In light of these attacks on his leadership of the ELLKW, then, Wurm undoubtedly had proof of the brutality and destructiveness of the GDC. In spite of his initial affability towards its Nazi credentials as a means to forge an implicit relationship with the NSDAP, after these events Wurm had no choice but to oppose the destructive influence of the GDC in his *Landeskirche* if he were to retain control of his bishopric. Since Wurm’s particular predicament was akin to that of his Bavarian counterpart in this period, it is unsurprising that Wurm’s actions came to converge with those of Meiser. The commonality of cause between the two *Landesbischofe* had been established, after all, as a result of the relative isolation of their *Landeskirchen* in the predominantly Catholic south, and their similar experiences at the hands of the Nazis. Both of these factors caused the bishops to come together to find strength in numbers to resist a common threat. Having been forced ultimately into a position in which any sign of leniency to the GDC was tantamount to the surrender of their respective *Landeskirchen*, therefore, Meiser and Wurm had no choice but to take a decisive step against its policies. In this context, then, it is understandable why the two bishops not only joined the ‘Confessing’ cause but also took up the fight against ‘German Christian’ heresy together.

Although Meiser and Wurm’s rejection of the GDC should not be allowed to obscure the fact that both bishops remained welcoming of the NSDAP at large, their continuing support of the Nazi regime can be explained in part by Hitler’s intervention on behalf of the two bishops in the autumn of 1934. Only a year after coming to power in Germany, Hitler had spoken to Meiser and Wurm about their opposition to the GDC-led *Reichskirche*. On 13th March 1934, in particular, Hitler had warned the bishops that he would consider them “Landesverräter und Volksverräter” should they continue to oppose the demands of the *Reichskirche* administration.²⁴⁰ Following Müller and Jäger’s public aggression towards them, however, Hitler had obviously lost cause to punish Meiser and Wurm, since the *Reichskirche* administration had already conveyed a detrimental image of itself to the international ecumenical community.²⁴¹ For this reason, after ordering their release and inviting them, along with Marahrens, to meet him in Berlin on 30th October 1934, Hitler was careful not to express his support for Müller. He was also evidently compelled to let the bishops go and conduct their work in the Church as they saw fit for the sake of preserving the external image

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Wurm, 1953, p.96.

²⁴¹ Conway, 1964, pp.101-103.

of German Protestantism.²⁴² In this respect, although Hitler had theoretically been obliged to reinstate Meiser and Wurm to preserve Germany's external image, the fact remains that his personal intervention had saved the bishops from GDC aggression. Meiser and Wurm's continued loyalty to the NSDAP, then, can be seen to a certain degree as a reflection of their indebtedness to Hitler for ensuring that they retained control of their bishoprics. Further to this, there can also be no doubt that Hitler's earlier anger at the bishops for their turn to the Church opposition movement prompted the bishops to demonstrate that they were not opposed to the political will of Nazism at large. It is for these reasons that the bishops founded the *Bekennende Kirche* as a means to express opposition to the GDC and to foster an alternative Christian community that could be presented as being more appropriate to the needs of the Nazi State.

As previously suggested, however, Meiser and Wurm differed in their perceptions of this Christian community. Whereas Meiser came to regard the *Bekennende Kirche* as a vehicle specifically to unite the German Lutheran churches, Wurm's recent resurgence of pietistic tendencies can be seen to have encouraged him to foster a Church union based on an adherence to the universal Christian parables. In a sermon of 10th March 1935, Wurm reaffirmed the importance of establishing a Christocentric national Church with the words,

Es schien lange Zeit, als ob Volk und Kirche sich immer weiter trennen wollten. Das ist heute anders. Man achtet die Kirche, aber man nimmt es doch schwer, wenn die Kirche nicht bloß das sagt, was man aus dem Gebiet der Welt sagt, sondern wenn sie auch das sagt, was von Gott her gesagt werden muß. Daraus sind Nöte entstanden, aber das kann uns nicht abhalten, wenn wir Kirche des Herrn Jesus Christus bleiben wollen.²⁴³

In this sermon, Wurm not only justified his turn to the 'Confessing' cause by describing it as being in accordance with God's ultimate rule but he also appealed to a collective will through his use of the pronoun *wir*, which not only helped to exculpate him from sole culpability for the recent strengthening of the Church resistance movement but, more importantly, demonstrated that his concept of a Christian community was all-encompassing and unrestricted to a particular Protestant denomination.

Further to this, Wurm's sermons and letters from the period also suggest that his idea of a Confessing Church was not only one which was universal but also somewhat militant. In an effort to promote both a sense of Christian mission amongst the 'Confessing' community and an urgent call to stand up for the Word of God against the unorthodoxy of the GDC, Wurm can be seen to have used major events in the Christian calendar to raise awareness of the

²⁴² Wurm, 1953, p.122.

²⁴³ 'Verfaß und Verantwortung', 10/03/1935, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.1, p.8.

Christian *Kampf* against the *Reichskirche*. A particularly striking example of how Wurm managed to promote a sense of a Christian crusade against the GDC is found in his Christmastide sermon of 1934, in which he not only emphasised the incompatibility of *Kampf* and *Krippe* within the *Kirche*, but also played upon the sharp alliteration of these words to highlight the inappropriateness of GDC brutality against the soft, innocent image of Christ. To illustrate this, Wurm stated that,

Wir wollen nichts von der uns verpflichtenden Wahrheit von Jesus Christus preisgeben, aber wir kämpfen mit entschlossenem Willen um die Befriedung der Kirche, um der Kirche, um unsres Volkes, um des Staates willen. So treten wir als eine kämpfende Kirche in dieser Weihnacht an die Krippe.²⁴⁴

In light of provocative sermons like these, then, it can be asserted that Wurm desired the 'Confessing' Front to take the form of a fighting force for universal Christian precepts. This ultimately brought his approach to the nature of the *Bekennende Kirche* closer to Marahrens' diplomatic endeavour to achieve pan-denominational conciliation than to Meiser's efforts to effect both passive and specifically Lutheran change in the Church. Unlike Marahrens, however, Wurm was already showing signs of militancy against Nazism at large.

Wurm's desire to destroy not only the intra-Church factionalism that had arisen as a result of 'German Christian' heresy, but also age-old Protestant denominationalism, is also confirmed by his sermon of 15th April 1934. In the *Stiftskirche* in Stuttgart, Wurm exclaimed that,

Wohl wissen wir, wie sehr die Teilung des deutschen Volkes in zwei christliche Konfessionen sich manchmal verhängnisvoll erwiesen hat, und darum verstehen wir es, wenn manche Volksgenossen glauben, es sei jetzt der Zeitpunkt gekommen, um auch diese Unterschiede zu beseitigen.²⁴⁵

Not only do Wurm's words suggest that he believed traditional intra-denominational divisions ought to be overcome in order for the Church to assert effective opposition to the GDC but his later sermons reinforce the notion that he believed the true essence of the Church to rest solely on a universal belief in God and not on any specific confessional order. Speaking on 4th November 1934, Wurm expressed his objections to the heretical practices of the GDC-led DEK, stating that,

...um Kirche zu sein, braucht man nicht einen unfehlbaren Papst zu haben, braucht man nicht die irdische Organisation zu vergöttlichen und für unfehlbar und heilig zu erklären. Um Kirche zu sein,

²⁴⁴ 'Rundschreiben an die Geistlichen der württembergischen evangelischen Landeskirche', 20/12/1934, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.3.3, pp.1-2, (p.2).

²⁴⁵ 'Unter Hirte und Bischof', Predigt, 15/04/1934, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.1, p.13.

muß man sich nur sammeln um das Wort und dieses Wort in seiner Verheißung und in seinen Geboten, in seiner rettenden und richtenden Kraft ganz ernst zu nehmen.²⁴⁶

It is thus in the context of Wurm's increasing turn away from the self-imposed confessional structures of the Protestant Church, together with the unorthodoxy of recent pro-Nazi practices, that it is possible to see Wurm's vision for the *Bekennende Kirche* as one which spoke up for Christian values per se, irrespective of both confessional and political allegiances.

Just as Marahrens and Meiser did not escape criticism for their respective approaches to the Church opposition movement, however, Wurm's actions in this period equally set him up to receive condemnation from the 'Dahlemitic' strand of the *Bekennende Kirche* in the next stage of the Protestant struggle. This is mainly because his appeal to pietistic values in this phase of the Third Reich led the 'Dahlemites' to expect more from Wurm in the ensuing years. Contrary to Marahrens and Meiser, who were criticised for not doing enough to unify the 'Confessing' cause, Wurm had already begun to arouse the expectation from those hardest hit by GDC oppression that he would quickly come to oppose Nazism in its entirety. This expectation arose from Wurm's sermons in this period in which he claimed, for example, that, "Kein Kirchenbau kann vor ihm Gnade finden, der nicht aus dem Dank für sein Wort und Werk hervorgegangen ist".²⁴⁷ Wurm's sudden change in tactics in the ensuing years of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, which will be discussed in the next chapter, therefore came to disappoint those who had come to expect more of his increasing prioritisation of universal Christian values.

Chapter Summary

In order to tie the individual threads of this chapter together, it should be reiterated that *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm were forced to respond to two distinct manifestations of Nazism at the outset of the Third Reich: namely the political and the ecclesiastical. Despite sharing a presumed commonality of cause as three Lutheran *Landesbischöfe*, the actual responses of the bishops to both manifestations of Nazism were neither congruent nor entirely compatible.

²⁴⁶ 'Die Kraft des Wortes', Predigt am Reformationsfest in der Stiftskirche, Stuttgart, 04/11/1934, LKAS, Bestell Nr.1.

²⁴⁷ 'Hirte und Bischof', in Wurm, 1950, p.78.

To take the bishops' reactions to political Nazism first, it becomes clear that, even though all three *Landesbischöfe* endorsed the NSDAP initially, their pro-Nazi sentiments were not necessarily a result of their personal support for the Party, since the bishops also had to act in accordance with the socio-cultural conditions of their *Landeskirchen*. Just as it was necessary for Marahrens to appease his predominantly Nazi ELLKH as well as his Nazi neighbours in Berlin by speaking positively about the NSDAP, it was beneficial for Meiser and Wurm to appeal to the NSDAP in the hope of overpowering the force of political Catholicism that had long subjugated their respective *Landeskirchen*. Since all three *Landesbischöfe* desired to retain their positions of leadership once the *Intaktheit* of their churches had been established, therefore, it was not possible for Marahrens, Meiser or Wurm to avoid expressions of affability and allegiance to Nazi secular rule.

With regard to ecclesiastical Nazism, however, the responses of the three bishops differed dramatically. Whilst Marahrens displayed strong opposition to the GDC from the start of the Third Reich, as a result of his personal aversion to the character of Ludwig Müller and his prior experience of constitutional matters, Meiser – following the lead of his more politically-minded neighbour Wurm – initially supported the pro-Nazi GDC as a means to achieve an implied union with the NSDAP. Once 'German Christian' heresy had become clear, however, Meiser and Wurm soon came to share Marahrens' initial rejection of the GDC's politico-ecclesiastical agenda. By this point, Marahrens – although still opposed to the movement – nevertheless had no choice but to pacify its proponents in his predominantly pro-Nazi *Landeskirche* if he was to continue to rule with uncontested authority. Whilst the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* can be seen to have begun with Marahrens in steadfast opposition to the GDC, and Meiser and Wurm in joint support of the movement, by the end of 1934 the three bishops had undergone a paradoxical role reversal, with Marahrens now in a position of pacification of the GDC, and Meiser and Wurm completely rejecting its aims. This astonishing turnaround in the bishops' predicaments was not due to a sudden change in the political or ecclesiastical attitudes of the bishops themselves, but rather a response to the changing socio-cultural climate of the time, which rapidly saw the crux of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* move to the southern German *Länder*. Whilst Meiser and Wurm were therefore obligated to oppose the GDC at all cost, Marahrens was in a different position, as Wurm himself confirmed: "Nur der Landesbischof von Hannover konnte sich eine gewisse Bewegungsfreiheit retten".²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ Wurm, 1953, p.99.

Placing the bishops' responses to both the NSDAP and the GDC in relation to their eventual turn to the *Bekennende Kirche*, then, Marahrens' decision to agree to assume the role of *Vorsitzender* of its first VKL can be seen to be a result of his new-found "Bewegungsfreiheit". Not only did he boast prior experience of formulating a national Church constitution as part of his work on the *Kapler Ausschuss* but his relative acceptance by both sides of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* allowed him to assume a much-needed mediating position between proponents of Nazism on the one hand and the 'Dahlemitic' strand of the 'Confessing' Front on the other. Whilst Meiser and Wurm brought about the official establishment of the *Bekennende Kirche*, as a result of their need to solicit wider institutional support for their rejection of the pro-Nazi GDC, their underlying confessional tendencies ultimately influenced their involvement in the movement to the benefit of their own *Landeskirchen* and not German Protestantism generally. Whilst Meiser employed the framework of the *Bekennende Kirche* to attempt to establish a specific union of the German Lutheran churches, Wurm used his traditional Württembergian pietism to call for a universal Christian crusade against the heresy of the GDC. With Meiser and Wurm thus positioned at the poles of confessional exclusivity and pietistic inclusivity, therefore, Marahrens must be regarded as being the only bishop of the 'intact' churches in this period with the capacity to show respect for the three distinct Protestant denominations as well as the pro- and anti-Nazi intra-Church factions.

Although Marahrens' leadership of the *Bekennende Kirche*'s first VKL was to be expected on geographical grounds alone, it is indisputable that both Meiser and Wurm's respective approaches to the *Bekennende Kirche* at this stage in the Third Reich were not appropriate to the chairmanship of the 'Confessing' cause. Despite the criticism Marahrens subsequently received for his moderate leadership style, since he did not object to the Nazis' unchristian practices in the wider secular arena, there can be no doubt that his credentials were more suited to the presidency of the *Bekennende Kirche* than those of either Meiser or Wurm. After all, Meiser's staunch Lutheranism had already proven itself to alienate his Reformed and United counterparts from the idea of a specifically Lutheran unification, and Wurm's militant overtones, although not met with overt criticism in this period, risked steering the 'Confessing' cause onto the path of the radical 'Dahlemites' too early in the Third Reich and thereby provoking reprisals from the State. Although this latter approach is undoubtedly the method many of us in the present day with the benefit of hindsight would have liked to see the Church adopt, since it opposed Nazism in its entirety and may have alleviated the situation of the Jews and other persecuted minorities in the Third Reich, it

cannot be denied that Marahrens offered a 'safer' means of protecting the Church through the early years of the Protestant struggle against Nazism. This is because Marahrens succeeded in earning the respect of moderate 'German Christian' clergymen, moderate members of the *Bekennende Kirche*, and the Nazi State alike, and ultimately facilitated negotiation between the respective parties. It is, however, unfortunate that Marahrens' power to effect conciliation between the Church and the State in this period came at the expense of protecting Christian morality in Nazi Germany in general.

In spite of its limitations, Marahrens' commitment to Protestant conciliation in the first phase of the Third Reich cannot be denied. The sincerity of his actions can be confirmed by his own proclamation that, "Als verantwortlicher geistlicher Führer bin ich zu durchgreifendem Handeln gezwungen, um das ungestörte Zusammenarbeiten aller landeskirchlichen Stellen zu ermöglichen".²⁴⁹ It is for this reason that this investigation attributes the initial direction of the particular dynamic that the bishops of the 'intact' churches represented to Marahrens, who not only succeeded in suppressing GDC influence on the regional and the national level but, more importantly, enabled the 'Confessing' Front to develop throughout the early years of the Third Reich with the least possible risk of reprisals from the Nazi State and also from Protestants of the United and Reformed denominations. Adopting the title of a sub-chapter in Waldemar Röhrbein's study of the Hanoverian bishop, then, this chapter concludes that the years of 1933 to 1935 were indeed "[d]er Sieg des Landesbischofs in der ersten Phase des Kirchenkampfes".²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Letter from Marahrens, 02/11/1934, LKAH, Bestand HI 513, Nr.144.

²⁵⁰ Röhrbein, 1996, p.35.

CHAPTER TWO – 1935-1939: THE MEISER YEARS

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, the three *Landesbischöfe* of the ‘intact’ churches clearly ended the early years of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* in a position of overt opposition, at least to the ecclesiastical Nazism of the GDC. This came about primarily as a result of Meiser and Wurm’s eventual convergence, which led them to proclaim the existence of the *Bekennende Kirche*, as well as Marahrens’ subsequent conciliatory leadership of its first VKL. The bishops’ positions were, however, to alter dramatically from mid-1935 onwards due to two parallel developments in the Church and the State.

In the first instance, the *Bekennende Kirche* split in February 1936 over disagreements between moderate members of the ‘Confessing’ Front and the radical ‘Dahlemites’; the former wished to continue to tread carefully within the Nazi State by solely displaying *Resistenz* to ‘German Christian’ heresy, whilst the latter insisted that the *Bekennende Kirche* adopt a more resolute form of *Widerstand* to Nazism in general in response to the NSDAP’s rapidly escalating policies of discrimination. After all, during this era, the Nazi State enacted the so-called Nuremberg Race Laws against German Jews,²⁵¹ which, amongst others, prohibited them to marry or to have sexual relations with deemed ‘Aryans’, and also introduced various categories of “*Mischlinge*” to determine the precise degree of Jewish heritage of every citizen of the Third Reich.²⁵² Full ‘Aryans’ also did not escape the implications of Nazi eugenics, since on 26th June 1935 the Nazis passed an amendment to the existing law from 1933 to force abortions on German women to prevent them from passing on hereditary diseases.²⁵³ Moreover, on 10th February 1936, just before the *Bekennende Kirche* split, the NSDAP demonstrated that its brutality was to become a fact of life in Nazi Germany from this point on, when it placed the *Gestapo* above the law.²⁵⁴

In spite of these developments, *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm continued to adhere to the moderate faction of the *Bekennende Kirche* and objected to resisting Nazism in its entirety. As a result of their decision to diverge from their ‘Dahlemitic’ counterparts in this period, Marahrens renounced his leadership of the first VKL whilst Meiser used the split in the *Bekennende Kirche* to build upon his specifically Lutheran design for institutional

²⁵¹ Enacted on 15th September 1935.

²⁵² For more details cf. ‘The Nuremberg Laws’ in Evans, 2005, pp.536-554.

²⁵³ This was the *Gesetz zur Änderung des Gesetzes zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses* (cf. Friedländer, 1997, pp.39-40).

²⁵⁴ Manvell and Fraenkel, 2007, p.53.

Protestantism in Germany. Since this had thus far proved a vehicle through which he was able to oppose the heretical practices of the GDC without also running the risk of overtly appearing to criticise the NSDAP and, thereby, jeopardising German Protestantism at large, Meiser built upon his already established Lutheran organisations and networks to found the *Rat der Evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche Deutschlands* (RELKD), which was alternatively known as the *Lutherrat*.²⁵⁵ The new *Lutherrat* superseded the original *Lutherischer Rat* of 1934 and became the instrument of Church governance from 1936 onwards for the moderate strand of the *Bekennende Kirche*, which was known from this point on as the *lutherischer Flügel*.

Parallel to this, the Nazi State had also taken a decisive step to attempt to remedy the intra-Church Protestant dispute, hailing in, alongside its intensification of racial laws, a new era of *staatliche Kirchenpolitik*. Since the joint efforts of Müller and Jäger had only created further factionalism within the German Protestant Church in the initial years of the *Kirchenkampf*, the Nazi government in Berlin established the *Reichsministerium für kirchliche Angelegenheiten* (RMfKA) under the headship of *Reichsminister* Hanns Kerrl. It was intended that Kerrl would work with moderate Protestant clergymen to bring about a more effective and united *Reichskirche*. Although Kerrl had only been appointed to the post on 16th July 1935, by 19th December of the same year he had already imposed the *Sicherungsgesetz* on the Church, which gave him full control over Protestant affairs and the power to circumvent any synodal authority.²⁵⁶ With this, Kerrl set about establishing a national *Reichskirchenausschuss* (RKA) supported by smaller regional *Landeskirchenausschüsse* (LKA) in the majority of Protestant *Landeskirchen*. These church committees comprised only moderate churchmen since Kerrl hoped that their influence would help to demobilise the radical elements of both the GDC and the *Bekennende Kirche*; the latter of which he also officially prohibited from engaging in further activity in the Third Reich.²⁵⁷ The only churches to remain free from LKAs, then, were the three ‘intact’ *Landeskirchen* of Hanover, Bavaria and Württemberg, and selected GDC-led churches that did not have a very large presence of ‘Confessing’ clergymen.²⁵⁸ In essence, Kerrl’s RKA and LKAs presented the German Protestant Church with two options – either to conform and become a working functionary of the State as part of its envisaged *Staatskirche*, or to strictly separate itself from the State, accepting the abolition

²⁵⁵ The RELKD comprised Marahrens, Meiser (*Vorsitzender*) and Wurm, together with representatives from the *Brüderräte* of the Lutheran *Landeskirchen* of Thuringia, Saxony and Mecklenburg, and the *Kirchenrat* of the *evangelisch-lutherische (althutherische) Kirche* (cf. Schäfer, 1977, Bd.4, p.570, and Schneider, 2008, Ch.3.1).

²⁵⁶ Krüger and Noss, 1999, p.161. For legal details, cf. Etzel, 1992, p.127.

²⁵⁷ Krüger and Noss, 1999, p.161.

²⁵⁸ Helmreich, 1979, p.193.

of State-based funding, a loss of influence in State affairs, and the absence of State protection against potential reprisals from the GDC. Whilst the Niemöller strand of the *Bekennende Kirche* opted for the latter at the fourth *Reichsbekenntnissynode* at Bad Oeynhausen and formed its own leadership under the second VKL,²⁵⁹ Church moderates Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm seized the chance to work with Kerl and influence the design for the new *Staatskirche*.

Whether perceived as a consequence of the division of the *Bekennende Kirche* or, indeed, as the reason behind the split in the first place,²⁶⁰ there can be no doubt that the emergence of the stronger Lutheran alliance between the ‘intact’ *Landeskirchen* helped *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm to continue on their conciliatory course through the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*. Not only did their particular *lutherischer Flügel* help to pacify the Nazi State and its RMfKA at the start of the phase of *staatliche Kirchenpolitik*, but, once tensions increased between the Nazi regime and the ‘Dahlemitic’ wing of the *Bekennende Kirche* in the face of Nazi violence, it also served as a means to defend the bishops and the ‘intact’ Protestantism that they represented from increasing Nazi aggression. A paradoxical inter-relationship nonetheless developed between the *lutherischer Flügel* and the RMfKA during this period to the extent that, whilst the bishops’ common Lutheran obligation to co-operate with the State encouraged their partnership with Hanns Kerl, the increasing encroachment of the RMfKA into the affairs of the Church in turn served to reinforce their Lutheran disinclination to compromise the essence of Protestant Christianity in Nazi Germany.

Whilst the *lutherischer Flügel* was becoming increasingly more protective of the original Protestant confessions, however, it is nonetheless important to remember that during the years of the Third Reich under investigation in this chapter, Nazi violence and aggression was rapidly developing in two ways; firstly through the establishment of the Nazi aim for territorial expansion in Europe. This began with the occupation and re-militarisation of the Rhineland on 7th March 1936,²⁶¹ and soon included the annexation of Austria (13th March 1938),²⁶² the occupation of the Sudetenland (15th October 1938),²⁶³ the seizure of Czechoslovakia (15-16th March 1939),²⁶⁴ and the invasion of Poland on 1st September

²⁵⁹ This took place between 17th and 22nd February 1936. For a full account, cf. W. Niemöller, 1960.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Gerlach, 2000, p82-94.

²⁶¹ Cf. Evans, 2005, pp.633-638.

²⁶² Cf. *ibid.*, pp.646-663.

²⁶³ Cf. *ibid.*, pp.678-679.

²⁶⁴ Cf. 'The Rape of Czechoslovakia' in *ibid.*, pp.665-688.

1939.²⁶⁵ In addition to this, the NSDAP intensified its discriminatory policies towards the Jews in particular in this period.²⁶⁶ Following the Nuremberg Race Laws, German Jews were dismissed from professional occupations, prohibited from trading, and forced to adopt the Jewish names of 'Israel' and 'Sara' on all legal documents.²⁶⁷ In 1938, the Nazis began to employ violence against the Jews on a mass scale, destroying Jewish synagogues and initiating the so-called *Reichskristallnacht* on 9th November, which took the form of a co-ordinated attack on Jewish homes and businesses, and saw many Jews assaulted, murdered, and rounded up for deportation to concentration camps that the Nazis had by now established around Germany.²⁶⁸ Before war approached in 1939, Hitler also publicly threatened the Jews with annihilation in a speech to the *Reichstag* on 30th January,²⁶⁹ German Jews were forced to hand over their wealth and properties to the Nazi State,²⁷⁰ and plans were being formalised to ensure the emigration of the Jews in the Third Reich at large.²⁷¹

It is against this complex backdrop of escalating Nazi violence, therefore, that this chapter seeks to show how *Landesbischof* Hans Meiser of Bavaria emerged as the forerunner within the particular 'intact' dynamic that he shared with Marahrens and Wurm. Although Meiser's efforts did not facilitate opposition to the wider Nazi aims of expansion and persecution at this point in the Third Reich, they nevertheless ensured that the bishops' general responses to Nazism in this period served to keep their particular 'intact' dynamic in a vital position of negotiation between Nazi agents on the one hand, and proponents of 'Dahlemitic' theology on the other. By encouraging a heightened sense of confessional Lutheranism within a particular section of the German Protestant Church, Meiser not only steered the 'intact' churches away from both total assimilation to the demands of the RMfKA and the radical opposition of the 'Dahlemites' but, by extension, he kept an element of German Protestantism away from direct attack by the increasingly brutal and remorseless Nazi State in this period. Since Meiser's actions ultimately helped to shroud the 'intact' dynamic with a distinct confessional status of its own, which freed it from the ever intensifying conflict between the 'Dahlemites' and the Nazi State, this chapter is devoted to

²⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, pp.689-702.

²⁶⁶ Nazi discriminatory policies were not solely directed towards the Jews, however. For example, in 1935 and 1936, the NSDAP established an office to combat homosexuality (cf. *ibid.*, pp.531-533), and also abortions by healthy 'Aryan' women (*ibid.*, p.515).

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.575.

²⁶⁸ For more details cf. 'The Onslaught' in Friedländer, 1997, pp.269-305, and 'The Night of Broken Glass' in Evans, 2005, pp.580-610.

²⁶⁹ Cf. Friedländer, 1997, pp.308-312.

²⁷⁰ Cf. 'Aryanizing the Economy' in Evans, 2005, pp.378-391.

²⁷¹ Cf. 'The Jews Must Get Out of Europe' in *ibid.*, pp.555-579.

demonstrating how the ‘Meiser Years’ of 1935 to the onset of war in 1939 were integral to ensuring the continued survival of ‘intact’ Protestantism in Germany in the face of both increasingly confrontational *staatliche Kirchenpolitik* and Nazi aggression at large.

The *Landesbischöfe* and the *lutherischer Flügel*

Although the *lutherischer Flügel* had been evolving on Meiser’s initiative since early 1933, as detailed in the introduction to Chapter One of this dissertation,²⁷² *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm only began to consolidate their specific Lutheran niche in mid-1935, once they realised the potential of their confessional alliance not only to defy the converging demands of the Nazi State and the GDC, but also to neutralize the efforts of their more radical counterparts in the *Bekennende Kirche*. As the encroachment of the Nazi State on Protestant affairs increased in this period via Hanns Kerrl and his RKA, and with it the radicalism of the *Bekennende Kirche* as a response to the RMfKA’s advances, the need of the bishops to seek sanctuary in their common Lutheran confession can be seen as a logical consequence of their shared desire to protect the *Intaktheit* of their respective churches and their consequent endeavour to strike a balance between outright defiance of Nazi aims and total compliance with the radical ‘Dahlemites’. When consolidating their specifically Lutheran alliance in the RELKD of 1936, the *Landesbischöfe* released a joint statement of intent, which depicted the development as a logical consequence of their ever closer union over the initial years of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* and shared confessional hopes and aspirations for the German Protestant Church. Their statement thus read that, “Durch den lutherischen Pakt [...] haben die lutherischen Kirchen von Hannover, Württemberg und Bayern versucht, die Gemeinsamkeit des lutherischen Bekenntnisses auch in der Ordnung und im Leben ihrer Kirchen stärker zur Geltung zu bringen”.²⁷³ Taking this joint proclamation of presumed “Gemeinsamkeit” as its starting point, then, this sub-chapter investigates whether the bishops did, in fact, display a commonality of cause via their shared Lutheran alliance or whether, instead, they saw “in der besonderen Vereinbarung zwischen den drei lutherischen Landeskirchen von Hannover, Bayern und Württemberg”,²⁷⁴ a common means to achieve fundamentally distinct ends.

Since *Landesbischof* August Marahrens of Hanover had led the particular ‘intact’

²⁷² Cf. pp.32-33.

²⁷³ ‘Abschrift des Erklärung der Bestellung des Lutherrats’, (undated), EZA, 50/50 Nr.22-23.

²⁷⁴ ‘Die Stellung der württembergischen Landeskirche zur Vorläufigen Kirchenleitung und zur Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche’, 06/11/1935, EZA, 50/17 Nr.77-78.

dynamic which the three bishops exemplified into the second stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, it is only logical that this investigation looks at his response to the advent of *staatliche Kirchenpolitik* first. By mid-1935 Marahrens was not only the leader of the ELLKH and the head of the *Bekennende Kirche*'s first VKL but he had also become president of the *Lutherischer Weltbund* (LWB) in the international ecclesiastical arena. Given his prominent roles on local, national, and now also international platforms, Marahrens entered the second phase of the Protestant struggle in Nazi Germany with a heightened need to balance considerations from all the sides and of all the levels for which he now worked. For this reason, it was only natural that Marahrens' actions in the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* became less confrontational and, instead, targeted towards keeping the peace between the various Church factions. Although Marahrens' move away from the 'Dahlemitic' strand of the *Bekennende Kirche* in this period meant that he rejected the possibility of outright *Widerstand* to Nazism, it was nonetheless a logical means of achieving his true ambition of preventing further antagonism between the Church and the State. After all, even though Marahrens' relative lack of commitment to *Widerstand* caused friction within the radical ranks of the *Bekennende Kirche*, this was nonetheless a lesser sacrifice than if Marahrens had supported the 'Dahlemites' at the risk of aggravating his predominantly Nazi *Landeskirche* and, of course, the nearby Berlin government itself.

The view that Marahrens' departure from 'Dahlemitic' radicalism had become increasingly inevitable in this period is supported by Erwin Wilkins, who concludes that the 'Dahlemites' were not able to offer Marahrens the socio-political security he needed in order to keep face with all sides of the Protestant conflict. As Wilkins states, "Die bruderrätlichen Kritiker von Bischof Marahrens haben ihrerseits keine allgemein überzeugenden Alternativen gesamtkirchlicher Art entwickeln oder durchsetzen können [...]. Die einzige realistische Alternative wäre der Weg in die Freikirche mit einer vereinsmäßigen Gemeindestruktur gewesen".²⁷⁵ Since Marahrens had always based his Church conciliation efforts upon the "Drei-Säulen-Theorie" that brought together the Lutheran, Reformed and United elements of German Protestantism,²⁷⁶ it must be appreciated that his all-embracing unification efforts were always going to stand in direct contrast to those of the revolutionary 'Dahlemites'. As well as being at risk of creating a "Freikirche" away from the main German Protestant Church, the 'Dahlemites', in Marahrens' opinion, were also in danger of turning into an equally heretical movement on par with that of the 'German Christians'. In a letter to the

²⁷⁵ Wilkins, 1989, p.122.

²⁷⁶ Hauschild, 2006, p.105.

Hanoverian pastorate in late 1936, Marahrens wrote that,

Aufs neue droht innerhalb der Kirche eine Gefahr. Eine Nationalkirche, die alle Konfessionen mit Einschluß der katholischen Kirche umfassen soll, erscheint vielen als das große Ziel der nächsten Entwicklung.²⁷⁷

Marahrens' principal fears can be seen, therefore, to have moved in the space of a couple of years from a concern to prevent the GDC from destroying the orthodoxy of German Protestantism to a worry over the 'Dahlemites' similarly ruining the confessional diversity of the German Protestant Church. As can be inferred from his words, Marahrens feared that the *Bekennende Kirche* under the leadership of the second VKL sought to establish yet another nationalised Church, although this time, instead of adopting the heretical values of ecclesiastical Nazism as its unifying force, it was at risk of sacrilegiously devaluating the traditional Protestant confessions in its concern to oppose simply the Nazi *Weltanschauung* through its militant and unsystematic theology.

Moreover, Marahrens' aversion to 'Dahlemitic' practices grew ever stronger once the radical strand of the *Bekennende Kirche* proved itself willing to compromise the three pillars of German Protestantism purely to establish a stronger theological force that was more appropriate to counter the Nazi threat. In their turn to an 'eye for an eye' mode of rationale to justify an outright attack against Nazi hegemony, the 'Dahlemites' reworked the original Protestant confessions to defend the use of militarism against the State.²⁷⁸ It must be accepted, therefore, that these 'Dahlemitic' methods stood in contrast to Marahrens' deep-seated desire to unite the individual Protestant *Landeskirchen* without compromising their original confessional characters. Whilst the 'Dahlemites' were attempting to counter Nazi heresy with their own staunch Christocentrism in the central period of the Third Reich, therefore, Marahrens recognised the insufficiency of 'Dahlemitic' theology as an ideological basis for a united German Protestant Church. For this reason, when reflecting on a Church led by the 'Dahlemites', Marahrens declared at the end of 1936 that, "Solche Kirche könnte aber nur eine Kirche / ohne wahre Einheit des Glaubens sein".²⁷⁹ Since the 'Dahlemites' based their intra-church unity not on the original Protestant confessions but, rather, on a temporal, doctrinal aversion to Nazi ambitions, Marahrens viewed the *Bekennende Kirche* under their headship as violating the traditional confessional underpinnings of German Protestantism. It is

²⁷⁷ 'Schreiben des Landesbischofs an die Kirchenvorsteher und Helfer des Pfarreramts in den Gemeinden', 28/11/1936, LKAH, SI HII 121 (Nr.101-107), Nr.101.

²⁷⁸ The 'Dahlemites' strictly adhered to the fifth thesis of the Barmen declaration, which taught that Christians should not allow the State to become "the single and totalitarian order of human life" (cf. Hockenos, 2007, p.17).

²⁷⁹ 'Schreiben des Landesbischofs an die Kirchenvorsteher und Helfer des Pfarreramts in den Gemeinden', 28/11/1936, LKAH, SI HII 121 (Nr.101-107), Nr.102.

thus in this context that Marahrens' decision to turn to the Lutheran cause in the central years of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* can be viewed as his means of preserving at least the original and most distinctly German Protestant confession to which he and his *Landeskirche* belonged.

Marahrens' decision to find sanctuary in the *lutherischer Flügel* did not mean, however, that he gave up striving to find compromise between the polarities of the GDC-led *Reichskirche* on the one hand and the 'Dahlemitic' design for a 'Confessing' *Nationalkirche* on the other. Although Marahrens had firmly embedded his ELLKH in the *lutherischer Zweig* of the Confessing Church, his subsequent actions show that this was not an excuse to avoid further involvement in the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* per se. Over one year after the division of the *Bekennende Kirche* at Bad Oeynhausen and Marahrens' subsequent resignation as leader of the first VKL, for example, Marahrens still stressed the fact that the future of German Protestantism lay in the preservation of the original Protestant confessions. Implicitly chastising both the GDC and the 'Dahlemites' for their manipulation of traditional Protestant doctrine to suit their respective politico-ecclesiastical ends, Marahrens exclaimed, "Die Deutsche Evangelische Kirche kann auch nicht zur "Sekte" oder "Winkelkirche" werden. Sie ist die Erbin der größten kirchlichen Überlieferung unseres Volkes und muß es bleiben".²⁸⁰

Despite Marahrens' honourable intentions to counter the anti-confessionalism of both the GDC and the 'Dahlemites', however, it cannot be denied that the particular structure that Marahrens desired for the DEK may well have been based on the three original Protestant confessions but was, nonetheless, conceived in full support of the secular aims of the Nazi State. Through his turn to the *lutherischer Flügel*, Marahrens clearly exploited specifically Lutheran constraints which allowed him to oppose the doctrinal heresy of the GDC without forcing him to comment on the implications of Nazism in the wider secular arena. Although this ensured that Marahrens did not jeopardise his relations with the NSDAP which, as the following sub-chapter will demonstrate, viewed Marahrens as a credible figure to encourage negotiation between the GDC and the 'Dahlemites', Marahrens' desire not to lose favour with the Nazi regime obviously calls into question his sense of duty to protect Christian morality in Germany at large, particularly in light of the Nazi's ever-intensifying persecution of the Jews and other selected minorities at this point in the Third Reich. Moreover, it was precisely on these grounds that the 'Dahlemitic' strand of the *Bekennende Kirche* rapidly lost faith in his leadership credentials. Marahrens' decision to follow the non-confrontational course of the *lutherischer Flügel* must be appreciated, nonetheless, from his position as choosing the lesser

²⁸⁰ 'Landesbischof D. Marahrens zur Kirchenwahl', 15/03/1937, LKAH SI HII 122B Nr.122.

of two prospective evils: since the *Intaktheit* of his ELLKH had already been assured in the initial years of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, he was no longer actively reliant on the ‘Confessing’ Front for his own personal and professional security. Marahrens’ need to ensure that no further revolts occurred within his *Landeskirche* from either the GDC or Nazi agents was, therefore, better served in the context of his highly Nazi bishopric by appearing willing to co-operate with Nazi agencies rather than being associated with the increasingly radical ‘Dahlemites’.

Further to this, Marahrens’ turn away from the ‘Dahlemites’ was not only in line with the highly Nazi sentiments of his pastorate and parishioners, but was also in accordance with the strong sense of Lutheranism in his region. A letter sent by *Gerichtsassessor* Arnold Fratzscher to Marahrens following the division of the *Bekennende Kirche* confirms that the ELLKH in general had experienced a resurgence of Lutheran identity in this period. Fratzscher describes how, “die lutherischen Kräfte und das theologische Können gerade der Norddeutschen viel größer ist, als wir gedacht haben. Die ganze Frage des Luthertums innerhalb der altpreußischen Union hat sich als ein sehr viel schwierigeres Problem herausgestellt”.²⁸¹ Whether this resurgence of confessional Lutheranism prompted Marahrens to tighten the Lutheran ties of his *Landeskirche*, or whether it came about as a result of Marahrens’ own turn to the *lutherischer Flügel* in this period, the strength of Lutheran sentiment throughout the region explains why Marahrens viewed confessional Lutheranism as a force for unification in the DEK. Further supporting this notion is the fact that Marahrens knew that confessional Lutheranism had experienced a renaissance not just in his own northern German *Landeskirche*, but also throughout the Third Reich generally. As part of his role as ambassador for German Protestantism in the international community of the LWK, Marahrens spoke to the representative of the *Deutsche Englische Gesellschaft* about the resurgence of confessional Lutheranism in Nazi Germany at large. Marahrens explained that, “Es handelt sich also bei unserer Gefolgschaft um ein großes Gebiet, das nicht territorial bestimmt werden kann”.²⁸² Since confessional Lutheranism had proven itself to Marahrens to be able to attract adherents from the entire socio-cultural spectrum of the Third Reich, then, it is unsurprising that Marahrens came to view the theological doctrine as no temporal fad in the history of his own *Landeskirche*, but rather as a stable and unwavering component of German Protestantism at large, and thereby also a suitable basis for intra-Church conciliation.

²⁸¹ ‘Brief an Marahrens’, 23/04/1936, LKAH, SI HI 837 Nr.8, p.2.

²⁸² ‘Niederschrift der Unterredung Marahrens mit Mr. Wygall (Vertreter der Deutschen Englischen Gesellschaft)’, 17/01/1936, EZA, 50/50, (Nr.10-15), Nr.13.

Due to his own ongoing concern to unite the specifically Lutheran German *Landeskirchen* since early 1933, *Landesbischof* Hans Meiser of Bavaria obviously approved of Marahrens' turn towards the Lutheran cause as a means to unify the DEK. Although Meiser's contemporary Karl Steinbauer argued that Meiser initially voted for Ludwig Müller in the *Reichsbischof* elections of 1933 in the hope that he would unify the DEK by the principles of undistorted Lutheranism,²⁸³ it is obvious that, once Müller's leadership was exposed in all its heresy, Meiser was quick to define confessional Lutheranism as distinct from the unorthodoxy of the GDC. In a letter to the *sächsische Kirchenleitung* in response to its close association with the radical Thuringian faction of the GDC, Meiser outlined his opposition to 'German Christian' heresy on the grounds that it specifically distorted the Lutheran confession. Meiser explained that,

Die Kirchenbewegung Deutscher Christen huldigt, wie die Kundgebungen ihrer maßgebenden Führer ausweisen, einem bekenntniswidrigen Chiliasmus, der die Zeit der völkischen Erneuerung in einschaut mit dem ewigen Reich Christi und den Gehorsam der Kirche gegen das Wort ihres Herrn umdeutet in die Bindung an die völkischen Grundlagen der Nation. Die biblische Offenbarung ist hier preisgegeben und das Bekenntnis der lutherischen Reformation verleugnet.²⁸⁴

By setting out to establish a national Lutheran alliance in opposition to the GDC, which he by now perceived as being in no sense "bekenntnistreu lutherisch",²⁸⁵ Meiser demonstrated that his invocation of the Lutheran cause was not simply a means to undermine 'German Christian' authority in the Third Reich, but, implicitly, also a means of appointing himself upholder of 'pure' Lutheranism in Nazi Germany. Moreover, since the GDC reached its peak membership in Bavaria during this period,²⁸⁶ it can be appreciated that Meiser was more compelled than ever to strengthen his opposition to its unorthodoxy. This he did by reaffirming his original confessional values.

Although Meiser theoretically only had to fight against the GDC on the local level of his *Landeskirche* to preserve its *Intaktheit*, he nonetheless took his campaign to promote confessional Lutheranism in Nazi Germany to the national stage early on in the Third Reich. Most notably, Meiser attempted to mould the Lutheran confession that was being celebrated at the *Lutherischer Tag* in Hanover in 1935 into an effective mode of opposition to the heresy of the GDC. To convince his fellow Lutherans throughout the Third Reich of the righteousness

²⁸³ Steinbauer details how Meiser was duped into voting for Müller using the logic that, "Ludwig Müller war Lutheraner, Friedrich von Bodelschwingh war zwar auch Lutheraner, kam aber aus der Union, deshalb war Müller der bessere Wahrer des Luthertums" (cf. Sommer, 2008, p.77).

²⁸⁴ 'Eine bekenntnismäßige Antwort auf die "lutherische" Antwort des Landeskirchenamts Sachsens', 20/09/1935, LKAB, Bestand 297.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Precisely in 1935 (cf. Kollmannsberger, 1996).

of their confession, Meiser drew directly upon Luther's own words in the closing sermon to rally and exclaimed that,

Wir halten es mit unserem Vater D. Martin Luther, der gesagt hat: "Wo ich Gottes Wort ergreife, so habe ich gewonnenes Spiel." Wir spielen nicht / *ya banque* und treiben keine Katastrophenpolitik, wenn wir uns an das Wort und an sonst nichts halten.²⁸⁷

Although Meiser addressed a purely Lutheran audience, there is no doubt that his words were intended to effect change on the level of national Church administration *per se*. This is particularly apparent since Marahrens, who had offered his Hanoverian *Landeskirche* to host the event, was at the time also chairman of the first VKL, thereby helping to attract nationwide attention to the Lutheran cause. Moreover, in implying that churchmen ought solely to adhere to the Gospel and avoid the potentially catastrophic effects of mixing its message with the secular policies of the NSDAP, Meiser used Luther's original phraseology of "gewonnenes Spiel" to intimate an acceptable sense of moral victory over the pro-Nazi GDC. By carefully avoiding having to describe the intra-Church conflict in terms of the *Kampf* that it was, therefore, Meiser was able to ensure that his proclamation of the superiority of confessional Lutheranism was not interpreted as a militant attack on the NSDAP as well. Although Meiser's reluctance to comment on political affairs calls into question his Christian integrity in light of the rapid development of Nazi atrocities, it must be accepted that due to Meiser's reliance on the NSDAP to keep his *Landeskirche* free from assimilation into the *Reichskirche*, it was nonetheless imperative that he did not overly infuriate Nazi agents in this period.

Since Meiser had an unwritten need both to appease the NSDAP yet to reject its 'German Christian' henchmen, he began to employ stringently the dictates of the Lutheran confession and, in particular, those of the *Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*. Following the establishment of the RELKD, Meiser sent a message to his *Landeskirche* in which he framed his commitment to the specifically Lutheran instrument of unofficial Church governance as no threat to the Nazi State. There he explained that,

Die politische Gestaltung unseres Reiches und die Verantwortung für das Leben unseres Volkes ist in die Hände unseres Führers und Reichkanzlers gelegt. [...] Wir bitten Gott, daß er das Werk des Führers segne und unser Land weiter in Gnaden ansehe. [...] Vor allem aber lasse Er unserem Volk die Predigt des Evangeliums als die Quelle seiner innersten Kraft und seines tiefsten Trostes, damit auch in Zukunft der Herr Christus unter uns wohne und unser Volk und Land reichlich segne!²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ 'Das Wort! Das Wort', Schlußpredigt über Offenb.3.10 auf dem Deutschen Lutherischen Tag, Hanover, 05/07/1935, in Meiser, 1982, (pp.70-76), pp.75-76.

²⁸⁸ 'Wort an die Gemeinden', 20/01/1936, LKAB, Bestand 506, III Nr.257.

By asking God to protect and to guide Germany's secular leaders alongside pleas that the original Christian confessions continue to form the ideological basis of German society, Meiser was strategically able to employ traditional Lutheran logic to demonstrate that he was content to see Germany led by Nazi secular principles, so long as Christian precepts not only continued to prevail in the spiritual arena but also came to direct Nazi secular policies themselves. In this respect, Meiser can be seen to begin to call for the precise opposite of the 'Nazified' Christianity of the GDC in this period. By encouraging the preservation of the original and specifically German Protestant confessions, Meiser ultimately called for the eventual Christianisation of the Nazi State.

A speech Meiser gave to the LWK in Paris on 13th October 1935 further testifies to his insinuation that only the Christianisation of German society held the key to harmonious relations between the German Protestant Church and the Nazi State. By continually emphasising the adage that, "Glaube ist Sieg über die Welt",²⁸⁹ Meiser not only demonstrated that he sought to bolster Christian awareness in the Third Reich but also that he implicitly regarded a reaffirmation of Christian precepts as the only way by which Germany was to overcome its current politico-ecclesiastical crisis of the *Kirchenkampf*. Although there can be no doubt that the connotations of the word "Sieg" imbued Meiser's proclamation with an air of militancy against Nazi secular principles, it must be acknowledged that, should he have been met by reprisals from the NSDAP, Meiser was free to invoke the particular Lutheran context in which he made his speech, which ultimately demanded that he separate the two realms of the Church and the State anyhow and speak about them as contrasting entities. In any case, the fact that Meiser chose to make his speech on foreign soil not only lessened the amount of criticism he received from the Nazis since they were not the predominant audience, but, conveniently, also served to portray to the international Lutheran community an image of German Protestantism trying to defend itself against Nazism at large.

Just as for Marahrens, however, the framework of confessional Lutheranism was as limiting to Meiser as it was liberating. Even though Meiser's High Lutheranism allowed him to co-found and to contribute to the *Bekennende Kirche* in the initial years of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, it soon came to prevent him from co-operating with the so-called 'Dahlemites', who were more lenient about their particular confessional identity and more concerned with using United Protestant principles as an ideological weapon against Nazism.

²⁸⁹ 'Der Glaube und die Welt', Vortrag über 1.Joh.5.4 auf dem Lutherischen Weltkonvent, Paris, 13/10/1935, in Meiser, 1982, (pp.77-83), p.80.

Since Meiser saw in the ‘Dahlemitic’ design for the *Bekennende Kirche* an institution which threatened confessional compromise in the style of the United tradition of the EKApU, it can be said that Meiser contributed highly to the Church opposition movement before its division at Bad Oeynhausen in an effort to keep the ‘Confessing’ Front “as open as possible” and acceptable to the strictest of confessional Lutherans.²⁹⁰ As Wolf-Dieter Hauschild confirms, as a result of his vision of a *Bekennende Kirche* as one which had to be built upon the original German Lutheran confession, Meiser knew that, “Eine Bekennende Kirche, wie die meisten der Bündnis-Brüder meinten, konnte jene “Bekenntnisfront” nach seiner Auffassung grundsätzlich nicht sein, weil ihr als einer Kooperation von Lutheranern, Unierten und Reformierten das entscheidende Merkmal des Kircheseins fehlte, die Übereinstimmung in Bekenntnis und Lehre gemäß Art. 7 der Confessio Augustana”.²⁹¹ For Meiser, then, a *Bekennende Kirche* that was united simply through a shared desire to oppose Nazism in its widest sense and not through the common German Lutheran confession was not a *Bekennende Kirche* at all.

It is in this specific context that Meiser’s strengthening of his Lutheran identity during the second stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* must be seen as the logical corollary of both his original desire to effect a specifically Lutheran Church union, which he showed as early as 1933, and the change in atmosphere of the conflict that had forced Meiser to develop an effective means by which he was not only able to resist the GDC but now also the increasingly ‘unionistic’ theology of the ‘Dahlemites’ as well. Although Meiser’s eventual decision to form the RELKD was seen by the ‘Dahlemites’ as a treacherous move away from the essence of the *Bekennende Kirche*,²⁹² it must be remembered that, by contrast, Meiser himself believed that he led the only truly confessional, if not Confessing, Church in the Third Reich. In an attempt to reassure the national Protestant community of the righteousness of his actions, therefore, Meiser explained, “daß Klarheit darüber bestehen müsse, daß der lutherische Zusammenschluß nicht von solchen nachträglich zur Rehabilitierung im Kirchenkampf mißbraucht werden dürfte, die den Entscheidungen der letzten 2½ Jahre ausgebogen sind”.²⁹³ As far as Meiser was concerned, his eventual establishment of the *Lutherrat* ought not to be thought of as exacerbating the Protestant struggle in Nazi Germany

²⁹⁰ Ward, 1996, p.408.

²⁹¹ Hauschild, 2006, p.109.

²⁹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer captured the essence of ‘Dahlemitic’ thinking in this period with his proclamation, “Whoever cuts himself off from the Confessing Church in Germany cuts himself off from salvation” (cf. Hockenos, 2007, pp.15-16).

²⁹³ ‘Niederschrift der Besprechung über die lutherische Vereinbarung, Leipzig’, 18/03/1936, LKAB, Bestand 297.

but, rather, offering a solution to the recent intra-Church conflict, since it provided churchmen from all factions with common confessional ground on which to build a more formal alliance.

The extent to which we are inclined to view Meiser's attempt to create a confessional union of Lutherans as either a beneficial or detrimental contribution to the historical development of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* per se ultimately depends, however, on the alternative approach to Lutheran unification efforts that was being propagated at the time by Meiser's southern German counterpart, *Landesbischof* Theophil Wurm of Württemberg. Even as early as March 1936, as the split in the *Bekennende Kirche* was still being formalised, the differences between the confessional characters of the three 'intact' *Landeskirchen* of Hanover, Bavaria and Württemberg were apparent. The Nazi newspaper, *Der Reichsbote*,²⁹⁴ characterised the clergy of the ELKB and the ELLKH as "die Hochlutheraner" due to their similarity of approach to the Lutheran alliance. Conversely, however, the ELLKW found itself branded alongside the *Landeskirche* of Saxony and the *reformierter Bund*²⁹⁵ as a result of its comparatively "mildere[s] Luthertum".²⁹⁶ Moreover, only a month later Arnold Fratzscher reaffirmed these confessional differences, proclaiming, "Denn Württemberg ist ja fraglos in keiner Weise lutherisch bekenntnisgebunden. Ja, die Württemberger sind fraglos viel weniger lutherisch als die unter so scharfe lutherische Kritik genommenen norddeutschen Lutheraner."²⁹⁷

At first glance, however, at least in appeals to his pastorate, Wurm framed his decision to join the *lutherischer Flügel* in the second phase of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* no differently to either Marahrens or Meiser – namely as a matter of doctrinal urgency to quell the assault of the ever more radical 'Dahlemites'. For example, in a speech to the *Pfarrverein* of the ELLKW in April 1936, shortly after the RELKD had been established, Wurm exclaimed that,

...unser Diffensus von den Dahlemern [ist] wirklich von Voraussetzungen aus zu verstehen, die im lutherischen Verständnis von Schrift und Kirche liegen. Der eigentliche Gegensatz zwischen lutherischem und reformiertem Denken liegt doch in der Bestimmung der Verhältnisses zwischen Zeit und Ewigkeit, in der verschiedenartigen Betonung von Transzendenz und Immanenz.²⁹⁸

Although Wurm's failure to endorse the 'Dahlemitic' line took many by surprise, particularly in light of the pietistic tone of his efforts to resist the GDC during the preceding 'Marahrens

²⁹⁴ Nr. 9, 01/03/1936.

²⁹⁵ It should be noted that the Reformed churches, which were willing to co-operate with the RKA, were later to merge under the *Arbeitsausschuß der reformierten Kirchen*.

²⁹⁶ 'Zusammenstellung der Presseberichte über die Bekenntnissynode in Oeynhausen', EZA, 50/50 Nr.42-44.

²⁹⁷ 'Brief', LKAH, SI HI 837 Nr.8, p.2.

²⁹⁸ 'Ansprache bei der Jahresversammlung des Ev. Pfarrvereins am 15. April 1936 von Landesbischof D. Wurm', LKAS, Bestell-Nr.3.3.

Years', his words clearly show that, much as Wurm wanted to establish a broad community of Christians to oppose Nazi heresy, he nonetheless recognised the need to retain the original confessional underpinnings of German Protestantism in order for the Church to retain its true essence. By drawing upon the specifically Lutheran belief that, "das Ewige [ist] ins Zeitliche eingebettet",²⁹⁹ Wurm can be seen to recognise that the timeless nature of German Protestantism needed to be preserved in the particular material age of the Third Reich at all costs. By characterising the 'Dahlemites' as being influenced by the principles of Reformed Protestantism, Wurm not only implicitly charged them with building a temporal Church to resist the secular Nazi fad, but also with endangering the eternal nature of God's spiritual reign on earth. For these reasons, it can be seen that Wurm was drawn closer towards Marahrens and Meiser in the central years of the Third Reich, and was attracted to their specifically Lutheran endeavours to preserve the status of the original German Protestant confession in Nazi Germany.

In this respect, it should be noted that the main target of Wurm's opposition in the second stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* had moved from the GDC to the radical element of the very *Bekennende Kirche* he had once helped to found. Wurm's predicament in the two distinct stages of the conflict was, however, very different, since the initial years of the Third Reich demanded that Wurm turn to universal Christianity to resist the influx of the GDC in his *Landeskirche*. As the behaviour of the 'Dahlemites' nonetheless shows, this radical and universalist mode of resistance was not suitable to the central years of the Protestant struggle in Nazi Germany since, although it purported to resist Nazi crimes against humanity in the wider secular arena, it risked overriding the very essence of the Church that it was trying to defend. As a result, it was only logical that Wurm turned to the more moderate Lutheran line of *Resistenz* outlined by his Bavarian counterpart Meiser in order to undermine what he saw as the new "Alles-oder-Nichts-Politik" of the 'Dahlemites'.³⁰⁰ By condemning the radical 'Dahlemitic' line as detrimental to the "positive erreichbare Ziele" of the *lutherischer Flügel*,³⁰¹ therefore, Wurm demonstrated that he viewed confessional Lutheranism as the most reliable means by which he was not only able to convey opposition to the two extreme Church factions, but also to effect small yet significant change to the state of national Protestant Church affairs.

Testifying to this view is Wurm's subsequent attempt to justify his adherence to

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

confessional Lutheranism by contrasting specifically Lutheran doctrine to Catholicism on the one hand and *reformierter Protestantismus* on the other – both of which Wurm regarded as being too tolerant of the Nazi *Weltanschauung* and precariously permitting “die Vermischung des Göttlichen und des Kreatürlichen”.³⁰² In clarifying the benefits of the Lutheran position, Wurm stated that,

Die lutherische Lehre steht in der Mitte zwischen diesen Extremen; [...] sie legt [...] höchsten Wert darauf, daß die *gloria dei* in der Fleischwerdung des Sohnes, im Eingehen des Ewigen in die Zeit, des Geistes ins Fleisch gesehen und anerkannt werde.³⁰³

By appealing to the Lutheran recognition of the timelessness of God’s presence on earth once again, Wurm managed to show how the fundamentals of the Lutheran confession prevented the incorporation of heresy into its doctrine. Moreover, since Marahrens’ ELLKH was the only ‘intact’ *Landeskirche* to share its territory with a Reformed Protestant church, and Meiser’s ELKB was forced to operate in highly Catholic surroundings, Wurm’s decision to place himself and his ELLKW firmly “in der Mitte zwischen diesen Extremen” can also be seen as an implicit attempt by Wurm to emphasise that the particular manifestation of confessional Lutheranism epitomised by his own *Landeskirche* was the only example of undistorted Lutheranism in the *lutherischer Flügel*. In this context, then, even though Wurm did not necessarily claim to be the staunchest Lutheran within the ‘intact’ dynamic which he shared with Marahrens and Meiser, his focus on the importance of confessional traditions not only confirms initial suspicions that his contribution to the *lutherischer Flügel* differed inherently from those of his Hanoverian and Bavarian counterparts, but already shows the theological awareness coming to the surface that was to lead Wurm to the fore of the ‘intact’ dynamic in the third and final stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*.

The most important difference that Wurm’s particular branch of confessional Lutheranism brought to the *lutherischer Flügel* was that it saw him commit to a closer Lutheran union without completely excluding the prospect of expressing opposition to political developments in Nazi Germany. Whereas Marahrens and Meiser can both be seen to have couched their arguments for a Lutheran-dominated Protestant Church in assertions that reveal the potential of Lutheranism to complement and guide Germany’s secular leadership, Wurm tended to view his own particular interpretation of confessional Lutheranism as one which directly opposed Nazi ideology in general. For example, in a chain of sermons throughout Württemberg in

³⁰² ‘Der lutherische Grundcharakter der württembergischen Landeskirche’, Predigt, 07/12/1938, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.3.3, p.7.

³⁰³ Ibid.

early 1935, Wurm demanded of the ELLKW: “Lass uns dafür sorgen, [...] daß wir ein Leben haben, das nicht von dieser Welt ist”.³⁰⁴ By issuing such rallying calls to his pastors and parishioners, Wurm ultimately reinforced the need of the Church to assert itself against the increasingly despotic Nazi State to ensure that the timeless presence of God’s kingdom continues to have a place in the secular arena of the Third Reich. In this respect, it can be claimed that, although Wurm did not go far enough in explicitly objecting to Nazi policies of discrimination and persecution in this phase of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, he was nonetheless beginning to employ specifically Lutheran principles to achieve more common and universal Christian ends, which included his desire to ensure that there continues to exist “innerhalb der Kirche Toleranz im Sinne des Liberalismus”.³⁰⁵

In spite of the fact that Wurm’s own interpretation of confessional Lutheranism was more relaxed than that of either Marahrens or Meiser, however, it must be acknowledged that Wurm was not without his detractors. Most significantly, the *Kirchlich-theologische Sozietät in Württemberg* (KTSW), which was a working group of pietistic theologians with connections from their student days at Tübingen,³⁰⁶ branded Wurm’s decision to take his *Landeskirche* into the RELKD to be “im Gegensatz zum Beschluss des von der Synode beauftragten Reichbruderrats”.³⁰⁷ The KTSW thus pledged adherence over and above Wurm’s powers of regional administration to the ‘Dahlemitic’ leadership of the second VKL. As well as claiming that the ELLKW’s membership of the *Lutherrat* rendered impossible “das offene Gespräch zwischen den Konfessionen innerhalb der DEK”, the KTSW also condemned Wurm for not displaying traditional Württembergian pietism in his approach to the Protestant struggle. In its decision to oppose the formal establishment of the *lutherischer Flügel*, then, the KTSW stated that,

Was sich bei diesem Zusammenschluß “Luthertum” nennt, ist nicht durch das lutherische Bekenntnis zusammengekommen, sondern lediglich durch Subtraktion von jenen Teilen der DEK, die sich an die Bekenntnissynode und die durch sie bevollmächtigte Leitung gebunden wissen.³⁰⁸

In recognising Wurm’s tendency to employ the particular Lutheran confession to justify only minimal participation in the *Bekennende Kirche* in the central stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, the KTSW criticised Wurm for the fact that he too had allowed the politico-

³⁰⁴ ‘Verfaß und Verantwortung’, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.1, p.8.

³⁰⁵ Wurm, 1953, p.133.

³⁰⁶ For a detailed account of the response of the KTSW to Wurm’s activities throughout the *Kirchenkampf*, cf. Conrad, 1995, pp.51-64.

³⁰⁷ ‘KTSW (29/03/1936), Beschluß gegen Zusammenausschuß der lutherischen Kirchen, gegen Lutherrat als geistliche Leitung und für VKL als Leitung der DEK’, EZA, 50/50 Nr.4-9 (Nr.1).

³⁰⁸ Ibid., Nr. 3.

ecclesiastical atmosphere of the time to impact on his chosen interpretation of what it meant to be a confessional Lutheran. For all Wurm's flaws in this period, however, it should be acknowledged that he never interpreted Lutheran doctrine in such a way so as explicitly to appease Germany's Nazi regime like Marahrens and Meiser, and he still ensured that his own interpretation of confessional Lutheranism was at least acceptable to and did not ostracise completely the 'Dahlemitic' strand of the *Bekennende Kirche*.

Further to this, the press releases of the ELLKW from the period show that Wurm's own interpretation of confessional Lutheranism was influenced by his awareness of the importance of presenting an image of German Protestantism that was in accordance with the expectations of the international ecumenical arena. Since his fellow member of the 'intact' dynamic, Marahrens, had by now not just been head of the first VKL but also the LWB as well, a statement from the ELLKW shows that Wurm appreciated the need to appease the Protestant community both inside Nazi Germany and abroad. The press release stated that,

Eine Weiterentwicklung in dieser Richtung würde sicherlich auch im evangelischen Ausland, das soeben durch die Wahl des Vorsitzenden der VKL zum Vorsitzenden des lutherischen Weltbundes dem Landesbischof Marahrens ein unüberhörbares Vertrauensvotum erteilt hat, freudig begrüßt werden, und würde den Beziehungen Deutschlands zu den vorwiegend evangelischen Nachbarvölkern zustatten kommen.³⁰⁹

Even whilst Wurm was a member of the specifically German *lutherischer Flügel*, then, he recognised the importance of maintaining wider ecumenical relations abroad. Even though Marahrens became the face of German Lutheranism on the international level, and Meiser the spokesman of confessional Lutheranism on the national level, it cannot be denied that, through his particular brand of more universalised Lutheranism, Wurm was already showing potential to become the face of a Protestant confession that was set to transcend all forms of secular boundaries in the subsequent years of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*.

The *Landesbischöfe* and the *Kirchenausschüsse*

Even though an analysis of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm's reaction to the *lutherischer Flügel* during the central stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* serves to clarify the bishops' confessional concerns for the future of the German Protestant Church, it only provides us with one half of the situation facing the bishops during the years of *staatliche Kirchenpolitik*. In addition to the strengthening of the 'Dahlemitic' strand of the *Bekennende*

³⁰⁹ 'Stellung der württembergischen Landeskirche', 06/11/1935, EZA, 50/17 Nr.77-78.

Kirche and the bishops' subsequent increasing involvement in the *lutherischer Flügel*, the Nazi State extended its encroachment into the affairs of the Protestant Church via the RMfKA and its leader Hanns Kerrl. As a result of the commonality of cause fostered by their shared *lutherischer Flügel*, Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm initially adopted an agreed accommodationist approach to Kerrl's *staatliche Kirchenpolitik* and his establishment of regional and national church committees. Although all three bishops generally accepted the measures of the Nazi State as an opportunity to establish a model for the German Protestant Church which was acceptable to both spiritual and secular administration, however, their co-operation with Kerrl's RKA did not equate to a decisive turn away from the 'Confessing' cause and submission to Nazi principles. As is often overlooked in accounts which focus on the 'Dahlemitic' strand of Protestant resistance during these years, neither Marahrens, Meiser nor Wurm took the oath of allegiance to Hitler which was proposed for all churchmen in 1935 in an effort to bring them into line with other professionals working within the system of the Third Reich. Writing on behalf of all three men, Marahrens justified the bishops' joint decision to reject the oath with Lutheran logic. He explained that they had already sworn loyalty to God and, because God's kingdom is also present on earth, they did not need to swear further loyalty to His instruments of secular rule.³¹⁰ With all three bishops therefore agreeing in principle to co-operate with the Nazi State to formulate a new design for the DEK, yet nonetheless careful not to display outward support for the Nazi regime in any other context, this sub-chapter investigates the individual impetuses behind the bishops' common move to support the State's official involvement in Church affairs.

Since the RMfKA came into existence during Marahrens' leadership of the first VKL, and particularly in view of the fact that his decision to support Kerrl's RKA was pivotal not only to the continued existence of his own *Landeskirche* but also to the direction of the national 'Confessing' cause per se, this chapter deals with the predicament of the Hanoverian *Landesbischof* first. In light of August Marahrens' wider function as *Vorsitzender* of the unofficial national Church administration, it must be appreciated that the fate of the DEK was an issue of great importance to Marahrens, not only due to his endeavour to protect the sanctity of the specifically Lutheran confession which he shared with Meiser and Wurm, but also since his national leadership role rendered him partly responsible for any potential damage to the Protestant Church in general. Whereas Marahrens had been relatively free in his role as leader of the first VKL to oppose the GDC, his predicament altered dramatically

³¹⁰ Cf. Marahrens' statement, 27/09/1935, LKAB, Bestand 1665.

when Kerrl become officially involved in Church affairs. On coming to office, Kerrl himself had stated that,

Ich werde nicht Staat und Kirche trennen, weil ich nicht will, daß auf diesem Gebiet alles zusammenfällt. Ich will Staat und Kirche miteinander verbunden sein lassen. [...] Sollte der Weg nicht zu diesem Ziele führen, dann müßte ich die Trennung von Staat und Kirche vollziehen. Dann hätte die Kirche keine Staatszuschüsse und keine Besteuerungsmöglichkeiten mehr, auch nicht mehr den Religionsunterricht.³¹¹

Since Marahrens had long desired to impose positive change on the DEK where his long-time adversary *Reichsbischof* Müller had failed, Kerrl's threat to disable completely institutional Protestantism in Germany heightened the need to resolve the Protestant struggle and, thereby, Marahrens' longing to put an end to the conflict. Since he was at the time one of the most prominent figures in the German Protestant Church, it can be appreciated that Marahrens did not want to be left with a legacy of being the bishop who had led German Protestantism into an era of isolationism from the State and, thus, brought about the financial and ideological demise of the Church. For reasons of his personal pride and professional ambitions, then, it becomes understandable why Marahrens welcomed Kerrl's offer of co-operation with the Church, since this not only protected his own ecclesiastical reputation but also German Protestantism generally from impending annihilation.

Since Marahrens had chosen to make the best of the only realistic choice that was available to him to keep the prospect of a fully functioning DEK alive, therefore, it was only natural that he began to emphasise the positive aspects of the RKA, as this not only served to convince the rest of the *Bekennende Kirche* of his chosen direction, but most certainly also helped to keep up his own morale with regard to his controversial decision. Although scholars have painted Marahrens as an ardent pro-Nazi, willing to seize any opportunity to work with the Nazi State,³¹² there can be no doubt that he was initially uncertain of his decision to take the *Bekennende Kirche* into co-operation with the RMfKA. This apprehension clearly came through in an interview with Mr. Wygall of the *Deutsche Englische Gesellschaft*, during which Marahrens spoke about Hanns Kerrl and explained,

Ich habe dem Minister geschrieben, weil ich der Überzeugung bin, daß der gute Wille da ist, um wirklich den Dienst zu tun und so zu leiten, wie es von der Kirche und vom Staate aus geleitet werden muß. Aber die Sorge bleibt, daß wirklich nichts dazwischen kommt.³¹³

As can be seen from this comment, although Marahrens displayed faith in Kerrl to formulate a

³¹¹ 'Besprechung mit Reichsminister Kerrl', Berlin, 23/08/1935, EZA, 50/17, (Nr.138-142) Nr.139.

³¹² Cf. Lindemann, 1998, p.232.

³¹³ 'Niederschrift der Unterredung Marahrens mit Mr. Wygall', 17/01/1936, EZA, 50/50, (Nr.10-15) Nr.11.

design for the DEK that would be amenable to the Protestant Church and the Nazi State alike, he was nonetheless concerned that other forces might potentially influence Kerrl's efforts to the detriment of German Protestantism. This leaves us in no doubt, therefore, that Marahrens was well aware of the risk he was taking when agreeing to co-operate with the RMfKA in this period.

Further to this, although critics have seen Marahrens' willingness to engage with Kerrl and his church committees as an indication that he was "blind obrigkeitstgläubig",³¹⁴ his concerns of the time reveal that he was worried, in spite of Kerrl's seeming sincerity, about whether the full freedom of German Protestantism could be truly ensured in any attempt to bring it into line with the expectations and ambitions of the Nazi State. In an exchange with Mr. Wygall, Marahrens outlined his personal concern to ensure that co-operation with the RMfKA did not result in an unnecessary sacrifice for the German Protestant Church. Marahrens thus stated that,

Gerade ist das unser Anliegen, daß diese Freiheit auf jeden Fall bleibt gewahrt. Die Tendenz des Aufrufs ist in diesem Punkt klar und gut. Aber das ist nun ein ungeheuer großer Fragenkomplex, wie es gelingen kann, diese Tendenz so klar herauszustellen, daß zwischen der Freiheit der Kirche nach ihrem Wesen und den staatlichen Interessen der rechte Ausgleich durchgeführt werde.³¹⁵

By demonstrating that his willingness to compromise the essence of German Protestantism was not without limits, then, Marahrens revealed that he intended Protestant principles to have a stronger influence on Kerrl's RKA than secular Nazi precepts. Marahrens also subsequently reaffirmed that, "Wir suchen die rechte Gestaltung des Verhältnisses zwischen Staat und Kirche. Nach welchen Normen muß es gestaltet werden? Die Antwort kann nur in Übereinstimmung sein mit dem Evangelium".³¹⁶ In the particular context of Marahrens' prioritisation of Christian values, it may be asserted that, although on the surface it might appear that he had agreed to compromise the essence of German Protestantism by co-operating with the Nazi State, in practice he expected the proponents of Nazism to give up their own secular ideology in their co-operation with the Church. It is for reasons of Marahrens' resolve and unwillingness to compromise Christianity, therefore, that his decision to lead the first VKL into collaboration with the Nazi State must not be equated with the actions of the GDC, which incessantly compromised age-old Christian traditions for temporal Nazi beliefs.

³¹⁴ Cf. Schmidt-Clausen, 1989, p.14.

³¹⁵ 'Niederschrift der Unterredung Marahrens mit Mr. Wygall', 17/01/1936, EZA, 50/50, (Nr.10-15) Nr.11.

³¹⁶ Ibid., Nr.13.

The strong presence of the GDC in Marahrens' own *Landeskirche* undoubtedly influenced his decision to collaborate with the Nazi state, however. In the same way as the demographics of the highly-Nazi ELLKH forced Marahrens to compromise his rejection of Nazism in the initial years of the Third Reich, his decision to engage in co-operation with Kerrl and his RKA in the central years of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* can also be seen, in part, as a result of the politico-ecclesiastical composition of his *Landeskirche*. In a letter written in May 1935, *Superintendent* Stumpenhausen described the ELLKH as comprising a large majority of 'moderate' churchmen. He explained that,

In der Bischofsfront unserer Landeskirche befinden sich etwa 170 Amtsbrüder, die nicht Mitglieder der Bekenntnisgemeinschaft sind. Entweder haben sie nie einer kirchenpolitischen Gruppe angehört oder waren früher einmal bei den Deutschen Christen.³¹⁷

Since Hanns Kerrl obviously preferred to co-operate with men of the so-called Church 'middle' and, where possible, moderate members of the GDC, it must be accepted that Marahrens, as leader of the moderately 'German Christian' ELLKH at this stage, was in a sense compelled to heed Kerrl's demands. Not only can it be appreciated that Marahrens felt a personal obligation to engage with Kerrl and his RKA in a last-ditch attempt to preserve his own status and that of institutional Protestantism in Germany at large, but the socio-cultural conditions of his own *Landeskirche*, which comprised very few 'Dahlemites', meant that his co-operation with the RMfKA was in line with the desires of its predominately moderate pastorate.

Despite the favourable conditions of Marahrens' *Landeskirche* for collaboration with the RMfKA, however, it was never forced to construct a regional LKA of its own due to its established *Intaktheit*. Although Marahrens was undoubtedly more involved than most in the administration of the *Bekennende Kirche*, his relative unaffectedness by church committees on the regional level inevitably caused him to lose touch with the reality of life within the 'destroyed' *Landeskirchen* which, increasingly facing the brunt of *Gestapo* persecution, understandably did not see the best solution to the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* to be compliance with the secular ambitions of the Nazi State. Most notably, the Bishop of Breslau wrote to Marahrens at the beginning of the years of *staatliche Kirchenpolitik*, in an effort to ensure that he did not overlook the reality of the situation for the majority of the DEK. The bishop thus warned Marahrens of the potentially damaging repercussions of co-operating with Kerrl's

³¹⁷ 'Brief', 07/05/1935, LKAH, SI HI 838 Nr.67.

RKA, and prophesied that, “Diese Politik der Mitte wäre der Tod der Kirche.”³¹⁸ In spite of such warnings, Marahrens nevertheless showed determination to pursue the RKA line on a course which was eventually to see him split, not only from the representatives of the ‘destroyed’ *Landeskirchen*, but also from his Lutheran counterparts Meiser and Wurm during the third and final stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter of this dissertation.

In his account of Marahrens’ actions in this period, however, Kurt Schmidt-Clausen attributes Marahrens’ unflinching co-operation with the RMfKA to the underlying influence of his regional identity. This he believes rendered him more cautious and contemplative in nature, as well as more inclined to respect the law. In describing Marahrens, Schmidt-Clausen suggests that,

Sein Handeln war zunächst dadurch bedingt, daß er Niedersachsen war. [...] Der Niedersachse ist langsam und bedächtig. [...] D. Marahrens führt seine Kämpfe so, daß er die Dinge reifen und zur inneren Auswirkung ihrer eigenen Gesetze kommen läßt. Er besitzt das tiefe Vertrauen auf das Recht und die Kraft des Rechtes, die dem Niedersachsen eigen ist.³¹⁹

Although such regional stereotypes cannot be relied upon to explain every decision Marahrens made during this period, there can be no doubt that the specific demographics of his *Landeskirche* encouraged him to embrace the ‘safer’ and least confrontational route through the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* offered by Kerrl and his RKA. This, together with Marahrens’ longstanding concern to appease all sides of the Protestant struggle and to arouse the least amount of friction possible between the Church and the State, further encouraged Marahrens to heed Kerrl’s ‘all or nothing’ threats to the Church.

Finally, no attempt to explain Marahrens’ attitude to the policies of the RMfKA can be made without reference to his own adherence to the Lutheran confession, which demonstrably strengthened in line with his determination to work with Kerrl’s church committees. Although Marahrens’ Lutheran conscience existed long before the advent of *staatliche Kirchenpolitik*, it cannot be denied that Marahrens’ parallel commitment to both the Lutheran and the RKA lines worked to reinforce each other mutually, to the extent that Marahrens’ final view of the State was thoroughly based upon “ein[e] unkritisch[e] Staatsnähe des späteren Luthertums”.³²⁰ It is for this reason that Marahrens’ position of unwavering co-operation with the Nazi State worked to distance him from less radical Lutherans like his counterpart Wurm,

³¹⁸ ‘Brief an Marahrens von dem Bischof von Breslau’, 05/10/1935, EZA, 50/17, Nr.92.

³¹⁹ Schmidt-Clausen, 1989, p.87.

³²⁰ Ibid, p.120.

for example, who eventually came to use his own milder interpretation of Lutheran doctrine to strengthen and to contribute to the opposition efforts of the ‘Dahlemitic’ strand of the *Bekennende Kirche*. To illustrate Marahrens’ uncompromising interpretation of confessional Lutheranism, we need only to look to a comment of fellow Lutheran pastor Hans Asmussen in 1939. Even before Marahrens began to display extreme support for the Nazi State after the onset of war, as will be explained in the next chapter of this dissertation, Asmussen described Marahrens’ commitment to the RMfKA in this period as being detrimental to the future of the DEK. He exclaimed that, “Ich [halte] nach theologischer Erkenntnis und praktischer Erfahrung den hannöverschen Weg für kirchlich unmöglich und strategisch und taktisch unklug”.³²¹ Since Marahrens ended the second stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* upholding a particular politico-ecclesiastical position that threatened to undermine the very Lutheran alliance that he had consistently helped to develop, Marahrens can therefore be seen to have transferred his faith in confessional Lutheranism increasingly over to his confidence in the RMfKA in a bid to seek a resolution to the Protestant struggle. By the onset of the Second World War, then, Marahrens’ commitment to the Lutheran cause and his dedication to the RMfKA had virtually become indistinguishable from each other, to the extent that his Lutheran conscience prescribed his support of the Nazi State, and his co-operation with State measures reinforced his particular manifestation of obedient Lutheranism against that of his more pietistic or ‘Dahlemitic’ contemporaries.

Marahrens was, however, not alone in initially agreeing to co-operate with the RMfKA for doctrinal reasons. *Landesbischof* Hans Meiser of Bavaria also supported the Hanoverian bishop in his willingness to work with the secular authorities. This is unsurprising, since Meiser had not only displayed the strongest commitment to the creation of a specifically Lutheran course through the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* to date but had, inadvertently, also become the mouthpiece for confessional Lutheranism on the national level, engaging in discussions with the State alongside Marahrens. Whereas Marahrens clearly had a duty to engage with Nazi authorities as leader of the first VKL at the start of this second phase of the Protestant struggle, however, Meiser’s emergence as a force for negotiation on the national level came about out of personal enthusiasm rather than obligation from any specific position of national Church leadership. In an early discussion involving Meiser, Marahrens, and *Reichsminister* Kerrl, Marahrens inevitably took a less antagonistic approach to the *Reichsminister*, whilst Meiser usurped the occasion to instruct Kerrl vehemently on how he

³²¹ ‘Brief von Pastor Asmussen an Marahrens’, 22/06/1939, EZA, 50/94, Nr.17.

ought to conduct his *staatliche Kirchenpolitik* from the perspective of the Lutheran churches. Meiser is on record as having said,

Machen Sie sich, Herr Reichsminister, zum Anwalt der ungeheuren Gewissensnot vieler Pfarrer und Gemeindeglieder! Sorgen Sie dafür, daß die “Deutschen Christen” nicht fortfahren, für ihre eigenen machtpolitischen Bestrebungen die Autorität der Partei und des Führers zu stehlen. Eine Neutralisierung der Gegensätze vom Staat her müßte uns in neue Gewissenskonflikte bringen.³²²

As well as demonstrating that he viewed the GDC as the main source of antagonism in the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, and that he in no way viewed its actions as equivalent to those of the Nazi State, Meiser clearly demonstrated that he regarded Kerrl as a neutralising force in the conflict. Despite apparently turning a blind eye to the NSDAP’s displays of brutality against the Jews and other persecuted minorities to date, Meiser’s words nonetheless reveal that he did not accept Kerrl’s involvement in the affairs of the Church without reluctance. After all, the crisis of conscience of which Meiser speaks here did not necessarily refer to the dilemma caused by the GDC, but also to the problematic fact that Kerrl was ultimately an instrument of the NSDAP. Since, under Lutheran doctrine, the State should not be seen to interfere in matters of the Church, Meiser’s reference to the concerns shared by many pastors shows that he knew Kerrl’s involvement in ecclesiastical affairs was in breach of Lutheran teachings.

In an attempt to lessen potential Lutheran disgruntlement over co-operation with the RMfKA, then, Meiser was careful in this period to emphasise the positive outcome which Kerrl was supposed to bring to the Church. For example, Meiser continually stressed Kerrl’s agreed function to repair relations between the Protestant Church and the Nazi State, and to establish a structure for the Church which was acceptable to both the NSDAP and the staunchest of Protestant clergymen. In expressing his optimism that the recent collaboration between the Church and the RMfKA would find an amenable solution to the Protestant struggle in Nazi Germany, Meiser exclaimed, “Ich hoffe, daß die von Herrn Reichsminister als mögliche angedeutete Trennung von Kirche und Staat nur die ultima ratio wäre”.³²³ In doing so, however, Meiser not only offered Kerrl the high-profile Lutheran endorsement he needed to ensure the support of other confessional Lutherans in the Third Reich. In addition, Meiser’s inversion of Kerrl’s original threat to the Church, by which he warned churchmen that they would be punished by a complete separation of the Church from the State in the event of non-

³²² ‘Besprechung mit Kerrl’, 23/08/1935, EZA, 50/17, Nr.140.

³²³ Ibid.

co-operation,³²⁴ worked to ‘turn the tables’ in the partnership and implicitly put Kerrl as much under the service of the Church as under that of the State. Although, on first glance, it may appear that Meiser unquestioningly submitted to Kerrl’s authority to bring about an end to the Church in the worst instance, there can be no doubt that his instruction to Kerrl to seize every possible measure to unite the Church and the State saw him begin to dictate the conditions of partnership between the DEK and Kerrl’s RKA. As the openly pro-Nazi Bishop of Bremen, Heinrich Weidemann, confirmed at the time, “In die kommende Kirche marschieren nicht zuerst Organisationen, so notwendig sie auch sind, sondern einige beherzte Männer, die es mit dem Evangelium ernst nehmen, ganz ernst und ganz ursprünglich”.³²⁵ As can be demonstrated by his actions in this period, then, Meiser was ultimately able to become one of these ‘courageous’ churchmen to foreground Protestant precepts in the new Church administration, since he was not bound by the same position of Church leadership as Marahrens and, as a result, his interventionist approach and domineering attitude in this period were not at risk of jeopardising the reputation of the wider German Protestant Church at large.

Meiser was nevertheless careful not to punch above the weight granted to him by his relatively detached position from the DEK and both its official and unofficial modes of governance. To encourage the RMfKA to heed his specifically Lutheran aims, therefore, Meiser continued to show that his objections were to the heretical practices of the GDC only and not to Nazism in general. Although this tactic called his wider Christian scruples into question, since he proved himself to be willing to ignore demonstrations of Nazi violence in the wider secular arena, it nonetheless helped him to retain his leadership over the ELKB. This is primarily because Meiser’s silence towards the secular policies of the State at least allowed him to demonstrate to the increasingly Nazi-dominated territory of Bavaria that his *Landeskirche* continued to remain ‘intact’ primarily as a result of an intra-Church dispute and not a wider disagreement with the NSDAP. To convey exactly this message, Meiser released a statement to his ELKB which stated that,

Eine Kirchenleitung, die sich gebunden weiß an das Evangelium, muß gegen solche Irrlehre aufstehen, muß sich mit aller Kraft, die ihr geschenkt ist, gegen solche Irrlehre zur Wehr setzen. Die Leitung der Bayerischen Landeskirche weiß um diese ihre Pflicht und wird im gegebenen Augenblick das tun, was notwendig ist.³²⁶

The steadfast objection to the heresy of the GDC that Meiser conveys here can also be seen as another implicit threat to Hanns Kerrl and his RMfKA. Since Meiser revealed himself as

³²⁴ Cf. p.96 of this dissertation.

³²⁵ In Heinonen, 1978, p.111.

³²⁶ ‘Kundgebung’, 29/08/1936, LKAB, Bestand 506.

being willing to employ any means necessary to rid the Church of anti-doctrinal Christianity, Meiser implicitly demonstrated to Kerrl and his church committees that he was not prepared to accept any further distortions of the Christian confessions on any level of Church administration. Since Meiser's rejection of 'German Christian' unorthodoxy had already proven a substantial hindrance to the creation of a fully united DEK in the first stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, it was in the best interests of the RMfKA to keep Meiser on side to prevent similar damage to its own attempts at ecclesiastical unification in the ensuing years of the Protestant struggle.

Despite Meiser's newfound ability to use his *Landeskirche* as a bargaining chip to threaten the RMfKA into heeding his concerns, particularly in light of Bavaria's increasing importance to the Nazi regime as its chosen spiritual homeland, like Marahrens, Meiser was not without his critics. These critics began to attack Meiser for failing to view the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* from the perspective of the 'destroyed' *Landeskirchen*. In an anonymous letter sent to *Dekan Schieder*, for example, the sender who was evidently from a *Landeskirche* under the control of a LKA complained of Meiser's lack of understanding for the predicament of the 'destroyed' churches. The sender thus wrote that,

Was soll werden, wenn er so wenig Verständnis für unsere Lage hat, die wir doch jetzt eben die Ausschüsse haben, also das System Jäger, aus dem doch wir damals ihn und Wurm ganz wesentlich mit befreit haben. Wie kann er uns dies System zumuten, das er für sich damals als untragbar erklärte, und demgegenüber er selbst in Ulm feierlich erklärte, daß wir die rechtmäßige Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands seien...³²⁷

In a chain of rhetorical questions, the sender not only expressed opposition to Meiser's decision to work with the RMfKA, but manifestly framed Meiser's actions as a betrayal of both the 'destroyed' *Landeskirchen* that had formerly helped him to establish the *Intaktheit* of the ELKB, and of his previous commitment to the *Bekennende Kirche* as an autonomous mode of administration based solely on the Word and Will of God. For the author of the letter, Meiser's decision to co-operate with the RMfKA appeared both offensive and unreasonable.

Although Meiser's decision to formalise the *lutherischer Flügel* met with such criticism, it is nonetheless important to recognise that, in spite of Meiser's willingness to co-operate with the Nazi State to find a solution to the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, he was not prepared to allow Nazi precepts to infiltrate into any aspect of Church life. Speaking in Ansbach on 16th December 1936, Meiser most notably warned of the dangers that would occur if Nazism was

³²⁷ 'Brief an Herrn Dekan Schieder', Nürnberg, 17/01/1936 (Halle), sender anonymous, EZA, 50/185, Nr.19.

allowed to supersede the Christian faith to become the only religion in Germany.³²⁸ Unlike Marahrens, then, who strove for the success of Kerrl's church committees as the new form of administration for the German Protestant Church, Meiser's underlying suspicion of Nazism proved that he was committed only to the victory and survival of the *lutherischer Flügel* in this period and not to *staatliche Kirchenpolitik* per se. As will hopefully become clear in the next sub-chapter of this dissertation, Meiser's commitment to the State's involvement in Church affairs between 1935 and 1939 was only evident so long as he was free to pursue the Lutheran line. As soon as the State began to threaten Meiser's freedom to maintain a Lutheran element to the DEK, however, Meiser's endorsement of the State's interference in the Church clearly diminished.³²⁹

Meiser's southern German counterpart, *Landesbischof* Theophil Wurm of Württemberg, also shared Meiser's heightened displeasure with the methods of the RMfKA. Wurm's mounting disenchantment with the RKA line was at least commensurate with his comparatively 'looser' definition of confessional Lutheranism in this period, however. At the start of the central phase of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, Wurm was nevertheless as seemingly enthusiastic about the advent of *staatliche Kirchenpolitik* as his Hanoverian and Bavarian counterparts. Believing that the first VKL ought to embrace the opportunity for co-operation with the Nazi State provided by the RMfKA, Wurm exclaimed that,

...die VKL [sollte] nicht gehindert werden, im Zusammenwirken mit dem RKA die Zusammenfassung alles dessen, was wirklich auf den Namen Kirche Anspruch erheben darf, tatkräftig zu fördern und dadurch dem für Staat und Kirche gleich erwünschten Ziele einer neuen wahren kirchlichen Gemeinschaft im evangelischen Deutschland zu dienen.³³⁰

Like Marahrens and Meiser, then, Wurm too initially expressed faith that Kerrl and his church committees had the potential to succeed in fostering a fully unified German Protestant Church that was appropriate to the particular temporal framework of Nazi Germany.

Just as Meiser had attempted to assert influence over Kerrl in an effort to render him a servant of the Church as well as of the State, Wurm too did not offer his support to the RKA line without attempting to mould it first into the design that he saw fit for the Church. In an effort to extract a clear statement of intent from the national RKA and to free it from radical 'German Christian' elements, Wurm participated alongside Meiser and visibly took the lead in

³²⁸ Cf. 'Predigt, Ansbach', 16/12/1936, LKAB, Bestand 506.

³²⁹ Hence Meiser's appeal to the *Bruderrat* of the EKApU in 1937 to present a united front against Nazism. This is discussed on pp.115-116 of this dissertation.

³³⁰ 'Die Stellung der württembergischen Landeskirche zur Vorläufigen Kirchenleitung und zur Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche', 06/11/1935, EZA, 50/17, Nr.77-78.

a meeting with representatives of the national RKA on 10th January 1936.³³¹ During the meeting, Wurm raised objections to three main character traits of the GDC, namely that it considered Hitler to have “heilsgeschichtliche Bedeutung”, that it was attempting to re-write Christianity according to Nazi precepts, and that the totalitarian mentality of the GDC left no room for the confessional and dogmatic differences between the original Protestant denominations.³³² After highlighting these points, Wurm then raised the following direct questions:

Steht der Reichskirchenausschuss mit uns auf demselben Boden der Verurteilung dieser Sätze? Wenn auch er dieselben als bekenntniswidrig ansieht, was tut er, um dem Bekenntnisanliegen Geltung zu schaffen, auch wenn er seinem Auftrag gemäß in erster Linie Ordnung in der Kirche zu schaffen versucht?³³³

By adopting such a direct interrogative approach, there can be no doubt that Wurm tried to force the representatives of the national RKA, through a form of rhetorical blackmail, to agree with both him and Meiser in their condemnation of the GDC’s methods if it wanted to ensure the bishops’ continued support. Similarly, his insinuation that the RKA ought to work towards a Church union that was based on an awareness of the Protestant confessions only and was not simply amalgamated in the style of the United EKApU also put pressure on the RKA to set its methods in contradiction to those of the GDC.

In spite of his disdain for ‘German Christianity’, however, Wurm was nonetheless well aware that it was precisely because of the three main characteristics of the GDC to which he took exception that the NSDAP offered the Church its support in the first place. For this reason, despite his personal dislike for the GDC, Wurm reluctantly acknowledged that a considerable *Deutsche Christen* presence was needed in the church committees in order to ensure that the Nazi State continued to engage with Church affairs. In other words, whilst Wurm still continued to view the GDC as the main cause of the Protestant struggle, he nonetheless knew that its proponents in the RKA had to become a pawn in his national endeavour to dupe the Nazi State into believing it was successfully transplanting Nazi precepts into the Protestant Church. All the while, however, Wurm intended the Church to neutralise the heretical practices of the GDC by asserting the overarching influence of the original Christian confessions over Nazi precepts within the church committees. In this particular context, then, it can be appreciated that Wurm eventually gave his support to the RKA line, not out of disrespect for the condition of the ‘destroyed’ *Landeskirchen*, but since

³³¹ For Meiser’s transcription of the meeting, cf. Braun and Nicolaisen, 1993, pp.151-168.

³³² Ibid., p.153.

³³³ Ibid., p.154.

he saw in the church committees a hidden means for the Protestant Church to assert much-needed influence over the RMfKA. Moreover, since staunch Lutheran Wilhelm Zöllner had already been chosen to head the national RKA, Wurm was able to trust in Zöllner's strong confessional beliefs to lead him away from accepting Nazi heresy and to govern the RKA according to Lutheran doctrine first and foremost. Speaking directly to Zöllner at the meeting with the RKA, Wurm thus reiterated the need for Christian doctrine to overpower Nazi ideology within the national Church committee and explained that,

Man hat den Eindruck, daß es für den Reichskirchenausschuss außerordentlich schwer ist, sich im Reichskirchenministerium durchzusetzen. [...] Deshalb aber brauchen Sie unsere Unterstützung. Wir geben sie mit freudigem Herzen; es muß nur klar werden, daß sich der Reichskirchenausschuss durchsetzt.³³⁴

In light of Wurm's insistence that his support for the RKA was only guaranteed as long as it asserted itself against the might of the RMfKA, then, it can be inferred that Wurm was only in favour of co-operation with the Nazi State in Church affairs as long as the Protestant Church remained the dominant party in the partnership.

Further to this, Wurm's belief in the RKA as a means for the Church to influence the State can also be demonstrated by his willingness to imitate the RKA system on the regional level. Although Wurm's ELLKW was never forced to institute a regional LKA of its own due to its established *Intaktheit*, Wurm nonetheless oversaw theological negotiations between the official administration of his *Landeskirche* and representatives of the regional GDC in an effort to co-ordinate his *Landeskirche* with the new administrative structure of the DEK.³³⁵ The principal reason for doing so was that moderate Württembergian *Deutsche Christen* had expressed a desire to work towards a solution to the conflict on the level of regional administration.³³⁶ There can be no doubt, however, that Wurm's presiding over these regional synodal discussions also served to benefit him, not only by demonstrating his commitment to ecumenical negotiation but also by strategically allowing him to display to the Nazi State a willingness to conform to its new style of Church governance – the latter of which undoubtedly served to reassure the NSDAP that the *Intaktheit* of Wurm's ELLKW did not threaten to jeopardise its wider efforts to consolidate the DEK in this period. Since Wurm succeeded in diverting the suspicion of the NSDAP away from his *Landeskirche* through voluntary co-operation with the GDC, this ultimately left Wurm free to ensure that the Christian confessions took precedence within the administrative decisions of his

³³⁴ Ibid., p.161.

³³⁵ Fischer, 1972, p.62.

³³⁶ Ibid.

Landeskirche, and it was through the prevalence of Christian precepts that he hoped to convert the GDC.

Inevitably, however, whilst Wurm's efforts pleased many in the 'destroyed' *Landeskirchen*, who saw in his voluntarily embracing of the LKA line an attempt at least to empathise with their complex predicament, more radical 'Dahlemites' viewed Wurm's negotiations with the GDC as treacherous to the stability of the 'Confessing' cause. Yet, as Wurm himself confirmed in his memoirs,

Wir in Württemberg versuchten es, eingedenk der Fabel vom Wettstreit der Sonne und des Windes um den Mantel des Wanderers, nicht mit dem Hinauswerfen, sondern mit dem Heranziehen der Deutschen Christen, indem wir einige von ihnen zu einem theologischen Gespräch einluden...³³⁷

Unlike Marahrens, who theoretically had no choice but to appease the GDC in his predominantly Nazi *Landeskirche*, two options existed for Wurm during the years of *staatliche Kirchenpolitik* – namely either to reject or to welcome the GDC into negotiations concerning the design for the DEK. Wurm's eventual decision to work with the GDC should not be taken as an expression of his sympathies for the movement, however, especially since it had originally provided the impetus for Wurm's original move to the *Bekennende Kirche*. Rather, in light of Wurm's allusion to the "Wanderer" who has to grapple with the competing influences of the sun and wind with only his coat for protection, it should be recognised that keeping the GDC in negotiations at this point was a safer option, by which Wurm was able to attempt to impose his confessional principles on the LKA, than if he had removed it from the equation so early on. Just as the "Wanderer" to whom Wurm alludes might have ditched his coat, leaving himself with no protection against further ravages of the weather, Wurm was not prepared, despite his aversion to GDC aims, to reject the movement completely just yet for fear that he might once again require the strategic protection of the movement against more brutal attacks from the Nazi State on the traditional affairs of the Church.

The *Landesbischöfe* and the Acquiescing Church

In spite of the inter-connection between the *lutherischer Flügel* and *staatliche Kirchenpolitik* that had been building up since mid-1935, the Protestant struggle in Nazi Germany dramatically changed direction in 1937. As Wurm states in his memoirs, "Das Jahr 1937

³³⁷ Wurm, 1953, p.132.

brachte eine überraschende Wendung in der Kirchenpolitik des Staates".³³⁸ The peaceful co-operation between the Church and the RMfKA that all three of the *Landesbischöfe* had envisaged came to an abrupt end with the demise of Kerrl's regional and national church committees. Not long after the church committees had been established throughout the majority of the DEK, a local church crisis in the diocese of Lübeck caused the national Church unification effort to crumble just over a year later, demonstrating the power of regional events to influence the national Church line. In short, a dispute occurred in the *Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Lübeck* concerning the unlawful dismissal of nine 'Confessing' pastors from its regional administration by its *Deutsche Christen* bishop. In an attempt to resolve matters, the national RKA decided to send its leader, Wilhelm Zöllner, to Lübeck to facilitate negotiations between the regional 'Confessing' clergy and its 'German Christian' leadership. Unhappy with the attempt of the RKA to re-empower members of the *Bekennende Kirche*, however, since the committee had originally been designed to foster moderate politico-ecclesiastical positions only, the Nazi State intervened to prohibit Zöllner from travelling to Lübeck. In response to the State's aggressive intervention in Church affairs and use of secular law to hinder a spiritual mission, the national RKA resigned in protest on 12th February 1937, which only served to intensify the anger of the Nazi State towards the Protestant Church.³³⁹

Following this, the Nazi State and its *Gestapo* agents stepped up measures against the DEK which, in the absence of the national RKA, was forced to revert to its former instruments of Church governance. The DEKK thus came to represent the official Church administration of the GDC once more, yet it was now forced to engage in the Protestant struggle on its own since *Reichsbischof* Müller had disappeared from the national stage altogether following the controversies he had caused in the pre-RKA years. By contrast, although the two strands of the *Bekennende Kirche* continued to be governed by the *Lutherrat* and the second VKL respectively, the unofficial Church administration also laid claim to the *Kirchenführerkonferenz* (KFK), which was originally established by the RKA between 19th and 20th November 1936 as an additional instrument of pan-confessional governance. Consisting exclusively of non-'German Christian' church leaders from throughout the DEK, the KFK was the only moderate Protestant organisation in a position to take over the leadership of the alternative national Church. Initially, the KFK appointed an ad-hoc

³³⁸ Ibid., p.137.

³³⁹ Detailed in Sautter, 1960, p.45.

executive committee known as the *Gremium*³⁴⁰ to manage its affairs and to engage with the State. However, due to Hanns Kerrl's refusal to acknowledge the *Gremium* and his insistence on speaking only with August Marahrens of Hanover in his capacity as "dienstälteste[r] Landesbischof",³⁴¹ the KFK soon replaced the *Gremium* with the *Kirchenführerausschuss* (KFA) under Marahrens' leadership.³⁴² The KFA-led KFK thus assumed unofficial Church leadership from 12th February 1937, just before the State upped its attack on the DEK. Most notably, Hitler personally intervened in the Protestant struggle against Nazism on 15th February 1937 to announce the *Kirchenwählerlass*. This forced the Church to design its own national constitution and to hold elections for its own *Generalsynode*, despite Kerrl's repeated assurances to the KFK that no such elections would be called. In addition to this, the State also began to disable the *Bekennende Kirche* financially. Following a fruitless letter of protest from the second VKL to the highest ranking ministers of the NSDAP on 29th April 1937,³⁴³ the RMfKA forbade Church collections and, in the most direct expression of its hostility to the 'Confessing' cause to date, the *Gestapo* arrested the founder of the Protestant resistance movement, Martin Niemöller, on 1st July 1937.³⁴⁴

In order to offer a more unified response to the State's heightened persecution of the Church in this phase of the Protestant struggle, then, the KFK, the RELKD and the second VKL came together and agreed to form a further pan-organisational executive committee called the *Kasseler Gremium*,³⁴⁵ which was intended to prepare the DEK for the promised Church elections. These elections were never to materialise, however, due to the State's increasing focus on territorial expansion during this period and its relative loss of interest in Church affairs. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, by the onset of the Second World War, the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* had radically changed in consistency, no longer being a relatively contained intra-Church conflict concerning the survival of the original Protestant confessions only, but now further complicated by an added battle for survival against the increasingly

³⁴⁰ The *Gremium* was led by Pastor Dr. Lilje and comprised *Landessuperintendent* Henke (Lutheran), *Superintendent* Gramlow (United) and Pastor Langenohl (Reformed) (Klügel, 1964, pp.235-236).

³⁴¹ Helmreich, 1979, pp.207-208.

³⁴² The other three members of the KFA were *Landesbischof* Wurm, *Landessuperintendent* D. Dr. Hollweg and *Präses* Zimmermann (Klügel, 1964, p.236).

³⁴³ Letters were sent to von Blomberg, Göring, Frick, Rust, Seldte, von Neurath, Schwerin-Krosigk, Schacht, Dorpmüller and Hess (Helmreich, 1979, p.213).

³⁴⁴ Niemöller was accused of violating the decree of 2nd February 1937, in which the RMfKA forbade clergymen to read the names out in services of those who had left the Church. A trial took place, beginning on 7th February 1938, and although Niemöller left court a free man on 2nd March 1938, he was re-arrested the very next day under Hitler's direct orders and detained in KZ Sachsenhausen. Niemöller was to remain here until he was relocated to KZ Dachau on 11th July 1941, where he was to stay until the end of the war.

³⁴⁵ This was established between 5th-6th July 1937 and comprised *Landesbischof* Marahrens on behalf of the KFK, *Oberkirchenrat* Breit on behalf of the RELKD and *Pfarrer* Müller-Dahlem on behalf of the second VKL (Brunotte, 1977, p.99).

brutal Nazi State. By the time Nazi Germany invaded Poland on 1st September 1939, the NSDAP had done its best to disable the DEK with both a top-down and bottom-up assault on the Church. Amongst other things, it disbanded the remaining LKAs between 23rd August and 30th September 1937,³⁴⁶ limited the collection of Church taxes to State and local authorities on the insistence of DEKK leader Dr. Friedrich Werner,³⁴⁷ and cruelly forced clergymen to display their allegiance to the Third Reich over that of their Christian faith following the annexation of Austria to Germany.³⁴⁸

Despite the efforts of the *Kasseler Gremium* to unite the separate ‘Confessing’ factions against this fresh Nazi onslaught, it was not long before intra-Church divisions re-emerged. In particular, on 27th September 1938, three ‘Dahlemitic’ pastors³⁴⁹ issued a new *Gebetsliturgie* to the entire DEK as a response to the so-called Czechoslovakian crisis.³⁵⁰ This liturgy appeared to attack not just the State’s encroachment into Church affairs but also the fundamentals of Nazi secular rule itself.³⁵¹ Although *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm all attempted to distance themselves from this liturgy, stressing that it was channelled solely through the organisation of the second VKL and not their *Lutherrat* or even the common *Kasseler Gremium*, all three men nevertheless refused to sign a formula prepared by Kerrl, which accused the writers of the liturgy of treason to the Third Reich.³⁵² In this context, then, although the outcome of the dispute over the *Gebetsliturgie* served to re-establish the divisions between the RELKD and the second VKL of old, almost mirroring the division of the *Bekennende Kirche* at Bad Oeynhausen, the three bishops did not turn their backs on their colleagues in the Confessing Church altogether. In this respect, therefore, although the incident undoubtedly tested the bishops’ true allegiances in this phase of the Protestant

³⁴⁶ With the notable exception of the *Landeskirche* of Hesse-Waldeck, which continued to function under its LKA until the end of the Third Reich (Helmreich, 1979, pp.204-205).

³⁴⁷ Ibid., p.211.

³⁴⁸ On 20th April 1938, Dr. Werner ordered all the churches of the EKApU to take an oath of allegiance to Hitler (ibid., p.228).

³⁴⁹ Namely Martin Albertz, Hans Böhm and Fritz Müller of Berlin.

³⁵⁰ In brief, the Czechoslovakian crisis refers to the dispute over the Sudetenland, which belonged at the time to Czechoslovakia but its predominantly German population desired that it be annexed to the *Deutsches Reich*. In order to prevent Hitler from annexing the Sudetenland with military might, Neville Chamberlain of England began a ‘policy of appeasement’ which, following three meetings, resulted in the peaceable German occupation of the Sudetenland and was considered at the time to have avoided the prospect of war in Europe. For further details of the crisis, cf. Weinberg, 1994, pp.27-47.

³⁵¹ Ernst Christian Helmreich offers an English translation of the controversial section of the liturgy, which read, “We confess before Thee the sins of our people. Your name is derided among them, your word is attacked, your truth has been oppressed. Openly and in secret much injustice has taken place. Parents and people in authority were scorned, the life of the people infringed upon and disturbed, marriage ties broken, property seized and the honour of neighbours trespassed upon.” (Helmreich, 1979, p.230). For further details of the liturgy, cf. Wall, 1976.

³⁵² Helmreich, 1979, p.231; Wall, 1976, p.423.

Kirchenkampf, all three of the bishops remained true to the ‘Confessing’ cause and continued to maintain a position of churchly compromise.

Looking at the individual reactions of the *Landesbischöfe* to the drastic change in *staatliche Kirchenpolitik* after 1937, however, it becomes clear that, although the bishops were united in response within their particular *lutherischer Flügel*, the reasons behind their *Resistenz* and the extent to which they were committed to this ‘middle’ line differed considerably from bishop to bishop. Most interestingly, it was *Landesbischof* August Marahrens of Hanover who was once again thrown into the front line of the *Kirchenkampf* during this period to find a solution to the conflict after the intensification of Nazi violence against the Church. This time his elevation in Church affairs was, however, due to the specific request of the Nazi State, since Hanns Kerrl insisted on talking to no other clergyman. Although scholars attribute Kerrl’s insistence on talking to Marahrens to the latter’s standing as the longest-serving *Landesbischof*,³⁵³ the clear connection between Kerrl’s partiality for the Hanoverian *Landesbischof* and Marahrens’ steadfast adherence to Kerrl’s former RKA in the preceding years must also be borne in mind. Since Marahrens’ recent conciliatory conduct suggested that he was the most approachable and accommodating *Landesbischof* in the eyes of the Nazi State, it is understandable that those in the RMfKA who were so eager to succeed in the task to reform the Church that had been delegated to them by Hitler came to view Marahrens as the ‘bishop of last resort’ in the Protestant Church.

Further to this, Marahrens’ strict adherence to the dictates of confessional Lutheranism and his subsequent commitment to honour his secular leaders as instruments of God can equally be seen to have trapped Marahrens and put him in a paradoxical position in which his staunch Protestantism actually compelled him to work with the NSDAP. With Kerrl singling him out as his negotiator of choice on the one hand, and his Lutheran confession obliging him to work in harmony with Germany’s secular leaders on the other, there can be no doubt that the parallel demands of Marahrens’ specifically Lutheran and national-conservative conscience rendered his co-operation with the Nazi State virtually inevitable. It must also be acknowledged that, since Kerrl had pinned his hopes for collaboration solely on Marahrens on the national stage, Kerrl had placed Marahrens in the awkward public position which forced all those who wanted to see a resolution to the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* to look to Marahrens as a means of last resort to bridge the Protestant divisions. Since Kerrl had intimated that he was only prepared to engage with Marahrens or cut all ties with the Church, it is

³⁵³ Helmreich, 1979, p.207.

understandable that Marahrens felt compelled to act on behalf of the DEK. After all, any refusal to co-operate with Kerrl looked set to result in the instantaneous demise of institutional Protestantism in Nazi Germany at large. Moreover, in addition to being rendered single-handedly responsible for the fate of the DEK, Marahrens' eagerness to conform to the demands of the State was also enhanced by the ever-worsening plight of his colleagues in the nearby EKApU, who were by now on the receiving end of more vigorous *Gestapo* persecution. In consideration of the fact that the Nazi State had already demonstrated the extent of its power by imprisoning Martin Niemöller, and that Dr. Werner of the DEKK was already curbing finances for the alternative Church government,³⁵⁴ it must be appreciated that Kerrl's initial threat to suffocate the Church by cutting off its provisions and restricting its freedom to operate appeared very real at this point in the Third Reich.

Whereas Klaus Scholder, for example, has characterised Marahrens as "politisch ein gläubiger Anhänger Hitlers und kirchenpolitisch ein überzeugter Vertreter des reichskirchlichen Zusammenschlusses",³⁵⁵ this investigation views Marahrens' continued co-operation with the RMfKA to formalise a *Staatskirche* as a necessary consequence of many factors, which ultimately prevented him from refusing personal participation in the Church conflict. In the first instance, Marahrens had been concerned to effect change in the DEK since his participation in the *Kapler Ausschuss* of 1933. Since the essence of the DEK was now in more jeopardy than ever before in light of intensified Nazi violence against the Church, it is understandable that Marahrens grasped Kerrl's offer of co-operation in this period to keep German Protestantism in Nazi Germany alive. Even though Marahrens' decision to continue to work with Kerrl ended up with him being ostracised by the very *Bekennende Kirche* to which he essentially belonged, it must be appreciated that a chain of socio-political causality was ultimately responsible for taking Marahrens in a different direction through the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* to that of his 'Confessing' colleagues.

Speaking about these divergent directions within the *Bekennende Kirche*, Ministerialrat Stahn drew upon Marahrens' conduct to typify the actions of those who diverged most from the 'Dahlemites'. Stahn thus stated that, "Auch die Bekenntnisfront ist nicht einheitlich. Es ist ein weiter Weg von Karl Barth bis Marahrens. Auch da gibt es zersetzende Kräfte. Das Vorhandensein einer starken Mitte ist wichtig".³⁵⁶ By singling out Marahrens as the member

³⁵⁴ Helmreich, 1979, p.211.

³⁵⁵ Scholder, 1985, p.169.

³⁵⁶ 'Vertraulich: Aus der Ansprache von Ministerialrat Stahn bei der Reichstagung der Deutschen Pfarrervereine in Wernigerode', 18/09/1935, EZA, 50/17, Nr.113-115.

of the *Bekennende Kirche* whose stance was furthest away from that of ‘unionistic’ Karl Barth, Stahn’s words reveal that Marahrens’ conduct had by now come to be viewed as detrimental to the stability of the ‘Confessing’ Front. Although Marahrens’ conciliatory approach had been regarded in the first phase of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* as appropriate to the needs of the ‘Confessing’ cause, the sudden change in the pace and the nature of the Protestant conflict had rendered Marahrens’ relatively accommodating approach to the Nazi State insufficient in the eyes of the ‘Dahlemites’. Since the more radical ‘Dahlemites’ by now perceived a need to respond to Nazism in its entirety and not just its policies with regard to the Church, it was inevitable that they began to move away from Marahrens, whom they ultimately saw as being more accommodating of the Nazi cause than of their own.

Despite ‘Dahlemitic’ disgruntlement with Marahrens’ methods, however, by this phase in the Protestant struggle his theoretical function had nevertheless become one of being a ‘man for all sides’. As a result, his own aims and aspirations subsequently became shaped accordingly. After all, Marahrens’ continued participation in national Church administration demonstrates that he truly believed he was able to achieve a compromise solution that was acceptable to the Protestant Church and the Nazi State alike. Marahrens’ insistence on creating a thoroughly Christocentric Church within a deeply Nazified German State was nonetheless met with criticism, particularly from those in the so-called ‘destroyed’ *Landeskirchen*. For example, in a letter to Marahrens in June 1939, Pastor Asmussen wrote that,

Darum bedaure ich auch, daß ich immer wieder hören muß, wie stark in Hannover die Verschiedenheit gegenüber den preußischen Brüdern verharmlost wird, sobald man für eine bestimmte Kirchenpolitik eine möglichst breite Front darstellen möchte. Ich kann Ihnen gar nicht sagen, wie etwa in den letzten Wochen angesichts Ihrer besonderen kirchenpolitischen Pläne alle Brüder hier in Berlin-Brandenburg innerlich gebangt haben!³⁵⁷

When Pastor Asmussen’s refers to Marahrens’ work in this period as creating a type of “Kirchenpolitik”, this characterises Marahrens’ attempt to fuse the political will of the Nazi State with a traditional Church structure very well. As a result of his increasing entrapment between the parameters of defiance and compliance in the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* – first through the *Intaktheit* of his *Landeskirche*, then via the hopes of the DEK, before finally being appointed official spokesman for the Church by the RMfKA – Marahrens ultimately left the second stage of the Protestant struggle firmly committed to an unrealistic fusion of unchristian Nazism and confessional Lutheranism. Since *Ministerialrat* Stahn had insisted that a strong

³⁵⁷ ‘Brief von Pastor Asmussen an Marahrens’, 22/06/1939, EZA, 50/94, Nr.17.

mediating force was needed between the two extremes of Marahrens and Barth, however, the floor was nonetheless open in this period for another moderate churchman to come to the forefront of the Protestant struggle with a more amenable attempt to bridge existing divisions.

Landesbischof Hans Meiser of Bavaria certainly looked set to fulfill this mediating role, since he had come to the forefront of the Protestant struggle against Nazism voluntarily over the preceding years, and not as the result of requests from either the Church or the State like Marahrens. Meiser's self-instigated establishment of the *lutherischer Flügel* and his natural elevation as spokesman for the Lutheran confession on the national stage demonstrated his personal commitment to seek a resolution to the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, yet did not render him subservient like Marahrens to either the pan-confessional 'Confessing' cause or the increasingly brutal Nazi State. As a result, the freedom that had been afforded him by the *Intaktheit* of his *Landeskirche* ensured that Meiser was not trapped by pressures, whether from the DEK or from the NSDAP. If anything, Meiser's own voluntary entrapment as spokesman for the Lutheran cause only served to reiterate his deep-seated commitment to this specific denomination of German Protestantism. It is in this context, then, that Meiser's commitment to both developing and leading the *lutherischer Flügel* truly reflected the strength of his dedication to finding an alternative solution to the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* that avoided fruitlessly having to unite the polar opposites of Nazism and universal Christianity, just as his counterpart Marahrens was ultimately forced to do.

In spite of the NSDAP's increasing hold over the infrastructure of the DEK, Meiser was able to use his relative freedom to conform to and to reject simultaneously the demands of the Nazi State. For instance, on the occasion of Hitler's birthday in 1939, it was ordered that all Protestant churches in the Third Reich ring their bells in celebration of the event. Despite his *Landeskirche* not officially coming under the jurisdiction of the official administration of the DEKK in this period, Meiser nonetheless issued the declaration that "am 20. April 1939 in der Zeit von 10.15 bis 10.45 Uhr, wie in der gesamten Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche, alle Glocken geläutet werden".³⁵⁸ Since Meiser was undoubtedly the most prominent representative of the Lutheran cause in Nazi Germany at this point, his decision to co-operate with DEKK demands ought not, however, to be seen as endorsement of the Nazi line, but rather as a convenient means of appeasing the State to ensure the continued *Intaktheit* of his ELKB and also to fulfill his Lutheran obligation to give thanks for Germany's secular leadership.

³⁵⁸ 'Bekanntmachung ins Amtsblatt', 15/04/1939, LKAB, Bestand 1978.

It is important to recognise, however, that Meiser only gave praise for Germany's *Führer* in contexts where it did not threaten to overrule his overarching allegiance to God. When the DEKK officially ordered the constituent churches of the DEK to take an oath of allegiance to the Nazi State on 20th April 1938, for example, Meiser publicly refused to do so, aligning himself instead with his counterpart Theophil Wurm in rejecting the action as an infringement of the rights of confessional Lutherans.³⁵⁹ In this respect, Meiser's seemingly contradictory response to the Nazi State during the immediate pre-war years can be seen to be influenced largely by his clear dedication to the Lutheran line, namely offering praise to the State only to the extent that it was God's administrative instrument on earth. In accordance with Lutheran doctrine, Meiser never allowed his commitment to the Nazi State to supersede his overarching dedication to God's eternal spiritual kingdom. It is also worth noting how Meiser presented this stance as one he shared with his Württembergian neighbour Wurm, not only in an effort to rekindle the commonality of cause between the ELKB and the ELLKW of the early *Kirchenkampf* years, but strategically to avoid singling himself out for persecution in the event of potential reprisals by the NSDAP.

Such a 'safety in numbers' approach, in fact, became typical of Meiser's actions during the years of intensifying Nazi violence against the Church. As can be determined from his appeal to the *Bruderrat* of the EKApu just before the State increased its persecution of the wider DEK, Meiser continued to assert his status as part of the 'Confessing' cause. In spite of the relative detachment brought about by his insistence on pursuing a specifically Lutheran way through the Protestant struggle, Meiser explicitly called for the *Bekennende Kirche* to patch up its differences for the sake of presenting a united front against Nazism. With the threat of imminent Church elections, Meiser thus exclaimed that,

Dringend empfehle ich deshalb, doch noch einmal einen Versuch auf dem Wege persönlicher Verhandlungen mit Vertretern des preußischen Landeskirchenausschusses zu machen. Unsere Kirchen und Gemeinden ertragen es nicht, daß die bestehenden Spannungen bis in den Wahlkampf hineinreichen, so daß es u. U. dazu kommt, daß die verschiedenen Teile der Bekennenden Kirche in diesem Kampf gegeneinander statt miteinander gegen den gemeinsamen Gegner antreten.³⁶⁰

Although Meiser tried to enforce ideological change on the *Bruderrat* of the EKApu and encouraged it to engage with the Nazi State during this tumultuous time, he did this because he wanted to arouse as little confrontation as possible from the Nazi State. For Meiser, appearing to accept the NSDAP was the most convenient means to achieve a peaceful

³⁵⁹ Cf. 'Bekanntmachung: Treueid der Geistlichen', 12/05/1938, LKAB, Bestand 1665.

³⁶⁰ 'Brief von Meiser an den Bruderrat der evangelischen Kirche der altpreußischen Union, z.H. von Herrn Präses Jakobi', 19/02/1937, EZA, 50/185, Nr.39.

resolution to the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* which was in accordance with the dictates of confessional Lutheranism and not in total contradiction to the aims of the RMfKA. As is implied by the words quoted above, Meiser believed the activism of the ‘Dahlemites’ against Germany’s Nazi regime served only to intensify the conflict. As can be reasonably inferred from his parallel Lutheran unification efforts, the underlying implication of Meiser’s instruction to the churches of the EKApu was for them to look to their common Lutheran element in an effort to bridge the divisions of the *Bekennende Kirche*. Although there can be no doubt that Meiser issued this directive in an attempt to strengthen the DEK as an effective force to protect German Protestantism in the pre-war years, his encouragement of the *Bruderrat* of the EKApu to foster amical relations with the rest of the DEK through its underlying Lutheran identity was undoubtedly advantageous to his wider plan of reasserting the Lutheranism behind the United EKApu and, ultimately, establishing a national German Lutheran Church.

Further to this, it is clear to see that, whereas the change in the State’s policy towards the Church in 1937 provoked Marahrens to ‘soften’ his approach to the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* into one of all-round conciliation, the intensification of State measures against the Church in this period served only to strengthen Meiser’s adherence to the *lutherischer Flügel* and encouraged him to retreat from the frontline of the battle. Whereas Meiser originally justified his support for Kerl’s RKA via the dictates of confessional Lutheranism, from 1937 onwards he came to use the Lutheran confession as a means of defence against the intrusive Nazi State by continually attempting to transform the DEK into a specifically Lutheran entity which could not be harmed by secular measures. In a completely opposite manner to Marahrens, then, Meiser used the freedom afforded him by the *Intaktheit* of his ELKB to build a wider ‘free’ Lutheran space on the national level of ecclesiastical administration which, instead of trapping Meiser between the ‘Dahlemites’ and the NSDAP, actually helped him to continue to foster a more moderate position that satisfied both the Church and the State even during the immediate pre-war years.

Following the fall of the Third Reich, Meiser reflected on his position in the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* during the central years of Germany’s Nazi administration and confessed that,

Wenn ich einmal wegen meiner Stellung zur Kirche und zu unserer lutherischen Kirche zur Rechenschaft gezogen werden sollte, dann würde ich mich lieber dem Vorwurf aussetzen, zu lutherisch gewesen zu sein, als daß man mir vorwerfen möchte, ich sei meiner lutherischen Kirche etwas schuldig

geblieben.³⁶¹

As is clear from his reflections, then, Meiser considered his fostering of the *lutherischer Flügel* as the best means by which he was able to honour the *Intaktheit* of his own *Landeskirche*, namely by attempting to spread the very model that had ensured its freedom to the rest of the DEK. This involved emphasising the common confessional element of Lutheranism prevalent in the 'intact' and 'destroyed' *Landeskirchen* alike. Even though his southern German neighbour, Theophil Wurm, was the only other representative of the *lutherischer Flügel* at this stage who was committed to the unification of the DEK in the interests of the Protestant Church alone, since Marahrens had been forced by now into heeding the aims for German Protestantism of the Nazi State, Meiser intended the new German Protestant Church to be specifically Lutheran in nature.

As much as Meiser looked to his Württembergian neighbour for support with his fostering of a specifically Lutheran Protestant community in Germany, however, it cannot be denied that, even at this stage in the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, *Landesbischof* Theophil Wurm had a far wider agenda for the future of the DEK. That is not to say that Wurm did not also offer demonstrations of acquiescence to the Nazi State though, particularly in light of its intensifying hostility, which provoked increasingly more churchmen to toe the Nazi line in an effort to save themselves from reprisals. For example, in response to Hitler's annexation of Austria in 1938, Wurm issued a public declaration of gratitude for the expansion of the Third Reich, framing the annexation as an expression of God's Will. Wurm proclaimed that,

Wir freuen uns von Herzen, daß Gott es dem Führer des deutschen Volkes geschenkt hat, seine Heimat zurückzugewinnen und mit dem Reich der Deutschen wieder zu vereinigen. [...] Wir freuen uns, daß durch die Befreiungstat des Führers auch für unsere Glaubensgenossen in Österreich der Weg in die deutsche evangelische Kirche frei geworden ist. Und wir bitten Gott, daß er uns bald eine geeinte deutsche evangelische Kirche schenken, die im Gehorsam gegen ihren Herrn Jesus Christus und in voller Freiheit ihren Dienst am Volk ausrichten darf.³⁶²

Although Wurm clearly portrayed Hitler, not only as God's divinely-appointed leader on earth, but also as the saviour of the pan-Germanic Church, there can be no doubt that Wurm usurped the occasion as a public, yet subtle, platform to reinforce the urgency for a firmly united German Protestant Church that was free to serve the Germanic people independently of the dictates of the Nazi State. In spite of the fact that Wurm's words of praise for Germany's *Führer* can be seen as an expression of his underlying support for the NSDAP, it must not be overlooked that, by framing his appeal for a solution to the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* within

³⁶¹ Quoted in Heiwik, 1956, p.36 (date of quotation unknown).

³⁶² 'Wurm zur Annexion Österreich', 16/03/1939, EZA, 50/182, Nr.22.

such an expression of gratitude for Germany's secular leadership, Wurm was ultimately able to instrumentalise a moment of national fervour to his own advantage, namely to raise awareness of the DEK's predicament on the national stage. To a certain extent, then, Wurm's ability to turn the public focus from the elation at the annexation of Austria to the uncertain predicament of the DEK can also be seen as an implicit attempt to convey his dissatisfaction with the so-called *Anschluss* and to criticise the State for its failure to make sure that the appropriate infrastructure was in place before it proceeded with its territorial aims. The underlying hostility of Wurm's words are testified to by his subtle reference to Hitler's own 'foreignness' as an Austrian and as someone who Wurm paints as having hedonistically satisfied his own needs first without full consideration of the effects this was to have on institutional Protestantism in Germany at large.

Despite his underlying disgruntlement with the expansionist aims of the NSDAP, however, Wurm was nonetheless careful not to target his aggression in this period directly at Hitler himself who, owing to his top-down mode of governance, had delegated the care of Church affairs to the supervision of the RMfKA. Most notably, in response to plans to demolish the *Matthäuskirche* in Munich in 1938, Wurm appealed directly to Hitler on behalf of all three bishops of the 'intact' churches to stop the destruction. He pleaded that,

Wir müssen darüber Beschwerde führen, daß die staatliche Stelle, die zur Ausführung des Willens des Führers in den kirchlichen Angelegenheiten berufen ist, diesem Willen zuwiderhandelt und die Volksgemeinschaft gefährdet. / [...] Die Mißachtung der evangelischen Kirche von seiten staatlicher Organe wird dadurch in verletzender und aufreizender Weise zum Ausdruck gebracht. [...] Wir können nicht glauben, daß die planmäßige Entrechtung und Zerstörung der evangelischen Kirche Ihre Billigung findet.³⁶³

Wurm's words clearly convey the sentiment that, although the bishops were infuriated by the decision of the State to demolish the *Matthäuskirche*, they still had faith that Hitler himself neither instigated nor endorsed the ruling. By distinguishing Hitler's leadership from the actions of his RMfKA henchmen in his protestations, Wurm was conveniently able to convey the bishops' displeasure at the State's measures without criticising the 'core' of the NSDAP itself, and thereby avoid accusations of high treason such as those levelled against the second VKL as a result of its *Gebetsliturgie* of the same year. Although Wurm's reluctance to criticise the nucleus of Germany's Nazi movement in this period for its demonstrations of violence both in and outside the Church undoubtedly casts doubt on his sense of Christian morality, it must ultimately be appreciated that this was a necessary tactic to avoid the abolition of the last remaining example of 'intact' Protestantism in Germany protected by all three bishops

³⁶³ Wurm quoted in Sautter, 1960, pp.54-55.

represented in his letter.

Moreover, it is significant that it was Wurm who protested to Germany's *Führer* on behalf of the *lutherischer Flügel* in this instance. Even though this may initially appear surprising, particularly since the *Matthäuskirche* fell firmly within Meiser's ELKB, it can be argued, nevertheless, that Wurm was the only *Landesbischof* in a position to complain to Hitler at this point in the Third Reich. After all, Marahrens by now had too much to lose with the weight of the Nazi State scrutinising his every move, and Meiser, as the self-appointed head of the *lutherischer Flügel*, could not afford to infuriate the NSDAP and thereby endanger his Lutheran unification efforts. As a result of Marahrens' enforced participation in the national Protestant conflict as chief negotiator between the Church and the State, then, and Meiser's parallel, albeit voluntary, involvement as spokesman for the specifically Lutheran unification effort in Nazi Germany, Wurm was the only bishop left in the 'intact' dynamic who could realistically protest on the national level without bringing down any part of the wider Protestant conciliation effort.

Without such a central role on the national stage, since his participation in the KFA had ultimately been superseded by Marahrens' representation of the KFK in the *Kasseler Gremium*, it can be argued that Wurm's contribution to the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* in the central years of the conflict served purely to maintain equilibrium between the responses of the *lutherischer Flügel* and the more radical elements of the *Bekennende Kirche* to the intensification of Nazi secular policies. Once the Nazi regime began to increase its attack on the DEK in 1937, Wurm continued in his protests on behalf of Protestant interests, yet increasingly turned toward the Lutheran line established by Meiser and away from the appeal to universal Christian values typical of his protestations in the early years of the Protestant struggle. The extent to which the increasing hostility of the NSDAP towards German Protestantism forced Wurm to temper his protestations and adopt specifically Lutheran arguments is demonstrated by his own description of his *Landeskirche* in 1938. Despite his initial milder interpretation of confessional Lutheranism during the preceding phase of RKA administration, Wurm saw his *Landeskirche* at this point in the Third Reich as belonging firmly to the *lutherischer Flügel*. Describing the ELLKW in the immediate pre-war era, Wurm stated that,

Aus ihrem Charakter als lutherische Kirche folgt notwendig, daß sie sich innerhalb der DEK, die einen Bund bekenntnisbestimmter Kirchen darstellt, den lutherischen Kirchen zurechnet, die eine Neugestaltung der DEK unter Wahrung des Bekenntnisstandes und einen engeren Zusammenschluß der

By positioning his *Landeskirche* alongside Meiser's ELKB in this period of heightened Nazi violence, therefore, Wurm found a convenient means by which he could soften his open protestations to the State and, thereby, avoid incurring revenge attacks from Nazi agents.

Unlike Marahrens and Meiser, then, who were both involved in negotiations with the Nazi State on the national level during this period, Wurm's relative lack of obligation to proponents of Nazism meant that he was free both to issue subtle protests over the NSDAP's secular policies and to work solely within the parameters of the *Bekennende Kirche*, between *Resistenz* and *Widerstand*, to foster unity within the 'Confessing' cause. Although Marahrens and Meiser were both at the forefront of the Protestant struggle against Nazism during this period, whether involuntarily or willingly, their respective attempts at engaging with the Nazi State left Wurm free to work solely on resolving the intra-Church conflict – an effort which, as the subsequent chapter of this dissertation will demonstrate, was to prove crucial to the third and final stage of the Protestant Church Struggle in Nazi Germany.

Chapter Summary

To begin to summarise the findings of this chapter, it must first be accepted that it deals with undoubtedly the most complicated stage of the Protestant struggle in the Third Reich, particularly in light of the advent of *staatliche Kirchenpolitik* and its transition from moderate negotiation to brutal persecution in the space of only a few years. For this reason, *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm, despite all being members of the *lutherischer Flügel*, were forced to develop different roles within their particular dynamic of 'intact' churches. These differences in their positions during this period ultimately came about as a result of the politico-ecclesiastical tendencies they had displayed in the initial years of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*.

Taking Marahrens' predicament first, then, it is evident that his conciliatory approach during the first stage of the Protestant struggle saw him enthusiastically embrace the prospect of co-operation with Hanns Kerrl and his RKA in the central years of the conflict. Once the church committees failed, however, and Kerrl blatantly blackmailed Marahrens publicly to

³⁶⁴ 'Wurm zur kirchlichen Lage Württembergs', Brief an sämtliche Dekanatämter, 11/03/1938, EZA, 50/182, Nr.20.

compel him to continue to work with the RMfKA, since he made clear that any failure to do so would result in the instant annihilation of the DEK, Marahrens' power to move the 'intact' dynamic back into a force for negotiation in the best interests of German Protestantism had naturally diminished. Having been trapped by his earlier successes in the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, therefore, Marahrens ended the phase of *staatliche Kirchenpolitik* fruitlessly balancing the polarities of ambitions for German Protestantism of both the Church and the State. Although Marahrens' continued commitment to achieving conciliation between Church and State authorities must be commended in light of the increasing difficulty after 1937 of maintaining such a 'middle-grounded' position, it must nonetheless be acknowledged that the politico-ecclesiastical atmosphere of the time allowed Marahrens to practise no other stance. After all, since all factions of the German Protestant Church and the Nazi State equally looked to Marahrens during this period in the hope that he would work in favour of their own design for German Protestantism, it is no wonder that Marahrens was reluctant to move towards a more polarising position in the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* for fear of destroying his Church unification efforts. This reluctance was also enhanced by the fact that Kerrl had put the fate of institutional Protestantism in Germany in Marahrens' hands alone in the immediate pre-war years.

Like Marahrens, Wurm was also forced to quell his protestations against Nazi agents in this period as Nazi violence rapidly intensified. Even though Wurm had never practised High Lutheranism like his counterparts Marahrens and Meiser, he was increasingly forced to frame his arguments against Nazism during this phase within specifically Lutheran logic to ensure that he was able to continue to appeal for the benefit of the Protestant Church on the national level without evoking undue reprisals from the Nazi State. Although his lack of connection to national Church governance afforded him the freedom to comment on political developments, Wurm nonetheless had to do so subtly via Lutheran doctrine. This allowed him to distance himself from the more direct defiance of the 'Dahlemites' and, thereby, to avoid persecution from Nazi agencies. Wurm's lack of involvement in national Church administration was, however, no negative development in this period, since his relative lack of prominence in national Church affairs left him free to work firmly within the *Bekennende Kirche*. Since Wurm had not lost as much respect as Marahrens and Meiser in the eyes of the 'Dahlemites', who viewed the bishops' co-operation with the NSDAP during this period as traitorous to the 'Confessing' cause, Wurm was able to lay the foundations for his eventual rise to the leadership of the 'intact' dynamic in the third and final stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*. By ultimately positioning himself at the less radical end of the *lutherischer Flügel*, Wurm

may not have been able to influence the Church line to the extent of his Bavarian neighbour Meiser, yet his constantly oscillating appeal to both the High Lutherans and the more unionistic ‘Dahlemites’ was to prove crucial in earning Wurm the respect he needed to move the ‘intact’ dynamic on after the onset of the Second World War.

As the founder of the *lutherischer Flügel*, however, Meiser used the phase of *staatliche Kirchenpolitik* to develop further his commitment to confessional Lutheranism as a solid foundation for Church conciliation. While Marahrens was busy holding the polarities of Church and State ambitions at arm’s length, and Wurm was pre-occupied ‘backstage’ reconciling the conflicting branches of the *Bekennende Kirche*, Meiser was free to come to the forefront of the ‘intact’ dynamic as chief representative of the Lutheran cause. In developing a uniquely confessional approach to the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* which did not openly contradict the designs for German Protestantism of both the Nazi State and the Church, Meiser ultimately devised an effective means both to encourage intra-Church unification and to protect the essence of institutional Protestantism in Germany at large. Whereas both Marahrens and Wurm were forced to ‘soften’ their responses to Nazism in line with the State’s increasing persecution of the Church from 1937 onwards, Meiser was able to draw on the protection afforded to him as leader of the *lutherischer Flügel* to continue his own Lutheran unification efforts and, in doing so, undermining the power of the State over Church affairs.

Although the last section of this chapter suggests that the ‘Meiser Years’ of 1935 to 1939 may indeed be seen as a move towards an ‘acquiescing’ Church, Meiser’s instigation of a specifically Lutheran way for German Protestantism was, in fact, no negative development in the history of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* itself, even though it controversially provided the bishops with a theological rationale for not commenting on the State’s escalating persecution of the Jews in this period. Looking at the Protestant predicament alone, then, it can be seen that Marahrens’ ability to put an end to the Protestant struggle in Nazi Germany for the benefit of the Church ceased after Hanns Kerrl recruited him to serve the interests of the Nazi State. Similarly, although the *lutherischer Flügel* provided Wurm with a means to ‘soften’ his inherent pietism and continued associations with the more universalised Protestantism of the wider Church resistance movement, these underlying preferences still shone through in Wurm’s work. Meiser’s ability to transform and subsequently lead the ‘intact’ dynamic into the specifically *lutherischer Flügel* in this period, however, ultimately allowed the ‘intact’ churches to act as a bulwark to prevent the Nazi State from completely destroying the DEK. Whereas Victoria Barnett once characterised the “concessions made to the official church” as

“symbols of acquiescence to the Nazi regime”,³⁶⁵ a quotation that provided the inspiration for the title of the final sub-section of this chapter, the compromises fostered by the confessional Lutheranism of the ‘Meiser Years’ must be seen, rather, as necessary manoeuvres that helped to preserve the essence of German Protestantism through the most brutal era of Nazi violence towards the Church. By establishing the *lutherischer Flügel* during this period, Meiser not only revealed himself as “spiritus rector und Promoter des lutherischen Zusammenschlusses, Sprecher der Lutheraner im Kreis der deutschen Kirchenführer,”³⁶⁶ but, more importantly, succeeded in shielding the ‘intact’ dynamic which he shared with Marahrens and Wurm with a strong sense of faith and spirituality that was impenetrable even by the most violent secular policies.

³⁶⁵ Barnett, 1992, p.98.

³⁶⁶ Braun, 1986, p.624.

CHAPTER THREE – 1939-1945: THE WURM YEARS

Although *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm still continued to lead the only three ‘intact’ Protestant *Landeskirchen* in Nazi Germany, by the onset of the Second World War in 1939 it was apparent that their membership of this special ‘intact’ club did not hold the same benefits for each of the three men. August Marahrens of Hanover, for instance, had started out in 1933 as the only bishop of an ‘intact’ church to object outwardly to the GDC-led *Reichskirche*. By 1939, however, Marahrens had been incrementally pulled into co-operation with both the ‘German Christians’ and the NSDAP as a result of his steadfast dedication to the Church and his parallel loyalty to the German nation state. This had the result that, by the time war broke out in Europe, Marahrens’ politico-ecclesiastical policies edged ever closer to the Nazi line. By contrast, *Landesbischöfe* Hans Meiser of Bavaria and Theophil Wurm of Württemberg had moved from an initial, albeit strategic, acceptance of the GDC in the initial years of the Third Reich to attempts to maintain distance from the increasing radicalism of the movement in the immediate pre-war period. Whereas Meiser had found protection from escalating Nazi violence via the constraints of his Lutheran confession, however, Wurm evidently became ever more galvanised by the potential of German Protestantism to act as a united force against the might of Nazism. This had the result that, by 1939, the original commonality of cause between the two southern German *Landesbischöfe* was rapidly diminishing. With the tensions of war about to add to the crisis of conscience experienced by all three of the bishops, this chapter initially assesses the effect of the Second World War on the actions and attitudes of the *Landesbischöfe*, and demonstrates how the conditions of war in Germany served to reinforce the bishops’ individual politico-ecclesiastical positions as they had been developing since 1933.

Before this part of the investigation can begin, however, it should be noted that, although the breadth of time covered in this chapter is considerably larger than in the previous two sections of this inquiry, this disparity is largely due to a change in pace and atmosphere of the specifically Protestant *Kirchenkampf*. Despite the increased tensions between the German Protestant Church and the Nazi State following the collapse of Kerl’s church committees, the NSDAP rapidly lost interest in *staatliche Kirchenpolitik* from late 1939 onwards³⁶⁷ as it began to turn its attentions to the very real prospect of eastward expansion and the fulfilment of its desire to eliminate Jewish influence in Europe. Although the NSDAP had been gradually

³⁶⁷ Helmreich, 1979, p.308.

increasing its policies of violence and discrimination against the Jews since coming to power in 1933, it was in the period after 1939 that Nazi policies visibly began to head towards extermination.³⁶⁸ After invading and capturing Poland in September 1939, the Nazis began to deploy SS *Einsatztruppen* in its captured territories to force the Jews into ghettos.³⁶⁹ On 12th February 1940, the first German Jews were deported to Poland.³⁷⁰ As ever more nations fell to Nazi troops in the ensuing months and the Nazis forged alliances with eastern European nations,³⁷¹ mass deportations of Jews to the east begin in earnest. Most poignantly, on 1st September 1941, German Jews were ordered into forced labour and were forced to wear the Star of David on their chests.³⁷² During this year, the mass murder of Jews also became commonplace by SS *Einsatztruppen* in seized lands, with almost 34,000 Jews shot near Kiev, and 23,000 in the Ukraine in September alone.³⁷³ On 23rd October 1941, the fate of the Jews in captured territories was sealed when the Nazis forbade their emigration from the Reich.³⁷⁴ In 1942, mass killings of the Jews began in Auschwitz and other extermination camps erected by the Nazis.³⁷⁵ As well as brutally murdering their prisoners, the Nazis conducted brutal experimentations, sterilisations and castrations in the camps.³⁷⁶ However, on 2nd February 1943, the Nazis suffered their first major military defeat at Stalingrad, which marked the beginning of the end of the Third Reich.³⁷⁷ By 1944, in light of increasing German military defeats,³⁷⁸ the Nazis ceased to use the gas chambers in Auschwitz and ordered their destruction. As Allied troops advanced into German territories from both the eastern and the western fronts in 1945, the Nazis ordered their prisoners on ‘death marches’ out of the camps to ensure that “not a single prisoner from the concentration camps falls alive into the hands of

³⁶⁸ This dissertation deals with the debate between the ‘intentionalist’ and ‘structuralist’ interpretations of Nazi violence on p.152.

³⁶⁹ Reinhard Heydrich issued the guidelines for the deployments on 21st September 1939 (cf. Friedländer, 2007, p.30).

³⁷⁰ Eight hundred Jews were deported from Stettin and Schneidemühl to Lublin (cf. *ibid.*, p.35).

³⁷¹ The Nazis soon occupied Denmark, Norway, France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Greece. In November 1940, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia became Nazi allies. For details of the general development of the Second World War and Nazi military victories in this era, cf. Weinberg, 1994; specifically for details on victories in Poland (p.57), Denmark and Norway (p.116), France (pp.130-131), the Soviet Union (p.205), the Balkans (pp.216-224), and North Africa (p.348).

³⁷² Cf. Friedländer, 2007, pp.251-256.

³⁷³ Reinhard Heydrich gave the order for the execution of all Jewish prisoners of war on 17th July 1941 (cf. *ibid.*, pp.207-241). For details of the mass shootings in Kiev, cf. *ibid.*, pp.215-219 and p.293.

³⁷⁴ Hermann Göring, however, forbade the emigration of Jews from France and Belgium even earlier on 20th May 1941 (cf. *ibid.*, p.136).

³⁷⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, pp.351-395.

³⁷⁶ For more details, cf. Lifton, 1987 and Baumslag, 2005.

³⁷⁷ For details, cf. Weinberg, 1994, pp.453-454.

³⁷⁸ After the Battle of Stalingrad, German troops surrendered to the Allies in North Africa in 1943, whilst Russian troops advanced to the Polish border. On 6th June 1944, the Allies invaded France in the ‘D-Day’ landings. As a result, captured territories began to be liberated on both the eastern and western flanks. For details, cf. Weinberg, 1994.

the enemy”.³⁷⁹ Although there is much debate over exactly how many people lost their lives at the hands of Nazi brutality in this era,³⁸⁰ it cannot be denied that millions of Jews, Soviet prisoners of war, Roma and Sinti gypsies, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, the handicapped, and political and religious dissenters fell victim to the Nazi killing machine, as well as both military personnel and civilians in the war.

Although the specifically Protestant struggle against Nazism did not cease during these tumultuous years, the conflict developed at a much slower speed than during the early stages of the Third Reich. Since the NSDAP was by now targeting its aggression at other societal groups, the measures of the Nazi State against the DEK in particular had become relatively subdued during this period. For these reasons, even though this chapter deals with exactly half of the chronology of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, the issues affecting the Protestant Church during the final six years of the Third Reich are roughly equivalent in number to those of the earlier but shorter stages of the Protestant conflict. The structure of this chapter nonetheless shows that a reduction in the State’s interest in the fate of German Protestantism did not bring a simplification of the conflict for the DEK. On the contrary, due to the intensification of the State’s policies of racial discrimination and its persecution of those societal groups judged ‘unworthy of life’ in the Third Reich,³⁸¹ the nature of the Protestant struggle naturally expanded from one of a purely Church-based conflict to one concerned with the wider moral obligation of the Christian Church to protect God’s people on earth. To accommodate this widening of the character of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, then, the second section of this chapter deals with the responses of *Landesbischofe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm to pressing humanitarian concerns. Although the bishops arguably had ample opportunity in the pre-war years to protest to the NSDAP about its violations of human rights, it must be appreciated that it was only in this period that the bishops were actually forced to take position on Nazi violence and discrimination when Nazi racial laws intruded directly into Church governance once the DEKK endorsed the segregation of non-Aryans Christians and declared Nazi racial laws as no business of the Church. For this reason, this chapter will first examine the bishops’

³⁷⁹ Himmler issued the order for the death marches with this justification (cf. Friedländer, 2007, p.648).

³⁸⁰ Although it has become commonplace since 1945 to speak of the Nazi death toll as comprising around six million Jews, this figure is based on the definition of the Holocaust as the Nazis’ attempt to eliminate European Jewry only. If the Holocaust is taken in its broadest sense to refer to every societal group that lost their lives at the hands of the Nazis, however, the number of victims has been pitched as high as seventeen million. This number could also be even higher if we add to this the total number of people who were not directly murdered by the Nazis but died as a result of starvation, persecution, experimentation and mistreatment (cf. Niewyk and Nicosia, 2000, pp.45-52).

³⁸¹ This statement has its origins in the Nazi designation *lebensunwertes Leben* and is, in no way, a reflection of the attitudes of the author.

reaction to the ‘German Christian’ position towards non-Aryan Christians, before moving on to investigate the bishops’ positions towards wider violations of human rights, including the NSDAP’s programme of euthanasia for the severely disabled and the elderly, and the persecution of the Jews of Europe.

It is only against this doubly-reinforced backdrop of hardship and mass-murder, fostered both by the conditions of war and the ruthless Nazi killing machine, that the reactions of the *Landesbischöfe* to the original disunity of the German Protestant Church can ultimately be assessed in the final section of this investigation. Taking the universal despondency of the time as its impetus for intra-Church unification, then, the third section of this chapter assesses the capacity and capability of each of the *Landesbischöfe* to enact structural change within German Protestantism. Since Marahrens eventually proved himself unable to retreat from his course of mediation between Church and State interests, and Meiser found himself stuck on the course of Lutheran isolation he had established in the pre-war years, this chapter traces the origins of Theophil Wurm’s national Church leadership credentials, which were ultimately to give rise to the ‘Wurm Years’ of ecumenical reconciliation.

The Dictates of War

To begin this investigation into the effect of war on the bishops’ individual politico-ecclesiastical positions in this phase of the Third Reich, it must be appreciated that *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm did not only have to contend with the challenges that war brought to Germany, but also the particular developments which increased Nazi aggression brought to the Church. On the same day as Nazi Germany invaded Poland, namely 1st September 1939, Hanns Kerrl inflicted further structural change on German Protestantism as revenge for the collapse of his church committees and the continued refusal of the Church to heed State demands. In an effort to gain further control over the administration of the DEK, Kerrl began to compartmentalise Church authority and, to this end, formally decreed the separation of the administrative governance of the DEK from the organisation of its spiritual affairs.³⁸² Kerrl’s actions did not come as a complete surprise to the DEK, however, which had been left ever since the collapse of the RKA under the official leadership of the predominantly ‘German Christian’ DEKK. The implication of a Church controlled solely by the DEKK was that its leader, Dr. Werner, was able to combine his

³⁸² Melzer, 1991, p.46.

headship of the organisation with his parallel leadership over the *Finanzabteilungen* of the EKApU. This resulted in the ‘Dahlemitic’ strand of the *Bekennende Kirche* viewing the Church under Werner’s governance as nothing more than an “Einmannkirche”.³⁸³

Since Werner had already been asserting increasing control over the finances of the DEK since 1937, once he got wind of Kerrl’s plan to divide formally the administration of Church affairs into spiritual and bureaucratic matters, Werner began to establish a suitable team to see to the spiritual governance of the Church which did not threaten to impair his likely domination over national Church finances. Already a week before the outbreak of war, therefore, Dr. Werner called for *Landesbischof* August Marahrens of Hanover, *Oberkonsistorialrat* Friedrich Hymmen of the EKApU and *Landesbischof* Walther Schultz of Mecklenburg to form “ein Kreis führender kirchlicher Männer” to complement his administrative leadership of the DEK with spiritual instruction.³⁸⁴ Although debate ensued throughout the ranks of the KFK as to the suitability of this new governing structure for the national Protestant Church, principally fuelled by the fact that Werner, Hymmen and Schultz were all prominent *Deutsche Christen*, by the time Kerrl issued his decree, the three men already felt themselves bound to Werner’s call, and the *Geistlicher Vertrauensrat* (GVR), as envisaged by Werner, was thus formed.³⁸⁵

Inevitably conceptualised, despite Marahrens’ presence, as a specifically ‘German Christian’ instrument of Church governance, the GVR assumed spiritual leadership over the DEK from 1940 onwards.³⁸⁶ In an effort to quell opposition, however, Dr. Werner was quick to rebrand the GVR as “kein geistliches Ministerium [...], sondern ein Gremium von Vertrauensleuten der hinter ihnen stehenden Kreise von Landeskirchenführern”.³⁸⁷ With Marahrens on side, who was by now representing a multiplicity of various interests of both the Church and the State, there can be no doubt that Dr. Werner manipulated Marahrens’ apparent status as “*pastor pastorum*”³⁸⁸ at the start of this phase of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, both to persuade Kerrl to endorse his GVR and to appease the KFK. Even though Marahrens technically led the KFK through his presidency of its executive committee, the KFA, it must not be overlooked that by now Meiser had also become a prominent

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., pp.48-49.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Krüger and Noss, 1999, p.166.

³⁸⁷ ‘Brief von Schulz an Landesbischof Sasse’, 04/09/1939, quoted in Melzer, 1991, p.52.

³⁸⁸ Cf. Ködderitz, 1952.

“Wortführer” in the organisation,³⁸⁹ owing to the authority gained through his recent ability to present himself as leader of the *lutherischer Flügel*. Since Meiser had personally called for a prominent member of the KFK to sit on the proposed GVR to keep the *Deutsche Christen* in check,³⁹⁰ Marahrens was doubly obligated to join the spiritual *Gremium* by both top-down pressure emanating from the RMfKA and the bottom-up demands of the KFK. Confirming his inescapable sense of duty to the GVR in this period,³⁹¹ Marahrens told his fellow Church leaders that he found himself, “angesichts der augenblicklichen Lage [...] verpflichtet [...], von [seinen] Bedenken abzusehen und diesem Ersuchen zu entsprechen”.³⁹²

To view Marahrens as the KFK’s representative of choice for the GVR is, however, problematic, since relations between Marahrens and the other Protestant church leaders, including his counterparts Meiser and Wurm, had undoubtedly soured over recent months. Not only had Marahrens lost the respect of the more radical members of the *Bekennende Kirche* in the autumn of 1938 when his refusal to sign the Confessing *Gebetsliturgie* in response to the Czech crisis was seen as a major blow to the Church resistance movement,³⁹³ but his open endorsement of Kerrl’s *Fünf Grundsätze* for the DEK in the summer of 1939 had caused a major rift between Marahrens on the one hand, and Meiser and Wurm on the other. Kerrl’s *Fünf Grundsätze* were essentially a modified form of the *Godesberger Erklärung*, which was originally issued by the GDC on 4th April 1939 in an attempt to assert the superiority of the Christian tradition over Judaism.³⁹⁴ Kerrl’s *Grundsätze*, by extension, attempted to formulate a working agreement between the fundamentally incompatible Nazi *Weltanschauung* and specifically Protestant Christian doctrine.³⁹⁵ Kerrl claimed that his *Grundsätze* reinforced the supremacy of the Nazi *Weltanschauung* over the secular sphere, whilst they sought to prevent this *Weltanschauung* becoming a religion in its own right.³⁹⁶ Moderate churchmen nonetheless viewed the *Grundsätze* as detrimental to the infallible status of the Word and Will of God. Due to the claim of Kerrl’s first *Satz*, which stated that the Nazi

³⁸⁹ Melzer, 1991, p.53.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Marahrens’ sense of obligation is also alluded to in Klügel, 1964, p.375 and Helmreich, 1979, p.305.

³⁹² ‘Brief von Marahrens an die Mitglieder der KFK’, 01/09/1939, quoted in Melzer, 1991, p.54.

³⁹³ Meier, 1967 (Bd.3), p.35. It should be noted here that, even though Meiser and Wurm also refused to sign the liturgy, the majority of antagonism was targeted towards Marahrens in his capacity as national conciliator.

³⁹⁴ The *Godesberger Erklärung* stated that National Socialism was the logical *Vollendung* of Martin Luther’s work. In its mission to eradicate Jewish influence from the Church, the *Erklärung* also made provision for the foundation of the *Institut zur Erforschung und Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben* (cf. Heschel, 1994, pp.590-591).

³⁹⁵ ‘Die Fünf Grundsätze des Reichskirchenministers’ are reproduced in full in Klügel, 1965, pp.153-154.

³⁹⁶ Brunotte, 1977, p.27.

Weltanschauung was also “für den christlichen Deutschen verbindlich”,³⁹⁷ many saw Kerrl’s *Grundsätze* as a direct intrusion of earthly principles into spiritual affairs.³⁹⁸ Marahrens eventually gave his endorsement to the *Grundsätze* on 23rd June 1939 in his capacity as *Landesbischof* of the ELLKH, but he did not do so before holding an emergency meeting of the KFK on 31st May 1939 to negotiate the *Grundsätze* with his fellow Church leaders. He subsequently presented to Kerrl a list of amendments which would be necessary before the KFK could guarantee its commitment to the reform.³⁹⁹ Unsurprisingly, however, in light of his insistence that Marahrens push through his reform on the national Church level, Kerrl refused the KFK’s amendments on 1st June 1939. In order to appease the State, Marahrens went ahead and agreed to the original *Grundsätze*, along with two other ‘German Christian’ clergymen,⁴⁰⁰ rendering him not only unpopular with the ‘Dahlemites’ but also with his more moderate counterparts in the *Lutherrat*. As Heidrun Becker confirms, “Selbst mit den lutherischen Landesbischöfen Meiser und Wurm und dem Lutherrat kam es aufgrund des Alleingangs von Marahrens zu schwerwiegenden Differenzen”.⁴⁰¹ Marahrens’ signing of the *Grundsätze* thus brought about a situation in which he came to be stuck “in einer kirchenpolitisch recht isolierten Position”.⁴⁰²

Since Meiser and Wurm had both flatly refused to sign in acceptance of Kerrl’s *Fünf Grundsätze*, then, the distance between Marahrens and his ‘intact’ counterparts in this period became ever more apparent. As Gertraud Grünzinger explains, in giving his agreement to the *Grundsätze*, Marahrens “zog den Unwillen des bayerischen Landesbischofs Meiser und seines württembergischen Amtskollegen Wurm auf sich”.⁴⁰³ Whilst Meiser and Wurm were evidently uneasy about Marahrens’ increasing willingness to co-operate with prominent members of the GDC, as well as his tendency to succumb to State demands, they nonetheless knew that a GVR without Marahrens’ presence could prove fatal to German Protestantism. In short, then, as long as Marahrens remained part of their ‘intact’ dynamic, Meiser and Wurm had to have faith in his capacity to moderate the extreme ‘German Christian’ tendencies of his colleagues, Hymmen and Schultz, on the national level. At the same time, however, Marahrens was also aware that he had to keep Meiser and Wurm on side if he was to regain

³⁹⁷ Klügel, 1965, p.153.

³⁹⁸ Brunotte, 1977, p.27.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., pp.27-28. (The ‘durch die KFK abgeänderte Form der fünf Grundsätze’ are reproduced in Klügel, 1965, pp.154-155.)

⁴⁰⁰ Namely *Landesbischof* Helmut Johnsen of Brunswick and Pastor Karlheinz Happich, chairman of the committee for the *Landeskirche* of Hesse-Waldeck (Helmreich, 1979, p.234).

⁴⁰¹ Becker, 1996, p.93.

⁴⁰² Melzer, 1991, p.59.

⁴⁰³ Grünzinger, 2009.

the trust of the more radical ‘Dahlemites’ and to convince them that he was not submitting to the aims of the GDC, but rather working in defence of the original Protestant confessions. Although Marahrens viewed Meiser and Wurm’s refusal to co-operate with Kerrl’s latest attempt at Church reform as edging dangerously close to ‘Dahlemitic’ radicalism,⁴⁰⁴ he nonetheless had to have faith that the limitations imposed by their common membership of the ‘intact’ club prevented Meiser and Wurm from crossing the boundary towards more direct defiance. In view of the bishops’ entanglement within their ‘intact’ dynamic, then, it is incorrect to view Marahrens as having directly opposed the politico-ecclesiastical positions of Meiser and Wurm at the start of the Second World War. Instead, an underlying mutual interdependency between the *Landesbischöfe* must be seen as keeping the three men working within the remit of moderation and, ultimately, as holding the ‘intact’ dynamic together. Karl-Heinrich Melzer has summed up this unspoken yet strategic bond between Marahrens on the one hand, and Meiser and Wurm on the other. As he put it,

Wenn [Marahrens] auch von Meiser und Wurm keinen Gang nach Canossa verlangte, so forderte er doch eine einmütige Vertrauenskundgebung seitens der süddeutschen Bischöfe. Weil aber weder Wurm noch Meiser selber Neigung verspürten, in dieses Gremium einzutreten, blieb ihnen nichts anderes übrig, als Marahrens zu bestätigen, daß man seine bekenntnismäßige Haltung nie habe anzweifeln wollen.⁴⁰⁵

Although it is impossible to gloss over the glaring disparity between the politico-ecclesiastical positions represented by Marahrens and by Meiser and Wurm in this phase of the Third Reich, the bishops’ initial commonality of cause established by their headships of the only three ‘intact’ Protestant *Landeskirchen* in Nazi Germany had created metaphorical ‘barriers’ for the bishops, which not only prohibited them from venturing outside the middle ground between defiance and compliance but also worked to reassure each bishop that no member of their ‘intact’ club was able to break through the constraints of their dynamic, regardless of the strength of external socio-cultural pressures. It is for this reason that, despite Marahrens’ entrapment within the framework of the GVR during the final six years of the Third Reich, his contribution to resolving the specifically Protestant struggle in Nazi Germany must be viewed as being pitched firmly within the area of remit of the ‘intact’ dynamic, albeit closer to the parameter of clear-cut compliance.

The implications of Marahrens’ structural obligation to the GVR during the wartime

⁴⁰⁴ Marahrens found Meiser and Wurm’s opposition to the *Grundsätze* to be unwarranted because he believed that, “Es ist ein völliges Mißverständnis, anzunehmen, dass die ‚Grundsätze‘ die nationalsozialistische Weltanschauung für den Bereich der Kirche verbindlich machen wollten. Die Kirche wird also nicht unter 2 Herren gebracht” (cf. ‘Wochenbrief’, 12/07/1939, in Becker, 1996, p.100).

⁴⁰⁵ Melzer, 1991, p.54.

years also work to explain many more of his controversial actions from 1939 onwards. For example, one of his first acts as a member of the GVR was to send a telegram to Hitler on 9th November 1939, in which he thanked God for saving Germany's *Führer* from the attempt on his life by Georg Elser at the *Bürgerbräukeller* in Munich the previous day.⁴⁰⁶ Since Marahrens was by now working for an organisation of GDC members, who described themselves as having to come to decisions and to take measures, "die sich aus der Verpflichtung der evangelischen Kirche gegen Führer, Volk und Staat ergeben",⁴⁰⁷ it is unsurprising that Marahrens was obligated to express public praise for Hitler's survival in this instance.

Once Nazi Germany found itself at war, Marahrens began to issue words of support for the Nazi war effort on behalf of the GVR in line with his newfound function to serve the Nazi State, its *Führer*, and its people. After sending an initial letter of praise to Hitler to congratulate him for the successes of the Polish campaign, the GVR consistently issued messages of congratulations for each subsequent German military victory.⁴⁰⁸ In its most direct outpouring of support for the Nazi war effort, the GVR sent a telegram to Hitler which stated that,

Die Deutsche Evangelische Kirche [...] ist mit allen ihren Gebeten bei Ihnen und bei unseren unvergleichlichen Soldaten, die nun mit so gewaltigen Schlägen daran gehen, den Pestherd zu beseitigen, damit in ganz Europa unter Ihrer Führung eine neue Ordnung entstehe und aller inneren Zersetzung, aller Beschmutzung des Heiligsten, aller Schändung der Gewissensfreiheit ein Ende gemacht werde.⁴⁰⁹

Although such blatant expressions of political support for Nazi secular ambitions paint Marahrens as a proponent of both the expansionist and genocidal aims of the NSDAP, it must nonetheless be borne in mind that Marahrens was compelled to join in with the 'German Christian' chorus of strong support for the Nazi war effort to avoid damage to his ecclesiastical reputation and, by implication, to the status of his thus far 'intact' *Landeskirche*.

Further to recognising Marahrens' obligation to support Nazi troops as being a result of his involvement in the GVR, it must also be appreciated that it was part of Marahrens' role as a Protestant clergyman to see to the spiritual needs of his parishioners, which by now included the "im Felde stehenden Gemeindegliedern" as well as their families 'at home'.⁴¹⁰ The strength of Marahrens' duty to his congregation, both within and outside of German borders,

⁴⁰⁶ 'Telegram', 09/11/1939, LKAB, Bestand 1978.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. Melzer, 1991, p.189.

⁴⁰⁸ For details, cf. *ibid.*, pp.189-200.

⁴⁰⁹ 30/06/1941, in *ibid.*, p.193.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.183.

is best shown by his reaction to the ban on the DEK from sending religious writings and providing spiritual guidance to frontline soldiers, issued by the *Oberbefehlshaber der Wehrmacht* on 12th July 1940. In discussing the ban with fellow GVR member Friedrich Schultz, Marahrens described it as being, “den schwersten Schlag gegen eine um der seelischen Haltung der Heimat und der Front willen unentbehrliche und von der Kirche aus unaufgebbare Aufgabe”.⁴¹¹ To understand Marahrens’ anger over the matter, it must be acknowledged that Marahrens had himself once served as a *Lazarettpfarrer* to German troops during the First World War and had voluntarily travelled to Belgium in November 1918 to tend to the spiritual needs of German prisoners of war.⁴¹² In light of his past work in the trenches, it can be appreciated that Marahrens had more understanding than most of the need to make pastoral provisions for those in battle. He had no illusions, therefore, as to what another major war entailed for German soldiers, who were at particular risk of both mental and physical injury from the brutality of machine warfare in this period.

Further to this, it ought not to be forgotten that Marahrens himself lost a son to battle at the very start of the Nazis’ ‘Polish campaign’, which explains why the subject of providing pastoral care to frontline troops was close to his heart. Although Marahrens’ public silence on the matter⁴¹³ means that it is impossible to determine whether the personal turmoil experienced by Marahrens over the death of his son actually contributed to his uncompromising politico-ecclesiastical stance in this stage of the Third Reich, which fought for the right of the Church to provide for German troops, it cannot be denied that his in-depth experience of war, both as a firsthand witness to the injuries suffered by soldiers and as a grieving parent, provided Marahrens with considerable emotional authority to moderate the views of his colleagues in the GVR. Although it must be remembered that Marahrens’ desire not to appear an outright adversary of the State to his ‘German Christian’ counterparts meant that the scope by which he could influence the activity of the GVR was extremely limited, Marahrens’ attempts to persuade the GVR to campaign for the Church’s right to provide spiritual support to German soldiers nonetheless highlighted his unpreparedness to overlook the true essence and function of the Christian Church during this critical stage in the Third Reich.

⁴¹¹ ‘Brief von Marahrens an Schultz’, 18/04/1940, in *ibid.*, p.185.

⁴¹² Grünzinger, 2009.

⁴¹³ Thomas Jan Kück notes that Marahrens did not mention the loss of his son, Erich, in any of his *Wochenbriefe* (cf. ‘Briefe zwischen Anpassung und Widerstand - Landeskirche legt Quellensammlung über Bischof August Marahrens vor’, *EVLKA News*, available at: <http://www.evlka.de/content.php?aktion=print&contentTypeID=4&id=9656>, last accessed 30/12/2010).

Landesbischof Hans Meiser of Bavaria was even clearer in his opinion regarding the role of the Church and the State in this period, however, since his strict adherence to confessional Lutheranism did not allow the dictates of war to influence his loyal obedience to the *Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*. Immediately concerned that the war would bring about a change in the nature of Protestant sermons and services, namely by tempting clergymen to select biblical texts which would easily support a commentary on the military developments, Meiser issued to the pastorate of the ELKB on 30th October 1939 specific guidelines for Protestant preaching during the war.⁴¹⁴ Not only did Meiser emphasise that the nature of preaching in this period ought not to differ from that in times of peace but, as his personal correspondence confirms, he was “überzeugt, daß nur eine Predigt[,] die aus reiner Quell schöpft und ihrem göttlichen Auftrag treu bleibt, ausrichten kann, wozu sie gesendet sei”.⁴¹⁵ Thus, even for soldiers on the frontline of the conflict, Meiser insisted that only undistorted Christian parables were appropriate for their encouragement.

True to his own precepts, then, Meiser was careful not to overstate his support for the NSDAP and its war effort in this phase of the Third Reich, even when faced with having to issue obligatory prayers for Germany’s *Führer* and messages of congratulations on the occasion of Hitler’s birthday. To illustrate just how effectively Meiser managed to moderate these expressions of support for the regime by setting them within a specifically Lutheran framework, we need only look to his prayer for the *Führer*, which he issued on behalf of his *Landeskirche* towards the end of 1939. In a direct appeal to God, Meiser stated that,

Wir danken Dir, daß Du in einer Stunde ernster Gefahr Deine schützende Hand über den Führer unseres Volkes gehalten hast. Wir bitten Dich von Herzen, Du wolltest ihn auch weiter in Deinen gnädigen Schutz nehmen und ihn täglich zu seinem schweren Werk ausrüsten mit Kraft aus der Höhe.⁴¹⁶

In complete contrast to the style of the GVR, which addressed its gratitude for past military victories and its hope for future successes directly to Hitler himself, and also claimed to be with Hitler in thought and prayer, Meiser’s words were directed exclusively to God in an implicit recognition of His ultimate authority. Although these words can inevitably be used to show that Meiser was in full support of the German war effort, as well as having been grateful for the continued existence of Germany’s secular *Führer*, Meiser remained faithful to the view that the fine line between victory and defeat in the current war lay firmly in the hands of God. By evoking the image that God’s protective hand had continued to rest over Germany’s

⁴¹⁴ Helmreich, 1979, p.317.

⁴¹⁵ ‘Meiser an Pfarrer W. Harnisch’, 03/01/1940, in *ibid.*, p.537 (endnote 3).

⁴¹⁶ ‘Gebet für den Führer’, 09/12/1939, LKAB, Bestand 1978.

Führer, Meiser consciously acknowledged the supreme presence of God in the world and, in doing so, declined to endorse the Nazi image of Hitler as Germany's sole saviour. Whereas the GVR anchored its praises for Nazi military victories firmly within the secular sphere, commending the military might of the Third Reich as well as the racial superiority of its Aryan troops, Meiser's constant appeal to a higher authority leaves no doubt of his ultimate allegiance to the supreme Will of God.

Although Meiser's overarching loyalty to Lutheran precepts prevented him from speaking out against the violent aims of the Nazis in this phase of the Third Reich, a partially redeeming factor is that it nonetheless ensured that he did not explicitly encourage Nazi ambitions either. As such, his attitude towards the Nazi war effort remained constant at times of both victory and defeat. At the start of Germany's military successes, for example, Meiser issued a press release on behalf of the ELKB in the Bavarian *Amtsblatt* to commemorate Hitler's birthday. Although this was an occasion on which the individual Protestant *Landeskirchen* were expected to honour Hitler for his leadership of the Third Reich, Meiser was unwilling, nonetheless, to acknowledge the supposed secular achievements of Germany's *Führer* in isolation from God's ultimate power. He thus stated that,

Die Gemeinden unserer Landeskirche [...] sehen darin [den] Beitrag [des Herrn der Kirche] zum Werke des Führers, daß sie durch die Botschaft von Jesus Christus den deutschen Menschen hinführen zu den Quellen aller Kraft, ihn stark machen für den Kampf, ihn freudig machen zu allem Opfer.⁴¹⁷

Although Meiser recognised the supposedly valuable contribution of Hitler to the life of the German people, he only did so to the extent that he framed Hitler as being an instrument of God's reign on earth. Consequently, his tone was no different even after the major defeat of German troops at the battle of Stalingrad. On the occasion of Hitler's birthday only two months later, Meiser showed no emotion over the military setback and still continued in formulaic terms to ask God to empower Hitler and, "daß er ihm mit seinem Geist und seiner Hilfe zur Seite stehe und sein Werk mit seinem Segen kröne".⁴¹⁸ Although this can be interpreted as Meiser having made a conscious decision not to demoralise his parishioners, who due to the demands of war were predominantly female at this point, with their sons, husbands and fathers serving on the frontline, the fact that he did not comment on the defeat can also be seen as signalling his implicit submission to God's Will in swaying the war effort against his own country.

⁴¹⁷ 'Geburtstag des Führers', 15/04/1940, LKAB, Bestand 1978.

⁴¹⁸ 'Geburtstag des Führers', 15/04/1943, LKAB, Bestand 1978.

It is as a result of Meiser's continuing strict adherence to the principles of confessional Lutheranism, then, that he did not and, more significantly, could not allow the German war effort to alter his work within the Church. Fully aware of his Lutheran remit to support the Nazi government as an instrument of God's secular rule only and to accept the political changes of the time as a reflection of God's overriding Will, Meiser was compelled to refrain from comment on developments in the secular arena. After the war had commenced, in fact, Meiser himself acknowledged the extent to which his adherence to confessional Lutheranism had taken him and his *Landeskirche* into a position of unquestionable isolation from political developments in this stage of the Third Reich. He thus exclaimed that, "Es wurde jetzt nur offenbar, daß die Haltung unserer Landeskirche auch in den zurückliegenden Jahren niemals politisch bedingt war; es ging uns stets nur um ein religiös kirchliches Anliegen".⁴¹⁹ Although Meiser's reluctance to address any issues outside the remit of the Church calls into question his wider Christian morals, as he showed himself prepared to sit back whilst the NSDAP led the German nation into violence and desolation, it nonetheless demonstrates his unswerving dedication to a specifically Lutheran confessional way through the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* and his determination to protect at least one facet of German society from Nazi domination.

Landesbischof Theophil Wurm of Württemberg did not have to exercise the same degree of caution in response to the German war effort as his counterparts Marahrens and Meiser, however, since he had neither ties to the *Deutsche Christen*-led GVR nor such a strict adherence to confessional Lutheranism in this period. Sharing Marahrens' concern that "der Dienst der Kirche an den Gliedern der Wehrmacht nicht begehrt war",⁴²⁰ Wurm used his comparative freedom from both the GDC and the constraints of High Lutheranism to begin to complain about the issue to Nazi authorities. Even before the NSDAP implemented an official ban on the distribution of Church literature to frontline troops, Wurm raised concerns over the NSDAP's policies towards the pastoral care of German troops with Württembergian *Reichsstatthalter* Wilhelm Murr. Wurm explained that,

...[E]s ist nicht bloß eine selbstverständliche Verpflichtung des Heimatpfarramts, sondern eine ebenso selbstverständliche Erwartung der Ausmarschierten, daß gerade das Heimatpfarramt sich nicht bloß der Familie, sondern auch der Ausmarschierten selbst annimmt und ihnen, wie in Friedenszeiten, in schweren Stunden hilft, die für jeden kommen und in denen der seelsorgerliche Zuspruch aus dem Worte Gottes und aus den Liedern / unserer Kirche die größte Stärkung bedeutet.⁴²¹

Since Wurm recognised the obligation of the Protestant Church to serve its members 'at

⁴¹⁹ 'Brief an Kreisdekane', 11/10/1939, LKAB, Bestand 506.

⁴²⁰ Wurm, 1953, p.156.

⁴²¹ 'Brief an Murr', 05/06/1940, reproduced in Sautter, 1960, pp.63-64.

home' as well as those away at war, Wurm demonstrated that he was not prepared to sit back and allow Germany's Nazi regime to destroy the fundamental essence of the Church. In his particular adherence to universal Christian principles, Wurm saw the Church's function as being to serve all God's people on earth, regardless of geographical location and, as will be discussed in the next sub-chapter, also race, age and ability. Since Wurm openly negated the State's authority to take away the basic right of German soldiers to spiritual provisions from the Protestant Church, however, Wurm implicitly undermined the totality claim of the NSDAP on the German nation and its *Volk*. By emphasising the fact that heightened developments in the secular arena did not negate the presence of the spiritual realm in the everyday life of the nation, Wurm ultimately rejected the NSDAP's claim over its soldiers as property of the Third Reich and, thereby, emphasised the need for the parallel presence of the Church in their lives. In this respect, then, the onset of war for Wurm meant less a literal battle between Nazi Germany and its surrounding territories, and more an ideological battle between the totality claim of the Nazi *Weltanschauung* and the illimitable presence of the Christian Church.

It is for this reason that, as Nazi military gains intensified and State demands on the German people for military service increased, so too did Wurm's protestations against the NSDAP's right to monopolise demands on human life. At the height of Nazi supremacy in Europe, therefore, Wurm opted not to praise the Nazi regime for its impressive series of military victories to date, but rather to object to the State's efforts to increase its ideological hold over German soldiers. In its attempts to almost 'dehumanise' its troops, the Nazi state had by now not just prohibited the distribution of religious literature to its frontline forces, but was actively encouraging the allocation of pseudo-religious Nazi material in its place. This it had justified with the argument that, due to the requirements of battle, the Nazi government had to preserve the economy from demands not deemed necessary to the German war effort.⁴²² Angered at the obvious intrusion of the Nazi State into Church affairs and its attempts to restrict the DEK's ecclesiastical influence outside German borders, Wurm sent an "offene Aussprache" to *Propagandaminister Goebbels* on 1st April 1942, in which he wrote that,

Nicht bloß die kirchliche Gemeindepresse ist völlig unterdrückt worden; auch die ganze christliche Literatur ist schweren Hemmungen unterworfen; selbst der Druck der Bibel und der Gesangbücher ist unmöglich gemacht. Dagegen kann antichristliche Literatur in Massen auf den Markt geworfen und an die Front geschickt werden. Der große christliche Volksteil fügt sich gerne jeder sachlich notwendigen

⁴²² Helmreich, 1979, p.319.

In addition to sending this letter to Goebbels, Wurm also handed a copy of it over to Swedish authorities, from where it ultimately found its way into the Swedish press and was distributed worldwide. The *Gestapo* deemed this manoeuvre traitorous to the Third Reich and had intended to use it as grounds for arrest. As Ernst Christian Helmreich reports, however, Hitler ruled against Wurm's detention and prosecution in this period.⁴²⁴ This is because Wurm had formulated his letter to Goebbels in such a way that, although it accused the NSDAP of injustice towards its frontline soldiers and the Christian Church, it did not criticize Nazi secular precepts per se. Since the outside world was by now focused on Wurm following the dissemination of his letter in the foreign press, any attempt by the NSDAP to punish Wurm for his mere expression of objection would only have served to confirm his initial accusations of prejudice and discrimination to the entire international arena. Moreover, since German military resources were already stretched to their limits during this period, as Germany was by now engaged in battles on both its eastern and western fronts, any reprisals on Wurm risked creating yet more opponents of the regime and, thereby, opening up further battles which the Nazi regime simply was not able to afford. As a result of Wurm's focus on defending the principles of universal Christianity, then, together with his ability to find security in the wider ecumenical community, Wurm was ultimately able to turn the Nazi war effort to his advantage to ensure that no further incursions of the Nazi State on the operations of the German Protestant Church took place without public knowledge.

As in the case of Marahrens, Wurm's passion about this matter was reinforced by the fact that he had lost his son, Friedler, to the Second World War.⁴²⁵ Since Wurm had personally experienced the sorrow of losing a child to war, he therefore had greater empathy with the feelings of his grieving parishioners. Unlike Marahrens, however, whose entrapment in the GVR during this period limited the extent to which he was able to critique the German war effort which he was employed to defend, Wurm was able to use his comparative freedom to assess openly the human cost of the war and to begin to contemplate the very real prospect of German defeat. After German troops had lost the battle for Stalingrad in 1943, for example, Wurm used a sermon to emphasise the fact that it was also possible for the sun to set on the German nation as much as it had set on the Jews in recent years.⁴²⁶ Wurm also criticised Marahrens and his colleagues in the GVR for their unnecessary and overt endorsement of the

⁴²³ 'Brief an Goebbels', 01/04/1942, reproduced in Schäfer, 1968, p.180.

⁴²⁴ Helmreich, 1979, p.319.

⁴²⁵ Cf. Wurm, 1953, p.58.

⁴²⁶ 'Predigt am Totensonntag', 21/11/1943, LKAS Bestell-Nr.2.

NSDAP. By complaining that Marahrens and the rest of the GVR had loaded their “Kundgebung mit Ausführungen politischen Inhalts [...], die aus dem Bereich eines rein kirchlichen Aktes hinausführen”,⁴²⁷ Wurm was able to utilise the German war effort in this phase of the Third Reich to render himself the only true spokesman for universal Christendom amongst the *Landesbischöfe* of the ‘intact’ churches.

The *Landesbischöfe* and Responses to Nazi Terror

Even though it may be difficult for us to appreciate today with the benefit of hindsight, many Protestant churchmen in the Third Reich did not make an effort to protest against the Nazi regime’s policies of discrimination and persecution which had been increasingly intensifying since 1933. This is because the gross reality of the situation meant that many clergymen were either unable or unwilling to risk their own lives to be seen to object to Nazi ambitions in the face of escalating Nazi brutality, or simply because they did not feel it the job of the Church to comment on secular methods of administration. Those few churchmen who were both inclined and able to do so, however, began to discuss, comment on, and even protest against Nazi measures on the grounds of the universal Christian belief that the Church ought to look out for the wellbeing of God’s people on earth. During the years of the Second World War in particular, Nazi racial policies became ever more brutal and began to test the ethics of Protestant churchmen in different ways, both directly through the exclusion of non-Aryan Christians from the Protestant Church, and indirectly through the Nazis’ persecution of the Jews and other selected minorities in the supposedly ‘Christianised’ society of the Third Reich. As figureheads for their respective ‘intact’ *Landeskirchen*, as well as spokesmen for Church affairs in both the national and the international arenas, *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm were therefore no longer able to avoid comment on the issue of Nazi racial terror in this period. This sub-chapter thus examines the attitudes of each of the *Landesbischöfe* to three distinct areas of Nazi eugenic policy to ascertain to what extent their stances on the matters were affected by their political and religious conditioning, their socio-cultural positioning and, above all, their wider sense of obligation to universal Christian morality.

⁴²⁷ ‘Brief an den Geistlichen Vertrauensrat’, Berlin, 05/07/1941, EZA, 50/94 Nr.223.

The Persecution of ‘Non-Aryan’ Christians

The Nazi racial law that affected the Church most directly in this stage of the Third Reich was undoubtedly the exclusion of non-Aryan Christians from the German Protestant Church. Although the *Arierparagraph* had been adopted in the DEK as early as 1934, as Chapter One has already explained,⁴²⁸ it was not until late 1941 that the issue of non-Aryan Christians in the Church resurfaced in line with the NSDAP’s escalating discriminatory policies against the Jews. In particular, the Nazi decree to all German Jews to wear a yellow Star of David on their chests was seen by the predominantly ‘German Christian’ leadership of the DEK at this point to be a positive move towards the exclusion of all Jews from the German Protestant Church.⁴²⁹ Since Marahrens was by now already implicated in all official decisions and opinions emanating from the administrative instrument of the GVR, he at least was forced to address the issue of so-called *nichtarische Christen* as part of national Church administration in this period. Moreover, since Meiser and Wurm were also at liberty to decide whether intensified measures of Nazi discrimination be introduced into the administration of their own *Landeskirchen*, this sub-chapter examines the positions of all three of the bishops towards the imposition of Nazi racial laws on Church governance.

In consideration of his dual obligations to the official leadership of the DEK through the GVR and his headship of the subsidiary organisation of the KFK, *Landesbischof* August Marahrens of Hanover was obviously forced to formulate a policy towards the exclusion of so-called non-Aryan Christians from the German Protestant Church, which was suitable for both his predominantly ‘German Christian’ colleagues and his more moderate ‘Confessing’ counterparts. This, however, Marahrens was unable to do, and the issue of *nichtarische Christen* therefore stretched his policy of moderation on the national stage to its limits. As part of his role on the GVR, Marahrens ended up agreeing to a statement issued on 22nd December 1941 by the DEKK, which concluded that,

Wir bitten daher im Einvernehmen mit dem Geistlichen Vertrauensrat der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche die obersten Behörden, geeinigte Vorkehrungen zu treffen, daß die getauften Nichtarier dem kirchlichen Leben der deutschen Gemeinden fernbleiben. Die getauften Nichtarier werden selbst Mittel und Wege suchen müssen, sich Einrichtungen zu schaffen, die ihrer gesonderten gottesdienstlichen und seelsorgerischen Betreuung dienen können.⁴³⁰

Although Marahrens’ endorsement of the above proposal makes him appear a proponent of Nazi racial policy in the Church, the fact must not be overlooked that, only a week

⁴²⁸ Cf. p.31.

⁴²⁹ Melzer, 1991, pp.262-263.

⁴³⁰ Reproduced in *ibid.*, p.264.

beforehand, Marahrens had agreed to a *Denkschrift* on behalf of the KFK, which expressed disagreement with the State's "steigernde Härte in der Behandlung der Nichtarier".⁴³¹ Marahrens' responses to the exclusion of *nichtarische Christen* on the national level of Church administration in this period were therefore nothing more than an expression of two separate, vain attempts to appease the competing factions of the Church for which he now worked.

Further to this, Marahrens' attitudes towards the exclusion of non-Aryan Christians from the Church were no clearer on the regional level of church governance. In spite of his agreement to the statement of the DEKK that *nichtarische Christen* be forced to fend for themselves in terms of finding an alternative place of Christian worship, Marahrens never implemented this measure in his ELLKH. Rather, not only did Marahrens issue a *Rundschreiben* to his pastorate which confirmed the responsibility of the Church to provide for "die betroffenen Männer, Frauen und Kinder",⁴³² but as the complaints of the GDC from this period show, Marahrens had not even fully heeded the *Arierparagraph* directive from 1934 to exclude all non-Aryan clergymen from his *Landeskirche*. For this reason, 'German Christians' were obviously concerned that Marahrens would not easily exclude non-Aryan parishioners from the ELLKH during this period of escalating policies of discrimination. A letter written in 1942 effectively conveys the GDC's anxiety over Marahrens' compromising position towards non-Aryan Christians. It reads,

Die Gegnerschaft des Landesbischofs gegen den Nationalsozialismus dürfte sich beispielsweise daran zeigen, daß 1938 in der unter der Leitung von Herrn D. Marahrens stehenden Hannoverschen Landeskirche noch drei Volljuden und drei Halbjuden als ordentliche Pfarrer im Dienst waren. Selbst jetzt hat sich Herr D. Marahrens nicht dazu entschließen können, die Juden aus seiner Landeskirche auszuschließen.⁴³³

Moreover, in spite of Marahrens' agreement to the declaration of the DEKK in 1941 that non-Aryan Christians be excluded from the Church, he nonetheless subsequently protested to *Reichsinnenminister* Frick on behalf of the KFK on 19th January 1943 and argued that the Church was "verpflichtet" to provide for its non-Aryan members.⁴³⁴ Of significance is the way in which Marahrens presented his argument to Frick. Firstly, he never admitted to knowing anything concrete of the Nazi regime's persecution of non-Aryan Christians, but rather portrayed himself as having been privy to "Gerüchte" surrounding the brutal handling

⁴³¹ Reproduced in *ibid.*, p.266.

⁴³² Reproduced in *ibid.*, p.266.

⁴³³ 'Schreiben des Leiters der Finanzabteilungen an den Reichskirchenminister', 16/06/1942, in Klügel, 1964, p.496.

⁴³⁴ 'Persönliches Schreiben D. Marahrens an den Reichsinnenminister betr. Unrecht und Gewalttat gegenüber Nichtariern', 19/01/1943, reproduced in Klügel, 1965, pp.202-203 (p.202).

by the Nazi State of those affected by its *Nürnberger Gesetze*.⁴³⁵ This was undoubtedly a convenient rhetorical vehicle through which Marahrens avoided accusing and thereby overly infuriating the NSDAP in order to protect German Protestantism at large, since his reliance on vague rumours served to lessen the accusatory tone of his general argument. This effect was further enhanced by Marahrens' acknowledgement of the NSDAP's ultimate right of decision over secular policies, when stating that, "Bei unserer Stellungnahme sind wir uns dessen bewußt, daß wir nicht etwa politische Entscheidungen der Staatsführung zu beurteilen haben".⁴³⁶ Marahrens' submission to Nazi authority therefore enabled him to maintain influence in the DEK against its predominantly 'German Christian' leadership.

Marahrens' conflicting responses to the entire issue of *nichtarische Christen* in this phase of the Third Reich must not, however, be seen simply as a reflection of his personal position towards the actual racial policies at hand, but rather as a purely strategic means to retain the trust of the competing Church factions for which he by now worked. His constantly oscillating positions towards the implementation of Nazi racial policies in the Church ultimately serve to portray Marahrens as a reluctant messenger for all sides of the Protestant conflict during this period. As Jörg Thierfelder confirms, once Marahrens had become officially associated with both the GVR and the KFK from 1939 onwards, "Im einzelnen wird man hier genau unterscheiden müssen zwischen dem, was Marahrens wirklich meinte und dem, was er aus taktischen Gründen zum Ausdruck brachte."⁴³⁷ Marahrens' attitudes towards secular racial policies obviously differed from those of his counterparts, Meiser and Wurm, who belonged solely to the moderate KFK and, as such, had no strategic need to make allowances for the pro-Nazi demands of the DEKK. In actual fact, Meiser and Wurm's complete lack of obligation to the official national Church administration in this period endowed the two southern German bishops with a genuine sense of freedom either to rebel against the discriminatory policies of the national Church leadership or to criticise the DEKK.

Nevertheless, *Landesbischof* Hans Meiser of Bavaria did not use his comparative liberty in this period to voice outright objection to the measures of the DEKK. Since this policy of silence was in keeping with his past tendencies to exercise caution in the Protestant struggle so as not to endanger unnecessarily the 'intact' Protestantism of his *Landeskirche* and the *lutherischer Flügel* at large, Meiser's lack of direct protest over the exclusion of non-Aryan Christians must not necessarily be taken to demonstrate his indifference in the matter

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., p.203.

⁴³⁷ Thierfelder, 1975, p.209.

altogether. In fact, Meiser's actions in this period reveal that he did recognise his wider moral commitments as a Christian bishop to provide for his entire community of believers. However, he was nonetheless aware of the parameters in which he could effectively contribute to the cause of the non-Aryan Christians without infuriating the Nazi State and consequently endangering his *Landeskirche* and the 'intact' Protestantism which it epitomised. To this end, even though Meiser's approach to the discrimination of so-called non-Aryan Christians from the Church did not include outright protestations against their dismissal, his indirect and clandestine involvement in 'underground' relief efforts in this period shows that he considered this to be the best means to address the plight of the *nichtarische Christen*.

Since Meiser's *Landeskirche* was not bound by the directives of the DEKK due to its continued *Intaktheit* and since, unlike Marahrens, he had no unspoken ties to the policies of the GDC, Meiser was at least able to get away without implementing the *Arierparagraph* within the ELKB in this phase of the Third Reich.⁴³⁸ He also began to assist the *Büro Grüber* financially within his region. The *Büro Grüber* was an aid organisation that had been clandestinely established within the ELKB by Pastor Heinrich Grüber to assist those most affected by Nazi racial laws. It had first set up *Hilfsstellen* in Nuremberg and Munich which were run by local clergymen.⁴³⁹ By May 1939 the *Büro Grüber* had more than twenty-one subsidiary offices throughout most of the DEK, with the exception of the predominantly 'German Christian' church of Thuringia and, most notably for this investigation, Marahrens' ELLKH.⁴⁴⁰ Whilst the establishment of the *Büro Grüber* in Bavaria obviously serves to demonstrate Meiser's preparedness to alleviate the plight of non-Aryan Christians in his *Landeskirche* as well as possible without attracting undue attention from the NSDAP, the fact that the *Büro Grüber* was not able to establish a permanent branch in the territory of the ELLKH further works to call into question Marahrens' Christian scruples in this period. Despite the fact that Marahrens never actively expelled all non-Aryan Christians from his own *Landeskirche*, his unwillingness to ease their predicament via the *Büro Grüber* meant that he did not ensure they received sufficient assistance either. Heinrich Grüber himself described Marahrens as being "in keiner Weise in dieser Sache mitzuarbeiten geneigt".⁴⁴¹

Meiser, by contrast, was the only Protestant bishop in Nazi Germany to finance the

⁴³⁸ Hermle, 2006, p.57.

⁴³⁹ Namely Hans Werner Jordan and Johannes Zwanzger respectively (Nicolaisen, 2002, p.323).

⁴⁴⁰ Gerlach, 2000, p.156. Gerhard Lindemann also confirms that a *Vertrauensstelle* only existed in Hanover from March until May 1939, and no actual *Hilfsstelle* was ever established there (Lindemann, 1996, p.366-367).

⁴⁴¹ Cf. Lindemann, 1996, p.366-367.

efforts of the *Büro Grüber* with funds from his *Landeskirche*.⁴⁴² Through his clandestine financing of the organisation, then, Meiser at least helped to make provision for at least two thousand non-Aryan Christians to overcome their financial and spiritual oppression by the Nazis. In many cases, Meiser's money even helped to finance plans for the oppressed to flee the Third Reich.⁴⁴³ Although Meiser did not protest openly against Nazi racial laws in this period or directly participate in efforts to relieve so-called non-Aryans from persecution, his indirect involvement in an 'underground' rescue mission within the ELKB must nonetheless be seen as the most effective way in which he could fulfil his Christian duty to serve all God's people within his *Landeskirche* without overly jeopardising the status of its 'intact' Protestantism. The fact that Meiser was also actively engaged in conversation with Bishop Bell's sister-in-law in England, Laura Livingstone, as well as Heinrich Grüber himself, in an effort to encourage and keep check on the evacuation process⁴⁴⁴ supports this view and reveals the positive Christian intentions behind Meiser's clandestine activities in this period. It is as a result of such conversations that we know that Meiser was genuinely concerned to effect the rescue of non-Aryan Christians within his *Landeskirche* and that it was not just by chance that his decision to finance the *Büro Grüber* ended up saving a considerable number of lives in his name.

Further to this, there is also evidence to suggest that, even after the *Büro Grüber* had been closed down by the *Gestapo* in the early war years, Meiser still continued to ease the plight of non-Aryan Christians through his involvement in the *Innere Mission* of his *Landeskirche*. Founded in 1886, the *Innere Mission* of the ELKB traditionally supported relief efforts in the Bavarian community, by financing care homes for the elderly and refuges for young people, for example, or even carrying out 'hands on' missionary work in towns and cities.⁴⁴⁵ After the closure of the *Büro Grüber*, however, Meiser used his right of decision as *Landesbischof* to determine which missionary efforts the Bavarian *Innere Mission* ought to fund. He thus directed Pastor Friedrich Hofmann of the *Innere Mission* to take over the care of non-Aryan Christians as part of its relief effort in this period.⁴⁴⁶ Although Meiser may not have vocalised his opinions about the discrimination of *nichtarische Christen* from the Church on the national stage, his continued localised efforts to assist those most affected by Nazi racial laws within the ELKB nonetheless reveal Meiser to have been in clear, albeit covert, opposition to

⁴⁴² Cf. *Landesbischof* Johannes Friedrich in Käppner and Maier-Albang, 2007, p.2.

⁴⁴³ Nicolaisen, 2002, p.323; Schönlebe, 2006, pp.54-61.

⁴⁴⁴ Gerlach, 2000, p.158.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. Braun, 2002, pp.173-175.

⁴⁴⁶ Nicolaisen, 2002, p.323.

the racial policies of the Nazi State. Moreover, as the present-day *Landesbischof* of the ELKB confirms, in light of Meiser's distinct preference for caution and the fact that his ability to influence national Church proceedings was ultimately trumped by Wurm's membership of the executive KFA in this period, Meiser's indirect involvement in relief efforts for non-Aryan Christians was still "mehr, als viele andere Menschen gewagt haben".⁴⁴⁷

Despite Meiser's honourable intentions, however, it was *Landesbischof* Theophil Wurm of Württemberg who offered the clearest opposition of the three *Landesbischofe* in this period to the exclusion of non-Aryan Christians from the DEK. Due to his vice-chairmanship of the KFA, it was arguably much easier for Wurm than it was for Meiser to become the most prominent, unbiased mouthpiece of KFK opinion towards Nazi measures. Although Marahrens still remained official head of the KFK at this point, he nevertheless had to be careful that declarations bearing his name did not overly infuriate his pro-Nazi colleagues in the GVR and, by extension, the NSDAP as well. As a result, there can be no doubt that the statements of the KFK issued by Wurm were a more accurate reflection of the attitudes of the moderate Church leaders toward Nazi racial laws in this period. Since Wurm ultimately lacked the fear which Marahrens had of jeopardising his relations with Germany's Nazi regime, he was able to take a more outright policy of opposition to the exclusion of *nichtarische Christen* from the Church. For this reason, it was Wurm, in his capacity as second-in-command of the KFA, who was able to formulate an unreserved response of the KFK to the DEKK's directive for racial segregation. In a letter to the DEKK of 7th January 1942, Wurm unequivocally rejected the organisation's discriminatory measures, stating that,

Vom Evangelium her ist der Ausschluß der getauften Nichtarier nicht zu rechtfertigen. Der Hinweis auf die früher oder noch jetzt bestehenden fremdsprachigen Sondergemeinden verfängt nicht; denn die nichtarischen Christen reden dieselbe Sprache wie wir. Aber dürfen die Kirchen an der Tatsache der Ausscheidung der Juden aus der deutschen Volksgemeinschaft achtlos vorübergehen? Sicherlich nicht. An keinem Unglücklichen darf der Christ achtlos vorübergehen. Daß die nichtarischen Christen heute Unglückliche sind, wird niemand bestreiten wollen. Dürfen wir dieses Unglück noch steigern, indem wir ihnen die Teilnahme an unseren Gottesdiensten entziehen?⁴⁴⁸

As was by now typical of Wurm's written protestations, he employed a mixture of direct and rhetorical questioning in order to emphasise to the DEKK the heresy of its directive. In referring to the shared Christian character of Aryans and non-Aryans alike as a common language, Wurm implicitly opened up the idea of a mutual understanding that ought to transcend the superficial, racial divisions of the ignorant and uninformed Nazi State. Moreover, by characterising the persecuted as "Unglückliche", Wurm's words were

⁴⁴⁷ *Landesbischof* Johannes Friedrich in Käppner and Maier-Albang, 2007, p.2.

⁴⁴⁸ 'Brief von Wurm an der DEKK', 07/01/1942, reproduced in Schäfer, 1968, pp.153-156, (p.155).

undoubtedly intended to pull on Christian heartstrings, since one of the fundamental Christian instructions has always been the duty to love one's neighbour and to display charity. Wurm's rhetorical scolding of the DEKK, then, was the most direct way in which he was able to assert the moral superiority of the KFK over the official 'German Christian' leadership of the Church without being overly accusatory. By employing this rhetorical method, Wurm was able to move the KFK into a position of clear opposition to the DEKK which, aside from emphasising the parting of ways between Marahrens and Wurm's executive leadership of the organisation, helped to reinforce the 'Confessing' credentials of the KFK in line with the politico-ecclesiastical policies of the wider *Bekennende Kirche*.

Further to the fact that Wurm undoubtedly showed the most strength of spirit in his direct opposition to the persecution of *nichtarische Christen* at this stage in the Third Reich, it is also clear that he was able to do so as a result of his lack of obligations to the DEKK and his subsequent ability to draw on his vice-presidency role in the KFA to correct the moderated views of its leader Marahrens. Even though it must be appreciated that Wurm was brave in directly objecting to the DEKK's directive to exclude all non-Aryan Christians from the Church, his comparative outspokenness must not be used, however, to condemn Marahrens for his less than lucid position on this particular Nazi racial law. Marahrens was, after all, trapped between two opposing national Church governing structures at this point. This had the effect that he was unable to object to the aims of the DEKK in the same way as Wurm, as any forthrightness from Marahrens risked his instantaneous dismissal from the GVR and, thereby, giving the GDC a 'free licence' to 'Nazify' the wartime Protestant Church. Similarly, Meiser's lack of vocal objection to the DEKK should not also be used to indict him of ambivalence to Nazi racial policies in this period. As his involvement in 'underground' relief efforts shows, Meiser recognised the injustice behind the Nazi measures and was prepared to ease the plight of non-Aryans in his *Landeskirche*. Since Meiser's primary concern still continued to be for the status of confessional Lutheranism in Nazi Germany, however, which may allow him to appear hypocritical in light of his reluctance to defend wider Christian ethics in the Third Reich, it must be appreciated that the indirect financing and supervision of aid organisations was the safest way by which Meiser was able to lessen the impact of Nazi injustice whilst still attempting "gegen den Druck des Regimes die Landeskirche zu bewahren".⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁹ Johannes Friedrich in Käppner and Maier-Albang, 2007, p.2.

The Euthanasia Programme

Historiographical accounts that concentrate on Nazi racial policies often overlook the fact that the NSDAP also intensified its aggression during the war years towards those sections of German society which it deemed to be 'life unworthy of life'. To this end, the NSDAP instigated a programme of enforced euthanasia against the mentally and physically ill, and later against the elderly. The euthanasia programme was implemented after the onset of war in 1939, as the Nazis had waited for the distraction of war as a means to avoid "expected church opposition" to the measures.⁴⁵⁰ Between 1939 and 1941, therefore, the Nazi regime established six secret *Euthanasie-Tötungsanstaltungen* throughout the Third Reich which, despite the best efforts of the NSDAP, failed to hide their murderous operations from the outside world. According to official statistics, the first of these euthanasia killing-centres was concealed in *Schloß Grafeneck*, which was situated in the heartland of the territory of the ELLKW.⁴⁵¹ In its first year of operation, *Schloß Grafeneck* laid claim to the highest death toll out of all the so-called *Euthanasie-Tötungsanstaltungen* in Nazi Germany, claiming 9,839 lives in 1940 alone.⁴⁵² Since Württembergian *Landesbischof* Theophil Wurm was in a prime position to observe events at *Grafeneck*, this sub-chapter investigates both how Wurm reacted to this breach of Christian morality in his *Landeskirche* and whether his counterparts, Marahrens and Meiser, adopted similar politico-ecclesiastical positions.

Since it did not take long for Wurm to gather evidence about the true nature of events at *Grafeneck*, it was only logical that he was the first of the bishops of the 'intact' churches to take position on the Nazi euthanasia programme in this period. In the first direct outburst of any of the three *Landesbischöfe* against Nazi racial and eugenic policies outside the Church, Wurm sent a clear letter of protest against the euthanasia measures to *Reichsinnenminister* Frick on 19th July 1940.⁴⁵³ Adopting a more direct tone than Marahrens had employed in his letter to Frick concerning the exclusion of non-Aryan Christians from the Church, which was examined in the previous sub-chapter,⁴⁵⁴ Wurm's letter presented a series of convincing known facts about *Grafeneck* which defied reason and excuse. Since Wurm was accusing the NSDAP of being in breach of the very Christian morality which it had once purported to defend in Germany, Frick remained silent towards Wurm's claims and failed to respond to his letter.

⁴⁵⁰ Helmreich, 1979, p.310.

⁴⁵¹ Cf. *Hartheimer Statistik*, in Klee, 1997, p.232.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ This letter is reproduced in full in Stöckle et al., 2000, p.65.

⁴⁵⁴ Cf. pp.141-142.

As well as demonstrating to the NSDAP that the German Protestant Church was prepared to rebuke the Nazi regime for its breaches of Christian morality, Wurm also used the advantage provided to him by his extensive knowledge of the Nazi euthanasia programme to further highlight the hypocrisy and immorality of the NSDAP at large. In the same letter, Wurm stated that,

Soeben erst hat der Führer zum Gebet für die kämpfenden Truppen und an demütigen Dank für den herrlichen Sieg über Frankreich aufgefordert. Dürfen wir nicht diesem Gott auch das Leben unserer leidenden Volksgenossen anempfehlen und ist es nicht sein Wille, daß wir, so lange Er sie am Leben lässt, uns ihrer annehmen?⁴⁵⁵

By adopting his customary style of rhetorical questioning, Wurm managed to challenge the supposed Christian principles of the Nazi State, proving them to be applied only in those cases which served its political agenda. Having called into question the Nazi regime's widely propagated perception of itself as a truly Christian community, therefore, Wurm succeeded in exposing the inappropriateness of the NSDAP's euthanasia measures, not only on humanitarian grounds but also by carefully reflecting its Christian claim back on itself and exposing its double standards. Wurm made this connection explicit when further explaining that,

Und da die Partei ausdrücklich auf dem Boden des positiven Christentums steht, und unter diesem positiven Christentum wiederum ausdrücklich und vor allem die ethische Haltung des Christen, besonders auch die Nächstenliebe verstanden wissen will, so könnte sie eigentlich die Maßnahmen zur Lebensvernichtung nicht billigen.⁴⁵⁶

Since he received no reply from Frick to this letter, Wurm penned yet another message to the *Reichsinnenminister* concerning the euthanasia programme on 5th September 1940. By this point in time it had become clear that residents of old people's homes throughout Württemberg were now also being sent to their deaths in *Grafeneck*.⁴⁵⁷ In an effort to evoke a response from Frick this time around, Wurm ended his second letter with a string of direct questions, which were very different from the vaguer rhetorical approach of his previous protestations, concluding that:

Muß das deutsche Volk das erste Kulturvolk sein, das in der Behandlung der Schwachen zu den Gepflogenheiten primitiver Völker zurückkehrt? Weiß der Führer von dieser Sache? Hat er sie gebilligt? Ich bitte, mich in einer so ungeheuer ernsten Sache nicht ohne Antwort zu lassen.⁴⁵⁸

Just as in his letter to Hitler that protested about the destruction of the *Matthäuskirche* in

⁴⁵⁵ 'Wurm – Proteste gegen den Euthanasieaktion', Brief an den Herrn Reichsminister Frick, 19/07/1940, EZA, 50/182 Nr.24.

⁴⁵⁶ 'Brief an Frick', 19/07/1940, EZA 50/182 Nr.24.

⁴⁵⁷ Helmreich, 1979, p.312; Sautter, 1960, p.65.

⁴⁵⁸ Reproduced in Stöckle et al., 2000, p.66.

1938,⁴⁵⁹ Wurm again demonstrated a certain naivety as to the nature of Germany's *Führer* when inquiring whether Hitler knew about and had personally endorsed the Nazi euthanasia programme. Since Wurm had witnessed the escalation of Nazi violence since Hitler came to power in 1933 and was well aware of Hitler's intentions from his political speeches and writings of the time, it must be appreciated that by employing a superficial air of naivety in his writing, Wurm was able to justify his threat to expose the Nazi euthanasia programme to the wider society behind a more immediate warning to approach Hitler about the issue. Through understated threats such as these, then, which Wurm made to seem even more realistic through his emphatic use of the verb *bitten*, Wurm ultimately found a means of presenting himself to the Nazi regime as not only a credible force to be reckoned with, but also as one which had the potential to expose its hideous crimes through ecumenical connections to the outside world.

These warnings were consequently not empty threats. In fact, Wurm's letter to Frick was soon distributed far and wide,⁴⁶⁰ and over the course of the next few years Wurm spread awareness of the Nazi euthanasia programme. This first began when Wurm sent a letter to the pastorate of the ELLKW on 27th July 1940, in which he asked that all "bekanntgewordene Fälle" of the so-called 'mercy' killings be reported to him.⁴⁶¹ Wurm then attempted to present his case for complaint against the euthanasia programme to both Hitler and *Propagandaminister* Goebbels.⁴⁶² Although neither of them responded to Wurm's protestations, Wurm's decision to approach Hitler and Goebbels after Frick at this stage in the Third Reich was particularly risky, since the Nazi regime was by now at the height of its power and was brash and overconfident owing to its successive military victories. In consideration of all that Wurm stood to lose by risking Nazi reprisals in this period, then, his decision to speak out above and beyond the confines of the Church ought not to be undervalued.

Wurm also proved himself to be unrelenting in the face of the NSDAP's failure to answer his complaints. In 1943, he used a prominent church service in Württemberg to take his grievances over the euthanasia measures to the public stage. At the height of the Second World War, Wurm asked his congregation,

⁴⁵⁹ Cf. p.118 of this dissertation.

⁴⁶⁰ Helmreich, 1979, p.312.

⁴⁶¹ 'Runderlass an sämtliche Dekanatämter der ELLKW', 27/07/1940, reproduced in Schäfer, 1968, pp.124-125, (p.124).

⁴⁶² For extracts of his letters, cf. *ibid.*, pp.157-158.

Haben wir es nicht mit angesehen, daß das gebrechliche Leben, das sogenannte lebensunwerte Leben, preisgegeben wurde, und müssen wir es nun nicht erleben, daß unsere Lebenswertesten und Liebenswürdigsten draußen geblieben sind?⁴⁶³

Although the State's euthanasia programme had officially ceased by the time Wurm spoke of the so-called mercy killings in this public address, there can be no doubt that Wurm drew upon the Nazi euthanasia programme to provoke thought on the downturn in the German war effort. Wurm's words also show that he was beginning to acknowledge a sense of shared guilt for complicity in Nazi crimes, since he uses the collective pronoun *wir* to emphasise how the German people, including himself, looked on whilst the Nazi regime was murdering those it deemed 'life unworthy of life'. Wurm deduced, therefore, that all Germans were by now paying the price for their past negligence by having to witness the suffering of their own loved ones in the heightened conditions of war. In light of the 'eye for an eye' sense of rationale Wurm displayed in this sermon, then, it is possible to see that, as the wartime years progressed, Wurm's theological stance was becoming ever more akin to that of the 'Dahlemitic' strand of the *Bekennende Kirche*.

While Wurm undoubtedly made the first clear move towards a more forceful form of *Widerstand* against Nazism in this period, his increasingly direct protestations against the Nazi euthanasia programme must be set in relation to the relative inaction of his counterparts Marahrens and Meiser. To take the position of Marahrens first, it should be noted that he only really objected to the Nazi measures as part of his role on the GVR. Since not even the 'German Christians' were able to justify the unlawful murder of German citizens in this way, the GVR released statements against the so-called mercy killings on behalf of the DEKK.⁴⁶⁴ Aside from his involvement in the decisions of the GVR, however, Marahrens only briefly commented on the Nazi euthanasia programme in his capacity as *Landesbischof* of the ELLKH. In a *Wochenbrief* of 31st July 1940, Marahrens spoke of "den Dienst der Liebe, den die Kirche ihren schwächsten Gliedern in den Heil- und Pflegeanstalten schuldig sei".⁴⁶⁵ Although confirming that he recognised the duty of the Church to care for the sick and the infirm, Marahrens nonetheless avoided explicit mention of the so-called mercy killings that affected Germany's ailing citizens at this stage in the Third Reich.

Meiser, however, was even more reluctant to broach the issue of the Nazi euthanasia programme than Marahrens, since he never made a comment against the measures outside of

⁴⁶³ 'Predigt zur 600-Jahr-Feier der Vollendung der Marienkirche in Reutlingen', 17/10/1943, reproduced in *ibid.*, pp.143-146, (p.144).

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. Melzer, 1991, pp.254-262.

⁴⁶⁵ Paraphrased in *ibid.*, p.256.

the frameworks of regional or national Church administration. After *Dekan* Christian Stoll had confronted Meiser with his concerns about the unlawful killings of disabled citizens in Bavaria, Meiser replied to him on 30th December 1940, stating that,

Was Sie mir in Ihrem Schreiben vom 21.12. berichten, ist nur ein Beleg mehr für die außerordentlich ernsten Vorgänge, die sich gegenwärtig auf dem von Ihnen erwähnten Gebiet abspielen. Die Angelegenheit hat uns im Landeskirchenrat und in der Kirchenführerkonferenz schon oft und ausgiebig beschäftigt. Es darf mit gutem Gewissen gesagt werden, dass geschehen ist, was geschehen konnte, um die Stimme der Kirche in dieser Sache nachdrücklich zu Gehör zu bringen. Leider blieb all unseren Bemühungen der sichtbare Erfolg bisher versagt.⁴⁶⁶

Meiser's insistence on operating solely within the confines of both the administration of his *Landeskirche* and the KFK reveals his unwillingness to take initiative in protesting against the Nazi euthanasia programme and his distinct preference for community action. The fact that Meiser also appeared resigned to the Church's failure to protest effectively and to influence State policies in this area demonstrates his awareness of the limitations of Church authority, which can be seen to be in line with his Lutheran interpretation of wordly order.

Although Marahrens and Meiser both failed to comment fully on the Nazi euthanasia programme as part of their respective Church leadership roles, however, it cannot be automatically concluded that both bishops lacked humanitarian concern during this period. For one thing, it must be accepted that, when strictly defined, Lutheran doctrine prohibited clergymen to comment on the affairs of the State. For High Lutherans like Marahrens and Meiser, then, to be seen to protest against what, for them, was ultimately a purely secular policy was difficult to reconcile with their fundamental Protestant confession. Secondly, since no *Euthanasie-Tötungsanstaltungen* were situated within the territories of the ELLKH and the ELKB,⁴⁶⁷ the issue of the so-called mercy killings was a less immediate concern to both bishops than it was to Wurm. Although they were eventually made aware of the measures by Wurm, without direct evidence of the murders taking place within their own *Landeskirchen*, both Marahrens and Meiser were still able to shy away from the issue and, at the very least, had reason not to further infuriate the NSDAP by protesting over an issue which did not affect their *Landeskirchen* directly, yet purported to destroy them by way of potential reprisals.

To summarise the dramatic disparity of response to the Nazi euthanasia programme between Wurm on the one hand, and Marahrens and Meiser on the other, then, it can be said that Wurm's decision to respond to this controversial aspect of Nazi policy was made easier

⁴⁶⁶ Reproduced in Müller and Siemen, 1991, p.110.

⁴⁶⁷ According to the *Hartheimer Statistik*, the other five *Euthanasie-Tötungsanstaltungen* were situated in the regions of Brandenburg, Hesse, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Upper Austria (Klee, 1997, p.232).

by the unfortunate geographical location of the measures within his *Landeskirche*, combined with his relative freedom to question Nazi actions due to the unrestricted *Intaktheit* of his *Landeskirche*. Wurm's increasing turn to a more 'Dahlemitic' line of theological rationale in this phase of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* also allowed him to view Nazi measures, as well as the apparent disregard of the German people towards them, as actions which were worthy of punishment and divine vengeance. Due to the High Lutheranism of Marahrens and Meiser, by contrast, both bishops were reluctant to criticise policies of the Nazi regime during this period which had no direct bearing on the administration of the Church. These positions are nonetheless problematic, since, as Christian bishops, both Marahrens and Meiser had a duty to preserve Christian ethics in Nazi Germany at large and not just the status of confessional Lutheranism in the Church. Whilst Wurm ought to be commended, therefore, for his eventual move away from the constraints of confessional Lutheranism, unlike Marahrens and Meiser, it must nonetheless be appreciated that Wurm was the only bishop of the 'intact' churches in a position to object effectively to the killings owing to his lack of administrative obligations, his more relaxed and 'universalised' interpretation of confessional Lutheranism, and his proximity to the organised murders.

The Holocaust

The years of 1939 to 1945 saw Nazi violence and brutality towards the Jews culminate in the genocide that came to be known as the 'Holocaust' during the course of the 1950s.⁴⁶⁸ Although there has been much debate over whether the mass extermination of European Jewry in this period had always been the main aim of Hitler himself, or was simply the result of a "series of ad hoc responses of a splintered and disorderly government machinery" that led to "an inevitable spiral of radicalisation",⁴⁶⁹ there can be no doubt that once the Nazis proclaimed their intention to implement the so-called "*Endlösung*",⁴⁷⁰ they set in motion the systematic killing of over six million Jews from across Europe. As an institution that was designed to protect God's people on earth and to promote Christian standards of morality in secular society, the German Protestant Church faced its largest challenge to date with the intensification of the NSDAP's persecution of the Jews and the eventual onset of the Holocaust. Lutheran Protestants in particular faced a two-fold dilemma in this period: they

⁴⁶⁸ Kershaw, 1993, p.80.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., p.82.

⁴⁷⁰ This was the Nazi term for the annihilation of European Jewry, which was declared at the *Wannsee Konferenz* on 20th January 1942. For details of the Conference, cf. Friedländer, 2007, p.339-340.

firstly had to assess whether they were at all obligated to respond to the NSDAP's murderous acts, which involved reconciling their specifically Lutheran obligation to refrain from political comment with their wider Christian conscience. Secondly, they also had to determine whether they were actually able to protest against the NSDAP's murderous measures, in consideration of all they had to lose and the extent to which they were actually able to influence the merciless Nazi regime. Since it has often been claimed that agents of German Protestantism ought to have done more to prevent the Holocaust,⁴⁷¹ mainly due to "the popular and theologically proper expectation that Christians are called to a higher standard of morality than others",⁴⁷² this sub-chapter assesses to what extent *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm were prepared to intervene in the issue and to what extent their respective decisions were influenced by their own particular theological rationale and their individual socio-cultural predicaments at the time.

As difficult as it may be for us to comprehend in retrospect, it is impossible to broach the subject of the Holocaust from the perspective of specifically Lutheran Protestants without first recognising that, unlike the DEKK directive to exclude non-Aryan Christians from participation in the Church, which was an issue of immediate concern to all clergymen, the implementation of the Holocaust was, in theory, an issue which was detached from the daily running of Church affairs. Moreover, since Marahrens and Meiser had already avoided comment on the Nazi euthanasia programme as an issue that belonged in the secular domain, as has been clarified in the previous sub-chapter, it was not to be expected that the bishops would be any more vocal about the Nazi implementation of the Holocaust, which was still more remote from the Church's immediate concerns.

Only with reluctance did *Landesbischof* August Marahrens of Hanover release public statements against the Holocaust. Having learnt from his experience during the debate over the exclusion of non-Aryan Christians from the DEK, in which he paradoxically gave in to pressure from the DEKK to accept the measures as part of the GVR yet was simultaneously compelled to reject the policy as spokesman for the KFK, Marahrens was careful this time around not to pitch himself clearly on the side of either the Church or the State. Even though Marahrens did send a letter to *Reichsinnenminister* Frick on behalf of the KFK to complain

⁴⁷¹ Cf. secondary literature, such as Ericksen and Heschel, 1999, or Gerlach, 2000, and also the *Stuttgarter Schuldklärung*, issued by the post-war German Protestant Church itself (the text of which is accessible at: http://www.markusgemeinde-stuttgart.de/1_schuldbek.htm last accessed 26/05/2010).

⁴⁷² Jantzen, 2008, p.vi.

about the Nazi extermination of the Jews in 1943,⁴⁷³ the grievances expressed in this letter should not automatically be seen as his own, since the issue of the Holocaust was put on the KFK's agenda by its more radical 'Confessing' members. Once the KFK had voted to complain against the murdering of Jews by the NSDAP, Marahrens took it upon himself, as the representative of the organisation, to tone down the inflammatory nature of the 'Dahlemitic' protestations, and issued a relatively mild complaint to the *Reichsinnenminister* instead. Angered by Marahrens' 'taming' influence over the wording of the letter, however, the more radical 'Dahlemites' in the KFK took their grievances over Marahrens' actions to the twelfth *Bekenntnissynode* of the EKApU in Breslau. It was as a result of this particular *Bekenntnissynode* that a more radical statement against the Holocaust was issued to the Nazis by the 'Dahlemites' in October 1943, independently of Marahrens' moderating influence.⁴⁷⁴ This statement declared explicitly that, "Die Vernichtung von Menschen, lediglich weil sie Angehörige eines Verbrechers, alt oder geisteskrank sind oder einer anderen Rasse angehören, ist keine Führung des Schwertes, das der Obrigkeit von Gott gegeben ist".⁴⁷⁵ It is not only by comparison with 'Dahlemitic' statements such as this that Marahrens' 'taming' influence over the KFK's protestations in this period is revealed, however. As will become clear later in this sub-chapter, Marahrens' protestations on behalf of the KFK also pale in comparison to those of his 'intact' counterpart Theophil Wurm.

A further illustration of Marahrens' 'toning down' of protestations from the KFK against the Holocaust is that, even though the letter he signed on behalf of the KFK proclaimed that the Nazi eradication of the Jews was contrary to "die elementarsten Gebote Gottes" and thereby justified the KFK's complaints on the grounds of the Church's function to see to the preservation of "die Heiligkeit des Lebens",⁴⁷⁶ Marahrens nevertheless 'softened' the letter by appending to it a personal declaration of his own that had not been approved by the rest of the KFK. Before Marahrens signed the letter he added the declaration that,

Die Rassenfrage ist als völkisch-politische Frage durch die verantwortliche politische Führung zu lösen. Sie allein hat das Recht, die notwendigen Maßnahmen zur Reinhaltung des deutschen Blutes und zur Stärkung der völkischen Kraft zu treffen und trägt auch allein vor Gott und der Geschichte die Verantwortung dafür.⁴⁷⁷

By proclaiming that racial issues were purely a secular affair to be resolved by worldly administration only, Marahrens visibly appealed to Lutheran logic, yet controversially negated

⁴⁷³ 'Schreiben an den Reichsinnenminister', 19/01/1943, in Klügel, 1965, p.203.

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. Gutteridge, 1976, p.248.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ 'Schreiben an den Reichsinnenminister', 19/01/1943, in Klügel, 1965, p.203.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

the right of the Church to intervene in the perpetration of the Holocaust. This is a stance that Marahrens can be seen to have practised publicly since 1939, when in a *Wochenbrief* to the ELLKH he similarly declared, “Daß die evangelische Kirche die Verantwortung für die Reinerhaltung unseres Volkstums im Bereich des Volks- und Staatslebens anerkennt, ist oft ausgesprochen worden und bedarf keiner Begründung”.⁴⁷⁸ In light of his complicated national web of allegiances to the ‘German Christian’ GVR, the ‘Confessing’ KFK, and the State-based RMfKA in this period, however, it can be said that Marahrens added the above sentences as a disclaimer to show the Nazis that he was expressing disapproval solely over their chosen methods of handling the so-called “Rassenfrage”, and not over Nazi ideology as such. It is for this reason that more radical ‘Confessing’ pastors began to question if Marahrens’ own interpretation of confessional Lutheranism in this period was as apolitical as he professed. As Heidrun Becker explains, “Psychologisch geschickt war die Frage an Marahrens impliziert, ob er einer kommunistischen Regierung den gleichen Respekt zollen würde wie einer nationalsozialistischen”.⁴⁷⁹

Since Marahrens was by now operating under a highly aggressive Nazi government with no political alternatives in sight, however, his agreement to send the letter to Frick should not be taken lightly, particularly in terms of his multiple structural ties at this point in the Third Reich. To ensure the least conflict occurred, as was customary of his actions in the earlier stages of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, Marahrens appeased the KFK by sending the letter, yet also took care not to infuriate the Nazis. A ‘watering down’ of the KFK’s complaints was therefore the best option for Marahrens to preserve his mediating function within the Church in this period. By acknowledging the ultimate right of the NSDAP to find an appropriate solution to the so-called “Rassenfrage”, however, it might be argued that Marahrens shirked his responsibility, as well as that of other churchmen, to intervene in the Nazi killing machine. Although it can be argued that churchmen like Marahrens may well have been able to impede the murderous aims of the NSDAP,⁴⁸⁰ it must nevertheless be acknowledged that, through his compromising efforts, Marahrens at least managed to ensure that the last remaining example of undistorted German Protestantism in Nazi Germany was protected against potential reprisals from the violent NSDAP.

Taking even less action than Marahrens, however, *Landesbischof* Hans Meiser of Bavaria

⁴⁷⁸ 12/07/1939, in Becker, 1996, p.100.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., p.102.

⁴⁸⁰ Hence Victoria Barnett’s questioning of what public resistance from prominent churchmen “might have achieved”, in Barnett, 1992, p.72.

never explicitly made a public statement about the ‘Jewish question’ during the course of the Third Reich.⁴⁸¹ In accordance with the dictates of his Lutheran confession, on which he had previously founded an effective means through which to preserve German Protestantism in the period prior to the Second World War, Meiser avoided comment on the Nazi murdering of the Jews. Following his own persecution at the hands of Nazi authorities in 1934 for the article he had written on the so-called “Judenfrage” in 1926,⁴⁸² Meiser was all the more reluctant to comment on Nazi eugenic thinking and racial laws in this period. In order to fully appreciate the effect of these public reprisals on Meiser’s subsequent preparedness to take a position against the NSDAP on the Holocaust, it must be remembered that Meiser had written the essay in 1926 because he was asked by the *Schriftleitung* of the *Predigerseminar* for which he worked to take a position on the so-called “Judenfrage” and to offer Christian guidelines on how to deal with the issue.⁴⁸³ In this respect, it is possible to suggest that, “Er hat es wohl nur getan, weil man ihn eben darum gebeten hatte”.⁴⁸⁴

Translating this experience into the context of the Nazi annihilation of the Jews in the latter years of the Third Reich, it seems plausible that Meiser was doubly reluctant to heed any further requests that risked rendering him victim to a similar and even more brutal smear campaign from the NSDAP. It is in this context that we must view Meiser’s subsequent refusal of a request by the *Lemppscher Kreis* to protest openly about the Holocaust in 1943. The *Lemppscher Kreis* was a group of Protestant booksellers and publishers who had come together to formulate the “Osterbotschaft Münchner Laien”,⁴⁸⁵ which was a declaration against the NSDAP’s extermination of the Jews. When the *Lemppscher Kreis* asked Meiser to disseminate the arguments of its *Osterbotschaft* on the national stage, either through church pamphlets or sermons, Meiser refused on the grounds that it was too dangerous for him to do so and it risked his arrest. Meiser also explained that, if he were to read the *Denkschrift*, it would not ease the plight of the Jews anyhow, and their suffering might even be heightened by the NSDAP in retaliation.⁴⁸⁶ Although Meiser was not prepared to spread awareness of the *Osterbotschaft* himself, he did, however, hand over his copy of the *Denkschrift* to his colleague Theophil Wurm, who was in a far more advantageous position to propagate the message. After all, it must be appreciated that since Bavaria was by now considered the

⁴⁸¹ Gerlach, 2000, p.95.

⁴⁸² Cf. pp.40-41 of this dissertation.

⁴⁸³ Cf. H.C. Meiser, 2008, p.66.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ The *Denkschrift* is accessible at: http://www.albert-lempp.de/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/lkas_signatur-d-1-nr-108_1.jpg (last accessed: 19/05/2010).

⁴⁸⁶ Hermle, 2006, pp.64-65; H.C.Meiser, 2008, pp.73-75.

spiritual home of the NSDAP and since Meiser had been under heightened surveillance by the Nazis following the controversies in his *Landeskirche* in 1934, any criticism of State measures by Meiser was at increased risk of detection and subsequently reprisals by Nazi agents.

Finally, it ought to be recognised that Meiser's strict adherence to confessional Lutheranism and his previous harassment at the hands of the Nazis meant that he was not only reluctant to comment on secular policies, but particularly those relating to the so-called 'Jewish question'. Speaking at an assembly of the first VKL on 13th September 1935, Meiser exclaimed, "Ich möchte meine Stimme erheben gegen ein selbstverschuldetes Martyrium. Ich sehe mit einiger Sorge auf die kommende preußische Synode, wenn sie solche Dinge anschneiden will wie z. B. die Judenfrage".⁴⁸⁷ Not only does this early remark confirm the pattern for a conscious policy of caution adopted by Meiser regarding Nazi racial thinking, but also reveals his implicit criticism of the tendencies for direct defiance of the 'Dahlemites', who had already shown themselves to Meiser as prepared to transcend traditional Lutheran teachings and, thereby, sacrifice the status of institutional Protestantism in Germany in their attempts to confront the NSDAP over its secular policies. Since Meiser had already established as early as 1935 that he was not prepared to agree to any comments on secular policies which risked putting the essence of the DEK in jeopardy, it is understandable that he was no more flexible in his responses to the Nazi persecution of the Jews in 1943, particularly in light of the NSDAP's established brutality, not just towards those it considered *lebensunwertes Leben* but also towards anyone who dared criticise it.⁴⁸⁸

Contrary to Meiser's constant reluctance to comment on secular affairs, however, *Landesbischof* Theophil Wurm of Württemberg showed no qualms about protesting to the very top levels of the NSDAP about events associated with the Holocaust. Initially keen to solicit the support of his colleagues within the DEK at large, Wurm used his authority on the executive committee of the KFA to raise awareness of the impending Holocaust to his fellow Church leaders as early as the autumn of 1941.⁴⁸⁹ Even though he failed to gain their agreement to outright protest, Wurm nonetheless voiced his concerns about news of mass killings of Jews of Europe to *Reichsminister* Kerrl only months later. In a letter to Kerrl written in December 1941, Wurm directly referred to the "Beseitigung der Geisteskranken

⁴⁸⁷ Reproduced in Niemöller, 1956, p.383.

⁴⁸⁸ By this point, the NSDAP had already punished Pastor Julius von Jan of Oberlenningen for his critical response to the *Reichskristallnacht* and had begun persecuting members of the outspoken 'Dahlemites' either by sending them to serve on the frontline (cf. Helmreich, 1979, pp.306-307) or, as in the case of Martin Niemöller, by imprisoning them in concentration camps.

⁴⁸⁹ Wurm's report of the KFK meeting of 21/10/1941 is reproduced in Schäfer, 1968, pp.157-158.

und Schwachsinnigen” and spoke of “Gerüchte[...] über massenhafte Tötungen im Osten”.⁴⁹⁰ Although mass extermination camps were not officially put into operation by the Nazis to murder the Jews until 1942, it must be remembered that the Nazis had been carrying out mass shootings of Jews and Slavs in the captured Eastern territories since early 1941, and the gas chambers at major extermination camps such as Auschwitz had been operational for trials since September 1941.⁴⁹¹ The earliest protests of the ‘Dahlemitic’ wing of the *Bekennende Kirche* against the Holocaust, such as its statement of Breslau and the protest writings of both Bonhoeffer⁴⁹² and Barth⁴⁹³, date from 1943, when the mass murders were already well under way, whereas Wurm should be given credit for raising objection to the annihilation of European Jewry long before the Nazi killing machine had moved fully into motion.

Moreover, the fact that the mass murders did not take place within the territory of Wurm’s *Landeskirche*, unlike the Nazi euthanasia programme, only serves to reinforce the fact that his protests were truly motivated by deep-seated moral and ethical concerns. Again, a full ten months before the *Bekennnissynode* of the EKApU issued its protest against the Holocaust, Wurm claimed to know, through holidaymakers who had travelled to the occupied territories, of the “systematisch[e] Ermordung von Juden und Polen”.⁴⁹⁴ By raising objections to these measures, Wurm showed that the physical distance of the extermination camps from his own ‘local’ area of jurisdiction, be it on the regional or the national level, was immaterial. Here is clear evidence that Wurm operated over and above his obligation to serve both the regional interests of his pastorate and the national interests of the *deutsches Volk*, and protested against the Holocaust on the grounds of his overriding Christian commitment to serve all God’s people on earth.

To demonstrate the strength of Wurm’s sense of duty to universal Christendom, then, we need look no further than the letter of protest he wrote to Germany’s *Führer* on behalf of the KFK. On 16th July 1943, Wurm sent the following words to Hitler:

Im Namen Gottes und um des deutschen Volkes willen sprechen wir die dringende Bitte aus, die verantwortliche Führung des Reiches wolle der Verfolgung und Vernichtung wehren, der viele Männer und Frauen im deutschen Machtbereich ohne gerichtliches Urteil unterworfen werden. [...] / Diese Absichten stehen, ebenso wie die gegen die anderen Nichtarier ergriffenen Vernichtungsmaßnahmen, im schärfsten Widerspruch zu dem Gebot Gottes und verletzen das Fundament alles abendländischen Denkens und Lebens: Das gottgegebene Unrecht menschlichen Daseins und menschlicher Würde

⁴⁹⁰ ‘Brief an Kerrl’, dated only “Dezember 1941”, reproduced in *ibid.*, p.158.

⁴⁹¹ For detailed chronologies of the Holocaust, cf. Levin, 1968; Edelheit and Edelheit, 1994; Botwinick, 2001.

⁴⁹² For more on Bonhoeffer’s ecumenical vision, cf. Barnett, 1995; Hockenos, 2007.

⁴⁹³ For Barth’s contribution to the Church resistance effort during the war, cf. Lindsay, 2001; A. Rasmussen, 2007.

⁴⁹⁴ ‘Brief an Dill’, 28/01/1943, reproduced in Schäfer, 1968, p.159.

überhaupt.⁴⁹⁵

To take his complaints to the very top level of national administration in this way was an act of bravery in itself, but the concluding lines of his letter are particularly significant in that, in complete contrast to Marahrens' earlier letter from the KFK, Wurm most plainly subordinates Hitler's authority to God and denies his right to interfere with the God-given order of creation. By further emphasising the fact that many men and women had been unlawfully sent to their deaths, Wurm implicitly applied a Lutheran moral yardstick to the NSDAP and showed that it had failed in its self-appointed role as God's chosen instrument on earth. Although these were undoubtedly risky claims to make against a dictatorship that had already revealed its capacity to carry out the heartless murder of millions throughout Europe, the main reason why Wurm was able to employ such direct methods of argumentation was due to his complete detachment from the DEKK and his consequent ability to portray himself as a representative of the spiritual force of Christendom, and not as the physical or secular manifestation of the German Protestant Church.

In this context, it can be appreciated that Marahrens was not in a position to utter such direct protestations like Wurm, since his close association with the administrative centre of the DEK rendered him a representative of institutional Protestantism in Germany at large, and thereby risked endangering the status of all the Protestant confessions in the event of Nazi reprisals. Similarly, although many have argued that Meiser should have put his name to a similar letter of protest to Wurm's,⁴⁹⁶ it must be appreciated that Meiser's recent ability to portray himself as the chief protector of specifically Lutheran Protestantism in Germany also rendered him a representative of a significant part of the national Protestant Church. Even though Meiser was predominantly concerned with preserving the status of confessional Lutheranism in this period, the loss of this single facet of German Protestantism was nonetheless a lesser risk than losing all the original Protestant confessions. It is for this reason that, despite his own reluctance to address the 'Jewish question', Meiser still possessed a certain degree of flexibility with regard to opposing the NSDAP. This hypothesis is corroborated by Wurm's post-war reflections on his own decision to sign the KFK's letter of 1943, in which he acknowledged that, "Marahrens konnte sich zur Mitunterschrift nicht entschließen. Meiser wäre bereit gewesen, aber wir fanden es dann doch richtiger, das Schriftstück nur mit einer Unterschrift abgehen zu lassen."⁴⁹⁷ By recognising that his own

⁴⁹⁵ 'Brief an Hitler', 16/07/1943, reproduced in *ibid.*, pp.164-165.

⁴⁹⁶ Cf. the accusations in the *Meiserstraße* conflict in H. C. Meiser, 2008, pp.48-66.

⁴⁹⁷ Wurm, 1953, p168.

signature sufficed on the letter of protest, then, Wurm strategically ensured that the ‘intact’ Protestantism of Meiser’s ELKB was at least secured and thereby able to continue the fight in the event that his own efforts failed and provoked reprisals from the NSDAP.

All in all, therefore, the above analysis of the dramatically different responses of the three *Landesbischöfe* to the Holocaust reveals that their actions in this period can only be explained through reference to the bishops’ respective positions on the regional and national stage. During this period, Wurm was the only bishop of the ‘intact’ churches not directly exposed to heightened surveillance or threatened by brutal reprisals from Nazi agents. Further to this, Wurm also had a free licence to speak on behalf of the KFK as a result of both the successes of his previous protestations and his ongoing turn to universal Christian values and ‘Dahlemitic’ theological rationale. It was for these reasons that, alone among the three bishops, he came to the forefront of the Protestant struggle against the persecution of the Jews in this phase of the Third Reich and, more significantly, became the only face of direct opposition (*Widerstand*) to emerge from the ‘intact’ *Landeskirchen*.

Das kirchliche Einigungswerk

Despite not officially being referred to as *kirchliches Einigungswerk* until late 1943,⁴⁹⁸ a fresh wave of initiatives to reconsolidate institutional Protestantism in Germany had occurred since 1940, primarily since *Landesbischof* Theophil Wurm of Württemberg had found himself becoming “ein[e] Art Schlüsselfigur” on the national level of Church administration.⁴⁹⁹ As a result of his lack of obligations to the predominantly ‘German Christian’ DEKK, his increasing appeal to the ‘Dahlemitic’ strand of the *Bekennende Kirche*, and his relatively mild adherence to confessional Lutheranism, Wurm not only found himself in an ideal position to protest to the NSDAP over its interference in Church affairs and its policies of mass extermination, but also managed to use his ecclesiastical freedom to instigate the largest and most effective structural change to the nature of the DEK to date. This was to prepare the Church for the foreseeable fall of the Third Reich and was to form the basis of the post-war EKD. Since it was Wurm’s unification efforts which dominated the final years of the specifically Protestant struggle against Nazism, this sub-chapter will firstly outline Wurm’s

⁴⁹⁸ Although Wurm had described his Church unification efforts as “Einigungswerk” in private correspondence to Meiser as early as February 1942, Jörg Thierfelder confirms that the term “kirchliches Einigungswerk” was first used in a letterhead on 01/10/1943 (Thierfelder, 1975, p.47).

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p.50.

particular contribution to the Church consolidation process, before considering the responses of his counterparts Marahrens and Meiser to his specific brand of *kirchliches Einigungswerk* during this period.

Since he had continually moved closer to the confrontational ‘Dahlemitic’ line in his responses to Nazi policies, particularly to its wartime restrictions and its policies of racial segregation, Wurm gradually began to win widespread respect and admiration within Church circles.⁵⁰⁰ When the time came for Wurm to fulfil his own desire to bring about intra-Church unification, he was therefore able to draw upon his newfound status as the man of hope for both moderate and radical ‘Confessing’ clergymen alike and began to solicit support for his own design for the new national German Protestant Church. Since 8th July 1940, Wurm had been engaged, in partnership with his Bavarian counterpart Meiser, in efforts to tighten their ecumenical ties with the northern German *Landeskirchen*.⁵⁰¹ When he was struck down with a life-threatening illness in 1941, however, Wurm experienced an epiphany and began to formulate a clearer position on the direction in which he wanted his *kirchliches Einigungswerk* to go.

Since Wurm had come to recognise the “Sünde und Schuld” of institutional Protestantism in Germany for having allowed itself to split into competing factions instead of remaining intact to preach the pure Word of God,⁵⁰² he henceforth began to work for the consolidation of the German Protestant Church based upon universal Christian principles, which transcended the squabbles of the various Church-political factions as well as traditional inter-denominational divisions. In an open attack on the leadership style of the GVR, which blatantly governed the DEK in direct relation to secular developments in the Third Reich, Wurm expressed his objection to its methods of administration with the words,

Wenn Sie aber, wie ich in den letzten Wochen, mehrmals unmittelbar vor den Pforten der Ewigkeit gestanden wären, dann wäre es Ihnen unmöglich gewesen, im Namen der Kirche ein Wort zu sprechen, das statt eines klaren Zeugnisses eine Verhüllung der Tatsachen enthält.⁵⁰³

Demonstrating to the national leadership of the DEK that his recent illness had caused him to consider its policies to be in breach of the clear Christian witness that the Church ought to convey, Wurm thus confirmed his intentions to part ways with the existing *Reichskirche*, and began instead to establish a unified Church that existed in the sole service of God. In doing so,

⁵⁰⁰ Helmreich, 1979, p.333.

⁵⁰¹ This involved discussions with the prominent ‘Confessing’ clergymen, Otto Dibelius and Heinrich Held (Thierfelder, 1975, pp.32-33).

⁵⁰² Schäfer, 1984, p.319.

⁵⁰³ ‘Schreiben an den GVR’, 05/07/1941, reproduced in Schäfer, 1968, pp.319-320, (p.320).

Wurm not only positioned himself in complete opposition to the aims of the GDC, but also redefined the concept of a Confessing Church which, in his eyes, ought not to exist solely in a politico-ecclesiastical function to fight against the heresy of Nazism, but ought rather to remain detached from any political comment and propagate only the original Christian teachings which would in turn serve to undermine Nazi authority.

To illustrate the strength of Wurm's determination to establish a pietistic Confessing Church, we need only look to his sermons and public addresses of the central war years, in which he increasingly developed the idea of the German Protestant *Landeskirchen* united solely by their common allegiance to God. For example, by the summer of 1942, at the height of Nazi military victories in Europe, Wurm did not comment on the territorial gains brought about by secular battles, but rather on the potential of the Christian bond to unite the individual Protestant factions. In a sermon on 14th June, Wurm exclaimed that, "Diese evangelische Gotteserkenntnis, diese gehorsame Anerkennung der biblischen Wahrheit, der apostolischen Verkündigung eint uns; sie ist ein Band der Gemeinschaft, das wir heute beglückend empfinden".⁵⁰⁴ As if emphasising the benefits of unification for the Church was not enough, however, by the end of the same year Wurm had also begun to accentuate the responsibility of the German Protestant Church to the wider ecumenical community to demonstrate that it shared with the other Christian churches of the world the same undistorted faith in Christ. Recognising that the endemic factionalism of the DEK risked jeopardising its fundamental Christian witness, Wurm used the prominent *Reformationsfest* of December 1942 as a platform to remind the DEK of its overriding responsibility to act as a unitary force of God. He stated that,

Wir können es der Welt nicht glaubhaft machen, daß der Herr Christus durch sein Wort und seinen Geist uns regiert, wenn wir nicht als seine Gemeinde zusammenstehen und alle Meinungsverschiedenheiten in Fragen der kirchlichen Organisation zurückstellen hinter die Pflicht zu einhelliger Bezeugung der christlichen Botschaft.⁵⁰⁵

To add weight to these calls for a unified Christian community, in his first official move to push his *kirchliches Einigungswerk* forwards, Wurm used the occasion of the *Reformationsfest* to issue his aptly named *dreizehn Sätze über Auftrag und Dienst der Kirche*. Although these *Sätze* underwent numerous revisions throughout the remaining years of the Third Reich to render them acceptable to all the various Church factions that had emerged as

⁵⁰⁴ 'Gemeinschaft untereinander', Predigt be idem Gustav Adolf-Fest in Nürtingen, 14/06/1942, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.1.

⁵⁰⁵ 'Ich glaube, darum rede ich!', Predigt am Reformationsfest in der Stiftskirche, Stuttgart, 01/12/1942, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.1.

a result of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*,⁵⁰⁶ they nonetheless marked Wurm's first public step towards initiating structural change on the national level of the DEK. Wurm used his sermon to justify his *Sätze*, stating that,

Die ersten vier Sätze stellen fest, daß die Kirche [...] eine göttliche Stiftung ist und darum nicht wie eine menschliche Organisation ihren Auftrag ändern und irgend einer Zeitströmung anpassen kann, und daß sie zur Erfüllung dieses Auftrags auch dem eigenen Volk gegenüber in der Öffentlichkeit arbeiten muss und nicht im Winkel bleiben kann.⁵⁰⁷

Clearly demonstrating that he rejected the compromising methods of the GDC and its expectation that the Church ought to adapt itself to the socio-political climate of its secular surroundings, Wurm had plainly moved towards a theological rationale that was akin with that of the 'Dahlemites' in this period. In short, due to the favourable socio-cultural conditions in which he found himself following his expressions of hostility to Nazi secular policies, Wurm was finally able to draw upon the *Intaktheit* of his own *Landeskirche* and his independence from any of the major Church factions in order to expand this autonomy onto the wider DEK itself. Moreover, since Wurm had also found protection from the persecution of the NSDAP in the infallibility of universal Christendom by this point, it is understandable that he saw in the promotion of the Church's common Christian witness an effective bulwark against Nazism. The extent to which Wurm believed in the power of the Church's common Christian witness to withstand the demands of Nazism on the national Church level is demonstrated by his sermon held on *Kirchweihsonntag* in the autumn of 1943. In this sermon, Wurm poignantly asserted that, "In meinem Wörterbuch steht das Wort 'Unmöglich' nicht mehr".⁵⁰⁸ Armed with such a determination to succeed, Wurm pledged his uncompromising commitment to achieving the unification of the DEK on universal Christian precepts, which his counterparts Marahrens and Meiser had hitherto failed to achieve.

Wurm's measures of *kirchliches Einigungswerk* were, however, not the only Protestant unification efforts being undertaken during the war years. Further to his efforts to advance the *lutherischer Flügel* between 1933 and 1939, *Landesbischof* Hans Meiser of Bavaria continued to foster a communal Lutheran identity on the national level of the DEK during this period. On first glance, one could be forgiven for perceiving no difference between the attitudes of Meiser and Wurm towards the concept of *kirchliches Einigungswerk*, mainly since a programme of Church unification efforts that was based upon the principles of confessional

⁵⁰⁶ These revisions are detailed in Thierfelder, 1975, pp.94-109.

⁵⁰⁷ 'Predigt am Reformationsfest', 01/12/1942, LKAS, Bestell-Nr.1.

⁵⁰⁸ 'Gott, dein Weg ist heilig', Predigt in Reutlingen anlässlich der 600 Jahr-Feier der Vollendung der Marienkirche am Kirchweihsonntag 1943, in Wurm, 1950, (pp.100-111), p.107.

Lutheranism still required an acknowledgement of the Christian witness as the cornerstone of the Church. Best demonstrating Meiser's determination to eliminate Nazi heresy from German Protestantism is his sermon at Nuremberg in November 1941, in which he declared that,

...durch Wort und Schrift wird verkündet: Wir haben keinen Recht, unseren Führungsanspruch in Europa anzutreten, solange wir nicht den Mut haben, die Mächte einer fast 2000jährigen geistigen und politischen Gemeinschaftsidee auf revolutionäre Art zu überwinden und die neue nationalsozialistische Idee an ihre Stelle zu setzen. Dem Deutschen unserer Tage bleibt darum die immerwährende Aufgabe und heilige Verpflichtung, alle Lebenserscheinungen unseres Volkes mit nationalsozialistischem revolutionären Geist zu erfüllen und innerhalb Deutschlands alle Traditionen der alten Welt zu beseitigen. Das ist die radikale Verneinung des Christentums.⁵⁰⁹

Although Meiser's recognition that a belief in Christ ought to remain at the centre of Church life and not become superseded by temporal Nazi distortions was strikingly reminiscent of Wurm's own attitudes to the wartime predicament of the German Protestant Church, his later grievances over Wurm's methods of unification show Meiser to have had different ideas as to the direction the *kirchliches Einigungswerk* should take. Despite supporting the Church conciliation efforts of Wurm in principle, as can be inferred through his signing of Wurm's *dreizehn Sätze*,⁵¹⁰ Meiser most evidently began to object to the multi-confessional direction in which Wurm's unification efforts were heading. In particular, he raised concern in early 1942 over "eine Stärkung des Unionismus".⁵¹¹ Fearful that Wurm's approach to *kirchliches Einigungswerk* risked creating a Church with a compromised confessional basis that was reminiscent of the United Protestantism of the EKApU, Meiser first refused to sign in agreement with the *dreizehn Sätze* and, once again, began to assert his arguments for a strictly Lutheran DEK. Before eventually agreeing to put his name to Wurm's *Sätze*, Meiser wrote that,

Ich konnte meine Unterschrift nicht geben, wenn die vorgelegten Sätze ein Bekenntnis über die Kirche darstellen oder zu einem solchen ausgewertet werden sollten. [...] Mein Wunsch ist, daß die Sätze nicht wie die Theologische Erklärung von Barmen Ursache neuer Spaltung, sondern wirklich Mittel der Einigung werden, wobei ich mich versichere, daß im Rahmen der Einigung die Ziele des Lutherrats nicht aus den Augen verloren werden.⁵¹²

Reluctant to compromise the *lutherischer Flügel*, which he had so painstakingly established during the early years of the Third Reich and which, between 1935 and 1939 in particular, had served to shelter the 'intact' Protestantism of Hanover, Bavaria and Württemberg from the escalating conflict between the NSDAP and the more radical element

⁵⁰⁹ 'Stürzt Deutschland ins Dunkel?', Predigt über Joh.12, 35u.36 zum Reformationsfest, Nürnberg, 02/11/1941, reproduced in Meiser, 1982, pp.121-126, (p.122).

⁵¹⁰ For a list of those who agreed to the *Sätze*, cf. G. Niemöller, 1959a, p.253.

⁵¹¹ Thierfelder, 1975, p.157.

⁵¹² Reproduced in *ibid.*, p.158.

of the *Bekennende Kirche*, Meiser ultimately sought to influence Wurm's actions by reminding him of the Lutheran character of his own *Landeskirche* and his subsequent obligations to the *Lutherrat*. Although his efforts were doomed to failure from the start since, as Paul Fleisch concluded, for Wurm "der lutherischer Zusammenschluß [war] doch nur eine Vorstufe zum evangelischen Zusammenschluß", ⁵¹³ Meiser nonetheless remained committed to the idea of establishing a specifically 'deutsche lutherische Kirche' to the end of the Third Reich and beyond. Often working against extreme adversity, Meiser ultimately showed the strength of his commitment to confessional Lutheranism by continuing his struggle for the *lutherischer Flügel* even after the *Gestapo* prohibited the continued existence of the *Lutherrat* in October 1944. ⁵¹⁴

To sum up Meiser's response to Wurm's *kirchliches Einigungswerk*, then, it is clear that, in principle, he supported the unification efforts of his southern German neighbour, yet in practice he objected to Wurm's desired end-goal of a national Church that was united by universal Christian principles and not specifically by confessional Lutheranism. Having been swayed by the earlier successes of his national *lutherischer Flügel* in acting as a bulwark against the conflict between the feuding 'Dahlemites' and the Nazi State, Meiser evidently felt compelled in this phase of the Third Reich to continue to enhance the intra-Church Lutheran bond in the hope that this also functioned as an effective impetus for unification. Despite his genuine desires to effect structural change in the all-too-compartmentalised DEK and to oppose the heresy of the GDC, however, Meiser's unwillingness to compromise the confessional status of both his highly Lutheran *Landeskirche* and his wider *lutherischer Flügel* rendered him unable to heed the concerns of the more radical 'Dahlemites', and the Reformed and United Protestants alike. This ultimately left Wurm free to occupy the centre stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* with his more universalised mode of *kirchliches Einigungswerk* during this period.

It is thus only after delineating the two parallel types of Church unification effort that were taking place during the final years of the Third Reich that it is possible to demonstrate that the response of *Landesbischof* August Marahrens of Hanover to the Protestant Church conciliation efforts lay somewhere in between the two paths of progress adopted by Wurm on the one hand and Meiser on the other. As a representative of the highly Lutheran ELLKH,

⁵¹³ 'Sieben Jahre Lutherrat', 1943, reproduced in *ibid.*, p.161.

⁵¹⁴ Hauschild, 2006, p.114.

which had fought since 1866 to maintain its confessional autonomy from the EKApU,⁵¹⁵ it is understandable that Marahrens only originally consented to Wurm's *kirchliches Einigungswerk* on the proviso that its conditions for unification "dem Bekenntnis entsprechen und uns nicht in den Verdacht der Unionisierung bringen".⁵¹⁶ Almost echoing Meiser's fears that Wurm's plans for the new German Protestant Church risked having a 'diluting' effect on specifically Lutheran practices and principles, Marahrens thus turned to his original strong confessional beliefs to avoid giving full commitment to Wurm's efforts. This tendency to seek sanctuary in confessional Lutheranism to prevent assimilation into the 'United' Protestant confession had long been typical of clergymen from the ELLKH who, in their efforts to preserve the confessional character of their *Landeskirche* against the comparatively 'diluted' Protestantism of their 'United' surroundings in northern Germany, had come to be viewed as some of the staunchest Lutherans in the German territories.⁵¹⁷

Marahrens' particular entanglement on the national level of Church administration, however, also raises the question of the extent to which his initial reluctance to commit to Wurm's *kirchliches Einigungswerk* was a result of the High Lutheranism characteristic of his ELLKH, or rather a means to avoid conflict, once again, with his *Deutsche Christen* counterparts in the DEKK, who almost to a man viewed Wurm by now as a clear-cut member of the 'Dahlemitic' branch of the *Bekennende Kirche*. Since the GVR, for which Marahrens was spokesman, made "no significant contribution" to the task of uniting and re-organising the DEK itself during this period,⁵¹⁸ it is plausible that Marahrens considered not being seen on the regional level of his ELLKH to be openly welcoming of Wurm's measures to be the best way of preserving the seeming neutrality of the GVR towards the Church unification efforts. Gertraud Grünzinger has indeed already pointed to Marahrens' participation in the GVR to explain his suspicion over Wurm's unification methods during this period. According to Grünzinger, "Marahrens stand dem Einigungswerk Wurms, der alle bekenntnisgebundenen Kräfte zusammenführen wollte, zunächst wohl skeptisch gegenüber, da er mit dem Geistlichen Vertrauensrat eine reichseinheitliche Lösung bevorzugte".⁵¹⁹ Since Marahrens was therefore already engaged in the fruitless task of trying "to square a circle" as part of his prominent role on the administration of the DEK,⁵²⁰ namely by having to appease the NSDAP,

⁵¹⁵ For accounts of the sense of separatism characteristic of the ELLKH since Hanover joined the Prussian Union in 1866, cf. Uhlhorn, 1988 and Krumwieder, 1996.

⁵¹⁶ 'Schreiben an Wurm', 15/07/1942, reproduced in Thierfelder, 1975, p.158.

⁵¹⁷ Röhrbein, 1996, pp.11-14.

⁵¹⁸ Helmreich, 1979, p.333.

⁵¹⁹ Grünzinger, 2009.

⁵²⁰ Helmreich, 1979, p.333.

the GDC, the 'Dahlemites' and the Church moderates, any overly enthusiastic assertion of support for Wurm's *kirchliches Einigungswerk*, either in his guise as GVR spokesman or on behalf of the ELLKH, undoubtedly risked losing him the support of all those outside the *Bekennende Kirche*.

In spite of these structural constraints, however, it cannot be assumed that Marahrens was himself ambivalent to Wurm's *kirchliches Einigungswerk* in this period. In a sermon given in late 1943, Marahrens cited the well-known biblical instruction, "Ich bin der Herr dein Gott, du sollst keine anderen Götter neben mir haben" (Exodus 20, 2-6).⁵²¹ By expressing the sentiment that the Church ought to respect the Word of God only and not adhere to the instructions of any temporal idols, Marahrens' speeches during this phase of the Third Reich manifestly began to take on the same tone and transmit the same warnings as those of Wurm. In recognition of his inability to express personal sentiment on the issue for fear of jeopardizing his many conflicting Church positions, however, it can be appreciated that Marahrens was only able to offer support for Wurm's *kirchliches Einigungswerk* by safely framing it within widely-acknowledged biblical lessons. Moreover, since Marahrens had always strived to work as chief conciliator of the DEK throughout the Protestant struggle to date, the type of unification that Wurm was by now attempting to bring to the Church was of the sort that Marahrens himself had once hoped to achieve, yet had ultimately been unable to provide as a result of his complex web of obligations to all sides of the Protestant conflict.

Marahrens' inability to comment in depth or, indeed, to contribute personally to the *kirchliches Einigungswerk* process did not mean, however, that his operations on the level of national DEK administration did not aid Wurm's own unification efforts during this period. Although Marahrens was eventually criticised for spending the war years providing "Äußerungen zu konkreten militärischen Aktionen der Wehrmacht" as part of his role on the GVR,⁵²² to a certain degree his ongoing appeasement of the NSDAP and his ability to demonstrate to Germany's Nazi government that it had the fundamental support of the DEK during the war years left the way clear for Wurm to conduct his *kirchliches Einigungswerk* without attracting the attention of Nazi agents. Even though Hanns Kerrl passed away in December 1941, Marahrens still remained at the centre of the conflict between the Protestant Church and the Nazi State. The predicament of the *Bekennende Kirche* had even worsened considerably once the NSDAP replaced Kerrl with Hermann Muhs, who began to place

⁵²¹ 'Predigt', 26/10/1943, LKAH, SI HII 121 Nr.112-113.

⁵²² For details of the GVR's responses to specific military developments between 1942 and 1945, cf. Meyn and Grosse, 1996, pp.448-455 (from which the given quotation is taken).

tighter financial restrictions on the Church and confiscated Church property to fund the German war effort.⁵²³ Whilst the NSDAP was continuing its efforts to hamper the operations of the radical wing of the *Bekennende Kirche*, then, and even preventing the work of the *lutherischer Flügel* through increased *Gestapo* surveillance,⁵²⁴ Wurm was nonetheless left in peace to implement his *kirchliches Einigungswerk* ‘backstage’ in the DEK. These unification efforts were obviously helped by the fact that Marahrens was ultimately head of the KFA so, with attention being paid to Marahrens’ actions in this phase of the Third Reich, Wurm was relatively free to negotiate ‘behind the scenes’ with the rest of the KFK and more radical members of the Church resistance movement generally. In this particular context, it can therefore be claimed that, although Marahrens’ actions in the GVR essentially consisted of the very heresy which Wurm’s unification efforts were trying to dispel, his continuous pacification of the Nazis through congratulatory messages, telegrams of support, and prayers for victory implicitly enhanced Wurm’s freedom of intra-Church arbitration.

Since Marahrens ultimately had his own early efforts at achieving Church conciliation thwarted by his obligations to agencies of both political and ecclesiastical Nazism, then, his decision to support the unification efforts of both Meiser and Wurm during the war years was the best means by which he could influence the *kirchliches Einigungswerk* without endangering either the confessional status of his *Landeskirche* or his personal standing on any one of his executive committees. Although Marahrens eventually put his name to Wurm’s “Aufruf” for the *kirchliches Einigungswerk*,⁵²⁵ his actions show that he was only comfortable in doing so after having visibly shown himself to ‘water down’ Wurm’s *dreizehn Sätze* along with Meiser. In this respect, therefore, Marahrens was still able to honour his underlying desire for Church unification and live up to the expectations of the KFK without either jeopardising the High Lutheranism of his ELLKH or overly enraging the Nazi factions for which he was obligated to work during this period.

Chapter Summary

Drawing the individual strands of this chapter together, which deal with secular developments as well as purely intra-Church processes, it becomes evident that the responses of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm to each policy area corresponded entirely with

⁵²³ For more details of the wartime restrictions on the Church, cf. Helmreich, 1979, pp.323-326.

⁵²⁴ Hauschild, 2006, p.116.

⁵²⁵ Klügel, 1964, p.399.

the respective socio-cultural positions in which they found themselves in the final years of the Third Reich. With Marahrens and Meiser ultimately having had their ability both to oppose Nazi measures and to contribute to all-encompassing Church conciliation efforts restricted by their concurrent commitments to particular factions of the DEK, it was only *Landesbischof* Wurm of Württemberg who remained in an advantageous position both to criticise Nazi agents without overt risk to the Church and to enact a process of structural reform within the DEK remote from Nazi suspicions.

Although Wurm's actions obviously dominated developments in this third and final stage of the Protestant struggle against Nazism, his comparative successes should not be allowed to overshadow the contribution to the resolution of the conflict of Marahrens and Meiser during the Second World War. To take Marahrens' predicament first, then, this chapter has drawn attention to the restrictions imposed on him as a result of his reluctant entrapment in the GVR which, in light of its associations with both the GDC and the RMfKA, not only obligated him to respond positively to Nazi policies but also precluded any possible criticism of Nazi methods in view of its emphasis on spiritual affairs only. Further to this, Marahrens' operations on behalf of the GDC-led *Reichskirche* also limited the extent to which he was realistically able to support and contribute to Wurm's project to establish an alternative Church government. Despite having originally started out at the forefront of the intra-Church unification process at the beginning of the Protestant struggle, Marahrens was by now forced to remain silent on the matter to avoid angering his pro-Nazi colleagues in the GVR. Although his continuous efforts to appease the NSDAP and his GDC counterparts have often led to Marahrens' denunciation in retrospective literature, it is important to recognise firstly that he was not able to act otherwise in this phase of the Third Reich, and secondly that his declarations of support for the NSDAP and its war effort were not without implicit benefit. By continually praising secular developments as part of his role on the GVR, Marahrens ultimately protected his subsidiary committee of the KFK from overt suspicion, and thereby provided Wurm with a comparatively free space in which to pursue dialogue over his own *kirchliches Einigungswerk*.

As the luminary of the 'intact' dynamic during the previous stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, by contrast, Meiser continued to promote the same strict confessional Lutheranism throughout the Second World War, which had earlier provided the three *Landesbischöfe* with a means to avoid incorporation into the outright conflict between the 'Dahlemites' and the NSDAP. Since the dictates of the specifically Lutheran confession meant

that Meiser was virtually exempted from commenting on secular developments, however, Meiser found himself during the war years neither able to offer clear comments on the Nazi war effort nor, more significantly, able to criticise the NSDAP when its policies concerning the mass murder of the Jews and other persecuted minorities began. Adding to this Meiser's personal reluctance to take position on the so-called 'Jewish question', which dated back to his earlier harassment at the hands of the NSDAP in 1934, it is somewhat understandable that Meiser failed to find both the inclination and the courage to alter his ecclesiastical habits which had, until now, served to protect not only himself from Nazi reprisals but also the 'intact' Protestantism represented by his *Landeskirche*. Unfortunately for Meiser, however, the honourable intentions behind his efforts in this period do not disguise the fact that he failed to use his authority in the Church to protest against the extreme violations of human rights taking place throughout the Third Reich at the time.

Meiser's silence towards Nazi racial policies does not mean that he was completely insignificant to the Church relief effort though. Although he may not have made as much use of his presumed ecclesiastical freedom in this phase of the Third Reich to help the Jews as many hoped⁵²⁶ and, as a result, has become "eine persona non grata" in *Kirchenkampf* historiographies in general,⁵²⁷ Meiser's 'underground' efforts to finance the *Büro Grüber* must nonetheless be acknowledged as having saved a considerable number of lives from the Nazi killing machine during this period. Similarly, his reluctant support of Wurm's particular brand of *kirchliches Einigungswerk* ought not to be viewed as evidence of Meiser's general hostility to the plans. After all, Meiser's continuous efforts to effect change on a specifically Lutheran basis may well have put him in opposition to Wurm's methods, but not necessarily to his general objectives. It is in this respect, then, that Meiser almost became a victim of his own staunch confessional values. Unable to compromise any aspect of the original Lutheran confession of both his *Landeskirche* and his national *lutherischer Flügel*, Meiser had no choice but to resist not only the heresy of the GDC but also the universalism of more moderate and radical 'Confessing' clergymen, whose support was ultimately necessary for the realisation of intra-Church unity.

As a result of Marahrens and Meiser's increasingly restricted efforts in the Protestant struggle against Nazism, then, Wurm found himself projected "von Jahr zu Jahr mehr in den

⁵²⁶ Cf. The accusations raised against Meiser in the *Meiserstraße* conflict, in H. C. Meiser, 2008, pp.48-66; or the newspaper articles of Käpper, 2007 and Bormann, 2009.

⁵²⁷ H. C. Meiser, 2008, p.5.

Mittelpunkt des Kampfes zwischen Staat und Kirche”.⁵²⁸ In short, the inability of both Marahrens and Meiser to act in the best interests of every Church faction and every Protestant denomination in this period only served to highlight Wurm’s own preparedness to lead the German Protestant Church through the final years of the Third Reich and beyond. Moreover, circumstance had initially helped to bolster Wurm’s own credentials in line with those of the more radical ‘Dahlemites’. Firstly, Wurm already represented a *Landeskirche* with a strong pietistic tradition, which arguably rendered it easier for him to move away from the constraints of High Lutheranism and appeal to wider Christian values. Secondly, the fact that the Nazi euthanasia programme in particular took place predominantly within his own *Landeskirche* meant that Wurm was instantly put in a strategically more advantageous position to either Marahrens or Meiser in this period, since it was easier for him to collate information on the issue and to take his well-researched concerns to government officials. Although his subsequent protests over Nazi policies of racial and eugenic discrimination in this phase of the Third Reich arguably came too late for many, as a leader of an ‘intact’ *Landeskirche*, Wurm nonetheless had to exercise a degree of caution in his protestations to ensure the least risk possible to the undistorted Protestantism he represented. For this reason, he was not overly reckless in his confrontation of the NSDAP, as can be demonstrated by the fact that he ensured that Meiser remained free of association with the KFK’s letter of protest to Hitler in 1943. This manoeuvre guaranteed that at least one aspect of ‘intact’ Protestantism did not risk reprisals in the event of Nazi aggression against the Church. Despite the tardiness of Wurm’s complaints, then, it cannot be denied that they were strongly motivated by a genuine concern for humanity in this period and the propagation of God’s unconditional love to all His people on earth.

All in all, the events of the ‘Wurm Years’ not only demonstrate the rise to prominence of *Landesbischof* Wurm of Württemberg both within the ‘intact’ dynamic and within German Protestantism at large, but also, most significantly, reveal the unspoken interdependency between the three *Landesbischofe* of the ‘intact’ churches, who can be seen to have been largely reliant upon each other’s actions to effect small yet significant changes in the society of Nazi Germany, as well as to ensure the survival of their particular ‘intact’ dynamic to the end of the Third Reich and beyond.

⁵²⁸ Sautter, 1960, p.31.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this dissertation I claimed that, by studying the lives of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm during the Third Reich, it would be possible to provide fresh insight into the particular dynamic in which these bishops and the ‘intact’ churches they represented participated. My purpose was twofold: to demonstrate how each of the *Landesbischöfe* in turn came to the fore of their particular ‘intact’ dynamic to lead the group through the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* as a modest yet effective force of opposition to Nazi hegemony, and to reveal the unspoken structural reliance of the *Landesbischöfe* upon each other throughout the Third Reich. The ultimate aim behind this dissertation, therefore, was to show how the ‘intact’ dynamic that was shared by all three *Landesbischöfe* was a more successful vehicle of *Resistenz* against Nazism than it was possible for the bishops to display had they conducted the struggle alone.

My investigation took as its starting point the wealth of existing literature on the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, which it showed either to downplay the efforts of the three *Landesbischöfe* in comparison to the more spectacular modes of opposition of the ‘Dahlemites’, or to glorify the contribution of any one of the regional bishops to the struggle against Nazism. In its attempt to do justice to the bishops’ situation as leaders of the only three ‘intact’ Protestant *Landeskirchen*, therefore, this dissertation based its narrative upon a consistent acknowledgement of the fact that *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm had no choice but to pitch their particular form of *Resistenz* against Nazism somewhere between the extremes of defiance and compliance in order to preserve the ‘intact’ Protestantism that they collectively defended. In employing this specifically ‘social history’ approach, however, this dissertation acknowledged the potential pitfalls of this methodology, in so far as it can appear to downplay the brutality and moral repugnance of Nazi actions. In order to ensure as far as possible that this investigation did not ignore the totalitarian dimension of the wider history of the Third Reich, therefore, the beginning of each chapter outlined the development of crucial Nazi policies in each historical period so as to contextualise fully the bishops’ lives in a broader framework of the violence and discrimination that eventually led to war and genocide in Europe.

The ‘Introduction’ to this dissertation outlined the historical and methodological context in which a discussion of the bishops’ precarious predicaments ought to be placed, and the three central chapters of this dissertation analysed the bishops’ individual functions within

three distinct stages of the Protestant struggle against Nazism. The first chapter was designed to demonstrate how the initial leadership of the ‘intact’ dynamic fell to *Landesbischof* August Marahrens of Hanover, and examined the peak of Marahrens’ national Church leadership from his involvement in the *Kapler Ausschuss* of 1933 through to the establishment of the RKA in 1935. With Marahrens’ increasing obligations as “dienstältester Bischof” to work for the conflicting interests of both the national Protestant Church and the NSDAP in mind, the second chapter then considered the comparative freedom of *Landesbischof* Hans Meiser of Bavaria to protect the ‘intact’ dynamic with his fostering of the *lutherischer Flügel* between 1935 and 1939. Finally, having established that both Marahrens and Meiser soon became restricted in their manoeuvres by their respective positions of Church leadership, the third chapter examined the rise of *Landesbischof* Theophil Wurm of Württemberg during the years of the Second World War, not only to assume the headship of the ‘intact’ dynamic that he shared with Marahrens and Meiser, but also to come to the forefront of the Protestant Church conciliation process per se.

By examining the leadership styles of the three *Landesbischofe* together in this way, it becomes possible to see how each of the bishops in turn steered the dynamic of their peculiar ‘intact’ group through the Third Reich on a moderate course between the extremes of defiance and compliance. The structure and approach of this investigation not only draws attention to the gradual shifts in prominence of each of the *Landesbischofe* within their unique ‘intact’ grouping, but also demonstrates how this ‘intact’ dynamic shared by all three men depended on each of the bishops’ unique leadership styles to allow it to overcome three very distinct stages in the Protestant struggle, and ultimately to maintain the status of institutional Protestantism throughout the Third Reich and beyond. A summary of the development of the racial and expansionist ambitions of Germany’s Nazi government at the beginning of each chapter in this dissertation ensures, however, that the bishops’ relative successes in maintaining the autonomy of German Protestantism in the Third Reich are kept in perspective by reference to the escalating brutality of the NSDAP, about which the bishops often controversially failed to protest or which, at times, they even endorsed.

If we consider the conduct of Marahrens throughout the entire course of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* first, it becomes strikingly evident that, despite having started out in the most favourable position of all three *Landesbischofe*, his initial successes only ended up working against him in the central and final stages of the conflict. Following his parallel commitment to the intra-Church VKL and the State-based RMfKA in 1935, Marahrens was rendered

incapable of making any significant contribution to the direction of the ‘intact’ dynamic due to his parallel structural commitment to both Christocentric and Nazi agencies. Having started the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* as a key member of the *Kapler Ausschuss*, however, Marahrens nonetheless revealed his desire to unify German Protestantism in accordance with the principle of the *sola Scriptura*. It was only natural, therefore, that Marahrens initially expressed objection to the heresy of a *Reichskirche* based on secular principles, together with hostility to *Reichsbischof* Müller, through his membership of the first VKL. His headship of the organisation was also a logical consequence of his past experience of both constitutional affairs and of Müller’s character during his time on the *Kapler Ausschuss*.

Despite ending the first stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* at the helm of intra-Church opposition to the GDC-led *Reichskirche*, Marahrens found himself unable to display the same antagonism towards the interference of the NSDAP in Church affairs during the phase of *staatliche Kirchenpolitik*. Owing to his parallel commitment to appeasing his predominantly Nazi parishioners in the ELLKH, to fulfil his Lutheran obligation to respect Germany’s secular leadership, and also to take any measures necessary to keep the hope of an alternative Church governing structure alive, Marahrens did not oppose Nazism in its entirety when agreeing to co-operate with Hanns Kerrl and his RKA. Having consequently renounced his presidency over the first VKL, however, Marahrens was not able to sit back and allow the GDC to dominate the spiritual affairs of the Church, since his innate dislike of its heresy and longstanding desire to bring about Church unification purely on ecclesiastical grounds prohibited him from actively campaigning for a continuation of the *Reichskirche*. Instead, finding himself torn between the secular interests of the NSDAP and the spiritual core of the Church, Marahrens found protection in numbers within the *lutherischer Flügel* developed by his counterpart Meiser, which conveniently enabled him to ground his contradictory displays of support for both the Church and the State upon existing and shared theological principles.

Moreover, Marahrens’ inability to show unequivocal support for the initiatives of either the Church or the NSDAP was further highlighted when the Nazis singled him out to serve on their GVR in the final stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*. This time, being the only one of the three *Landesbischöfe* forced to respond to State demands, Marahrens was compelled to step back from intra-Church developments in the KFK and concentrate purely on providing spiritual support to the Nazi war effort. This conflict of interests was inevitably enhanced by the death of his son in the early years of the war, which provoked a tension between his patriotic fervour in this period and his opposition to a Nazi monopoly of spiritual support for

German troops. Although Marahrens' actions during this period saw him ironically promote the very 'Nazified' Christianity to which he had once taken personal exception, it must be appreciated that this was motivated by a desire to prevent potential reprisals to German Protestantism at large. Although his close affiliation to Nazi agents meant that Marahrens neglected his wider Christian obligation to condemn the NSDAP for its brutal methods of persecution and mass murder during this period, which calls into question the worthiness of his intentions, it ought at least to be recognised that his continual messages of praise for Nazi military victories in this phase of the Third Reich actually helped to clear the way for the *kirchliches Einigungswerk* and the direct protests of his counterpart, Theophil Wurm. From examining the position of Marahrens in the Third Reich alone, then, it is already possible to see, not only how the actions of Meiser helped to ease Marahrens' worsening predicament between 1935 and 1939, but also how the structural double-bind that Marahrens found himself in during the Second World War implicitly facilitated the work of Wurm.

The interdependency of the three *Landesbischöfe* becomes even clearer, however, when the respective highs and lows of Meiser's *Kirchenkampf* career are placed alongside the life story of Marahrens in the Third Reich. It is only in this context that it becomes evident that, instead of having to come to terms with declining influence over the 'intact' dynamic like Marahrens, Meiser was at first forced to project himself into a dominant role within the grouping before ceding his position of influence to Wurm in the final stage of the conflict. After actively welcoming the GDC into the administration of the DEK in a tactical endeavour to assert the authority of his own *Landeskirche* against its strongly Catholic surroundings, Meiser's initial tendency to compromise the Christian confessions for strategic societal gain almost instantaneously undermined his own potential to act in the best interests of the national Church in the first stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*. Having had time to prove, however, that he had dramatically changed his assessment of the GDC, and that he fundamentally objected to its manipulation of the original Christian confessions, Meiser was able to help his own cause, and consequently that of the entire 'intact' dynamic, by fostering the *lutherischer Flügel*, which both testified to his overriding commitment to Church doctrine and protected a particular sector of the Protestant Church from embroilment in the rapidly intensifying struggles between the 'Dahlemites' and the NSDAP between 1935 and 1939.

The potential of Meiser's *lutherischer Flügel* to facilitate the work of the 'intact' dynamic soon diminished, however, with the onset of the Second World War. When the imperative for the Church to comment on the rapidly escalating brutality of the Nazi State was at its

strongest, Meiser, in his strict adherence to the teachings of confessional Lutheranism, was ultimately reluctant to protest to the NSDAP, so as to continue to protect his *lutherischer Flügel* from increasing Nazi aggression. Once Nazi violence clearly began to head towards war and genocide in Europe, however, Meiser's failure to take up fully his wider Christian obligation to thwart Nazi atrocities obviously calls into question his unswerving adherence to Lutheran precepts. Although Meiser assisted 'underground' Jewish relief efforts within his own *Landeskirche*, his reluctance to confront Nazi violence directly undermined his ability to turn the 'intact' dynamic into an effective force of opposition to Nazism for the third and final stage of the Protestant struggle. Although the continued presence of his *lutherischer Flügel* undoubtedly ensured that the more radical 'Dahlemites' did not monopolise Wurm's *kirchliches Einigungswerk* during this period, and that Marahrens had a safe channel through which he was able to influence the Church conciliation process without endangering his position on the GVR, Meiser was nonetheless forced to take a less prominent role behind his southern German counterpart Wurm who, in his customary Württembergian pietism, was relatively at liberty both to comment on secular developments in this phase of the Third Reich and to nurture an all-encompassing brand of *kirchliches Einigungswerk* amenable to the three main Protestant confessions.

To complete the picture of the bishops' interdependency, it is important to realise that without the leadership efforts of Marahrens and Meiser during the first two stages of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, Wurm's consistently more confrontational approach to Nazism would have lacked a stable platform. Since Wurm had never successfully hidden his abhorrence of Nazi heresy from 1934 onwards, the consecutive leadership of the 'intact' dynamic of Marahrens and Meiser until 1939 served to shield Wurm's directness which, in the earlier stages of the Third Reich, was certainly at risk of jeopardising the reputation of the 'intact' dynamic along the lines of the escalating persecution facing the 'Dahlemitic' strand of the *Bekennende Kirche*. Although Wurm initially voted for Ludwig Müller as *Reichsbischof* in the intra-Church elections of May 1933, this was purely a rash, politically-motivated move to quell the influence of political Catholicism in his region and to raise the profile of his Protestant *Landeskirche*. Wurm's politico-ecclesiastical activities after this initial blunder nonetheless show that he steadfastly objected to the unorthodoxy of the GDC in ensuing years, yet he remained in a subordinate position first to Marahrens and then to Meiser in terms of his ability to influence national Church proceedings. It was not until the efforts of both of these bishops were thwarted by their commitment to the leadership of their respective national and Lutheran Churches that Wurm was able to make his voice heard, not only in terms of

expressing his own concerns about Nazi policies but also by coming to the forefront of the unique framework afforded to the three *Landesbischöfe* through the *Intaktheit* of their respective churches. Arguably the most knowledgeable about Nazi atrocities due to the location of the first *Euthanasie-Tötungsanstaltung* within the territory of his own *Landeskirche*, Wurm not only possessed the most freedom of the three *Landesbischöfe* in the latter stages of the Third Reich but also the most evidence to enable him to protest effectively against State measures. Moreover, the respect that was increasingly afforded to him as a result of the direct nature of his complaints to Nazi authorities in this phase of the Third Reich ultimately placed Wurm in the most favourable intra-Church position of all, which allowed him both to develop and execute a design for what was eventually to become the post-war German Protestant Church.

Tracing the continual shifts in position of Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm between the limits of defiance and compliance in the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* has therefore demonstrated that the bishops' contribution to the struggle was neither static nor a pure reflection of their personal preferences. Having taken the bishops' common interest in maintaining the *Intaktheit* of their respective *Landeskirchen* as the rationale for looking at the three *Landesbischöfe* together in one study, this investigation has shown their continually shifting positions within their 'intact' dynamic to be less a reflection of personal will and more a mixture of tactical and inescapable responses to ever-changing societal and ecclesiastical circumstances. In this respect, this investigation has revealed that, although all three bishops were obligated by the nature of their professions to refrain from membership of any political party, the specific ways in which the bishops behaved within the Church was constantly shaped by the activities of the Nazi regime at particular times.

Instead of purely condemning Marahrens for his pro-Nazi actions during the latter stage of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, criticising Meiser for his evasion of confrontation through the *lutherischer Flügel* or, indeed, attributing the credit for the rehabilitation of the German Protestant Church entirely to Wurm as a result of his ability to come to the forefront of the 'intact' dynamic during the wartime years, this dissertation acknowledges the valuable contribution of all three *Landesbischöfe* to the relative resilience and effectiveness of the 'intact' dynamic as a force for Christocentric Protestantism in the Third Reich. In response to existing studies, which categorise the reactions of Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm to Nazism according to clear-cut definitions of resistance and opposition, this investigation has not only proved that it was possible to contribute effectively to the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* in ways

that lie between defiance and compliance as conventionally understood, but has also exposed the necessary presence of the two concepts. Not only has this investigation exposed the necessity of compliance behind the bishops' most prominent displays of defiance to Nazism but, in an important change of perspective, has also uncovered the intrinsic defiance behind those actions which would otherwise be deemed direct displays of compliance.

In short, this investigation into the lives of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm in the Third Reich, with its consistent attempt to explain their actions in this period with reference to variable socio-cultural factors, has shown the bishops to be not only literally positioned somewhere between defiance and compliance, but also ideologically situated between a theological imperative to display defiance on the one hand, and a tactical and often obligatory secular need to demonstrate compliance on the other. In its focus on a mixture of intra-Church developments, the imposition of State policy on the Church and also purely secular processes, this inquiry has revealed how the bishops' initial common willingness to resist the GDC eventually translated into three very different historical legacies as a result of the bishops' individual obligations to their professions, their *Landeskirchen*, their particular Lutheran confession, the wider German Church and the Nazi State, as well as to universal Christendom. Although the generally accepted individual post-war legacies of Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm resulted from the end-positions in which the bishops found themselves in 1945, this investigation has hopefully demonstrated that all three bishops should be given credit for having worked to preserve the essence of institutional Protestantism within the Third Reich principally as a result of their respective roles and inherent interdependency within their unique 'intact' dynamic.

In spite of the valuable contribution that the three bishops made specifically to the survival of German Protestantism in Nazi Germany through their collective strand of *Resistenz*, however, it must nonetheless be acknowledged that their ecclesiastical successes will remain forever eclipsed by both their failure to prevent and comparative contribution to the Nazi 'end goals' of war and genocide in Europe. As such, this dissertation must be recognised as having presented a micro-history of the *Landesbischöfe* of the 'intact' churches, for whom Nazi anti-Semitism and violence had been woven so deeply into the fabric of their everyday lives in the Third Reich that direct *Widerstand* was ultimately impossible.

EPILOGUE

Although the post-war lives of *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm fall outside the remit of this investigation, in order to give proper closure to this inquiry it is nonetheless helpful to note what each of the bishops went on to do and how they were received after the fall of the Third Reich and the consequent collapse of the DEK.

After the victory of the Allies in Europe, the institutional basis of the German Protestant Church lay in as much desolation as the hundreds of destroyed church buildings throughout Germany. The leaders of the individual *Landeskirchen* found themselves not only having to reconstitute their regional churches, many of which had been regrouped during the Third Reich, but also having to agree, once again, on a new form of national Church administration. Further to this, they also had to contend with the question of their shared guilt for not having opposed Nazism more forcefully. Significantly for this investigation, the *Landeskirchen* of Hanover, Bavaria and Württemberg remained territorially ‘intact’ and continued to operate with *Landesbischöfe* Marahrens, Meiser and Wurm at their helms.

As a logical consequence of his *kirchliches Einigungswerk* at the end of the Third Reich and his standing as a key figure in the national Church, *Landesbischof* Wurm called a conference of the leaders of all the German Protestant *Landeskirchen* which took place in Treysa on 27th August 1945. Resembling the former KFK, the Treysa conference did not escape the endemic factionalism of old, with the *bruderrätliche* ‘Confessing’ churchmen seeking an equal union of the three Protestant confessions, and the *lutherischer Flügel*, headed by *Landesbischof* Meiser, desiring Lutheran dominance over the proposed Church. Having met at Treysa only two days previously, the Lutherans declared their willingness to work with the Reformed and United Protestants in a Church confederation only so long as a specifically Lutheran Church was formed within it. As a result of the conflict of interests at Treysa, a provisional leadership committee was established for the new national Church, which was most notably led by Wurm and included Meiser, but with no sign of participation from *Landesbischof* Marahrens. This was because Marahrens had been boycotted by his fellow churchmen after the fall of the Third Reich for having formerly cooperated with Hitler.⁵²⁹ Although the new provisional leadership committee founded at Treysa was intended to foster closer union between the individual Protestant *Landeskirchen* in post-war Germany,

⁵²⁹ As early as 24th July 1945, Willem Visser’t Hooft from the Provisional World Council of Churches had written to Bishop George Bell of England to explain how Marahrens “must disappear” from the German Church (cf. Jasper, 1967, p.300).

and managed to issue the *Stuttgarter Schulderklärung* of October 1945 that acknowledged the shared wartime guilt of the churches, constitutional disagreements between the various Church factions only became worse.

Due to the difference of opinion as to which direction the *kirchliches Einigungswerk* should take, Meiser set about formalising a national union of Lutheran churches (in the guise of the VELKD),⁵³⁰ which also received the backing of Marahrens, whilst the *bruderrätliche* clergymen drew up their pan-confessional design for the new Protestant Church. Perched somewhere between the two groups, as a Lutheran but with established ‘Confessing’ credentials, Wurm remained a part of the *Detmolder Kreis*, comprising Lutheran *Landeskirchen* which opposed Meiser’s plans for the VELKD.⁵³¹ After a second conference in Treysa, which took place between 5th and 6th June 1947, the three groups eventually reached a compromise and drew up a constitution for the present-day EKD.⁵³² Although this constitution was based on an acknowledgement of the VELKD within the EKD, which signified a triumph for Meiser’s *lutherischer Flügel*,⁵³³ it was to be Wurm who was appointed the first *Ratsvorsitzender* of the EKD on the occasion of its formal establishment in Eisenach on 8th July 1948.⁵³⁴

In complete contrast to the respective successes of Meiser and Wurm, who eventually got to see the fruits of their *Kirchenkampf* labours in the actualisation of the VELKD and the EKD, Marahrens virtually slipped out of view in the context of the new EKD. As Gerhard Besier has shown, Marahrens instead found himself as a prime target of the ‘denazification’ process conducted by the British occupation forces in Hanover.⁵³⁵ Although this was a logical consequence of his pro-Nazi utterances on behalf of the GVR in the final years of the Third Reich, Marahrens did not help his post-war case. As well as not being a signatory of the *Stuttgarter Schulderklärung* of 1945, Marahrens never issued an apology of his own, particularly for the dismissal of non-Aryan Christians from his *Landeskirche* after 1934. Moreover, as the studies of Gerhard Lindemann have shown, Marahrens made no attempt to restore those ministers to their former positions in the ELLKH who had first lost their jobs

⁵³⁰ For more information on Meiser’s “Lutherische Einigungsbemühungen” after 1945, cf. Hauschild, 2006.

⁵³¹ The *Detmolder Kreis* included the churches of Württemberg, Oldenburg, Eutin and the Lutheran churches of the EKApU (Helmreich, 1979, p.422).

⁵³² For detailed information on the discussions leading up to the foundation of the EKD, cf. Smith-von Osten, 1980.

⁵³³ For details on how Meiser continued to strive for a “Kirchenbund – nicht Kirche” after 1949, cf. Fix, 2006.

⁵³⁴ It should be noted that the VELKD also came into being in Eisenach on the same day but, significantly, Wurm chose not to admit to it his ELLKW (Hauschild, 2006, p.116).

⁵³⁵ Cf. Besier, 1986.

because of Nazi racial laws.⁵³⁶ Following mounting pressure from the British occupation forces and, most notably, from his former ‘intact’ colleagues Meiser and Wurm,⁵³⁷ then, Marahrens ultimately resigned from his leadership of the ELLKH on 15th April 1947, and thus made no personal contribution to the realisation of the EKD. He was immediately replaced by Hanns Lilje, himself a signatory of the *Stuttgarter Schulderklärung*.

Thus, whilst August Marahrens ended his life ousted from both the regional and national churches for which he had once been spokesman of choice, Theophil Wurm and Hans Meiser continued to reap the rewards of their *Kirchenkampf* efforts, with Wurm voluntarily entering retirement from both the ELLKW and the EKD at the height of his career in 1949,⁵³⁸ and Meiser remaining head of the ELKB and the VELKD until his own chosen retirement in 1955.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁶ The most prominent cases of Paul Leo, Bruno Benfrey and Rudolph Gurland are detailed in Lindemann, 1996, pp.520-521, and Lindemann, 1998.

⁵³⁷ Gerhard Besier details how Meiser and Wurm made Marahrens into the main “Sündenbock” for the direction of German Protestantism during the Third Reich (cf. Besier, 1986, pp.111-158).

⁵³⁸ For Wurm’s own account of his life after 1949, cf. Wurm, 1953, pp.205-222.

⁵³⁹ For details of Meiser’s contribution to the VELKD and the EKD between 1949 and 1955, cf. Mensing, 2006. For information on *Nachkriegsprotestantismus* in the ELKB under Meiser, cf. Renner, 1991.

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