

The synod that produced the Barmen Declaration was the defining moment of the Confessing Church (Ericksen & Heschel, 1999, p. 97). Thus the declaration was the theological declaration for the Evangelical Church in Germany who saw the nation's churches turning away from being grounded in the scripture as they see necessary.

The declaration is split into five sections; in each it gives some statements that the German Christians and/or Nazi regime would make and then rejects those views. Of these one of the more central claims is that the Confessing Church rejects the ideas that the development of the Church since Luther has been normal because temporal regulations should not take precedence over truth (Cochrane, 1962, p. 231).

The declaration as a whole speaks a theological message that is clearly counter that which the Nazi regime wants all of Germany to adhere to, and that which the German Christians advance. That being said, the message is not one that is that different from the message the Evangelical Church historically held at that time. Only now it finds itself holding political power and not just theological power. Really the declaration is asserting existing beliefs to allow the Confessing Church to clearly be against Nazi policy, though it is good to note that the declaration says nothing of the anti-semitism of either German Christians or Nazis (Ericksen & Heschel, 1999, p. 103).

The messages of Barmen resound as a protest against the Nazis. As an example, in section five they articulate that the State should not have the authority to relieve churches of their power to appoint and administer their own ministries

(Cochrane, 1962, p. 234). They simply reject State control of the church (Cochrane, 1962, p. 232). Here they are staking out the independence the churches should have from direct Nazi control. The main reason such things would be said in this political context is that saying them asserts the legitimacy of both the church and its scripture. I think the basic structure of the declaration, in being one paragraph giving Nazi or German Catholic thought and one paragraph rebuking it for each topic, lends to the agenda they had. I believe that they were not only asserting their existence, but also showing the flaws in the Nazi policy. Much of what they rejected of the Nazis they did on the grounds that it was unbiblical policy to require a church to follow (Ericksen & Heschel, 1999, p. 97).

The Bonhoeffer documentary described this declaration as an act of civil disobedience for those who authored it and for members of the Confessing Church. I agree with that claim as a way to place the document's theology within the political context it was written in. Civil disobedience normally requires not just the knowing act but also it being somewhat noticeable, and the style (as noted earlier) accomplishes this. It may have been less disobedient had they just asserted their claims rather than so blatantly rejecting the claims of the Reich Church.

The central claim of the declaration seems to me to be something like this: Recent ecclesiastical events have reinforced the Word of God as true authority (Cochrane, 1962, p. 230) and thus it is an error to reject portions of and rewrite the bible (Cochrane, 1962, p. 231). The Confessing Church in essence is confessing the validity of the full bible and aims at the German Christians and Nazis for their complete disregard and destruction of all things Jewish in the bible (among others).

By modifying the Word one makes it their own, but the true use of the Word would be in dynamically serving it (Cochrane, 1962, p. 232). This statement is the stand that is made against that of the political will behind the Nazi regime.

Overall the messages of the Barmen Declaration were an assertion of what the Confessing Church was and a push rejecting the core theological ideas advanced by the Nazis. While still a part of the National Church itself this splinter group was able to work to maintain the faith and attempt to stop the Nazi regime. At the heart of the problems the churches had with Nazis trying to control them was their insistence on using only “Aryan” components of scripture. Where the German Christians edited out Jewish subjects and words the Confessing Church, as this declaration decrees, held tight to their heritage in the full scripture. They further were one of the few groups using a theological resistance to the Nazis to enact attempts at assassinating Hitler to put a stop to the Nazi regime.

I came up with the answers I’ve discussed in this document analysis less from individual quotes in the document or *Betrayal*, and more from the overall feeling that the document continues to give me every time I read portions of it. What reinforces that these notions are plausible is that I could easily locate supporting claims from the document and context described in *Betrayal* with ease.

References

Cochrane, A. C. (1962). *The Church's Confession Under Hitler*. Philadelphia: Westminster.

Ericksen, R. P., & Heschel, S. (1999). *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers.