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Reassessing *The Holy Reich*: Leading Nazis' Views on Confession, Community and 'Jewish' Materialism

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Abstract

Returning to the Journal of Contemporary History debate on *The Holy Reich*, this article argues that the notion of 'positive Christianity' as a Nazi 'religious system' has been largely invented. It offers a close analysis of significant public statements on National Socialism by three leading Nazis: Adolf Hitler, Gottfried Feder and Alfred Rosenberg. In doing so, it demonstrates that in historical context the three key ideas from Point 24 of the NSDAP programme that were meant to form the content of this 'type of Christianity' were not promoted as Christian. Instead, they formed a part of the Nazis' racial ideology.

Keywords

Adolf Hitler, Alfred Rosenberg, Gottfried Feder, National Socialism, positive Christianity, religion

When Richard Steigmann-Gall wrote his revisionist work *The Holy Reich* in 2003, it launched a vigorous debate, including within this journal.¹ In response, Steigmann-Gall argued that his book was not being assessed on its own terms. That is, that the historical critiques focused more on 'what they believe are fundamental mistakes, egregious errors, and fatal shortcomings,' rather than on his core argument: that the 'positive Christianity' referred to in the Nazi programme was a

1 See special issue, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42, 1 (2007). The respondents were Doris L. Bergen, Manfred Gailus, Irving Hexham, Ernst Piper and Stanley Stowers.

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'type of Christianity' with an 'inner logic.'² This article seeks to rectify this, and to examine his conception against the Nazis' own promotion of their ideology.

In *The Holy Reich*, the key article that was considered was Point 24 of the programme of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP):

We demand freedom for all religious confessions in the state so long as they do not endanger its existence or offend the ethical and moral feelings of the Germanic race.

The Party as such stands for a positive Christianity, without binding itself confessionally to any one denomination. It combats the Jewish-materialist spirit within and without us, and is convinced that a lasting recovery of our nation can only succeed from within on the principle: *The general interest before self-interest (Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz)*.³

Steigmann-Gall argued that 'positive Christianity' formed 'a religious system' for the Nazis. To this end, he focused on three concepts that he believed were explicit in Point 24, arguing these were 'key ideas in which Nazis claimed their movement was Christian': the 'promulgation of a social ethic,' the 'spiritual struggle against the Jews' and 'a new syncretism that would bridge Germany's confessional divide.'⁴

Yet it is necessary to ask whether this is correct in historical context. That is, were the three aspects that Steigmann-Gall referred to – *Gemeinnutz*, fighting the Jewish-materialist spirit and a non-confessional position – claimed by Nazis as 'Christian' components of their world-view? In this regard, this article is not concerned with whether individual Nazis talked or wrote about Christianity per se, it questions instead whether there was any such cohesive construct as 'positive Christianity.' When leading Nazis promoted National Socialism, were these three concepts described in terms of 'positive Christianity'?

In order to answer this, I have considered how these three sections of Point 24 were promoted by Hitler and how they were depicted in the two commentaries on the Nazi programme: that by Alfred Rosenberg in 1923, and the Official Commentary by Gottfried Feder in 1927. Analysis of such significant public explanations shows that the Nazis did not portray these aspects as 'Christian,' but openly depicted all three as part of a racial-nationalist ideology.⁵

The choice of Hitler is obvious, given it is generally accepted that he and Anton Drexler wrote the Nazi programme (proclaimed 24 February 1920).⁶ Yet the major

2 R. Steigmann-Gall, 'Christianity and the Nazi Movement: A Response', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42, 2 (2007), 185; R. Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919–1945* (New York, NY 2003), 14–5. His emphasis.

3 A. Rosenberg, *Wesen, Grundsätze und Ziele der NSDAP* (München 1933), 45. Emphasis in original.

4 Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 14. For the description as 'religious system,' (49), on 'spiritual struggle' (17–19), 'social ethic' (41), and 'syncretism' (51ff).

5 It should be understood that where I refer to the Nazis and 'nationalism' in the text, it denotes their peculiarly racist and pan-Germanic 'ultra-nationalism.' For a general statement on fascism in these terms, see R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London 1991), 26, 44.

6 R.J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (London 2004), 179–80; R.H. Phelps, 'Hitler and the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei', *The American Historical Review*, 68, 4 (1963), 982; I. Kershaw, *Hitler*,

published explanations of the programme were those of Rosenberg and Feder. Rosenberg's was the first full published text of the programme, and it continued to be produced as the 'first publication of the NSDAP' in parallel to Feder's commentary, which formed Volume 1 of the National Socialist Library.⁷ Each of these men meets the requirement of being 'part of an ideological elite or milieu *within* the movement' who acted 'as arbiters of which idea or concept counted as National Socialist and which not.'⁸ As programme commentators, Rosenberg and Feder acted directly as such arbiters.

With respect to Hitler, I am most interested in his explanation of these key concepts in the years prior to the Munich Putsch. This was a period of time during which, as Steigmann-Gall noted with some justification, the Party 'articulated its vision without concern for campaign strategy or electoral posturing.'⁹ I have generally limited myself to Hitler's statements closest in time to the promulgation of the programme (1920), but have also considered *Mein Kampf* (first published in two volumes, 1925–6).

It is not the purpose of this article to consider the possible origins of the term 'positive Christianity' – if in fact they can be ascertained. A recent study by Derek Hastings has suggested the influence of Reform Catholicism but *positives Christentum* is a term about which there was (and is) great ambiguity.¹⁰ James Zabel conclusively demonstrated this ambiguity by showing that German theologians who examined the Nazis' 'positive Christianity' in depth during the 1930s came to vastly different conclusions about what it meant. As Zabel put it, it could 'mean almost anything': which was its great advantage.¹¹

Curiously, neither Steigmann-Gall nor Hastings has considered the longer history of 'positive Christianity' in Germany, where it meant those adhering to doctrinal or dogmatic, orthodox faith – not reformist or liberal. Zabel noted this 'traditionalist anti-liberal theological position' as the 'pre-Nazi' meaning of the term, and it was the commonly understood interpretation of 'positive

1889–1936: *Hubris* (London 1998), 144–5; J. Noakes and G. Pridham, *Nazism, 1919–1945: A Documentary Reader*, Vol. 1 (Exeter 1983), 14.

7 B. Miller Lane and L.J. Rupp, *Nazi Ideology before 1933: A Documentation* (Austin, TX 1978), 41; A. Rosenberg, *Wesen, Grundsätze und Ziele der NSDAP* (München 1935), 4; A. Rosenberg, *Wesen, Grundsätze und Ziele der NSDAP*, 15 ed. (München 1937), 7. I am using a 1933 edition: Rosenberg, *Ziele der NSDAP*. There is no full translation of Rosenberg's commentary, though sections appear in the Donovan Collection (Vol. III 7.17), available online at: <http://library2.lawschool.cornell.edu/~donovan/show.asp> (accessed 30 June 2011). References to Feder's commentary are to G. Feder, *Hitler's Official Programme and its Fundamental Ideas* (New York, NY 1934; repr., 1971); G. Feder, *Das Programm der N.S.D.A.P. und seine weltanschaulichen Grundgedanken*, Nationalsozialistische Bibliothek, Vol.1 (München 1934).

8 Steigmann-Gall, 'A Response', 186. Neither commentary was considered in great detail in *The Holy Reich*.

9 Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 13.

10 D. Hastings, *Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism: Religious Identity and National Socialism* (Oxford 2010).

11 See Chapter V 'Positive Christianity' in J.A. Zabel, *Nazism and the Pastors: A Study of the Ideas of three Deutsche Christen Groups* (Missoula, MT 1976), 111–29, here 128.

Christianity' in Germany across the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century.¹²

Even *Meyers Konversationslexikon* (common in middle-class German households) noted positive Christianity was an 'ecclesiastical, scholastic-dogmatic form.'¹³ While this may not have been the meaning given to the term by the Nazis, it was without doubt one of the interpretations brought to it by 'ordinary' Germans. The question I wish to address, however, is whether such leading Nazis as Hitler, Feder, or Rosenberg promoted their own particular interpretation in which community, interconfessionality and the 'Jewish-materialist spirit' were all formed into a cohesive 'positive Christian' faith.

It was argued in *The Holy Reich* that the Party 'undoubtedly put the nation above confession,' but also that 'positive Christianity was a genuine effort to unite Germans under the banner of a shared religion aimed against the Jew.'¹⁴ The latter point is the more problematic, given that this meant 'a new national religion ... would bind Catholic and Protestant in Germany.'¹⁵ Both commentaries on the programme argued the Party had a stated policy of avoiding religious questions unless they offended against 'morality and ethics,' on the grounds that politics should have nothing to do with religion (and vice versa).¹⁶ A major concern, as for Hitler, was that political interference in religion might lead to the churches adopting a political position.¹⁷

When it came to the question of nation above denomination, Rosenberg's commentary was emphatic that this section of Point 24 was intended to describe nationalism as forming the function of syncretism. Given this was the first commentary, it bore some weight, even more so because it was declared to have been 'thoroughly checked by Adolf Hitler.'¹⁸ While Rosenberg argued that most Germans adhered to 'extreme anti-Jewish Christianity,' it was not this religious belief that would draw them together, but National Socialism – as the 'new and yet ancient *völkisch* world-view' that 'alone is capable of uniting all classes and confessions in the German *Volk*, relying on the [as yet] only submerged German

12 See inter alia H. Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany*, 3 Vols, Vol. 2 (London 1965), 494; H. Hermelink, *Geschichte der evangelischen Kirche in Württemberg von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart 1949), 219; H. Lehmann, 'The Germans as a Chosen People: Old Testament Themes in German Nationalism', *German Studies Review*, 14, 2 (1991), 269; T. Nipperdey, *Religion im Umbruch: Deutschland, 1870–1918* (München 1988), 77–9, 93, 100, 118, 154.

13 Referring to *das positive Christentum* as a *kirchlich abgeschlossene, scholastisch-dogmatische Form* in a commentary on Apologetics. See 'Apologie,' *Meyers Konversationslexikon* (4. Auflage, 1888–1890) available in facsimile through Universität Ulm: <http://vts.uni-ulm.de/doc.asp?id=5436> (accessed 15 December 2011).

14 Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 51, 63. See more generally the chapter 'Above the Confessions'.

15 *Ibid.*, 50. Arguing this was based not 'on doctrine but on a value system.'

16 Rosenberg, *Ziele der NSDAP*, 44. Feder, *Hitler's Official Programme*, 107; Feder, *Programm* (1934 ed.), 57.

17 Rosenberg, *Ziele der NSDAP*, 44. They had learned the lesson of the *Kulturkampf*, see for example A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. R. Manheim (London 1943; repr., 2004), 107–8, 513–4. Church interference in politics was also strongly opposed (106).

18 This statement was included until at least the 1935 edition.

community-spirit.¹⁹ Rosenberg drew a direct correlation between ‘Socialism’ and this ‘spirit of community.’²⁰

The ideal was to forge ‘one community of blood, *Volk* and destiny,’ a racial-nationalist concept that was to overcome class divisions and confessional strife.²¹ ‘Confessional struggle’ was directly compared to ‘class struggle’ and both were viewed as causing unnecessary divisions in the nation, ultimately falling into the category of ‘the enemies of German unity.’²² Rosenberg argued strongly that one of the great dangers was that ‘confessional interests’ were set ‘before national [interests].’²³ This included the ‘international religious idea’ of Christianity because it placed greater emphasis on those joined in faith across national boundaries than on ‘racial-national’ concerns.²⁴ The process should be the opposite: national interests should take priority over those of any given confession.²⁵

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler argued ‘the racial question gives the key not only to world history, but to all human culture,’ and this point of view was certainly already expressed in Rosenberg’s commentary.²⁶ While Hitler wrote to Adolf Gemlich in 1919 that Jews formed ‘a non-German, foreign race’ with its own ‘racial characteristics ... its own feeling, thinking, and striving,’ Rosenberg argued ‘non-Germans’ would pursue ‘completely different intellectual (*geistig*), political, racial ends.’²⁷ For Rosenberg this drew on the ‘insight’ that ‘the Japanese, Negro or Jew following his own innermost nature can only be himself, not a European.’²⁸ Hence he referred to the ‘racial interests’ of the Jews, who were a ‘parasitic desert-people’ or a ‘counter-race’ to Europeans.²⁹ ‘Bastardisation’ was the only result of any ‘merger with the basically different and enemy Jewish counter-race, completely different according to its entire spiritual and physical structure ...’³⁰

The ‘highest principle’ was ‘protection of the *Volk* and race,’ meaning that ‘racial-national purity’ and the securing of the interests of the German nation-race were major emphases.³¹ This included eugenics, and it was from ‘fanatically nationalist and fanatically socialist thought’ that Rosenberg argued the ‘problem of old-age pensions’ could be solved, by also being ‘completely unsentimental and

19 A. Rosenberg, *Wesen, Grundsätze und Ziele der NSDAP* (München 1930), 44–5. His emphasis. Cf. E. Piper, ‘Steigmann-Gall, The Holy Reich’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42, 1 (2007), 48. I have relied on Piper’s translation of ‘as yet submerged,’ but not ‘spiritual community,’ given the German text: ‘*fußend auf dem nur verschütteten deutschen Gemeinschaftsgeist.*’

20 Rosenberg, *Ziele der NSDAP*, 8. He argued ‘Marxism was not Socialism = *Gemeinschaftsgeist*, but rather its conscious, only concealed, disparagement.’

21 *Ibid.*, here 5, see also 6–9, 44–5.

22 *Ibid.*, 46–7.

23 *Ibid.*, 15.

24 *Ibid.*, 11, 15–6.

25 *Ibid.*, 11, 44. Cf. Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 102–3.

26 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 308. Cf. Rosenberg, *Ziele der NSDAP*, 9–11.

27 Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism Vol. 1*, 1, 12; Rosenberg, *Ziele der NSDAP*, 43.

28 Rosenberg, *Ziele der NSDAP*, 43.

29 *Ibid.*, 25, 42, 17.

30 *Ibid.*, 18.

31 *Ibid.*, 38, 20. This included the call for colonization within Europe, especially Eastern Europe (16, 35). This was maintained: Feder, *Programm (1934 ed.)*, 12.

without breeding material of lesser value and erecting mental institutions.³² It was only from 'racial thought' that the idea of 'the genuine nation-state (*Volksstaat*)' was to be achieved, and this racial thought was 'the final measure of the entirety of our temporal affairs.'³³

Institutions and concepts that did not measure up on such a racial yardstick were described as *unvölkisch*, 'un-national.'³⁴ Given the world was conceived in such racial terms, it is hardly surprising that the ultimate arbiter of religion was 'racially conditioned' morality: 'German morality is the Germanic attitude towards life.'³⁵ Rosenberg was even more clear in his major work *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (1930) that the 'racial soul' dictated what was appropriate in religion.

In this latter work, Rosenberg's notion of 'positive Christianity' was defined in opposition to 'negative Christianity,' which he saw as represented by the Churches: 'Today we recognise that the central and supreme values of the Roman and the Protestant Church as negative Christianity cannot fit with our soul... they stand in the way of the organic strengths of the Nordic-racial peoples.'³⁶ Whereas Steigmann-Gall claimed that Rosenberg 'made no mention' of positive Christianity, he clearly did. '*Das positive Christentum*' was used by Rosenberg at least twice in contrasting 'negative and positive Christianity,' which were 'forever in a battle.'³⁷

In the Official Commentary, Feder supported Christianity in broad terms, though adding that the programme was not the place to discuss the 'hopes' that a new German form of 'knowledge of God' might be discovered in the future.³⁸ This statement is intriguing for two reasons. First, it implied there might well be a place to discuss such new forms. Secondly, the term that Feder used (*Gotterkenntnis*) was very strongly associated with a neo-pagan trend in the *völkisch* movement, given 'Mathilde Ludendorff's science-based religious views [were] called *Gotterkenntnis*.'³⁹

When it came to unity, the individual was given purpose through nationalism, by finding a place in the *Volksgemeinschaft* (the community of the nation-race), and

32 Rosenberg, *Ziele der NSDAP*, 30. Using the term *Idiotenanstalten*.

33 Ibid. 'Er ist heute der letzte Maßstab unseres gesamten irdischen Handelns.'

34 Ibid., 41, 45. The term *völkisch* is a complex one, but in essence bears the connotation of 'integral and racist nationalism': Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 86–90.

35 Rosenberg, *Ziele der NSDAP*, 44. *Germanisch* as 'Germanic.' He argued Christianity had adapted itself to and 'adopted' this.

36 A. Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts: Eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit*, 63–6 ed. (München 1935), 215. The Catholic Church receives far more attention, described variously as oppressive, Bolshevist, and pacifist (8–10, 199, 248, 294, 476–7). *Mythos* was 'at least as much an attack on Churches as it [was] upon Jewry': R. Cecil, *The Myth of the Master Race: Alfred Rosenberg and Nazi Ideology* (London 1972), 82.

37 Rosenberg, *Mythos*, 79. Cf. 'Whereas other Nazis referred to positive Christianity as a fundament of party ideology, in *Mythos* Rosenberg made no mention of it': Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 95. See also Piper, 'The Holy Reich', 49.

38 Feder, *Hitler's Official Programme*, 108; Feder, *Programm* (1934 edn), 57.

39 K.O. Poewe, *New Religions and the Nazis* (New York, NY 2006), 162. Mathilde 'despised Christianity and the occult,' creating 'her own new religion,' that 'combined notions of race-inheritance, belief, justice, culture and economy' (82). This *Deutsche Gotterkenntnis* is discussed in *Holy Reich*, 87–8.

the nation formed the ‘great social whole.’ While including a sense of the ‘individual awake[ning] to the higher life,’ Feder made such a revelation contingent upon the individual acting ‘in the service of the whole community . . . within the framework of the national community.’ This ‘*sense of community*’ was central, and only in realizing this was the individual given purpose.⁴⁰

There was no interconfessional or ‘national religion’ that would bridge the divide, but instead a stated opposition to any intertwining of confession and politics.⁴¹ The common good of the German nation was the main focus, and Feder explicitly defined this nation by race when he complained that the Weimar Constitution only referred to “German nationals,” but ignores the concept “German” in the *völkisch*, or still more precisely, in the racial sense.⁴²

From 1930, the Official Commentary also bore an introductory statement from Hitler mirroring the sentiments in Rosenberg’s commentary, that the ‘battle for freedom’ could ‘be fought successfully only by a political movement of freedom . . . that integrates the German-conscious of all ranks and classes of the German *Volk*.’⁴³ Given this, it is interesting to consider what Hitler had to say a decade earlier.

Arguably one of the best opportunities to discover Hitler’s views on the programme was on 7 August 1920, when he gave a speech to a conference in Salzburg consisting of representatives from ‘National Socialist parties’ from across Europe. Hitler was preaching to the choir, and there was no need to hide or ‘soften’ the Party platform.⁴⁴ This meeting also came less than six months after the NSDAP Programme had been proclaimed, which meant that Hitler took the opportunity to explain it in some detail.⁴⁵

This not only included promoting the creation of a greater Germany or attacking the Jews but also land reform and the creation of a ‘German law.’⁴⁶ Yet he neglected to mention positive Christianity, arguing that nationalism was the binding factor across all confessions. He described Point 24

40 Quotations from Feder, *Hitler’s Official Programme*, 49, 54. Emphasis in original.

41 *Ibid.*, 108, 68.

42 *Ibid.*, 75. With minor adjustments: Feder, *Programm* (1934 edn), 38.

43 Feder, *Hitler’s Official Programme*, 37. With minor adjustment: Feder, *Programm* (1934 edn), 14.

44 Hitler did often use religious language, which in combination with the Nazi use of ceremonial forms comparable to ecclesiastical traditions, has led to discussions of National Socialism as a ‘political religion.’ See for instance: M. Burleigh, ‘National Socialism as a Political Religion’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 1, 2 (2000), 1–26; H. Maier, ‘Political Religion: A Concept and its Limitations’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8, 1 (2007), 5–16. For a useful critique: R.J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power, 1933–1939* (London 2006), 257–60. On ‘Hitler’s faith’ see M. Rißmann, *Hitlers Gott: Vorsehungsglaube und Sendungsbewußtsein des deutschen Diktators* (Zürich 2001); C-E. Bärsch, *Die politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus: Die religiöse Dimension der NS-Ideologie in den Schriften von Dietrich Eckart, Joseph Goebbels, Alfred Rosenberg und Adolf Hitler* (München 1998); F. Heer, *Der Glaube des Adolf Hitler. Anatomie einer politischen Religiosität* (München 1968).

45 Speech, 7 August 1920. A. Hitler, E. Jäckel and A. Kuhn (eds), *Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen: 1905–1924*, (Stuttgart 1980), 173–80. For the organizations, see 173.n.1. A photograph (with Hitler marked) can be found in F. Maier-Hartmann, *Dokumente der Zeitgeschichte*, 4th edn, Vol. 1 (München 1942), 420.

46 Hitler, *Aufzeichnungen*, 177.

essentially in reverse order, arguing ‘the last condition’ of the Nazis was the rejection of:

the entire materialistic spirit... we stand the basic principle of *Gemeinnutz vor dem Eigennutz* at the top of all our thoughts and deeds. And here I would like to emphasise one thing. We reject every confessional struggle.

What he emphasized regarding the ‘common good’ was a racial-nationalist cohesion to overcome such divisions. In Hitler’s address to his fellow Nazis the main point was that members of the Churches, whether Catholic or Protestant, ‘are German and with every fibre of their hearts sympathise and suffer with the current calamity of the *Volk*, who are prepared for every sacrifice, regardless of which confession they belong to.’⁴⁷ Nationalism was not only paramount, it was the sole means of unity.

He went on to argue that National Socialists sought ‘something binding,’ and so had to leave aside ‘everything divisive,’ using the specific example of a division of the German ‘north and south’ to conclude ‘to be national means to be German.’⁴⁸ Hitler had nothing to hide from these other Nazis, so what explains the absence of any discussion of ‘positive Christianity’? If this author of the programme was not promoting it at this opportune point – addressing a group which included the other author, Drexler – arguably there was no comprehensive notion.

This is certainly supported in Hitler’s notes from the early years, from 1920–2, where he wrote out his own description of the content of the programme (see Table 1).⁴⁹ Unlike reports on speeches, these are near unfiltered pieces of evidence, and the explanation at the conference followed essentially the same structure as these later notes.

When Hitler himself wrote out the ‘DAP’ Programme (*Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, German Workers’ Party) the emphases were political and nationalist. The question of religion did not enter into his frame of reference, and Hitler did not conceive of it (or more specifically, of Christianity) as a significant part of the programme that he had co-written. Of course, this is not to discount the possibility that a discussion of religion could fall under one of these headings, but the notes give a strong sense of Hitler’s priorities and perception of what the Nazis sought to achieve. ‘Positive Christianity’ was not one of them.

Steigmann-Gall argued that one is more likely to find the ‘untempered’ views of Nazis in the years prior to 1923, and held that the declaration in *Mein Kampf* that the Nazis should not engage in religious reformation was ‘Hitler the *politician*’

47 Ibid., 178.

48 Ibid. Cf. Speech, 19 November 1920, *Aufzeichnungen*, 261.

49 A. Hitler, E. Jäckel and A. Kuhn (eds), *Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen: 1905–1924*, (Stuttgart 1980), 212, 409–10, 743. Emphases as in original. A fourth outline (12 August 1921, *Aufzeichnungen*, 456) was less detailed, listing ‘freedom,’ ‘solution of the Jewish question, monetary reform, land reform’ and *Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz*. The DAP became the NSDAP. On Hitler and the early party: R.H. Phelps, ‘Hitler and the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei’, *The American Historical Review*, 68, 4 (1963), 974–86.

Table 1. The Programme in Hitler's eyes

25 August 1920	24 May 1921
Our highest criticism however is our Programme. Its brevity. Our will.	Framework of the <u>Programme</u> .
Positive demands:	We do not promise – We demand.
National rebirth as premise.	Bases of a Germanic state
Jewish question just as much so (<i>ebenso</i>)	German equality with the whole world
<u>Finance reform.</u>	Peace treaties.
Banks.	German right of citizenship in the state.
Old age pension.	Jewish question.
Fighting usury.	Finance reform.
<u>German law.</u>	Old age pension.
<u>Land reform.</u>	Land reform.
Military reform.	Law reform.
<u>Press reform.</u>	Educational reform.
	Military reform.
	Press reform.
	Reform of the constitution.
	Germany as a true National State
	<u>24 February 1920</u>
After 22 November 1922	
DAP	
Its goal: no class division – <u>Only more Germans</u>	
I. National feeling	
II. Jewish question	
III. Interest (<i>Zins</i>) reform (Usury)	
IV. Old age pension	
V. Land reform	
VI. Law reform	
VII. Education	
VIII. Press	

engaged in strategy.⁵⁰ Yet in the years leading up to *Mein Kampf*, his view on the programme was already *völkisch* and political. He was either very strategic in these early years, or he genuinely believed the Nazis had little interest in religion, except as it impacted on NSDAP goals or offended the morals of the 'Germanic race.' In all probability, it was a combination of these, and non-interference in religious matters had been a part of the policy of the DAP since 1919.⁵¹

Indeed, the first reference we have to 'positive Christianity' in the evidence that remains on Hitler's early speeches was in arguing that the NSDAP should not be drawn into attacking religious confessions, referring particularly to the

50 Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 13, 62.

51 See the DAP *Grundsätze*, Reel 4, no.111, Hoover Institution *Hauptarchiv der NSDAP*, (Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace), microform.

'Away-from-Rome' movement: 'The Party stands on the basis of positive Christianity and supports every Christian activity as the fundament of authority.'⁵² Hitler's position in *Mein Kampf* was the same as Rosenberg's commentary, lending credence to the idea he agreed with this work: 'Political parties have nothing to do with religious problems, as long as these are not alien to the nation, undermining the morals and ethics of the race; just as religion cannot be amalgamated with . . . political parties.'⁵³

His own early notes (Table 1) fit with the point that Richard Evans emphasized with respect to Hitler's views on 'attempts to turn Nazism into a religion,' the 1938 description of National Socialism as 'a *völkisch*-political doctrine that grew out of exclusively racist insights.'⁵⁴ In this same speech he called it 'a cool doctrine of reality based on the sharpest scientific knowledge' to encapsulate the idea that National Socialism was grounded in the concrete world, not in the abstract world of the 'spiritual.' This matches the programme outlines, which consistently began with nationalism and the 'Jewish question.' This can also be seen in *Mein Kampf*.

Steigmann-Gall argued that Hitler opposed 'sectarian warfare' but also 'plainly stated his belief that a pre-existing variety of Christianity [Protestantism] already held up to his racialist scrutiny.'⁵⁵ Except that it did not. One can certainly agree with Steigmann-Gall's point that Hitler viewed Protestantism as nationalistic, but by using only sections of the relevant quotations he has changed the meaning of the original.

When one looks to the sections from *Mein Kampf* cited as evidence, Hitler was making the opposite point. Protestantism was a 'better defender of Germanism, in so far as this is grounded in its genesis and later tradition; *it fails, however, in the moment when this defence of national interests must take place in a province which is either absent from the general line of its ideological world and traditional development, or is for some reason rejected.*'⁵⁶ The italicized sections are missing from *The Holy Reich*, and Steigmann-Gall went on to the next sentence, which he also cut short:

Protestantism will always stand up for the advancement of all Germanism as such, as long as matters of inner purity or national deepening as well as German freedom are involved, since all these things have a firm foundation in its own being; *but it combats with the greatest hostility any attempt to rescue the nation from the embrace of its most*

52 Speech, 31 August 1920, Hitler, *Aufzeichnungen*, 221. This was a point he was to return to in *Mein Kampf*, and forms the major focus of the consideration of Schönerer in: Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 61–3.

53 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 106, see also 313. Cf. Rosenberg, *Ziele der NSDAP*, 15, 43–4.

54 Speech, 6 September 1938, Adolf Hitler, M. Domarus (ed.), *Reden und Proklamationen, 1932–1945*, Vol. 2, 2 'Triumph, 1935–1938' (Leonberg 1988), 893. See Evans, *Third Reich in Power*, 257–8.

55 Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 63. Arguing this was 'just like a prior generation of nationalists searching for an interconfessional religion.'

56 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 103.

mortal enemy, since its attitude towards the Jews just happens to be more or less dogmatically established.

Hitler was arguing that while Protestantism was more nationalistic than Catholicism, it specifically *did not* hold up 'to his racialist scrutiny.' It failed on the single most important point, the 'Jewish question.' Hitler went on to point this out in the very next line: 'Yet here we are facing the question without whose solution all other attempts at a German reawakening or resurrection are and remain absolutely senseless and impossible.'⁵⁷

Hitler had come to this through a discussion of the ways in which the clergy were not supportive enough of the German race, that is, they did not place the concerns of the nation-race above those of the Church. The whole discussion began where it ended: 'In the Jewish question . . . do not both denominations today take a standpoint which corresponds neither to the requirements of the nation nor to the real needs of religion?' Hitler emphasized this lack of concern for questions of importance to the 'race' applied to both denominations. In his eyes this was due to 'defending an abstract idea as such.'⁵⁸

He denounced such 'abstract' notions defended at the expense of the German nation, whereby 'all purely national vital necessities are judged exclusively' from the standpoint of such 'rigid and purely doctrinaire' concepts. This brought him to 'the weak defence of German interests by a part of the clergy,' which was located in the 'inadequate education in Germanism from childhood up' and 'unlimited submission to an idea which has become an idol.' He argued that clergy had to become 'objective' towards their religion and 'subjective' to their nation, so that the interests of the German race were defended first and foremost.⁵⁹

Hitler's solution was fairly simple. To solve this 'inadequate education in national sentiment and resultant lack of devotion to our nation' required raising Germans up in Germanism: 'Then in a short time it will be seen that (presupposing, of course, a radically national government) in Germany, as in Ireland, Poland or France, the Catholic will always be a German.'⁶⁰ Hitler believed that 'the mightiest proof' that nationalism could overcome religious divisions existed in the Great War:

Whether Protestant pastor or Catholic priest, both together contributed infinitely . . . In these years and particularly at the first flare, there really existed in both camps but a single holy German Reich, for whose existence and future each man turned to his own heaven.⁶¹

57 Ibid., 103, see also 307.

58 Ibid., 101.

59 Ibid., 102–3. These 'abstract notions' included many points he vehemently opposed like "democracy," "pacifism," "international solidarity." Rosenberg also referred to the 'national poison' of 'internationalism, pacifism, parliamentarianism'. Rosenberg, *Ziele der NSDAP*, 4–5.

60 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 104.

61 Ibid. Referring to Frederick the Great's saying that each person 'could choose his own path to blessedness,' on which see J.S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933–45* (London 1968), 6.

Hitler certainly believed there should not be confessional strife, but his solution was a cohesive *völkisch* movement, united in racist nationalism and not splintered by confessional issues that 'lie outside the frame of its political work.'⁶² This was not the call to join together under a 'shared religion,' but to serve the nation *regardless* of confession.

His perception of race meant that denominational issues were irrelevant, when the key question was 'whether the Aryan man is preserved for the earth or dies out.' Hence, the '*völkisch*-minded' had 'the most sacred duty, each in his own confession, to ensure that *people stop just talking superficially of God's will, but also actually fulfil God's will, and not let God's work be desecrated.*'⁶³ People could remain in their 'own confession' so long as they worked to preserve 'the Aryan man.' What taught Catholics and Protestants 'mutually to respect and esteem one another' in the Nazi movement was not shared religious faith but racial antisemitism: a battle against the common foe of the 'Aryans.'⁶⁴

Such notions followed a longer tradition in *völkisch* thought, and the second of Theodor Fritsch's 'German Commandments' read: 'You shall know that you, along with all of your fellow Germans regardless of faith or political opinion, have one common intransigent adversary. He is called *Jew*.'⁶⁵ The question that Hitler believed the Pan-German movement should have asked in Austria was not one of a common religion, but 'Is the preservation of Austrian Germanism possible under a Catholic faith or not?' If the answer was yes, then they should not have interfered.⁶⁶

As in Rosenberg's commentary, Germanism and the preservation of the Aryan race were the major concerns, and Hitler believed both denominations were failing. They failed through not putting national interests first (including above inter-confessional strife), and through their failure to protect 'Aryan' blood. He held the work of God was specifically race: 'God's will gave men their form, their essence and their abilities. Anyone who destroys His work is declaring war on the Lord's creation, the divine will.'⁶⁷ At times he conflated this 'divine will' and 'Nature,' or the 'commands' of 'Eternal Nature' and the 'will of the Almighty Creator.'⁶⁸ As he put it in the same 1938 speech cited above: 'Our "cult" is

62 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 313, see also 108, 513–4.

63 Ibid., 512. Emphasis in original. I have made adjustments. *Gottes Werk* appeared in Manheim's edition as 'God's word'. For the passage in German: A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (München 1936), 630.

64 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 514. This also means there was an official position that Nazis could belong to either Christian denomination, or (as Rudolf Hess declared in 1933), not to any confession: K. Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, Vol. 1: *Preliminary History and the Time of Illusions, 1918–1933* (London 1987), 525, 673.

65 T. Fritsch, *Antisemiten-Katechismus: Eine Zusammenstellung des wichtigsten Materials zum Verstaendniß der Judenfrage*, 25th edn (Leipzig 1893), 358. His emphasis.

66 If not, then a 'religious reformation' was required, and not a 'political party': Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 104–5. With minor adjustment for *österreichisches Deutschtum*: Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (1936 edn), 124.

67 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 512. Cf. the discussion of these sources in Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 26–7. Hitler also referred to 'Nature' as outlining the laws of race: Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 258–60.

68 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 60, 121–3, 258–60.

exclusively: cultivation of the natural and hence also that [which is] divinely ordained.⁶⁹

On these grounds he held that Protestants and Catholics were not fulfilling the will of God, as they placed Christian universalism above racial concerns. Hitler saw this as a betrayal of the German nation, especially given his perspective that ‘The sin against blood and race is the original sin of this world.’⁷⁰ This clarifies his repeated assertions that he fought for ‘the will of the Almighty Creator.’ An apt example is when Hitler supported celibacy ‘to put an end to the constant and continuous original sin of racial poisoning, and to give the Almighty Creator beings such as He Himself created.’⁷¹

Such a view on ‘original sin’ indicates religion viewed through a racial lens, and the failure of both confessions was indicated in his description of ‘Jewish bastardisation’:

Systematically these black parasites... defile our inexperienced young blonde girls and thereby destroy something which can no longer be replaced in this world. *Both, yes, both Christian denominations* look on indifferently at this desecration and destruction of a noble and unique living creature, given to the earth by God’s grace.⁷²

In another section of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler continued this theme that the Churches were committing sins against race by allowing ‘contamination of our blood.’

Writing that the institution of marriage must ‘produce images of the Lord and not monstrosities halfway between man and ape,’ he promoted eugenics concepts of ‘breed[ing] the best for posterity.’ In line with this, he wrote that the Churches were too focused on the spiritual, and not enough on the racial-biological, arguing ‘if our Churches also sin against the image of the Lord, whose importance they still so highly emphasise,’ it was ‘entirely because of the line of their present activity which speaks always of the spirit and lets its bearer, the man, degenerate into a depraved proletarian.’ He also advocated an essential physical-spiritual link, where racial degeneration led to consequences like the ‘small effect of the Christian faith’ in Germany and ‘terrible “godlessness”’, to a ‘physically botched *and hence* spiritually degenerate rabble.’⁷³

He felt strongly enough about this point to repeat it, arguing that if the ‘fertility of the healthiest bearers of the nationality’ were to be ‘consciously and systematically’ supported, it would lead to a race that had ‘eliminated the germs of our

69 Hitler, *Reden (Domarus) Vol. 2, 2*: ‘Triumph, 1935–1938’, 894.

70 ‘Die Sünde wider Blut und Rasse ist die Erbsünde dieser Welt’: Hitler, *Mein Kampf (1936 edn)*, 272. It can be traced back to 1919: ‘Not wars destroy races/ only original sin/ only poisoning of the blood’: W. Maser and A. Hitler, *Hitler’s Letters and Notes* (London 1974), 286. This clearly referred to the 1917 novel: A. Dinter, *Die Sünde wider das Blut: Ein Zeitroman*, 15th edn (Leipzig 1921).

71 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 369. Cf. 260: ‘racial crossing’ as ‘sin against the will of the eternal creator.’ See further 60, 348.

72 *Ibid.*, 512. My emphasis.

73 *Ibid.*, 366. My emphasis. In German, ‘*und damit natürlich*’: Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (1936 edn), 446. Hitler meant both race intermixture and degeneration within the German race through allowing ‘sufferers from syphilis, tuberculosis, hereditary diseases, cripples, and cretins’ to procreate.

present physical *and hence* spiritual decay.⁷⁴ In his view it would be more in line with Jesus' intentions to produce a eugenically healthy German race, than to focus on missionary work:

It would be more in keeping with the intention of the noblest man in this world if our two Christian churches . . . would kindly, but in all seriousness, teach our European humanity that where parents are not healthy it is a deed pleasing to God to take pity on a poor little healthy orphan child . . . than themselves to give birth to a sick child . . .⁷⁵

What we have then is a consistent emphasis that the 'non-confessional' position of Point 24 did not advocate religious syncretism, but racial-nationalist syncretism. It represented opposition to the intertwining of confession and politics, and did not refer to a 'national religion' or an attempt to unite the confessions under any 'banner' except that of the Nazis – which was '*national, social, and antisemitic*.'⁷⁶ The interests of Germanism, of the 'Aryan,' were to be placed above those of any given denomination. When Hitler spoke of his own notion of the common banner in 1920, this was clear:

I am an antisemite, we wish to remain German and racially pure, whoever is in agreement with this should join our ranks, but only those who are truly convinced of our idea, the others we are unable to use . . . German and racially pure (*Deutsch und rassenrein*) stands on our flag.⁷⁷

Indeed, in discussing Christianity and National Socialism it is a curious point to consider that the swastika, which Catholics and Protestants were to (and did) march beneath, was a symbol described in the commentaries as specifically Germanic: 'the Aryan symbol of renewal' or 'the sun-wheel . . . the symbol of reawakening life.'⁷⁸

To return to the speech of 7 August 1920, when Hitler explained Point 24 to his fellow Nazis his larger concern was how it related to the 'Jewish question,' specifically the 'Jewish-materialist spirit.' Hitler viewed this as a racial problem, as a struggle against the Jewish spirit of materialism, not a 'spiritual struggle against

74 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 368. My emphasis, 'und damit auch': Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (1936 edn), 448.

75 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 367.

76 This was Hitler's description of the Nazis' three major principles in: Speeches, 13 August 1920, 29 September 1920: Hitler, *Aufzeichnungen*, 201, 242. Quotation from the second speech, to a group of the Austrian National Socialists (his emphasis). 'Strongly national, strongly antisemitic, strongly social' were apparently the common goals that the Nazi conference had agreed to on 7 August (see report, 231).

77 Speech, 19 November 1920: *Aufzeichnungen*, 260; the same phrases appear in notes for a speech, 24 July 1920 (164). The authenticity of the July notes have been questioned: E. Jäckel, A. Kuhn, and H. Weiß, 'Neue Erkenntnisse zur Fälschung von Hitler-Dokumenten', *Vierteljahrshäfte für Zeitgeschichte* 32, 1 (1984): 163–9. No such issues arise with the November speech.

78 Rosenberg and Feder respectively: Rosenberg, *Ziele der NSDAP*, 48; Feder, *Programm (1934 edn)*, 60.

the Jews.’ As he described it by 1921 this was an infection of the German *Volk* that introduced the ‘poison’ of ‘foreign’ mammonism: the originating ‘germ of this racial illness’ was solely ‘the Jew.’⁷⁹

The stated battle against the ‘Jewish-materialist spirit’ in Point 24 most probably derived from Dietrich Eckart’s earlier work on ‘Jewishness within and without us.’ As depicted in an early account of his life, Eckart held a ‘mystical-Germanic worldview’ and was interested mostly in the inner battle *within* each individual between the ‘the forces of this world and the next,’ though also in Christ, the ‘ancient Mayan teachings’ and the ‘teachings of the ancient Indians.’⁸⁰

Yet Hitler stood on the racial side of the divide that Barbara Lane identified between Eckart and Rosenberg. She described the two principally by their anti-semitism, arguing ‘Rosenberg’s antisemitism was overwhelmingly biological’ meaning that Jews ‘were a distinct race, from whose racial characteristics religious, political and cultural consequences could be deduced.’ Eckart’s notions on anti-semitism included the idea: “‘Jewishness’ was not a racial condition but a spiritual one. In part, “‘Jewishness’ was defined by religion; the Jews are those... who do not believe in a life after death...’ For Eckart the expression ‘Jewishness within and without us’ meant that each individual was a ‘little bit “Jewish”’: that men must seek to overcome “‘Jewishness’” not only around them but also within themselves’ – what he meant by this specifically was that the Jewish spirit represented materialism.⁸¹

Steigmann-Gall depicted this more as a general concern with religious categories, based on the idea that Eckart’s phrase as it appeared in Point 24 ‘implied a religious element in the Nazi typology and suggested the Jewish “problem” was not solely racial.’ While agreeing that race was given ‘ontological priority’ he argued that many Nazis ‘commingled racial and religious categories,’ leading to a ‘dualism of Christian-Aryan and Jew-Semite.’⁸² This is a problematic assertion when we come to Hitler, given he refused to apply religious categories to the Jews: ‘the Jews are definitely a race and not a religious community.’⁸³

This was in line with Theodor Fritsch, who had argued in the nineteenth century that religion was only a ‘cloak’ (*Deckmantel*) for Jews: ‘Under the cloak of “religion” the Jews form in reality a *political*, social and economic community.’⁸⁴ This meant that Jews would only ever pretend to be ‘a German, Frenchman or

79 From his New Year article: 1 January 1921, Hitler, *Aufzeichnungen*, 279. This bore considerable weight, given it was the first article in 1921 and appeared shortly after the *VB* became the official party newspaper.

80 *Kampf der Diesseits- und Jenseitskräfte*: A. Rosenberg, *Dietrich Eckart: Ein Vermächtnis* (München 1928), 21–3, also 26–9. On Eckart: M. Plewnia, *Auf dem Weg zu Hitler: Der ‘völkische’ Publizist Dietrich Eckart* (Bremen 1970).

81 Quotations from Lane and Rupp, *Nazi Ideology*, xiii. On Jews as materialists (17). See also: ‘Every individual has to fight the “piece of Jewry” (*Stück Judentum*) – that is, the materialistic spirit – within himself’: Plewnia, *Dietrich Eckart*, 55.

82 Quotations are respectively from: Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 17, 29–30.

83 Gemlich letter of 16 September 1919: Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism Vol. 1*, 1, 12. He reiterated this in *Mein Kampf*: Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 278.

84 Fritsch, *Antisemiten-Katechismus*, 11, 48–9, 89ff.

Englishman,' the same opinion held by Hitler.⁸⁵ Hitler used the term 'protective cloak' (*Schutzdecke*) to describe the same notion as Fritsch, arguing 'the Jew' had always formed a state within a state, 'under the disguise of a "religious community," only dropping this 'protective cloak' when 'he felt strong enough.'⁸⁶ He also rejected antisemitism that drew on religious categories.

While influenced by the Austrian Christian Socialists, especially Karl Lueger, he rejected their 'sham antisemitism' and the 'struggle against the Jews on a religious basis,' arguing that 'a splash of baptismal water' constantly undermined religious antisemitism.⁸⁷ Hitler sought 'a serious scientific treatment of the whole problem.'⁸⁸ Hence, his support for the Pan-German movement: 'its antisemitism was based on a correct understanding of the importance of the racial problem, and not on religious ideas.'⁸⁹

He concluded that the NSDAP should combine the best elements of Schönerer's Pan-German nationalism, with its racial antisemitism, and Lueger's methods for building a mass movement.⁹⁰ Hitler was directly (and clearly) opposing a religious understanding of the 'Jewish question.' Simply put, it was not harsh enough. He did not want a co-mingling of religious and racial categories when it came to the Jews, it had to be a 'scientific' antisemitism built on 'racial knowledge.'⁹¹ One could not find a more direct expression of this than in the index to *Mein Kampf*, where the first entry on antisemitism read: 'Antisemitism: false (on a religious basis).'⁹²

As Lane noted, the 'pervasive dualism' in 'Jewishness in and around us' was that: 'Not only the individual but also the nation is wracked by the battle between the spiritual and the material, between Jew and non-Jew, yet "life" depends on the perpetuation of the struggle . . .'⁹³ This made it essentially impossible to fully overcome 'the Jew within.' Already by 1920 Hitler attacked this perspective, arguing that it must have first been 'a Jew' who came up with the 'train of thought' that one had to 'gradually deepen the scientific knowledge of the danger of Jewry' so that 'the individual begins on the basis of this knowledge to expel the Jew from himself.'⁹⁴

He could be even more aggressive. In 1922, he openly mocked such a view in a speech that was published on the front page of the *Völkischer Beobachter* (*VB*, from December 1920, the official Nazi newspaper). He argued that the 'hostility towards the Jews was a necessary consequence of the entirely different racial composition

85 Ibid., 12; Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 270.

86 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 277.

87 *Scheinantisemitismus*: Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (1936 edn), 132; Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 110. Steigmann-Gall's discussion of Lueger and Schönerer did not consider these points: Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 61–3.

88 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 110, cf. M.R. Gerstenhauer, *Der völkische Gedanke in Vergangenheit und Zukunft: Aus der Geschichte der völkischen Bewegung* (Leipzig 1933), 9, 30–1.

89 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 111.

90 Ibid., 111–2. See Kershaw's discussion of this same point: Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936*, 33–6.

91 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (1936 edn), 130–1.

92 Ibid., vii. It referred to the section discussed (130).

93 Lane and Rupp, *Nazi Ideology*, xiii.

94 Speech, 13 August 1920, Hitler, *Aufzeichnungen*, 199.

between Aryans and Jews,' going on to argue that Jews were purely destructive and materialist, unable to possess 'idealism' like Aryans— for whom adherence to the purely temporal would be 'an inner falsification.' On these grounds he attacked the notion, advocated by a speaker for the Bavarian Peoples' Party, that 'One has to kill the "Jew in oneself" ... No. *The tangible agent of the Jewish spirit, the living Jew, must be expelled. That is positive antisemitism.*'⁹⁵

It is clear that Hitler disagreed with Eckart's notion that 'Jewishness in and around us' was a 'quality inherent in every folk' and 'essential to life itself.' Eckart held 'Jewishness' was 'the condition of worldly existence' and the Jews 'a necessary evil' because: 'Jewishness belongs to the organism of mankind as ... certain bacteria belong to the human body, and just as necessarily as these.'⁹⁶

Hitler took a hard-line racist approach to the 'Jewish-materialist spirit.' He had described the Jews as a 'racial tuberculosis' in his letter to Gemlich in 1919, and he returned to this theme at the Nazi conference on 7 August 1920. Hitler addressed this aspect of Point 24 specifically under 'Our attitude to the Jewish question,' the key point that would decide:

whether our *Volk* first and foremost is restored to health again in its very essence (*innerlich*), whether the Jewish spirit also truly disappears. Because do not think, that you are able to combat an illness, without killing the virus, without killing the bacillus, and do not think, that you are able to combat the racial tuberculosis, without taking care that the *Volk* is free of the germ of the racial tuberculosis. The effect of the Jews (*Judentum*) will never die away, and the poisoning of the *Volk* will not end, so long as the virus, the Jew, is not expelled from our midst (applause).⁹⁷

Mammonism was 'Jewish,' not German, a point that became obvious in his discussion of *Gemeinnutz* (examined below). The 'Jewish-materialist spirit within' did not imply 'a religious element' for Hitler, it was a racial illness of the German people to be fought in the first instance through expelling the Jews. The 'Jewish spirit' could still be present in the German nation amongst their 'own bad elements,' but the struggle against such was to be taken up after the Jews were expelled.⁹⁸

Shortly before his speech at the Nazi conference, Hitler had expressed the same view in a private letter, arguing (as in the Gemlich letter) that the 'Jewish question' was to be solved not through 'emotional antisemitism' but through a 'level-headed recognition of reality.'⁹⁹ In this view, this was reality: 'The Jew is, as the ferment of

95 Speech, 2 November 1922, *ibid.*, 718–9, 720. His emphasis. '*Der greifbare Erreger des jüdischen Geistes.*'

96 Lane and Rupp, *Nazi Ideology*, 17, 24–5.

97 Speech, 7 August 1920, Hitler, *Aufzeichnungen*, 176–7. Hitler used *Erreger* throughout, which I have translated as 'virus' or 'germ.' Cf. Gemlich letter, Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism Vol. 1*, 1, 13.

98 Speech, 6 July 1920, Hitler, *Aufzeichnungen*, 159.

99 Letter, 3 July 1920, *ibid.*, 156. Cf. Gemlich letter, 16 September 1919: *ibid.*, 88. Clearly he had not moved that far from his original ideas by 1938: Speech, 6 September 1938, Hitler, *Reden (Domarus) Vol. 2*, 2: 'Triumph, 1935–1938', 893.

decomposition (following Mommsen) regardless of good or evil, the sole cause of the inner collapse of all races overall, into which he has burrowed as a parasite.' He believed he could not reprove 'a tuberculosis bacillus' but was called to combat it 'for my personal existence' through 'the destruction of its agent (*Erreger*).' He described 'the Jew' as: 'the racial tuberculosis of the peoples. To fight him means to expel him.' Only after such an expulsion could the struggle against 'the Jewish spirit and mammonism' be taken up.¹⁰⁰

Hitler carried this theme into *Mein Kampf*, where he argued that only one question was of 'causal importance': 'the racial preservation of the nation.' Not only were 'qualities inherent in the race' but '[a]nyone who wants to free the German blood from the manifestations and vices of today, which were originally alien to its nature, will first have to redeem it from the foreign virus of these manifestations.' What was required was 'the clearest knowledge of the racial problem and hence of the Jewish problem.'¹⁰¹

Rosenberg described this in the same way, arguing in his commentary that the aims of the Nazi movement could not be achieved without 'rendering the bacillus innocuous, that poisons our blood and our soul: the Jew and the Jewish spirit born from him with its adherents from the German camp.' In this 'wider knowledge,' Rosenberg advocated a 'ruthless struggle' against the Jews. At this same point he mentioned that the 'raw materialistic Marxist world-view' was a 'deadly enemy' of National Socialism. Nearly everything that he attacked was linked to the 'racial and economic-political interests of the Jews,' so that Marxism and capitalism were one: 'Marxism was not the deadly enemy of international trade-capital... but rather, on the contrary, championed the *racial* interests of this (Jewish) high-finance.'¹⁰²

Feder's commentary contained similar notion, arguing one could not 'govern the country in association with pacifists, internationalists and Jews,' as 'there never can be and never will be friendship and cooperation between eagles and snakes, between wolves and lambs, between mankind and the cholera bacillus.'¹⁰³ He too argued that a common 'spiritual (*geistig*) foundation' meant that 'Capitalism and Marxism are one!'¹⁰⁴ The 'agent' or 'representative' of capitalism was 'the Jew.'¹⁰⁵ He was also very clear that the Nazis believed Jews were parasitic, exhibiting 'destructive racial characteristics.'¹⁰⁶

100 Letter, 3 July 1920, Hitler, *Aufzeichnungen*, 156. Hitler also accused the state of not having 'protected the Germanic race from the influences of the Jewish-mammonistic spirit': Speeches, 19 November and 30 November 1920, Hitler, *Aufzeichnungen*, 262, 269–70.

101 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 307. In German: 'vom fremden Erreger,' Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (1936 edn), 372.

102 Quotations from Rosenberg, *Ziele der NSDAP*, 9, 42 and 20. His emphasis.

103 Feder, *Hitler's Official Programme*, 47. With minor adjustment.

104 Feder, *Programm* (1934 edn), 53.

105 Feder, *Hitler's Official Programme*, 55, 73. Using *Träger* (55). The 'greedy Jew' was equated with 'the capitalist' where the 'Nordic man' was the 'solid man of the soil': Feder, *Programm* (1934 edn), 45. On city dwellers as the 'rootless man of the asphalt' (*Asphaltmensch*): Ibid., cf. Rosenberg, *Ziele der NSDAP*, 32.

106 Feder, *Programm* (1934 edn), 39.

Solving the ‘Jewish Question’ and ‘racial policy’ were so much a part of National Socialism that Feder called these *selbstverständlich*, ‘so natural to us National Socialists that that no further explanation is needed; but it is not possible to give brief and convincing arguments to those who fail to grasp the principles of our racial doctrine.’ Antisemitism itself was ‘the *emotional foundation* of [the Nazis] movement’ although Feder pointed out that while ‘[e]very National Socialist is an antisemite . . . not every antisemite is a National Socialist.’ The reason for this was that antisemitism was ‘purely negative; the antisemite recognises the carrier of the national plague-germ but this knowledge is usually transformed into mere hatred of the individual Jew,’ while Feder argued that there needed to be some consideration of ‘What next?’¹⁰⁷

The Nazis’ racism was (in Feder’s view) based on ‘racial-scientific knowledge,’ and in addition to the ‘purely antisemitic application’ there was to be the practice of ‘racial hygiene’: ‘the lofty aim— *the highest goal of the Nordicising of our Volk* in the spirit of Nordic thought— must be promoted.’¹⁰⁸ For this reason, he argued that Germans (especially those overseas) should not be ‘apostles of humanity’ but the ‘conscious outposts, advance-guards of Germanism on earth’ and ‘bearers of the Nordic idea.’¹⁰⁹

In this context, Feder came to write on materialism as Jewish. He argued that the struggle of the Nazis against Marxism, parliamentarianism and mammonism was also ‘a powerful spiritual struggle against the soul-destroying materialist spirit of egoism (*Ichsucht*) and greed’ in various areas of German life:

In the final assessment and at its deepest level it is about the battle of two world-views, that are expressed through two fundamentally different spiritual structures – the original productive and creative spirit and the rootless grasping spirit.

These were world-views which he differentiated not through religious categories, but by race. ‘Aryans’ were exemplars of the ‘creative spirit,’ while Jews were the ‘very best representatives’ of the ‘materialistic spirit.’ National Socialism saw ‘the Jewish-materialist spirit’ as ‘the chief root of evil.’¹¹⁰

Hitler had argued this same point in a speech in 1923 (reported in the *VB*) where the crucial struggle was described as not that of class, but of ‘two world-views, the national-idealistic and the international-materialistic world-view.’ As ‘a *world-view* in the final assessment is rooted in *race*’ this struggle was ultimately about: ‘the

107 Quotations from: Feder, *Hitler’s Official Programme*, 78, 56–7.

108 *Ibid.*, 80. With minor adjustments, *rassenkundlich* translated as ‘racial-scientific’. For a consideration of the pseudo-scientific justifications for the Nazis’ racism, see H. Junginger, *Die Verwissenschaftlichung der “Judenfrage” im Nationalsozialismus* (Darmstadt 2011).

109 Feder, *Programm* (1934 edn), 38. He was hopeful that the ‘terrible racial ebb’ might also be stemmed through ‘the extraordinary interest which racial problems and racial literature have aroused in a large circle of readers’. Feder, *Hitler’s Official Programme*, 80.

110 Feder, *Programm* (1934 edn), 34–5. The term *ursprünglich* translated as ‘original’, *hauptsächlich* as ‘very best’. I have translated *beweglich* as ‘rootless’, given Feder went on to use *wurzellos* as a synonym: ‘the grasping, rootless, purely worldly, hawking materialistic spirit.’

battle of the *German race* against the *Jewish*. The Jew is the typical representative of the materialistic world-view, and for us as Germans any agreement with him is impossible.' This was emphatically a 'racial struggle,' and 'the Jew and his accomplices within our *Volk* remain eternally our enemies.' He concluded with the notion of unity against 'our common deadly enemy, the Jew.'¹¹¹ Hitler and Feder did not depict a racial-religious dualism, but a racial-spiritual one: where the 'spirit' or 'world-view' was linked to race.

This battle against the *Jewish-materialist* spirit was not promoted as a religious one. It was seen instead in racial terms, a spirit 'born' out of the Jew, a 'racial tuberculosis' that was inherently foreign and which had infected sections of the German populace.¹¹² The solution might not have been solely racial, but it was principally racial. More significantly for Steigmann-Gall's formulation of 'positive Christianity,' it did not imply a 'religious element.' Even Feder – who believed 'expulsion' of the Jews would not suffice – promoted the solution in terms of racial characteristics. Such concepts were similarly promoted by Hitler when it came to *Gemeinnutz*.

Steigmann-Gall saw the phrase 'common good before the individual good' in Point 24 as a 'social ethic' that was part of 'the party's positive Christianity.'¹¹³ The phrase probably derived from the programme of the German Socialist Party (*Deutschsozialistische Partei*, DSP), which argued the 'old principle *Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz*' was to be reflected in a German law to replace the 'Roman law.'¹¹⁴

However, to Hitler *Gemeinnutz* was a racial characteristic. At least, he explained it in exactly these terms only six months after the programme was proclaimed:

We see that here already two great differences lie in race: being an Aryan (*Ariertum*) means a moral view of work and thus that which we hear talked about so often today: Socialism, public spirit, the common good before the individual good (*Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz*) – being a Jew (*Judentum*) means an egoistical conception of work and thus mammonism and materialism, the contrary opposite of Socialism.¹¹⁵

111 Speech, 18 January 1923, Hitler, *Aufzeichnungen*, 795–6.

112 Writing on the 'Jewish Question' in 1933, Feder argued expulsion of Jews was necessary, but 'the solution, if it is to be enduring' meant turning 'from the *Jewish-materialist spirit*, without us, but also within us, insofar as it has already put down roots there – and it has done so not only in the Marxist but also in the capitalist oriented circles.': G. Feder, G.E.v. Reventlow and F. Werner, *Das Neue Deutschland und die Judenfrage* (Leipzig 1933), 67.

113 Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 41.

114 R.H. Phelps, "'Before Hitler Came": Thule Society and Germanen Orden', *The Journal of Modern History*, 35, 3 (1963), 258. The phrase was part of point 2; R. von Sebottendorff, *Bevor Hitler kam: Urkundliches aus der Frühzeit der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung*, 1st edn (München 1933), 175. Compare to the Nazis' own advocacy for 'German common law' (point 19): Lane and Rupp, *Nazi Ideology*, 42. A contemporary account described this as racial determinism applied to law: L. Preuss, 'Germanic Law versus Roman Law in National Socialist Legal Theory', *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law*, 16, 4 (1934), 269–80.

115 Speech, 13 August 1920, Hitler, *Aufzeichnungen*, 190. Phelps examined this speech: R.H. Phelps, 'Hitlers "grundlegende" Rede über den Antisemitismus', *Vierteljahrshfte für Zeitgeschichte*, 16, 4 (1968), 390–420. For this point, see 406.

He went on to describe such a ‘characteristic’ as lying in the ‘blood’ so that ‘[the Jew] cannot do otherwise, whether he wishes to or not.’¹¹⁶ He returned to this major point later in the same speech, arguing that *Gemeinnutz* ultimately meant Socialism, which in turn meant the ‘moral duty’ to work for the community at large – but that the Nazis held ‘the conviction, that Socialism in this sense is only to be found, and can only be found in nations and races which are Aryan.’ For this reason, he declared: ‘If we are Socialists, then we categorically have to be antisemites, because the contrary opposite is materialism and mammonism, which we wish to fight against.’¹¹⁷

This phrase in Point 24, then, depicted a racial struggle of Aryan *Gemeinnutz* against Jewish *Eigennutz*. In a speech of August 1920 Hitler re-emphasized this, arguing that by contrast to ‘the Aryan race’ the Jews’ ‘highest law’ and ‘foundational principle’ was: ‘The individual good before the common good.’¹¹⁸ Hitler continued to promote this view, writing in *Mein Kampf* that it was a characteristic of ‘the Aryan’ to ‘put all his abilities in the service of the community . . . he willingly subordinates his own ego to the life of the community.’¹¹⁹ By contrast, he believed that one of the defining features of ‘the Jew’ was self-interest: ‘In the Jewish people the will to self-sacrifice does not go beyond the individual’s naked instinct of self-preservation.’ ‘Aryan’ racial characteristics included a concern for the common good, by opposition to the supposed ‘Jewish’ racial characteristics: self-interest and materialism.

While Rosenberg believed that National Socialism was the sole world-view representing the German ‘spirit of community,’ Feder described *Gemeinnutz* in line with Hitler. Feder was clear that a focus on *Eigennutz* was destroying Germany, and he was apocalyptic in tone, describing ‘the lust of enjoyment,’ the pursuit of ‘party interests over the general welfare,’ and (ironically) ‘acts of violence triumph[ing] over justice.’¹²⁰ Yet this apocalypse was not that of ‘Christian discourse,’ but the Norse Edda:

So terrible a battle of all the baser instincts was never yet known. One is involuntarily tempted to recall the old prophecies of the twilight of the gods, ‘then justice and morality shattered, the time of the wolf and the axe dawned, the sea rages, fire falls from heaven and gods and men pass away.’¹²¹

116 Hitler, *Aufzeichnungen*, 190.

117 Ibid., 200.

118 Speech, 31 August 1920, *ibid.*, 219. ‘*Eigennutz vor Gemeinwohl.*’

119 Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Manheim edn), 270.

120 On the Nazi use of violence: R. Bessel, *Political Violence and the Rise of Nazism: The Storm Troopers in Eastern Germany, 1925–1934* (New Haven, CT 1984); Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich*, 183, 89, 220–1, 29–30; P. Ayçoberry, *The Social History of the Third Reich, 1933–1945*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York, NY 1999), 17–25 (SA), 26–37 (SS).

121 Feder, *Hitler’s Official Programme*, 52. With adjustments: Feder, *Programm* (1934 edn), 23. Cf. the notion of ‘Christian [apocalyptic] discourse’ in Eckart’s writings: Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 19.

He proclaimed ‘the common good before the individual good’ as the exact opposite of ‘the spiritual foundations of the present Jewish supremacy: “Individual interest before the common interest.”’¹²²

Feder implied the NSDAP advocated conformity and communal interest, in opposition to Marxists and capitalists. To such groups: ‘*Personal interest is the sole incentive* – the advantage of one’s own narrow class the sole aim in life.’¹²³ He argued racially ‘pure’ Germans did the same. The ‘expulsion of the Jews’ was necessary, but it was not enough by itself, because if:

individual interest . . . and its material means of power, the economic system of the Jewish bank, with its loans and credits, were still permitted to exist . . . there would be enough Jewish bastards or ‘normal Germans’ of miserable mongrel blood to take the place of the Jews and they would rage against their own people no less furiously than do the heterodox Jews today.¹²⁴

Once again, this section of Point 24 did not refer to ‘positive Christianity,’ nor was *Gemeinnutz* promoted as a ‘social ethic’ that related to religion.

What we are faced with then is the continuing difficulty that ‘positive Christianity’ is ambiguous, and that using it as the key to interpreting Point 24 is problematic at best. From the texts analysed in this paper, cohesion was to be achieved not by an ‘interconfessional’ religion but by a kind of salvational nationalism. Within this framework, *Gemeinnutz* and *Eigennutz* were both racial characteristics (of the ‘Aryans’ and ‘Jews’ respectively) and the struggle against the ‘racial tuberculosis’ of the Jewish spirit was to be fought first and foremost by removing the ‘agent’ or ‘germ’ of that spirit: the Jews.

If Hitler’s outlines (Table 1) capture the central emphases of the programme, it leads to the conclusion that *The Holy Reich* has been inventing a neatly delineated ‘positive Christianity.’ Individual Nazis may have believed in an ‘Aryan’ Jesus, that the Bible should be stripped of the Old Testament, or that the ‘gods’ of the Old and New Testament were fundamentally different: concepts already well established in the *völkisch* literature of the time.¹²⁵ Yet arguing this was some form of semi-cohesive faith position with ‘inner logic’ that one could adhere to or ‘propagate’ is to turn a very vague aspect of the programme into a ‘religious system.’¹²⁶

Put another way, Steigmann-Gall believed ‘positive Christianity’ was meant to embody three concepts, yet we find Hitler (as author of the programme) and the

122 Feder, *Hitler’s Official Programme*, 57. See also Feder, *Programm* (1934 edn), 23.

123 Feder, *Hitler’s Official Programme*, 53.

124 *Ibid.*, 57. In German: ‘*Judenbastarde oder auch “Normaldeutsche” in ihrer elenden Rassenmischung*’: Feder, *Programm* (1934 edn), 26. In his view, even some ‘antisemites’ might step into the breach.

125 Including Fritsch’s own particularly racist version of the Marcionite heresy: T. Fritsch, *Der falsche Gott: Beweismaterial gegen Jehwe*, 9th edn (Leipzig 1921). On Jesus as non-Jewish: H. Stewart Chamberlain, *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century: A Translation from the German by John Lees*, Vol. 1 (London 1911), 201, 11–2; G.G. Field, *Evangelist of Race: The Germanic Vision of Houston Stewart Chamberlain* (New York, NY 1981), 182–4.

126 Steigmann-Gall, ‘A Response’, 186–7.

Nazi commentaries describing these same points as derivatives of the Nazis' own racist brand of nationalism, not as aspects of a 'type of Christianity.' In historical context, these were not 'key ideas in which Nazis claimed their movement was Christian.' On the contrary, when these leading figures explained National Socialism, including to their fellow Nazis, they were described as part of a racial-nationalist ideology.

Biographical Note

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