

Antisemitism, Violence, and Invective against the Old Testament: Reinhold Krause's *Sportpalast* Speech, 1933¹

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Abstract

In November 1933, Reinhold Krause, a leader in the pro-Nazi German Christian Movement, delivered a speech to a crowd of 20,000 at the Berlin *Sportpalast*. Krause's antisemitic tirade demanded the elimination of Jewish influences from the Protestant church, calling for the deletion of Hebraisms from hymnody, the rejection of the theology of "rabbi Paul," and the erasure of the Old Testament itself. Ominously, Krause also endorsed excluding Christians of Jewish descent from the churches.

After examining the historical and theological context of the speech, this article analyzes Krause's rhetoric, highlighting in particular the "conflation of hostilities" that emerges in his condemnation of Jewish Scriptures and Jewish people. In conversation with research by Doris Bergen and Susannah Heschel, the article explores the implications of violent rhetoric directed at Jewish Scriptures amid the increasingly violent—and ultimately genocidal—context of Nazi Germany.

In the *Bebelplatz* in Berlin, where Nazi supporters burned thousands of books in May 1933, the cobblestones are today interrupted by a square pane of glass. Beneath this window lies a room lined with empty bookcases, a countermonument to the violent destruction of books that anticipated the violent destruction of the Holocaust. Near this empty library are engraved the words of the nineteenth-century poet Heinrich Heine:

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That was only a prelude: there
 where one burns books,
 one will ultimately also burn people.²

This plaque furnishes an unsettling coda to the empty bookcases, suggesting anticipatory parallels between the fire that consumed books and the subsequent murder of millions. Books and people, deemed likewise unacceptable to the Reich, became targets of violence.

This parallel between the treatment of books and the treatment of people applies also to the fate of the Old Testament during the Nazi period. This article explores how the so-called German Christian Movement targeted the Old Testament for exclusion and destruction even as Nazi leadership targeted Jews for exclusion and destruction. As this article suggests, the parallels were not incidental; rather, invective against the Old Testament, in the context of Nazi Germany, yielded violent implications.

Structurally, this article hinges on a “wildly anti-Jewish speech” delivered in 1933 at the *Sportpalast* in Berlin by Reinhold Krause, a leader in the German Christian Movement.³ I begin by establishing the background of Krause’s speech and the *Sportpalast* event: building on historical research, I sketch the German Christian Movement and its anti-Jewish construal of Christianity. Next, I analyze the *Sportpalast* speech, highlighting connections between Krause’s anti-Jewish and anti-Old Testament rhetoric. I then survey the impact and implications of Krause’s speech, showing how Krause’s tirade, especially his attacks against Jews and Jewish Scriptures, proved programmatic for the German Christian Movement. Finally, in conversation with Doris Bergen and Susannah Heschel, I consider the violent implications of antisemitic invective against the Old Testament in the context of Nazi Germany.

Background of the *Sportpalast* Speech: Historical and Theological Context

The German Christian Movement

The German Christian Movement (*Glaubensbewegung “Deutsche Christen”*), officially formed in 1932, was an influential, pro-Nazi and antisemitic Protestant

2 Author’s translation. The original inscription reads: *Das war ein Vorspiel nur; dort wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen.*

3 Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*, ed. and trans. Victoria J. Barnett (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 64.

group.⁴ The German Christians, as they were known,⁵ “claimed to represent the fusion—even the mutual fulfillment—of Nazi ideology and Christianity.”⁶ They perceived no conflict between Christianity and Nazism, but—to the contrary—considered these “not only reconcilable but mutually reinforcing.”⁷ In the German Christian Movement, the content and convictions of Christian faith were remoulded by Nazi ideology, resulting in an oftentimes theologically unrecognizable “Nazi-Christian synthesis.”⁸

Institutionally, the movement comprised a “faction” inside the Protestant Church, having never formed a distinct denominational structure.⁹ However, despite remaining institutionally within the established church, the German Christian Movement adopted a distinctly racist ecclesiology. The movement exploited the concept of the *Volkskirche* (“people’s church”) in a way that, as Victoria Barnett notes, “reconceived the *Volkskirche* as the ‘Aryan’ church required for an ‘Aryan’ people.”¹⁰ Rejecting classical notions of ecclesial identity, including the efficacy of baptism,¹¹ German Christians promoted a *Volkskirche* “defined by ‘blood’ that would embrace all ‘true’ Germans and provide a spiritual homeland for the Aryans of the Third Reich.”¹² This racist ecclesiology, combined with an unwavering commitment to Nazi antisemitism, fueled the German

4 German Christian membership reached approximately 600,000 in the mid-1930s, though this figure underestimates their impact, as “they exerted an influence far out of proportion to their numbers” (Doris Bergen, “Storm Troopers of Christ: The German Christian Movement and the Ecclesiastical Final Solution,” in *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, ed. Robert P. Erickson and Susannah Heschel [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999], 43). Susannah Heschel suggests that the impact of the movement may best be gauged by attending to “the location of its influence” (Heschel, “Nazifying Christian Theology: Walter Grundmann and the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life,” *Church History* 63.4 [Dec 1994]: 589). Not only did German Christians represent “a cross-section of society,” but they also became entrenched in key positions in German churches and universities (see Bergen, “Storm Troopers of Christ,” 45).

5 In this article, the terms “German Christian” and “German Christians” refer exclusively to the German Christian Movement.

6 Bergen, “Nazi-Christians and Christian Nazis: The ‘German Christian’ Movement in National Socialist Germany,” in *What Kind of God? Essays in Honor of Richard L. Rubenstein*, ed. Betty Rogers Rubenstein and Michael Berenbaum (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), 176.

7 Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 1.

8 Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 128.

9 Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 3. See also Bergen, “Storm Troopers of Christ,” 45.

10 Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest against Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 246.

11 The German Christian Movement subordinated the doctrine of baptism to Nazi racial ideology. As Bergen explains, “The Nazi worldview posited Jewishness as an immutable, biological fact; German Christians showed they shared that conviction by rejecting baptism as changing the status of a former Jew” (*Twisted Cross*, 42). German Christians made no secret of their rejection of classical conceptions of baptism, even employing their stance for antisemitic propaganda: “Baptism may be quite useful,” declared one German Christian poster, “but it cannot straighten a nose” (quoted in *Twisted Cross*, 86).

12 Bergen, “Storm Troopers of Christ,” 42.

Christians' self-definition as an "anti-Jewish church."¹³ Construing Christianity and Judaism as opposites and adversaries,¹⁴ the German Christian Movement focused on expunging Jewish elements from Christianity.

The November 1933 Sportpalast Rally

Shortly after its formation in 1932, the German Christian Movement underwent a meteoric rise in popularity and influence. Not only was the movement publicly endorsed by Nazi leadership, but it also secured influential positions in the Protestant church elections of July 1933.¹⁵ Building on this seemingly "unstoppable" momentum,¹⁶ the German Christians organized a rally at the *Sportpalast* arena in Berlin. As John Conway notes, the German Christian leadership intended the rally "to initiate a great propaganda campaign" that would "confirm their loyalty and indispensability to the Nazi Party."¹⁷

On November 13, 1933, a crowd of 20,000 supporters packed the venue, which was adorned with swastikas and pro-Nazi banners.¹⁸ The main speaker was Dr. Reinhold Krause (1893–1980), a high school religion teacher, Nazi Party member, and a leader of German Christians in Berlin. Employing "crude, abusive language," Krause "lambasted the Old Testament" and "attacked the fundamentals of Christianity as unacceptable marks of Jewish influence."¹⁹ In the following analysis of his speech,²⁰ I examine the connections between his anti-Jewish and anti-Old Testament rhetoric.

13 Bergen, "Storm Troopers of Christ," 42. German Christians trumpeted this claim explicitly: for instance, Bishop Heinz Weidemann announced that his church was "officially anti-Jewish" (quoted in Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 26).

14 This assertion was central to the German Christian outlook (Bergen, "Nazi-Christians and Christian Nazis," 178, 184 n. 18). The movement expressed this claim starkly in what Heschel calls the "centerpiece" of the Godesberg Declaration (1939): employing a catechetical format, the Declaration asks, "Is Christianity derived from Judaism and is it its continuation and completion, or does Christianity stand in opposition to Judaism? We answer this question: Christianity is the unbridgeable religious opposition to Judaism" (quoted in Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 81; see also "Nazifying Christian Theology," 591 and "Making Nazism a Christian Movement: The Development of a Christian Theology of Antisemitism During the Third Reich," in *What Kind of God?*, 162).

15 Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 5–7.

16 Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 7.

17 John Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches, 1933–1945* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1968), 51. For another perspective on the purpose of the *Sportpalast* rally, see Rolf Rendtorff, "Die jüdische Bibel und ihre antijüdische Auslegung," in *Auschwitz—Krise der christlichen Theologie*, ed. Rolf Rendtorff and Ekkehard Stegemann (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1980), 99.

18 Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 34.

19 Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 17.

20 No audio recording exists of Krause's speech; however, we can nonetheless inspect exactly what he said, and the reactions of the audience, because a transcript based on a stenographical report was subsequently published as a pamphlet: *Rede des Gauobmannes der Glaubensbewegung "Deutsche Christen" in Groß-Berlin Dr Krause gehalten im Sportpalast am 13. November 1933 (nach doppeltem stenographischen Bericht)* (n.p., n.d.). For this article, I have consulted two original copies of this pamphlet. Instructively, the stenographical report recorded not only Krause's

Analysis of Krause's *Sportpalast* Speech

One Volk, One Church: Krause's Construal of the Volkskirche

Krause began his speech by acclaiming the supposed unity of the German *Volk* under Hitler: "*Germans have become one people*," he declared, an event that "God—through the strength of our Führer Adolf Hitler—has brought to pass."²¹ Hitler's achievement in unifying the *Volk*, moreover, invited the inauguration of "*a powerful, new, all-encompassing German people's church*," or *Volkskirche*.²² Exemplifying German Christian adaptation of Christianity to Nazism, the mission of this church was to make Germans into Nazis: "*And most important of all*," Krause insisted, "*we now need but one mission: to remold our German people—without exception and to the depths of their souls—into German National Socialists*."²³ According to the stenographical report, this inducement to align the mission of the church with the goals of Nazism elicited "Very loud applause."²⁴

The pro-Nazi *Volkskirche*, Krause continued, required an ecclesial form "*as utterly German as one would expect it to be in the Third Reich*."²⁵ More specifically, Krause demanded "liberation from everything in the worship service and our confession of faith that is not German."²⁶ Predictably, for this leader in the anti-semitic German Christian Movement, allegedly un-German elements coincided with anything he perceived as Jewish. Krause denounced "rabbi Paul," whose "scapegoat- and inferiority-theology" had led to an "un-National Socialist" desire "to cling to a kind of salvation egotism."²⁷ Similarly, Krause condemned Jewish traces in hymnody and liturgy, decrying the intrusion of Hebrew words into German worship. "We want to sing songs that are free from any Israelite-isms," he demanded, adding: "We want to free ourselves from the language of Canaan."²⁸ Anything deemed Jewish, Krause argued, needed to be purged from the *Volkskirche* in Hitler's Germany.

The Conflation of Hostilities: Krause's Invective against the Old Testament and against the Jews

Yet as strongly as Krause condemned "rabbi Paul" and "Israelite-isms," he

words, but also the responses from the audience, including shouts and applause, allowing us to assess the notably enthusiastic reception of Krause's speech.

21 Reinhold Krause, "Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin," in *A Church Undone: Documents from the German Christian Faith Movement, 1932–1940*, ed. and trans. Mary M. Solberg (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 251. Here, and throughout Krause's speech, emphasis is original: Solberg's translation employs italics to reflect the emphasis (in bold type) that appears in the original pamphlet.

22 Krause, "Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin," 253.

23 Krause, "Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin," 256.

24 Krause, "Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin," 256.

25 Krause, "Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin," 257.

26 Krause, "Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin," 257.

27 Krause, "Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin," 259.

28 Krause, "Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin," 261.

deployed even more virulently antisemitic rhetoric to denounce the Old Testament, a text he considered “one of the most dubious in the history of the world.”²⁹ In what became a notorious section of his speech, Krause demanded “liberation from the Old Testament with its Jewish reward-and-punishment morality, with its stories of cattle-dealers and pimps.”³⁰ Indeed, Krause pronounced, retention of the Old Testament was utterly incompatible with the German Christian commitment to an ethno-nationalist German faith: “It is not acceptable,” he declared, “for German Christian pastors to maintain, ‘We continue to stand on the ground of the Old Testament,’ while their Guiding Principles say, ‘Christianity suited to Germans.’ For all practical purposes, the one excludes the other.”³¹ Krause’s message was clear: Germans could espouse the Jewish Scriptures or the anti-Jewish church, but not both.

It is critical, moreover, to observe the correlation between Krause’s anti-Old Testament rhetoric and his anti-Jewish rhetoric. At two points in his speech, Krause advocated the exclusion of Jews—or, more precisely in this context, the exclusion of Christians of Jewish heritage.³² The first occurrence is a brief, extemporaneous reply to a shout from the audience. In response to his denunciation of Protestant opponents’ unwillingness to implement the so-called “Aryan Paragraph” for church leadership,³³ the audience shouted, “We don’t need any white Jews!” Krause’s rejoinder restated—and amplified—the sentiment of the audience: “We don’t need any Jews at all in the church,” he replied.³⁴ Krause’s second incitement to exclude Jews, which was significantly more detailed and acerbic, emerged from his diatribe against the Old Testament.

Krause’s hostility toward the Old Testament blurred into hostility against Jews, as his target shifted from decrying Jewish Scriptures to decrying Jewish people.

29 Krause, “Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin,” 258.

30 Krause, “Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin,” 258. Though this phrase is frequently attributed to Krause, Bergen locates its provenance in Alfred Rosenberg: “In *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*,” she notes, Rosenberg “dubbed the Old Testament a collection of ‘stories of pimps and cattle traders.’” Bergen, “German Military Chaplains in World War II and the Dilemmas of Legitimacy,” *Church History* 70.2 (June 2001): 232.

31 Krause, “Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin,” 258.

32 Since German Christians privileged racial ideology over baptismal identity, Christians with Jewish heritage were identified and excluded as Jewish. Regardless of whether these so-called “Jewish Christians” or “baptized Jews” had any personal connection or contact with the Jewish community, the Nuremberg Laws (1935) defined them legally as “non-Aryans.” Accordingly, when referring to “Jewish Christians,” this article will employ the term ‘Jews’ in order to present accurately their categorization in both German Christian and Nazi structures and ideologies. As always in this context, terminology is a vexed issue: “We cannot talk about the German Christians without borrowing their vocabulary,” Bergen notes. “But we can keep in mind that use of those terms does not imply validation of that thought” (*Twisted Cross*, 4).

33 Krause’s speech expressed German Christian frustrations regarding failed efforts to implement this provision in the church (Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 89). For a concise discussion of the “Aryan Paragraph” in the Protestant churches, see Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 128–33.

34 Krause, “Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin,” 256.

He first connected these objects of his revulsion by evoking parallel experiences of “shame”: just as a Nazi feels shame for purchasing from Jews, Krause reasoned, so ought Nazis to feel shame from receiving spiritual material—in this case, the Old Testament—from Jews. “*If we National Socialists are ashamed to buy a necktie from a Jew,*” Krause argued, “*then we should really be ashamed to accept from a Jew anything that speaks to our soul, the most intimate matters of religion.*”³⁵ As “Sustained applause” assured Krause of the shared antisemitic fervor of his audience,³⁶ he pivoted from condemning the Old Testament to condemning Jews.

“It should also be said here,” he immediately added, “that our churches must accept no more people of Jewish blood into their ranks.”³⁷ Amid the roar of “strong applause,”³⁸ Krause specified that he desired not only to prevent Jews from joining the church, but also to eject Jews from the church, including both members and leaders. “We have [...] emphasized repeatedly,” he railed, “that *people of Jewish blood do not belong in the German people’s church [Volkskirche], either in the pulpit or in front of it.*”³⁹ Then, in language that proved not only menacing but ultimately predictive, Krause concluded this section of his speech with an ominous demand: “Wherever they [i.e., “people of Jewish blood”] are now standing in the pulpit,” he intoned, “they must vanish as quickly as possible.”⁴⁰ Thus, in Krause’s invective, hostility toward the Old Testament combined with hostility toward Jews, as the demand to exclude Jewish texts became blurred with the demand to exclude Jewish people: the Aryan *Volkskirche* required both, immediately, to “vanish.”

Impact and Implications of the *Sportpalast* Speech

Controversy and Departures

Krause’s speech became as famous as it was controversial. Beyond the 20,000 attendees at the *Sportpalast*, his speech was reported in newspapers and journals.⁴¹ Additionally, Krause’s speech was circulated as a pamphlet, evidently to function as promotional material for the German Christian Movement.⁴² In Protestant Germany, the reaction was largely negative. Barnett describes the “Protestant outrage”

35 Krause, “Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin,” 258.

36 Krause, “Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin,” 258.

37 Krause, “Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin,” 258.

38 Krause, “Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin,” 258.

39 Krause, “Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin,” 258.

40 Krause, “Speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin,” 258–59.

41 Krause’s speech even garnered international notoriety. In *The New York Times*, an article appeared the next day, summarizing his speech (“Revision of Scripture Is Urged on Germans,” *The New York Times*, November 14, 1933, 14).

42 The promotional function is indicated by the final page of the pamphlet, which was an application form to join the German Christian Movement. This page was to be torn out and mailed to Krause himself.

that ensued:⁴³ as she notes, the radical event “opened the eyes of a number of pastors who initially had been sympathetic to the ‘German Christians.’”⁴⁴

Especially controversial were Krause’s calls to eject the Old Testament, which, Barnett explains, “did not win widespread approval among Germany’s theologically traditional Protestant pastors and bishops.”⁴⁵ As Robert Ericksen notes, Krause’s treatment of the Old Testament “gave impetus to the formation of an opposition church structure,” thereby intensifying the nascent Church Struggle.⁴⁶ Krause’s controversial positions, especially his attacks on the Old Testament, resulted in a “wave of departures,”⁴⁷ as Protestants registered their dissent by rescinding their membership in the movement.⁴⁸ Indeed, so many Protestants left the German Christian Movement following the *Sportpalast* event that, until the 1980s, many historians concluded incorrectly that the movement effectively dissolved in 1933.⁴⁹

Turning against the Old Testament: The Sportpalast Speech as Programmatic

The *Sportpalast* event unmasked unmistakably the extremist convictions of the German Christian Movement. It was a “turning point,” according to Wolfgang Gerlach: “For the first time, many Protestant leaders realized how radical the German Christians really were.”⁵⁰ However, though this realization caused some to part ways with the movement, many—now fully aware of its radicality—chose to stay. When a movement is radicalized, sometimes it is only the radical who remain, which may help explain the surprising impact of Krause’s speech for the subsequent development of the German Christian Movement. Antisemitic components of Krause’s agenda, at first widely considered excessively radical, became

43 Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 34.

44 Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 35.

45 Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 37. The ensuing controversy surrounding Krause’s attacks on the Old Testament not only embroiled German Christian leadership, but also implicated rank-and-file German Christian supporters. Bergen reports on a letter written by one supporter from Berlin-Wilmersdorf who described parrying accusations that German Christians “want to get rid of the Psalms, the hymnbook, even the *entire* Old Testament” (quoted in Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 126; emphasis original).

46 Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 48.

47 Bergen, “Storm Troopers of Christ,” 44; Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 17, 145, and 177.

48 However, disagreement with Krause’s speech need not imply rejection of the antisemitic core of the German Christian Movement. As Heschel notes, “Their resignation should not be taken as an indication of their rejection of [German Christian] ideology or opposition to National Socialism” (“Nazifying Christian Theology,” 589). One Nazi Party member, for instance, critiqued Krause on antisemitic grounds, accusing him of having demonstrated a “Jewish spirit” in his speech (Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 32 and 126). Even Nazi leadership, as Conway explains, chafed at Krause’s presumption of National Socialist sanction, concerned that criticism of Krause could “be directed against the Party itself” (Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 54).

49 Bergen, “Storm Troopers of Christ,” 66. See also Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 2 and Heschel, “Nazifying Christian Theology,” 587.

50 Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 45–46.

normalized within the movement. “Within a few years [. . .],” Heschel writes, “Krause’s language no longer sounded outrageous.”⁵¹ Indeed, Krause’s speech soon shaped the German Christian agenda: just as Krause had decreed, German Christians proceeded to marginalize the theological influence of “rabbi Paul”⁵² while purging hymnody and liturgy of “Israelite-isms.”⁵³

Moreover, whereas German Christian treatments of Paul and hymnody were at times perfunctory,⁵⁴ the movement fervently pursued Krause’s intertwined demands to cast out the Jews and cast out the Jewish Scriptures. In the years following the *Sportpalast* event, German Christians persistently excluded Christians of Jewish heritage; yet in this respect, it was the Nazi regime, not the movement, that finally ensured exclusion.⁵⁵ Simultaneously, the German Christians worked to discredit and decanonize the Old Testament:⁵⁶ with an approach that was more uncompromising and unyielding than their revision of Paul and hymnody, and more effectual than their exclusion of Jews, the movement implemented Krause’s mandate to cast out the Old Testament. Krause’s *Sportpalast* speech, and especially his abasement of the Old Testament, thus proved programmatic for the activities of the German Christian Movement: “Krause’s speech shocked many, but he was no anomaly,” Bergen observes. “To the contrary, his words anticipated the definitive German Christian view of the Old Testament by the late 1930s.”⁵⁷

After the *Sportpalast* event, the movement began practical implementation of Krause’s demand to remove the Old Testament from Protestant life, as “German

51 Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 70.

52 Krause’s depreciation of Paul “emerged dominant” in the movement (Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 158). The German Christians, for instance, undermined Pauline theology by “attacking the notion of human sinfulness as a Jewish accretion to the true gospel” (Bergen, “Storm Troopers of Christ,” 56).

53 German Christian leadership announced a new hymnal soon after Krause’s speech (Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 165). This process continued during the Nazi period, culminating in the early 1940s with a hymnal produced by the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life. Fulfilling Krause’s demands, it was purged of any Hebrew words or allusions to the Old Testament: “the hymnal,” Heschel notes, “expunged words such as ‘amen,’ ‘hallelujah,’ ‘Hosannah,’ and ‘Zebaoth’” (Heschel, “When Jesus Was an Aryan: The Protestant Church and Antisemitic Propaganda,” in *In God’s Name: Genocide and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Omer Bartov and Phyllis Mack [New York: Berghahn, 2001], 85).

54 On the conflicted place of Paul in this context, see Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 145–46. On the limits of German Christian revision of church music, see Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 170–71.

55 The German Christians imposed exclusionary measures increasingly after the *Kristallnacht* pogrom in November 1938 (Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 97). However, the exclusion that eventually prevailed in the churches did not result primarily from German Christian efforts, but from the Nazi “policies of isolation, deportation, and annihilation” of Jews (Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 87).

56 The language of “decanonization” is accurate in this context: the German Christians did not merely downplay or avoid Old Testament texts, but in fact “rejected the canonicity of the Old Testament” (Bergen, “Storm Troopers of Christ,” 41).

57 Bergen, “Storm Troopers of Christ,” 53. See also Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 145. It should be noted that some German Christians advocated retention of the Old Testament for antisemitic purposes, promoting its utility as the “strongest antisemitic book” (quoted in Bergen, “Nazi-Christians and Christian Nazis,” 180). See also Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 170–71.

Christians focused much of their effort to create an anti-Jewish Christianity on the Old Testament.”⁵⁸ The movement not only removed the Old Testament from liturgical use,⁵⁹ but also published an edition of the New Testament with all references to the Old Testament expurgated.⁶⁰ As antisemitic critics denounced the Christian faith, including the Jewish origins of the Old Testament, German Christians responded by increasing their efforts, “intensify[ing] their assault on the Old Testament in the hope of exonerating Christianity.”⁶¹ In 1939, German Christians founded the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life, which subsequently “orchestrated” the escalating assault against the Old Testament.⁶² Then, with war raging in Europe, anti-Old Testament activities peaked: German Christian “[a]ttacks on the Old Testament reached a zenith during the war,”⁶³ as the movement “lost any ability to distinguish between the Old Testament and Germany’s enemies in the war.”⁶⁴

The connections between Krause’s anti-Old Testament and anti-Jewish rhetoric suggest at once a conflation and a mutual amplification of hostilities. It was his invective against the Old Testament that, as we saw, opened the floodgates of his invective against Jews. This conflation of hostilities against the Old Testament and against Jews was, moreover, not isolated to Krause’s speech. Rather, this conflation of hostilities became a broader trend in German Christian rhetoric, especially during Hitler’s war of annihilation. In one particularly menacing case, a German Christian writer invoked violent language against the Old Testament in a devotional published in 1940: “Into the oven,” he demanded, “with the part of the Bible that glorifies the Jews, so eternal flames will consume that which threatens our people.”⁶⁵ Thus, this conflation of hostilities, which Krause exemplified, took on more violent insinuations amid the murderous plans of the Third Reich, as rhetoric decrying the Old Testament “merged with the language of genocide.”⁶⁶

58 Bergen, “Nazi-Christians and Christian Nazis,” 179.

59 “The Old Testament,” as Heschel notes, “was simply eliminated from German Christian religious worship” (*The Aryan Jesus*, 106).

60 For more on deJudaized revisions of the New Testament, see Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 154–64 and Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 106–13.

61 Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 149. See also Bergen, “Storm Troopers of Christ,” 42.

62 Bergen, “Storm Troopers of Christ,” 54. See also *Twisted Cross*, 149.

63 Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 150.

64 Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 154.

65 Quoted in Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 152. See also “Nazi-Christians and Christian Nazis,” 181.

66 Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 152. See also “Storm Troopers of Christ,” 54.

Invective against the Old Testament within the Broader Framework of Complicity: A Reflection on Violence

Correlating Scripture and Violence

There are multiple ways of relating violence and Scripture. There is violence represented in the Bible, with theological, historical, and ethical implications. There is violence that Christians commit (or refrain from committing) with reference to a mandate from the Bible. What this article describes is something different: violent rhetoric targeting Jewish Scriptures in the context of violent rhetoric—and murderous action—targeting Jewish people. Discussing the consequences of the antisemitic theology promoted by the German Christians, Bergen addresses what she calls “the disastrous implications of anti-Jewish Christianity in the context of a genocidal state.”⁶⁷ More specifically, for the purposes of this article, how should the implications of anti-Old Testament invective be defined in the genocidal context of Nazi Germany?

A Broader Framework of Complicity

It is valuable to address this question within a broader framework of complicity in the Holocaust, since German Christian leaders who deployed violent rhetoric were mostly not personally perpetrators of violence. As Heschel remarks, the dejudaising activity of the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life “is not the same act as dropping Zyklon B into a sealed chamber filled with Jews.”⁶⁸ Some Christian leaders did directly participate in,⁶⁹ or advocate for,⁷⁰ the mass murder of Jews; however, in assessing the implications of German Christian invective against the Old Testament, it is important to acknowledge that many actions that proved disastrous for Jews took place far from actual murders, sometimes in the respectable venues of pulpit or lectern. How, then, can we characterize the broader complicity of the German Christian Movement, especially insofar as the movement attacked the Old Testament?⁷¹

By fervently promoting its anti-Jewish agenda within the anti-Jewish Nazi

67 Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 224.

68 Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 16.

69 For a discussion of Christian leaders, including some clergy, who participated “as killers” in the Holocaust, see Bergen, “Contextualizing Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Nazism, the Churches, and the Question of Silence,” in *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues*, ed. Clifford J. Green and Guy C. Carter (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 121–22.

70 In 1933, the renowned theologian Gerhard Kittel proposed “extermination” (*Ausrottung*) as a means for resolving the so-called “Jewish Question.” As Ericksen explains, Kittel dismissed this option, not for ethical reasons, but “solely on the grounds of expedience,” since the “extermination” of Jews would likely prove impracticable (Ericksen, 55; cf. Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 9, 185).

71 It should be noted that attacks against the Old Testament, which are the subject of this article, were only one component in the broader German Christian support for violent antisemitism, as “[o]ther German Christian proclamations during the war made no secret of the movement’s endorsements of Nazi mass murder” (Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 26).

state, the German Christian Movement effectively weaponized specific aspects of the Christian tradition for antisemitic purposes.⁷² Their ideological fusion of Nazism and Christianity was, in its essence, “an anti-Jewish religion that echoed and promoted Nazi genocide.”⁷³ The persistent efforts of the German Christian Movement to deJudaize Christianity, particularly through the elimination of the Old Testament, “both reflected and contributed to the religious and social situation that made the Holocaust possible.”⁷⁴ That is, by translating Nazi convictions into theological discourse,⁷⁵ the efforts of the movement to rid Christianity of its Jewishness bolstered the plausibility, intelligibility, and credibility of the Nazi efforts to rid Europe of Jews.

More specifically, expunging the Old Testament from Christian usage “destroyed one brake to genocide that might have operated in Christian Europe,”⁷⁶ as Bergen suggests, by eliminating an historical, spiritual, and theological connection between Christians and Jews. The Old Testament comprised a Jewish artifact at the heart of Christian faith; without its presence, Christians had one fewer reason to question the antisemitic propaganda that pervaded Nazi Germany. Removing the Old Testament “from Christian scriptures on antisemitic grounds,” as Heschel observes, contributed to conditions where “there was little basis left for a Christian to affirm Jews or Judaism.”⁷⁷ The Old Testament, if prominently and centrally honoured as a witness to God’s presence amid Jewish life, might have called into question the Nazi ideology of Jewish death.

Instead, the German Christian decanonization of the Old Testament removed this obstacle on the path to genocide. Rather than problematizing the call to destroy the Jews, the German Christian Movement normalized violent antisemitism by pursuing parallel activities. As Nazi leadership marginalized and assaulted Jews, German Christians followed a parallel course, marginalizing and assaulting the Jewish Scriptures.⁷⁸ Indeed, since German Christian ejection of the Old

72 “German Christians found that components of their religious tradition, even those most closely linked to its Jewish origins,” Bergen observes, “could become weapons in the attack” (“Storm Troopers of Christ,” 41).

73 Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 171.

74 Bergen, “Storm Troopers of Christ,” 41.

75 Heschel highlights the function of theologians who “translated” Nazi ideology into the register of Christian theology, “translating the Nazi message into religious language” (*The Aryan Jesus*, 173) and “translat[ing] the often inchoate meaning of Nazism into a substantive discourse of Christian ritual and theology” (*The Aryan Jesus*, 16).

76 Bergen, “Between God and Hitler: German Military Chaplains and the Crimes of the Third Reich,” in *In God’s Name*, 129.

77 Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 70.

78 Bergen’s analysis of the reverberation between Nazi antisemitism and German Christian decanonization is relevant here: “Public antisemitism inspired heightened German Christian attacks on the Old Testament; in turn German Christian ideas found resonance in a society that refused membership to those defined as Jews” (*Twisted Cross*, 148). See also Bergen, “Storm Troopers of Christ,” 53.

Testament preceded, historically, the deportation and mass murder of Jews, the movement established a conceptual precedent for the eradication of unwanted Jewishness. Dejudaising Christianity by means of decanonization may thus have diminished the cognitive dissonance of dejudaizing Europe by means of genocide, in this sense contributing to the shocking normalization of mass murder in the Third Reich.⁷⁹

The Conflation of Hostilities in the Context of Genocide

Furthermore, I wish to suggest that violently-inflected rhetoric against the Old Testament helped normalize increasingly violent rhetoric directed against Jews. This developed, as exemplified in Krause's speech at the *Sportpalast*, through what I have called the "conflation of hostilities," as slippage blurred the distinctions between denouncing Jews and denouncing Jewish Scriptures. This conflation of hostilities, functioning to normalize anti-Jewish rhetoric, may have proven all the more damaging due to the societal respect and moral authority accorded to Christian leaders,⁸⁰ as clergy and theological faculty denounced the Old Testament in terms that mirrored Nazi propaganda denouncing the Jews.⁸¹ Ultimately, German Christian efforts to cast out the Old Testament legitimated Nazi efforts to cast out the Jews, contributing to a climate where genocide appeared a credible proposal. It is probable that, without any assistance from the German Christian Movement, the Holocaust would have been perpetrated with no less brutality. Nonetheless, the German Christians—and their violent invective against the Old Testament—participated in the broader framework of complicity that made the destruction of Jews a conceivable and convincing option for Christian Europe.

Concluding Note

In 1933, Krause fervently advocated the anti-Jewish aims of the anti-Jewish movement, calling for Christianity to be purged of Jewishness and the church to be purged of Jews. Though initially perceived as radical, his words proved programmatic—especially as he assaulted the Old Testament. If articulated in another time and place, Krause's words might have yielded less destructive implications. However, in 1933, as the antisemitic storm gathered violent strength, and German

79 The removal of the Old Testament from Christian usage may additionally have set consciences at ease by aligning Christianity with Nazism. As Heschel suggests, "the effort to dejudaize Christianity was also an attempt to erase moral objections to Nazi antisemitism" (Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 16–17).

80 Heschel highlights the disproportionate impact of Christian leadership in the context of the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life: "Yet the moral and societal location of clergy and theologians," she writes, "lends greater weight to the propaganda of the Institute; propaganda coming from the pulpit calls forth far deeper resonance than that spoken by a politician or journalist" (Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 17).

81 On theological discourse "mirroring" Nazi propaganda, see Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 13.

Christian scorn for the Old Testament became ever more conflated with hatred for Jews, Krause's invective enflamed the approaching catastrophe. In the early days of the Third Reich, Krause insisted that the Jews "must vanish"; by the fall of the Reich in 1945, Krause's desire had been fulfilled through genocide. Returning to the words of Heine, at the *Bebelplatz* in Berlin, that inscription could perhaps aptly be transposed into Scriptural terms to serve as an epitaph to the *Sportpalast* event:

That was only a prelude: there
 where one [attacks Jewish Scriptures],
 one will ultimately also [attack Jewish people].