Ryan Tafilowski

‘Dark, Depressing Riddle’

Germans, Jews, and the Meaning of the Volk in the Theology of Paul Althaus

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Chapter I | Introduction

Where Paul Althaus is known in the anglophone world, he is known, as likely as not, as something of a villain. Althaus (1888–1966), longtime professor of systematic theology in Erlangen, has been obscured behind the Protestant giants of the twentieth century, save for a degree of unwelcome notoriety (and later, infamy) as the theologian who greeted the rise of National Socialism as "a gift and miracle of God."[1] Beyond this, though, he appears in many respects as a perfectly ordinary Protestant thinker, and a curious choice for a scholarly monograph. In the words of Paul Knitter, Althaus

> may be considered one of the lesser stars in the theological constellation of this century… . He gathered no theological school around himself, he ignited no theological bombs, he offered no shatteringly new insights. Althaus was a thinker who had something to say, who was respected and listened to; but he was not—like Barth, Bonhoeffer, Bultmann and Tillich—one of the "fashioners" of Protestant thinking of this century.[2]

His theology was not epoch-making, but Althaus did exercise wide influence, especially in Lutheran circles, as a systematician and ethicist, biblical exegete, and as a pastor and preacher. He was perhaps the preeminent Luther scholar of his generation, having followed his mentor Karl Holl as the president of the prestigious Luther Society, a post he held for over three decades until 1964. He was a prolific writer whose work was read "all over Germany."[3] He remains a central figure in the history of Lutheran confessionalism.

1 Paul Althaus, "Das Ja der Kirche zur deutschen Wende," in *Die deutsche Stunde der Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1934), 5. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from German texts are my own.

2 Paul Knitter, *Towards a Protestant Theology of Religions: A Case Study of Paul Althaus and Contemporary Attitudes*, Marburger Theologische Studien (Marburg: N.G. Elwert Verlag, 1974), 1.

3 Karlmann Beyschlag, *Die Erlanger Theologie* (Erlangen: Martin Luther Verlag, 1993), 184. For a sympathetic overview of Althaus' life and work, see Wenzel Lohff, "Paul Althaus," in *Tendenzen der Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert: Eine Geschichte in Porträts*, ed. Hans Jürgen Schultz (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1966). For an exhaustive bibliography of Althaus' publications, see

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Althaus' enduring significance, however, is in large part an accident of history. He was at the height of his intellectual powers and professional prestige at the moment of the Nazi *Machtergreifung*; the prime of his career coincided directly with the National Socialism's short-lived tenure. As a result, despite his irenic personality he found himself at the centre of the explosive theological debates of those turbulent years. Chief among these debates, and the subject of this study, was the so-called *Judenfrage*. The "Jewish Question"—that is, "the constant discussion in German society about the proper status of Jews"[4]—dominated public discourse during the waning years of the Weimar Republic.

Although the "Jewish Question" had been chiefly a socio-legal discussion among scientists, politicians, and makers of social policy, it held a special theological content for Althaus. Beginning in the late Weimar period he would comment on the *theological* meaning of Jewish existence and its significance for German *Volksgemeinschaft*. By the early 1930s, Althaus had established a reputation as "a knowledgeable expert on questions of Judaism" and a prominent interpreter of the "Jewish Question."[5] As Nazi measures against the Jews increased, he went on to play an instrumental part in deliberations about the place of Jewish persons in the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (DEK). Along with colleague Werner Elert (1885–1954), he drafted the *Erlangen Opinion on the Aryan Paragraph*, which is an important artefact not only of the *Kirchenkampf*, but also of the complex and ambivalent history of Christian antisemitism.

Wenzel Lohff, "Bibliographie der Veröffentlichungen von Professor D. Paul Althaus," in *Dank an Paul Althaus: Eine Festgabe zum 70. Geburtstag, dargebracht von Freunden, Kollegen, und Schülern*, ed. Walter Künneth and Wilfried Joest (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1958), 246–72. For a bibliography specific to Althaus' Luther scholarship, see Gottfried Petzold, "Veröffentlichungen von Paul Althaus über Luther, eine Auswahl," *Luther* 29 (1958), 12–13. For Althaus' wide-reaching influence, see also Herntrich Volkmar, "Paul Althaus dem Siebzigjährigen," *Luther Jahrbuch* XXV (1958). See also Walther von Loewenich, "Paul Althaus als Lutherforscher," *Luther Jahrbuch* XXXV (1968), 9–47. On Althaus' contributions to German church practice, see Martin Nicol, "Paul Althaus (1888–1966)," in *Gottesdienst als Feld theologischer Wissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert: Deutschsprachige Liturgiewissenschaft in Einzelporträts*, ed. Benedikt Kranemann and Klaus Raschzok, Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen 98 (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2011).

4 The definition is Götz Aly's. See *Why the Germans? Why the Jews? Envy, Race Hatred, and the Prehistory of the Holocaust*, trans. Jefferson Chase (New York, NY: Picador, 2014), 65. Aly offers a useful summary of the various social, financial, and cultural factors that contributed to discourse over the "Jewish Question" from about 1800 to the rise of the NSDAP in the early 1930s. There are points, however, at which his analysis is perhaps too psychological: Germans are depicted as suffering from an inferiority complex on a national scale and Aly locates the prehistory of the Holocaust primarily in Germans' material envy of Jews.

5 Marikje Smid, *Deutscher Protestantismus und Judentum 1932/1933*, Heidelberger Untersuchungen zu Widerstand, Judenverfolgung und Kirchenkampf im Dritten Reich 2 (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1990), 282.

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Althaus therefore remains an important case study for any Christian theologian with an interest in Jewish-Christian dialogue. His theology of the "Jewish Question," which reached its climax in a document that called for the prohibition of "Jewish" pastors in the DEK, represents a unique permutation of Christian anti-Judaism, as I will argue below. What is striking about Althaus, moreover, is precisely his contextual moderacy. There are authoritarian and xenophobic components to his thought, but he was not a fanatic that one can easily dismiss or disregard. In fact, Althaus understood himself to be combatting what he considered wild racial antisemitism. In so doing, however, he problematised Jewish existence in ways more subtle, but no less damaging, than his more openly-antisemitic contemporaries. Moreover, some elements of his brand of moderate anti-Judaism remain largely evident in Christian theology after the *Shoah*. Simply put, Althaus was a centrist—a prospect that "must be frightfully unsettling for moderate and conservative theologians of every time and place."[6]

Althaus' approach to the "Jewish Question" is a poignant example of the ways in which orthodox doctrines (especially in the Lutheran tradition) can be distorted into complicity with toxic ideologies. The study focuses narrowly on Althaus, but with a broader view to the viability of Lutheran dogmatics, specifically the doctrine of the orders of creation, as a suitable basis for the ethical enterprise. In recent days this kind of historical investigation into ethno-nationalist theologies has taken on a greater urgency, as Christian theologians must once again wrestle with questions of national and ecclesial self-understanding under the pressures of the mass migration and resurgent nationalisms, both in Europe and North America.

One | Statement of the research question

"Jewry [*das Judentum*]," wrote Althaus in 1930, "represents a *völkisch* question, without doubt. But today it is more important to emphasise that Jewry poses a theological question!"[7] For Althaus, the "Jewish Question" had two distinct yet interrelated dimensions: one socio-political and one theological (although the two dimensions often coincided). Like many of his contemporaries, he worried over the socio-political influence of the "Jewish spirit" as it mounted a "foreign invasion" [*Überfremdung*] into the public sector. He spoke of Judaism and its diseased spirituality as a threat to German life. He looked on in despair as the

6 Jack Forstman, *Christian Faith in Dark Times: Theological Conflicts in the Shadow of Hitler* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 202.

7 Paul Althaus, "Die Frage des Evangeliums an das moderne Judentum," *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 7 (1930), 196.

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infection spread; "the Jews" came to represent everything he feared most: secularism, urbanism, and modernism.[8] So far, Althaus is hardly unique; a distinct "Protestant antisemitism" shaped the prevailing mentality of most pastors and churchmen in his Bavarian context.[9] Antisemitic rhetoric targeting Jews as both the spiritual and cultural enemies of the German *Volk*, such as that of Adolf Stoecker, for instance, had been circulating since the nineteenth century.[10] But for Althaus the "Jewish Question" would always be first and foremost a theological question. And his theological deliberations on the meaning and destiny of Israel—what he called the "dark, depressing riddle"—did yield something unique: a dialectical interpretation of Jewish existence, according to which Jews are not to be expelled or assimilated, but quarantined.

This brings us to the project's chief research question: how did Althaus understand the "Jewish Question," especially in its theological dimension, and what did he envision as its solution? Put another way, what did Althaus believe the purpose of Jewish existence to be? The answer is not straightforward. His theology of the "Jewish Question" is rife with ambivalence, which is not the same thing as ambiguity: Althaus fits together two separate but coherent strands of thought—inclusion and exclusion—into a paradoxical socio-theological vision for the Jews. The predominance of the scholarly literature falters on his theology of Jews and Judaism because it interprets the evidence more or less according to a binary model (philosemitism/antisemitism or inclusion/exclusion). Yet on this point Althaus resists facile classification because, in my view, his approach to the "Jewish Question" is *dialectical.* As such, it requires a dialectical interpretive approach to account for the function of "Jews" within the wider logic of his theological system, including his doctrines of creation, the church, and the state. This dialectical reading is the primary contribution of the study.[11]

Namely, I argue the following: beginning in Althaus' Weimar writings, Jews are portrayed as existing in a dialectical relationship to all human communities, but especially to Germans. According to this dialectical relationship they must be contained because of the danger they pose to the peoples around them and yet

8 So argues Robert Ericksen in *Theologians Under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 108.

9 See Axel Töllner, *Eine Frage der Rasse? Die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Bayern, der Arierparagraf und die bayerischen Pfarrfamilien mit jüdischen Vorfahren im "Dritten Reich,"* Konfession und Gesellschaft 36 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007), especially 21–42.

10 See Gerhard Lindemann, "Christian Teaching about Jews in Protestant Germany (1919–1945)," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 16:1 (2003), 37–41.

11 Scholars of Hegel will be disappointed to learn that there is, so far as I can tell, no moment of *Aufhebung* in Althaus' theology of the "Jewish Question." The dialectic of pathology and performance, as I will argue in chapters six and seven, remains unresolved right up through the end of his life. Inclusion and exclusion, pathology and performance, are never sublimated into a higher unity, but rather continue to co-exist in an uneasy equilibrium.

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preserved within every society on account of their performative symbolic functions. Althaus therefore handles the "Jewish Question" according a *dialectic of pathology and performance.* The result is a vision that I have called *inclusive quarantine*—inclusive, because Jews are conceived as an indispensable factor in the life of the *Volk*; quarantine, because Althaus invokes the language of pathology and infection to characterise the nature of Jewish relationship to other peoples. In this paradoxical framework, Jewish persons simultaneously threaten to destroy the communities—both civil and ecclesial—in which they are situated while also performing constructive theological functions for those same communities.

"In his comments [on the 'Jewish Question']," explains Axel Töllner, "Althaus fluctuated between insight into the special role of the Jews, which was somehow salvation-historical in nature, and the perception of a fundamental cultural and ethnic foreignness between Jews and Germans."[12] Althaus, then, regarded the Jews as a people both vitally important and utterly strange. As a result, he contemplated neither the total inclusion nor the total exclusion of Jewish persons from German society, but rather envisioned the Jews as a foreign *Volk* both *a part of* and *apart from* other human communities. In this respect, his theology of the "Jewish Question" possesses a dynamism and complexity beyond much of the unsophisticated anti-Judaism of his era. At the same time, the dialectic of pathology and performance is a subspecies of what Stephen Haynes has called the "dialectic of fear and necessity," a tension which defines much Christian thinking about Jews.[13] This should come as no surprise: Althaus conceptualised Judaism within the confines of the classical "witness people" mythology that has dominated the Christian imagination since the patristic age. Even though Althaus amends the mythology in significant ways, his general approach conforms to the historical pattern: Jews are dangerous but indispensable.

Two | biography and intellectual influences

In the spring of 1947 Althaus found himself in an unexpected position: called to account for his political attitudes before the Allied denazification commission. He searched his international contacts in an effort to debunk allegations of his entanglement with National Socialism. The report from abroad was disappointing. The English missiologist Nathaniel Micklem offered his honest but

12 Töllner, *Eine Frage der Rasse?*, 35.

13 See Stephen Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses: Jews and the Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 184.

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hardly resounding support. Micklem's response doubles as a concise summary of Althaus' reputation in the anglophone world:

> I am quite certain that you will not have been a member of the Nazi Party, and I am quite certain that you must have hated much that was done by the Party. It would also be true to say that we have not in this country heard of your name as offering special resistance to the Nazis or their Church government [*sic*]. Your name is well known in this country as a theologian of weight and repute.[14]

Micklem's lukewarm endorsement presaged the controversy that has surrounded Althaus' legacy in the years since. The scholarly literature is divided on the question of how to understand his political commitments under National Socialism, yielding dissenting interpretations of the theological underpinnings of his political ethics. A central crux of the debate is whether there is some fatal flaw in his theology that rendered it susceptible to National Socialism. In particular, scholars have asked whether Althaus' doctrine of *Uroffenbarung* (primal revelation) and his *Theologie der Schöpfungsordnungen* (theology of the orders of creation) created a point of contact with the racial ideology of National Socialism.[15] There is no consensus on the precise nature and extent of Althaus' relationship to National Socialism. Nor is there an agreement on whether his posture toward Jews and Judaism has a distinct theological content, or whether those attitudes are symptomatic of his socio-cultural inheritance. We will return to these questions in due course.

It had not always been this way, however. In the decades before his removal from the professoriate (and subsequent reinstatement), Althaus had enjoyed a long and successful academic career, first at the University of Rostock, and then in Erlangen, where he remained until his death. Theology had always been in his blood. He was born the son of a Lutheran pastor, Paul Althaus the elder (1861–1925), who himself was professor of practical and systematic theology at the

14 Nathaniel Micklem to Paul Althaus, May 16, 1947, Althaus Nachlass 12.5, Friedrich-Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1. Hereafter, the Althaus Nachlass shall be referenced with the abbreviation "NA" (Nachlass Althaus).

15 Althaus exposited his famous (and controversial) doctrine most clearly in "Ur-Offenbarung," *Luther* 46:1 (1935), 4–32. For an overview of the concept, see Horst Pöhlmann, "Das Problem der Ur-Offenbarung bei Paul Althaus," *Kerygma und Dogma* 16 (1970): 242–58; Wenzel Lohff, "Zur Verständigung über das Problem der Ur-Offenbarung," in *Dank an Paul Althaus*, 151–70; and Joo-Hoon Choi, *Das Konzept der Ur-Offenbarung bei Paul Althaus: In seiner Bedeutung für die Stellung des Christentums unter den Weltreligionen*, Untersuchungen zum christlichen Glauben in einer säkularen Welt 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006), chapter 3. On the doctrine of the orders of creation, see Walter Sparn, "Paul Althaus," in *Profile des Luthertums: Biographien zum 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Wolf-Dieter Hauschild (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1998), 7–12. For a comprehensive account of Althaus' *Schöpfungsordnungslehre* within the history of the Erlangen School, see Nathan Howard Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft: a critical appraisal of the Erlangen contribution to the orders of creation*, American University Studies VII:338 (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2016), chapter 2.

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universities of Göttingen and Leipzig.[16] The year 1906 saw the younger Althaus undertake his own theological studies in Tübingen under the Swiss Reformed scholar Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938). Schlatter had a profound impact on Althaus, both personally and professionally. Althaus modeled his own church-oriented academic work after his mentor's, and he came to a special appreciation of the "wideness" of Schlatter's theology. This wideness—the openness to God's activity in history, nature, and human experience—is discernible in Althaus' own doctrine of *Uroffenbarung*.[17] It is also possible that Althaus inherited part of his deep ambivalence toward Jews and Judaism from Schlatter; their views in the mid-1930s bear a significant resemblance.[18]

In Tübingen Althaus also studied with the famed church historian Karl Holl (1866–1926), a chief architect of the so-called Luther Renaissance. From Holl Althaus took a commitment to the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith and a focus on the connection between systematic and existential questions in Luther's theology.[19] Holl himself had an affinity for authoritarian politics—he had joined the *Vaterlandspartei* movement in 1917—and this impacted his interpretation of Luther, whom he regarded as something of a German folk-hero.[20]

16 Paul Althaus d. Ä. was deeply influential for the younger Althaus, who edited a volume of his father's work which was published posthumously. He also wrote a biography of his father. See Paul Althaus, d. Ä., *Forschungen zur evangelischen Gebetsliteratur*, ed. Paul Althaus (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1927) and Paul Althaus, *Aus dem Leben von D. Althaus—Leipzig* (Leipzig: Dorffling and Franke, 1928). For an overview of Althaus' early life, see Gotthard Jasper, *Paul Althaus (1888–1966): Professor, Prediger und Patriot in seiner Zeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 18–32.

17 See Paul Althaus, "Adolf Schlatters Gabe an die systematische Theologie," in *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie*, ed. Paul Althaus (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1938). For more on Schlatter's influence on the young Althaus, see Gotthard Jasper, "Theologiestudium in Tübingen vor 100 Jahren—im Spiegel der Briefe des Studienanfangers Paul Althaus an seine Eltern," *Zeitschrift für neuere Theologiegeschichte* 13:2 (2006).

18 Schlatter published an antisemitic tract in 1935, by which time Althaus had already made several public remarks on the "Jewish Question." See Schlatter, *Wird der Jude über uns siegen? Ein Wort für die Weihnachtszeit* (Essen: Freizeiten Verlag zu Delbert im Rheinland, 1935). It is worth noting that two of Schlatter's other pupils, Gerhard Kittel and Walter Grundmann, "became leading figures in National Socialist exegesis," in the words of Anders Gerdmar. See his *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann*, Studies in Jewish History and Culture 20 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 254. Kittel's exegetical work became notorious for its anti-Judaism. See Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler*, chapter 2 and Alan Steinweis, *Studying the Jew: Scholarly Antisemitism in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 73–75. Grundmann founded the Institute for the Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life at the University of Jena. See Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), chapter 2.

19 Loewenich, "Paul Althaus als Lutherforscher," 12.

20 See James Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Savior: German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther, 1917–1933* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000), chapter 2. Stayer argues that Holl and the Luther Renaissance provided resources for

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Althaus went on to Göttingen to work with the Luther scholar Carl Stange (1870–1959), with whom he would later co-edit the *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* beginning in 1923. In the meantime, he completed his doctoral dissertation —*Principles of German Reformed Dogmatics*[21]—in 1914, the same year that saw his promotion to *Privatdozent* in Göttingen. The First World War, during which he worked as a chaplain at a military hospital and as a pastor among German expatriates in Łódź, Poland, interrupted his academic career until 1920, when he received a call to a professorship in systematic theology and New Testament at Rostock. Althaus was to make his name, however, as a champion of the Erlangen School.

By the time Althaus joined the faculty in 1925, Erlangen had been a bastion of confessional Lutheranism for generations. The faculty achieved its first golden age during the nineteenth century on the reputations of historical theologian Johann Hoefling (1802–1853), ethicist Gottlieb von Harless (1806–1879), and systematician Johann von Hofmann (1810–1877). Althaus and Elert, in the mind of at least one interpreter, led the way into the second golden age of Erlangen theology.[22] The Erlangen School, as Lowell Green has noted, is best thought of not as an institution, but as a theological method.[23] This method grew out of the revivalism movement [*Erweckungsbewegung*] of the eighteenth century, which in Erlangen took the form of a distinctive "theology of experience [*Erfahrungstheologie*]."[24] Above all, the Erlangen School understood itself as the opponent of theological liberalism. Since the Old Prussian Union of 1817, the Erlangen theologians occupied themselves with the tenacious defence of the confessional identity to such an extent that "Erlangen," writes Reinhard Slenczka, "became a catchword for politically conservative, right-wing confessional theology."[25]

theologians who would later recruit Luther to support a *völkisch* worldview. This development is perhaps detectable in Althaus. For instance, see his *Luther und das Deutschtum* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1917) in which Althaus identifies Luther's personality and message as representative of the distinct German type. Roland Kurz has shown that, especially during the First World War, Althaus regarded Luther as the "archetype of the German [*der Urtyp des Deutschen*]." See *Nationalprotestantisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik: Voraussetzungen und Ausprägungen des Protestantismus nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg in seiner Begegnung mit Volk und Nation.* Die Lutherische Kirche—Geschichte und Gestalten 24 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 423–25, 475. For further discussion of the influence of the Luther Renaissance on Althaus, see Karl Kupisch, "The Luther Renaissance," *Journal of Contemporary History* 2:4 (1967), 47–48.

21 Published as *Die Prinzipien der deutschen reformierten Dogmatik im Zeitalter der aristotelischen Scholastik* (Leipzig: Deichet, 1914).

22 Beyschlag, *Die Erlanger Theologie*, 184.

23 Lowell Green, *The Erlangen School of Theology: Its History, Teaching, and Practice* (Fort Wayne, IN: Lutheran Legacy, 2010), 28–29.

24 Beyschlag, *Die Erlanger Theologie*, 24–25.

25 Reinhard Slenczka, "Paul Althaus: A Representative of the Erlangen School," *Logia* XXII:2 (2013), 6.

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The Erlangen School, as Hans Christof Brennecke has observed, has always straddled the line between Lutheranism and nationalism.[26] This penchant for conservative politics was compounded by a distinct theology of history. The School's hallmark *Erfahrungstheologie* is characterised by an openness to God's self-revelation in historical events and natural structures of communal life (such as the *Volk*). Harless and Hofmann were the early pioneers of the *Schöpfungsordnungslehre*, and their influence on Althaus' thought-system is probably clearest here.[27] Following Hofmann's emphasis on historical developments as episodes in *Heilsgeschichte*, Erlangen theologians began to regard history (including political and social movements) as the arena of God's self-disclosure—a precedent that, of course, Althaus would fatefully seize upon in the early 1930s with his public endorsement of Hitler. By the middle of the 1920s, the Erlangen theologians, with Althaus, Elert, and church historian Hans Preuß (1876–1951) at the forefront, had already forged a distinctly *völkisch* approach to Lutheran theology, which was disseminated widely not only in Bavaria, but throughout Germany. "Through their programmatic synthesis of confessional Lutheranism and German *Volkstum*," explains Berndt Hamm, "[Althaus and Elert] attracted considerable attention and cleared a path, theologically and paradigmatically, for the Lutheran regional churches into National Socialism."[28]

I have provided this brief sketch of Althaus' intellectual development in order to situate his theology and to set the stage for the debate regarding his legacy. The exact nature of Althaus' relationship to National Socialism is a question with

26 See Hans Christof Brennecke, "Zwischen Luthertum und Nationalismus: Kirchengeschichte in Erlangen," in *Geschichtswissenschaft in Erlangen*, Erlanger Studien zur Geschichte 6 (Erlangen and Jena: Palm & Enke, 2000). For Brennecke, Erlangen's history of parochial Lutheran confessionalism is "almost embarrassing" in retrospect, and it culminated in the scholarship of Hans Preuß, an open supporter of National Socialism (262–67).

27 "History, as the passage of God through the world as well as in an organic view of all other knowledge together with history and theology was an integral part of [the School's] thought" (Green, *The Erlangen School*, 34). On Harless and Hofmann, see Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, 9–44.

28 Berndt Hamm, "Werner Elert als Kriegstheologe: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Diskussion 'Luthertum und Nationalsozialismus,'" *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 11:2 (1998), 208. Though in my view he overstates the case, Hamm holds Elert more responsible than Althaus for this state of affairs. Elert's bellicose ethical system, according to Hamm, "presents itself as precisely the kind of religiosity that a totalitarian and militaristic regime of the twentieth century must have welcomed" (234). Gotthard Jasper, a much more sympathetic commentator than Hamm, nevertheless agrees that by the 1930s Erlangen theology had taken on a strongly *völkisch* tone, which eventually found an "echo" in rising antisemitism and the National Socialist movement, "even though the men who produced the theology were neither radical antisemites nor National Socialists." See "Die Friedrich-Alexander-Universität in der Weimarer Republik und im Dritten Reich," in *Erkenntnis durch Erinnern: Aufsätze und Reden*, ed. Everhard Holtmann (Erlangen und Jena: Palm & Enke, 1999), 257–58.

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which I have dealt elsewhere and is not of immediate concern here.[29] However, the wider discussion regarding Althaus' political commitments is critical for our investigation insofar as it reveals the binary approach to the study of his socio-political theology. The dichotomous terms of the debate—where Althaus appears as a misguided patriot on one side and an "esteemed pastor-professor turned zealous Nazi"[30] on the other—expose a need for an alternative approach to Althaus research with a greater awareness of the ambivalence of his theological method in general and the dynamism of his theology of the "Jewish Question" in particular.

Three | between guilt and innocence: the legacy of Paul Althaus

Political and theological decisions are complicated. As Anders Gerdmar has shown, theological antisemitism develops out of a myriad of factors, including cultural prejudice, nationalism, political pressures, and perhaps above all personal temperament.[31] It is therefore a precarious enterprise to establish Althaus' precise motives in his comments about the Jews. However, the scholarly debate has sought to uncover—and in some cases separate—the various influences that give his theology of Judaism its unique character. Discourse surrounding Althaus' legacy can be distilled roughly into two overarching narrative-types: narratives of suspicion and narratives of sympathy. Of course, no interpretation conforms completely to either narrative, but this schematic allows us to trace the general contours of the debate. As we shall see, the two narrative types, whose conclusions differ significantly, offer important insight into Althaus' theology of the Jews while at the same time presenting new problems and leaving important questions unresolved. Only in recent years have several studies emerged that challenge this dichotomous paradigm by discerning something of the ambivalent nature of Althaus' theology of the "Jewish Question."

Variants of what I have called the *narratives of suspicion* are characterised by close scrutiny of Althaus' political decisions surrounding the National Socialist years and by the ethical indictment of his *völkisch* theology. Althaus' critics are unanimous that his theology is antagonistic toward Jews, but there is some debate on the character of this antisemitism. Nonetheless, these narratives do not hesitate to speak of Althaus' guilt for legitimising a regime that perpetrated crimes

29 See Ryan Tafilowski, "Exploring the Legacy of Paul Althaus," *Lutheran Quarterly* 31:1 (2017): 64–84.

30 Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 215. Elsewhere Marsh labels Althaus an "opportunist" who colluded with National Socialism (192).

31 Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism*, 601–09.

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against the Jews. For example, Richard Gutteridge charges Althaus as "the most evil German theologian in the National Socialist era, at least in terms of effect."[32] Others have identified Althaus—and the theological tradition he represents—as an explicit organ of the genocidal war against the Jews.[33] While the exact judgments vary from author to author, this narrative condemns Althaus for lending theological credibility and pastoral license to National Socialist ideology. In many cases, criticism of Althaus amounts more or less to criticism of Lutheran political and social ethics in general. Althaus' moral failure, so the argument goes, is the inevitable outcome of a flawed ethical system.[34] The shorthand version of this narrative type—"Althaus, Nazi theologian"—has dominated English-speaking discourse in particular since the publication of Robert Ericksen's seminal study *Theologians Under Hitler* in 1985.

Variants of what I have called the *narratives of sympathy* are generally charitable in their judgment of Althaus' politics and more attentive to the ethical quandary in which many German clergy found themselves during the Third Reich. These narratives caution against moralising historiography of a time in which theological decisions were clouded by Nazism's ambiguous relationship with Christianity, and by traditional Lutheran teachings on secular authority and statecraft. These interlocutors speak of Althaus' unintentional complicity with National Socialism, and can even speak of his innocence.[35] Virtually all scholars within this narrative type agree that Althaus should not be remembered as a perpetrator; his crime, ironically, was actually his "innocent naiveté [*un-*

32 Gutteridge's comment was conveyed to Robert Ericksen in a personal interview. See Robert Ericksen, "The Political Theology of Paul Althaus: Nazi Supporter." *German Studies Review* 9:3 (1986), 564. For Gutteridge, "it is certain that [Althaus] enormously encouraged others altogether less well trained in theological sense and altogether more ardent and uncontrolled in pro-Nazi enthusiasm to attempt to justify a form of volkish [sic] outlook, such as his religious support and vindication of the Nazi racial program." See *Open Thy Mouth for the Dumb! The German Evangelical Church and the Jews 1879–1950* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1976), 274.

33 Michael Steele: "[Althaus was] removed from the horrible physical acts of violence perpetrated against Other victims [but] distance does not serve to reduce [his] culpability." *Christianity, The Other, and the Holocaust* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 88–89. See also Arlie Hoover, "German Christian Nationalism: Its Contribution to the Holocaust." *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 4:3 (1989), 314.

34 For arguments of this type, see Wolfgang Tilgner, *Volksnomostheologie und Schöpfungsglaube: Ein Beitrag zur Geshichte des Kirchenkampfes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 180; Eberhard Hübner, *Evangelische Theologie in unserer Zeit: Darstellung und Dokumentation* (Bremen: Carl Schünemann Verlag, 1966), 97–101; Hans Tiefel, "The German Lutheran Church and the Rise of National Socialism." *Church History* 41:3 (1972), 331–35; and Forstman, *Christian Faith*, 121–32, 197–202.

35 Hans Schwarz has characterised Althaus as an "innocent ally" of the Nazi regime. See "Paul Althaus (1888–1966)," *Lutheran Quarterly* 25:1 (2011): 28–51.

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schuldsvolle Naivität]."[36] This interpretation is mostly German in provenance, as many of these scholars are bound to Althaus by personal and confessional commitments.[37] The shorthand version of this narrative type—"Althaus, misguided patriot"—seeks to counterbalance, and in some cases overturn, more damning portraits.

As these competing narratives seek to pull his legacy in different directions, Althaus for the time being remains suspended between guilt and innocence.

A | suspicion

Among the most critical accounts is that of British historian Richard Gutteridge, who isolates Althaus as the single most culpable theologian of the National Socialist era.[38] In Gutteridge's interpretation, it is precisely Althaus' moderate nature that makes him so sinister; his gravitas furnished National Socialism with a veneer of respectability, legitimising the movement in ways that crude forms of antisemitism and crass jingoism could not. Gutteridge's conclusions are echoed later by American historian Arlie Hoover, who identifies Althaus as paragon and proponent of a toxic romantic-Christian Germanism.[39] For Gutteridge and Hoover, Althaus' strident nationalism, which at first blush appears to be run-of-the-mill patriotic bombast, in reality spawned a perverse *völkisch* morality according to which "it is much easier for you to commit genocide with a clear conscience."[40] Yet Gutteridge and Hoover seem to overstate the case: neither contemplates the indispensable prophetic function of Jewish persons (either as individuals or as a construct) in Althaus' theology of the "Jewish Question." Genocide, as we shall see below, actually destroys Althaus' vision for Jewish existence.

On the strength of his *Theologians Under Hitler*, American historian Robert Ericksen emerged as the most prominent and prolific Althaus commentator in the English-speaking world. Ericksen's primary study locates Althaus as a mediator between two theologians—Gerhard Kittel (1888–1948) and Emanuel Hirsch (1888–1972)—with more pronounced National Socialist sympathies. This

36 Helmut Thielicke, *Zu Gast auf einem schönen Stern: Erinnerungen* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1984), 85.

37 See, for example, the memoirs of Wolfgang Trillhaas [*Aufgehobene Vergangenheit: Aus meinem Leben* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976)] and Walther von Loewenich [*Erlebte Theologie: Begegnungen, Erfahrungen, Erwägungen* (München: Claudius Verlag, 1979)], both former students of Althaus who became his colleagues on the Erlangen faculty.

38 See Gutteridge, *Open Thy Mouth*, 274.

39 See Hoover, "German Christian Nationalism," 312–13.

40 Hoover, "German Christian Nationalism," 314.

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portrayal is consistent with the depiction of Althaus in Ericksen's early work: a patriotic conservative who, despite his mediatory personality, lapsed into National Socialism and "limited antisemitism" on account of his neo-conservatism and "parochial" vision for Germany.[41] Ericksen sustains a negative judgment of Althaus over the course of subsequent publications. By the time we reach Ericksen's mature work, Althaus appears as a *völkisch* theologian "eager to ride the Hitler bandwagon."[42]

Ericksen understands Althaus' antisemitism in generally cultural terms, arguing that although Althaus was influenced to some degree by racial theory, he supported National Socialist discrimination against Jews out of a "personal aversion" for Jews and what they represented culturally.[43] "[Althaus] attacked Jews," says Ericksen, "primarily as the representatives of the Enlightenment, modernity, and moral disintegration. That is to say, he stereotyped Jews as the main causes of all those changes in modern Germany which he most feared and disliked."[44] While Ericksen's socio-cultural hypothesis remains in force throughout his writings, he later argues that Althaus gradually came to accept the pseudo-scientific racial ideology of National Socialism more fully.[45]

Ericksen is right to identify the doctrine of the orders of creation, specifically the theology of the *Volk*, as the driving force behind Althaus' views on the "Jewish Question." Ericksen's Althaus is "a product of Christian theology, not [a] monstrosity created by the exigencies of the Nazi regime."[46] That is to say, it was Althaus' theology that prevented him from protesting the persecution of the Jews. Ericksen's valuable account of Althaus as an "accessory to Nazi crimes" has proven influential, but it does suffer deficiencies. The evidence indicates that Althaus never subscribed to racial theory to the degree Ericksen alleges. Moreover, while Ericksen does identify the ways in which Althaus uses the Jews as negative symbols, but he does not at all explore the Jews' constructive and performative functions in his wider theological system. In short, Ericksen contrib-

41 Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler*, 115.

42 Robert Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 118. However, in his early work Ericksen had already identified Althaus as an "accessory to Nazi crimes" ("The Political Theology of Paul Althaus," 566).

43 Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler*, 108.

44 Robert Ericksen, "Emerging from the Legacy? Protestant Churches and the Shoah," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 17:2 (2004), 374. Cf. Ericksen, "The Political Theology of Paul Althaus," 561.

45 Ericksen, "Emerging from the Legacy?," 374–75. Ericksen elsewhere concludes that Althaus accepted the "racist ideal of the German Volk." See "Assessing the Heritage: German Protestant Theologians, Nazis, and the 'Jewish Question,'" in *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, ed. Robert Ericksen and Susannah Heschel (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 25.

46 Robert Ericksen and Susannah Heschel, "The German Churches and the Holocaust," in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 299.

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utes to a limited and dichotomous paradigm of discourse by emphasising only the negative pole of Althaus' dialectical theology of the "Jewish Question."

American theologian Jack Forstman is also critical of Althaus, but has a clearer grasp on the dialectical nature of his theology. For Forstman, Althaus' positive reception of National Socialism is not a result of unquestioned commitment to the regime's ideology, but an equivocal theological method: "We must not suppose that Althaus was a blindly ideological Nazi… . Barth employed the vigorous dialectic of Yes and No; Althaus used the more cautious dialectic of 'on the one hand … on the other.'"[47] As opposed to Barth, who had the vocabulary to flatly denounce Nazism, Althaus struggled to find a prophetic edge to his theology. Yet Forstman recognises the difficulty in casting moral judgments on these theologians who worked under Hitler's shadow. He writes, "Looking back on the Third Reich, we have no problem with clarity … but we presume to our own peril that from the other side of 1933 everything was clear."[48] Nevertheless, Althaus' story is one of failure; that he later recognised his error and fell silent is for Forstman "a pathetically modest credit."[49] With specific reference to the "Jewish Question," however, Forstman's depiction of the Althausian dialectic of "Yes and No" should be qualified to reflect a more robust vision of inclusive quarantine.

Erlangen church historian Berndt Hamm likewise concludes that Althaus, along with his colleague Werner Elert, implicated himself in a web of complicity with the National Socialist regime.[50] Yet what is most problematic for Hamm is the form of discourse to which Althaus resorted to come to terms with the National Socialist past after the regime's collapse. In the context of post-*Shoah* discourse, Hamm distinguishes between the language of "guilt" [*Schuld*], which implies moral agency and therefore responsibility, and the language of "fate" [*Verhängnis*], which presupposes inescapable determinism that exempts the subject from moral culpability.[51] By resorting to the language of *Verhängnis* in the post-*Shoah* period, Althaus divests German crimes of conscious agency and frames Christian guilt outside of "the sphere of perpetration and complicity, and characterises it as a passive omission [and thereby] trivialises it … through embedding it in the context of the unequally greater guilt of others …"[52] Althaus' postwar sermons, according to Hamm, really serve an "exculpatory function" as they allow "guilt to disappear behind an imposed destiny":

47 Forstman, *Christian Faith*, 198.
48 Forstman, *Christian Faith*, 15.
49 Forstman, *Christian Faith*, 202.
50 Berndt Hamm, "Schuld und Verstrickung der Kirche: Vorüberlegungen zu einer Darstellung der Erlanger Theologie in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus," in *Kirche und Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Wolfgang Stegemann, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992).
51 Hamm, "Schuld und Verstrickung," 13–14.
52 Hamm, "Schuld und Verstrickung," 17.

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> The problem with the Althausian way of preaching, which has so much to say about the suffering of the German people and its Christians and so little to say about its perpetration [*Täterschaft*], lies not in that Althaus has no concept of the culpable entanglement [*schuldhaften Verstrickung*] that both his Erlangen hearers and he himself shared… . That Althaus denied the guilt of Christians and their church is not the problem, but rather *how* he speaks of it and how he deals with it …[53]

In this way, Althaus exhibits what Hamm has called the "syndrome of displacing one's own fault"—a form of excuse-making *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that will never be able to come to terms with the past in a constructive way.[54]

Hamm argues that Althaus' antisemitism is rooted deeply in his theology. Even though both Elert and Althaus "felt themselves free from any antisemitism," for each theologian "the blood-nature of race [*Blutsbeschaffenheit der Rasse*] is a fundamental component of national identity."[55] In Hamm's reading, blood, race, and nationhood form the starting point for Althaus' theology of the Jews. His theology, anchored firmly in the *völkisch* tradition, grew so parochial that it blinded him to anything other than the suffering of Germans, even in light of the cataclysm that the Nazi war machine had wrought on the Jews and the other peoples of Europe. In his postwar sermons, Althaus eulogises fallen German soldiers and mourns displaced German refugees but speaks not a word "about the millions of murdered Jews."[56] For Hamm, then, Althaus' theology alienated the Jews in life and denied them dignity in death. For all of its strengths, however, Hamm's analysis does not account for the versatility of the Jews in Althaus' theological system, in which the Jews fulfill a number of theological functions, some of them constructive. Hamm judges correctly that for Althaus the Jews represent a danger, but underestimates the integral role Jews play—beyond that of enemies—in Althaus' theology.

In his study of socio-theological trends among conservative theologians and churchmen during the Weimar Republic, Roland Kurz considers Althaus' work an archetypal expression of Protestant nationalism in the university context.[57] Like other scholars, Kurz sees the First World War, chiefly Althaus' time in Poland, as the period during which his nationalist sympathies took root. It was during these years, long before his work as a university professor, that Althaus

53 Hamm, "Schuld und Verstrickung," 17. Emphasis in the original.

54 Hamm, "Schuld und Verstrickung," 16. Victoria Barnett has characterised this recollective strategy as the "*machtlos* phenomenon." See *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity during the Holocaust* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 18–19. Hamm's comments have drawn heated criticism from former Erlangen University rector Gotthard Jasper, who sees Hamm's interpretation of Althaus as typical of the naïve and overly-critical "68-ers" generation. See Jasper, *Paul Althaus*, 385–86.

55 Hamm, "Schuld und Verstrickung," 30.

56 Hamm, "Schuld und Verstrickung," 15–16.

57 See Kurz, *Nationalprotestantisches Denken*, 408–99.

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came to think of German history within the *Sonderweg* tradition, by which he interpreted the war as a holy crusade: Germany was struggling not only for its own greatness, but for the "blessing of the world."[58] It was through this ideological commitment to German exceptionalism that Althaus came to further develop the concepts of the *Volksberuf* ("ethno-national mission") and the *Konfliktgesetz* ("law of conflict")—both of which would prove influential for his attitudes toward the Jews. However, Kurz does not reckon fully with the ways in which Althaus brings his *völkisch* nationalism to bear on the "Jewish Question," as we will see below.

Kurz's careful examination of the evolution of Althaus' political ideas helps to make Althaus' eventual decision to support National Socialism intelligible, if not defensible. The study's key contribution, though, is its penetrating analysis of the eschatological dimension of Althaus' *völkisch* outlook, which is especially clear in his early preaching. Althaus' Łódź sermons reflect the "classical hope of nationalist Protestantism": the German *Volk*, fortified by Luther and Lutheran Christianity, called to lead Europe in preparing the way of the Kingdom of God. "Because God wants to raise the German *Volk* up to be the leading nation in Europe," Kurz explains, "it must follow him dutifully and give everything for the *Vaterland*, the highest earthly good."[59] This *völkisch* nationalism produced at least two critical outcomes: 1) Althaus demanded absolute obedience to the ordinances of creation, even though the questions of whether the *Volk's* actions are just or whether there is hope of victory always remain unclear, and as a result 2) he "sacramentalised" death for *Volk* and *Vaterland*, which, it seems to me, is something he did with violence generally. On account of these "misjudgments with catastrophic consequences," says Kurz, Althaus became an unwitting forerunner of Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels, whose invocation of "total war" called for complete sacrifice for the war effort regardless of the cost.[60]

For these reasons Kurz condemns Althaus' nationalist worldview as unchristian:

> Althaus' assessment of war is to be rejected decisively: the "God-willed hate" for the enemy is a symbiosis between social Darwinism, eschatology, and a doctrine of creation that goes beyond Christianity; a crusade mentality, which without doubt has been represented throughout the church's history, but nevertheless cannot be accepted as Christian because it stands in opposition to the concept of tolerance, among other things.[61]

58 See Kurz, *Nationalprotestantisches Denken*, 422–26.
59 Kurz, *Nationalprotestantisches Denken*, 477, 479.
60 Kurz, *Nationalprotestantisches Denken*, 496–98.
61 Kurz, *Nationalprotestantisches Denken*, 498.

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