



ECO

A Covenant Order
of Evangelical
Presbyterians

Understanding the Confessions
The Theological Declaration of Barmen

The Theological Declaration of Barmen



Barmen's Uniqueness

- It is a declaration about a specific issue that stands to unite the church against a moral heresy.
- It purposefully avoided being a confession in order to unite disparate confessional traditions.
- *Barmen* adds no new doctrine to the Reformed tradition
- It declares a perspective of supreme importance on the relationship of the church to:
 - the Word of God,
 - the state in a time of crisis.

Historical Context -Germany, 1933-34

- A growing nationalism based in ideology of *Volk*, and *blood and soil*, led to a zealous religious movement to unite and revitalize German churches
- “German Christians” succumbed to the temptation to use Jesus Christ to justify the world as the world.
- “German Christians,” called for the purity of their race as part of God’s established natural orders.
- Hitler became chancellor of Germany and used his power to unify the German churches under the power of “German Christians”
- The Nazi party produced the *Aryan Paragraph*, forcing all Jews from civil service and precluding their future involvement
- “German Christians” were happy to apply this to church membership.

Historical Context -Germany, 1933-34

- Unbiblical beliefs and bullying tactics caused a crisis for Churches
- April 22, 1934 Pastors met in Ulm creating the “Confessing Church” movement against the “German Christians”
- A Confessional Synod was commissioned and met in Barmen in May 29-31, 1934
- Karl Barth and three others wrote the declaration
- Unanimously accepted by 138 delegates
- NOT an attack on Hitler or Nazism
- Addressed false teaching in the church

Content

- Section One: *An Appeal to the Evangelical Congregations and Christians in Germany*
 - Uniting the church in obedience to the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit
 - Rejecting submission to false doctrine, force, and insincere practices

Content

- Section Two: *Theological Declaration Concerning the Present Situation of the German Evangelical Church*
 - Six theses used Scripture to:
 - Establish a positive doctrine
 - Reject the false doctrines of the “German Christians”

The Six Theses

1. Sola Scriptura: Jesus Christ, the Word of God as attested in Scripture is the sole basis of our trustworthy revelation of God
2. Solus Christus: Christ is Lord of all areas of life. None other can offer justification or sanctification
3. Christ is our only source of unity and the church is solely his property

The Six Theses

4. Positions of authority in the church are not “lordship” but ministry
5. The state is established by God but does NOT expand to function as the church and the church is not an organ of the state.
6. Free grace in Christ is a message for all people. It cannot be withheld from Jews or anyone else.

Significance

- *Barmen* declared that the church stood unified against false teachings that were destroying the peace, unity, and purity of the church in Germany.
- It exemplified the prophetic role of the church.
- The church trusted in its lord, Jesus Christ, alone and not aggressive political wrangling.
- As we enter a significantly different period of Western history churches will increasingly face situations similar to that of the Confessing Church.
- Will we be prepared to boldly declare the total lordship of Christ, rooted only in his revelation in Scripture, though it may cost us everything?
- *Barmen* asks us today, “In what ways is the church tempted to justify the world?”

Should Barmen Declaration be included?

- it is a different genre to the Patristic Creeds and the Reformed Confessions of the rest of the current *Book of Confessions*.
- It does highlight the vital importance, and political consequences, of declaring that every part of human life falls under the lordship of Christ.
- also highlights the problem of natural theology through natural law and natural revelation
- It further clarifies the relationship between church and state
- *Barmen* is a helpful balance to the confessions that are a product of Christendom.

References for the Essential Tenents in the Book of Confessions - Barmen

- Jesus is the Word, that is, God's authoritative self-revelation. 8.11
- We are declared justified because of God's grace. 8.26
- Christ sends us into the world to make disciples, to care for the natural world, to claim all areas of culture in the name of Jesus, to serve the poor, feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, and defend the helpless. 8.26
- The church must already now begin to reflect the eschatological reality of including people from every tribe, and tongue, and nation. Historical Context

References for the Essential Tenents in the Book of Confessions - Barmen

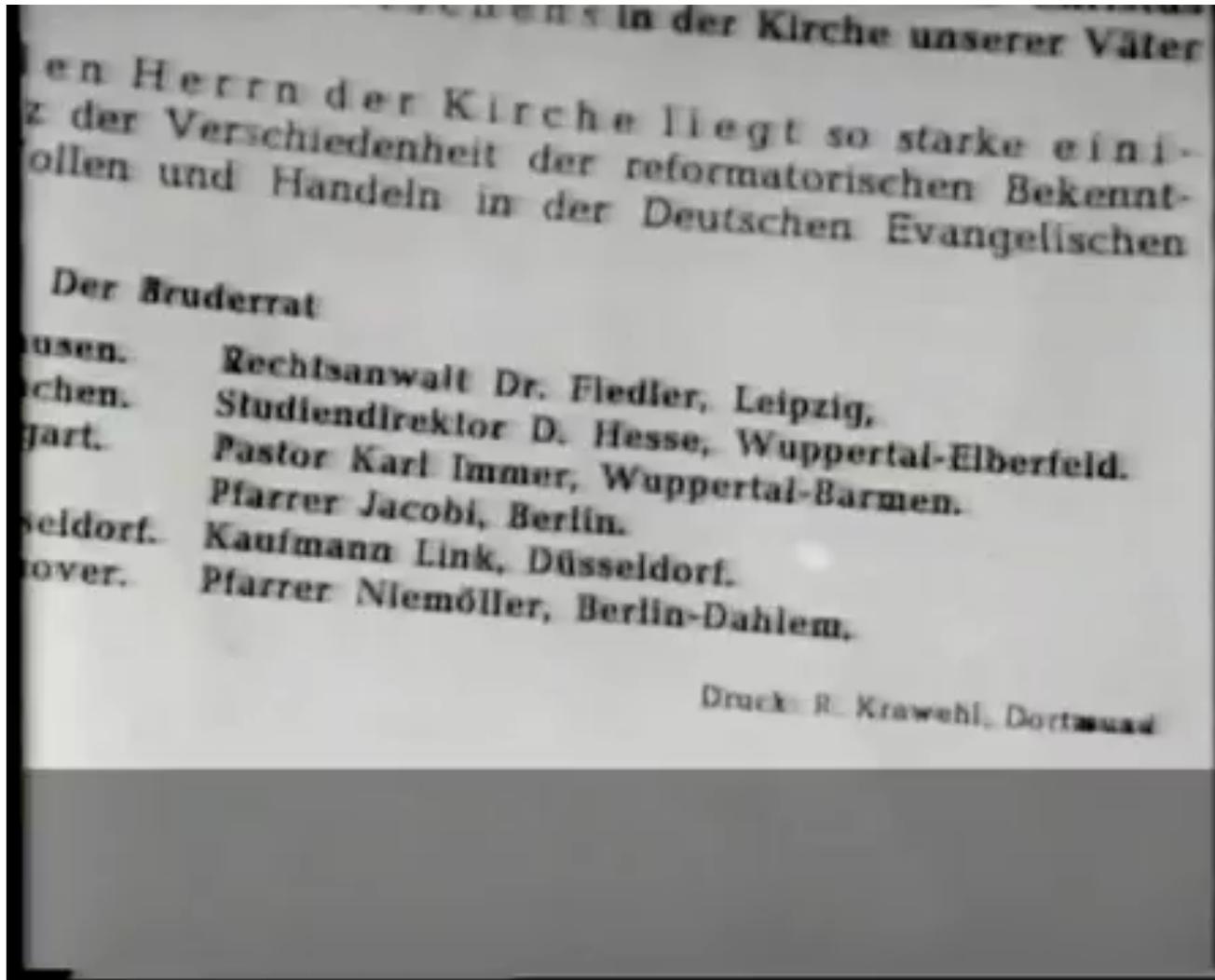
- God's grace is extended through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and the faithful practice of mutual discipline. 8.26
- No part of human life is off limits to the sanctifying claims of God. 8.14–15
- We must worship God alone, renouncing idolatry and inordinate loves. 8.17–18
- We must give honor to those in authority over us and practice mutual submission within the church. 8.22

Discussion Questions: How Does

- the system of doctrine in The Barmen Declaration accurately and faithfully reflect the theological teaching of the Scriptures?
- The Barmen Declaration reflect the grace, love, and joy of the gospel?
- it enable the church to confess what it believes and hold the church to believe what it confesses?
- it speak in a clear, concise, accessible, and warm manner to the whole church?
- it call for both affirmation and rejection?
- it represent merely the interests of one group in the church, or does it take responsibility to speak from and to the one universal Church?
- it speak only to its own temporal context or does it speak of the eternal truths of Scripture?
- it allow the eternal truths of Scripture to speak into our context?

Extra teaching resources:

A very short clip from an interview with Karl Barth in 1967.



He is asked about the success of the German Church/Barmen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4XYllcL2bQ>

Extra teaching ideas

- Watch this 4 minute Vimeo summary on Barmen

<https://vimeo.com/42045751>