Church-Building in Hitler’s Germany

Berlin’s Martin-Luther-Gedächtniskirche as a Reflection of Church-State Relations

Until recently, scholars in the field of contemporary German church history have largely held the view that Hitler, his movement, and his regime were fundamentally anti-Christian and essentially hostile towards the German churches.¹ This was certainly the position taken by scholars in the Protestant Working Group for Contemporary Church History (Evangelische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte), who published many of the early studies in the 1950s and 1960s.² In the English-language literature, John Conway argued that Hitler’s overtures to the churches in 1933 were merely a smokescreen to disguise the regime’s fundamental hostility towards Christianity and its institutional manifestations. Other scholars have also taken this view, based on evidence ranging from hostile statements made by Hitler and other leading Nazis to anti-Christian agitation by party organizations, the regular reports of the SS Security Service published in Meldungen aus dem Reich, and (not least) the dramatically anti-Christian policies of the Nazi occupation authorities in Eastern Europe.³

Over the past decade, however, the case for Nazi hostility towards Christianity and the churches has been put to the test, in part because of a renewed debate about Nazi ideology. Since the year 2000, when the journal Totalitarian Politics and Political Religions was established, publications by Michael Burleigh, Wolfgang Dierker, Emilio Gentile, Neil Gregor, Richard Steigmann-Gall, Klaus Vondung and others have turned the question of whether National Socialism was or was not a political religion into one of the liveliest debates in modern German historiography.⁴ Nowhere has this debate been more animated than in the con-

¹ I would like to express my appreciation to Gerhard Besier and Katarzyna Stokłosa for their kind invitation to participate in the conference »Myths – National Borders – Religion« at the Akademie Sankelmark, Flensburg, in September 2013. I benefitted greatly from the thoughtful comments of various scholars.
troversy that surrounded Steigmann-Gall’s 2003 book, The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919–1945. In contrast to the general understanding of scholars of the »German Church Struggle«, Steigmann-Gall argued that Nazism was neither intrinsically anti-Christian, nor neo-pagan, nor an ersatz political religion. Rather, he asserted that many National Socialist leaders either saw themselves as bona fide Christians or were significantly attached to central aspects of Christianity, including the person of Jesus. In The Holy Reich, Steigmann-Gall maintained that the Nazi Party did develop a genuine religious policy and not just a campaign of deceit against the churches, and that this policy revolved around the »positive Christianity« of Point 24 in the 1920 NSDAP program. In other words, Nazis advocated a version of Christianity which was supra-confessional (uncoupled from any Protestant or Catholic dogmatism), antisemitic (rooted in the German racial community), and socially ethical.5 Most of Steigmann-Gall’s Christian Nazis favoured Protestantism over Catholicism: for instance, the early Nazi ideologue Arthur Dinter described the mission of National Socialism as the completion of the Protestant Reformation.6

Steigmann-Gall’s novel approach to the history of religion in the Third Reich necessitated a reinterpretation of many of the main aspects of the early and middle phases of the German »Church Struggle«: National Socialist support for the German Christian Movement7 during and after the 1933 church election; the quest to establish a centralized, authoritarian Reich church; the attempt to bridge the divisions of the Church Struggle by means of representative church committees overseen by Reich Minister of Church Affairs Hanns Kerrl; and even Hitler’s announcement of a new church election to be held in 1937 (which was never actually carried out) – all these events were seen by Steigmann-Gall as attempts by the Hitler regime to enroll German Protestantism as an auxiliary partner in the Nazi revolution of German society. There was not, he contended,
any concerted drive to sweep away Christianity in favour of some neo-pagan faith or a political religion centred on Hitler and the NSDAP. Only when it became clear the churches would never unite themselves behind Nazism (some time around 1937) did party leaders allow forces hostile to Christianity to attack the churches with greater vigour. For Steigmann-Gall, this explains why most of the evidence found in traditional accounts emphasizing the hostility of Nazism towards Christianity and the churches comes from the late 1930s or, more commonly, from wartime.8

If the debate over Steigmann-Gall’s work has shown anything, it is that we need to pay much closer attention to the chronology of National Socialist religious policy. During the early years of Nazi rule, thousands of Protestant theologians, church officials, and parish clergy were actively engaged in bridge-building with the Hitler government, through official church pronouncements, noteworthy theological publications, and the formation of the German Christian Movement, along with its campaign to create a united Reich Church. Parish clergy celebrated the Nazi seizure of power and debated endlessly about how to forge a union between Christianity and Nazism, generally through the revitalization of a true national church (Volkskirche).9 These many ecclesiastical initiatives suggest that – during the first years of Nazi rule – Protestants sensed opportunity rather than hostility from the Hitler regime.

What we need now is a re-examination of the nature of church-state relations at the outset of the Third Reich, in order to understand in what ways Nazism may have been hostile towards Christianity from the outset, and in what ways Nazism may in fact have been initially supportive of Christianity and open to forging an alliance with churches in its campaign to renew German politics, culture, and society. This paper aims to be a contribution to this process of re-examination, focusing on the seemingly mundane matter of church-building, and in particular on the micro-historical case of a particular church in Berlin, the Martin Luther Memorial Church (Martin-Luther-Gedächtniskirche).

8 Steigmann-Gall’s detractors include both traditional religious historians who maintain the fundamental anti-Christianity of the NSDAP and newer theorists of political religion, who see in Nazism a novel mobilization of religious ideas, symbols, and emotions in the service of totalitarian politics. Both groups have criticized his depiction of leading National Socialists as Christians, pointing out shortcomings in his research and alleging mistaken or misleading interpretations of key sources. He, in turn, has defended himself, maintaining his basic views. See articles by Doris L. Bergen, Richard J. Evans, Manfred Gailus, Irving Hexham, Ernst Piper, and Stanley Stowers in the Journal of Contemporary History 42/1 (2007). Richard Steigmann-Gall countered with Christianity and the Nazi Movement: A Response, in: Journal of Contemporary History 42/2 (2007), 185–211. For a new critique of Steigmann-Gall’s understanding of the Point 24 of the NSDAP programme – the section on »Positive Christianity« – see Samuel Koehne, Reassessing The Holy Reich: Leading Nazis’ Views on Confession, Community and »Jewish« Materialism, in: Journal of Contemporary History 48/3 (2103), 423–445.
Church Construction in Nazi Germany

In Nazi Germany, as in previous eras, the construction or renovation of churches and other ecclesiastical buildings required the initiative of parish clergy, the support of both the local congregation and higher church officials, and the approval and logistical support of state authorities. Various government departments regulated the development of German culture and the mobilization of both capital and labour, which was especially important in the tumultuous interwar years, when money in short supply and unemployment a pressing political concern. Given the need for collaboration between church and state in matters of church construction and renovation, and given common assumptions about Nazi hostility towards Christianity, it might seem somewhat surprising to learn that over 900 church buildings were either built new or substantially renovated during the time of National Socialist rule. Many of these projects were influenced by members of the Reich Office for Ecclesiastical Art in the German Protestant Church (Reichsamt für kirchliche Kunst in der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche), which evolved into the Protestant Reich Association of Christian Art (Evangelische Reichsgemeinschaft christlicher Kunst), a newly formed organization incorporated (gleichgeschaltet) into Josef Goebbels’ National Socialist Reich Chamber of Culture (Reichskulturkammer). Indeed, scholars of church art and architecture have argued that the existence of so many Nazi-era churches illustrates the speed and extent to which Nazi ideology permeated the ecclesiastical realm, as seen in »Heimatschutz style architecture, shades of neo-classicism, and the erection of churches for National Socialist model settlements.« One of the key figures in this movement to politicize church architecture in the Third Reich was Winfried Wendland, author of the 1934 book, Kunst und Nation: Ziel und Wege der Kunst im Neuen Deutschland, who wrote:

»Art is race-bound. Each of the pyramids of Egypt, the temples of Greece, and the cathedrals of Germany are racially determined. They all carry the intellectual [geistige] content determined by the blood of their Volk, which reveals tangibly again and again the Egyptian, Greek, Germanic [Germanische] and German [Deutsche], and points above all to a highest mother-race, which we call Nordic.«

This application of Nazi racial ideology to Protestant church-building resulted in a number of striking new churches built in Hitler’s Germany. Perhaps the most important of these was the Martin Luther Memorial Church in Berlin-Mariendorf, which is noteworthy, I would argue, for the extent to which National Socialist and Christian symbols and concepts were interwoven.

11 Ibid.
Previously almost unknown outside Berlin, the Martin Luther Memorial Church has received increasing attention over the past decade. This stems in large part from a 2005 Protestant Church Building Authority report about the architectural significance of the church and an application from the Mariendorf Parish and the Berlin Monument Authority to the Federal Commissioner for Culture and the Media, the result of which was the designation of the Martin Luther Memorial Church as a monument of national importance, giving the building both legal protection and cultural status.

Martin Luther Memorial Church – Origins, Architecture, and Décor

The impetus for the construction of the Martin Luther Memorial Church dates back to at least 1908, when Franz Karl Hermann Rieger was appointed as parish pastor and a request to build a new church in the Mariendorf neighbourhood was sent to the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory. Little happened until August 1918, when the parish council purchased land »in a very privileged position« near the old Mariendorf city hall with the intention of building a war memorial church. In the wake of military defeat, revolution, and the inflation crisis of 1923–1924, no progress was made on the project. This was not for lack of trying, for Pastor Rieger pleaded with the consistory to build another church, arguing it was »absolutely necessary.« Still, Rieger admitted that the parish’s small building fund had been »wiped out in the vortex of the inflation,« while a higher official sympathetic to the parish confessed that »in this beggarly time,« a construction project

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16 Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory to the Prussian Superior Church Council, 11 December 1918, Evangelisches Zentralarchiv in Berlin (hereafter EZA) 7/11735.
for Mariendorf remained «a hopeless wish.»\(^{17}\) By the fall of 1926, though, in the relative stability of the middle years of the Weimar Republic, the Mariendorfers began construction of a parish hall, which was dedicated on 30 November 1927.\(^{18}\) Designed by the architect Curt Steinberg, head of the Berlin-Brandenburg Church Building Authority, the parish hall was intended to be the first of three buildings erected on the site, to be followed by the church itself and a residence for the parish clergy.\(^{19}\) Two years later, the parish council commissioned a parish building committee to develop a proposal for the construction of the new church building. Once again, Curt Steinberg – so valuable because of his connection to the Berlin-Brandenburg Church Building Authority – developed the architectural drawings and built a model of the proposed church, which greatly excited parishioners in Mariendorf. Their new church was planned to include a 51 metre tower with three or four bells, a large organ, room for a choir of at least 100 singers, and seats for 1200 parishioners.\(^{20}\) Once again, however, the project stalled – this time due to the economic crisis of 1929. Indeed, by 1931 conditions were so poor the German government had significantly reduced its support for the Old Prussian Union Church, which in turn announced that there would be no church construction until 31 March 1934, at the earliest.\(^{21}\)

All that changed in 1933, when the National Socialists seized power and the German Christian Movement swept church elections in the Old Prussian Union Church. With the support of Curt Steinberg, himself a National Socialist supporter, the Mariendorf project was revived as an emblem for a new era in church and state. Plans were reworked and construction soon began, with a cornerstone ceremony taking place on 22 October 1933. By the time it was finished two years later, the Martin Luther Memorial Church had become a celebration of the union of Protestant Christianity, German patriotism, and National Socialism.

For example, up in the tower, the church bells – consecrated on 11 August 1935 – captured historic Protestant and patriotic themes: the Evening Bell (\textit{Feierabendglocke}) bore the inscription «work and pray» together with Albrecht Dürer’s famous image of praying hands; the Parish Bell bore the image of the old Mariendorf village church; the Fatherland Bell was marked with the image of a swastika and an Adolf Hitler quotation, «May God show us favour as we go about our work, shape our will in the right way, and bless our judgement!»; and the Faith Bell was graced with an image of Martin Luther.\(^{22}\) Together, these bells incorporated references to the new National Socialist government into the

\(^{17}\) Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory letter (Abteilung Iia 1272), 28 April 1924; Undated letter from the Kölln Land Superintendent (II Tgb. Nr. 3528), EZA 14/6602.

\(^{18}\) Kurt Steinberg to the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory, 23 October 1926, EZA 14/6604; Mariendorf Parish Council to the Prussian Superior Church Council, 22 November 1927, EZA 7/11735.

\(^{19}\) See, Chronik der Martin-Luther-Gedächtnis-Kirche, loc. cit. (Note 15) part 1.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.

\(^{21}\) Prussian Superior Church Council circular letter (E. O. I. 8338), 22 October 1931, EZA 7/5756.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
traditional partnership of patriotism and Protestant faith so often manifest in ecclesiastical settings.

Similarly, just inside the front doors, the church vestibule was a »hall of honour« to traditional German religious nationalism and militarism, »like so many others built during the Weimar Republic and constructed in great number – for the church too – under the National Socialists to commemorate the soldiers killed during the First World War.«23 Around the top of the wall, artists painted the first verse of the famous Luther hymn, »A Mighty Fortress« (»Ein feste Burg«). Relief masks garnished the two side walls: on one side was the face of Reich President Paul von Hindenburg, former General and Chief of Staff of the German Army and Great War hero; on the other was the face of the new Reich Chancellor and Führer, Adolf Hitler. Above hung a wrought iron »heroic chandelier« in the shape of an iron cross, decorated with gold oak leaves. Rounding out the décor was a light fixture and a plaque with the names and death dates of parishioners who had fallen in the Great War.24 These patriotic symbols expressed the traditional patriotism, religious nationalism, and post-Reformation throne-and-altar relationship between the German Protestant churches and the various German monarchs or heads of state who presided over them.

Within the sanctuary itself, elements of National Socialist ideology move from the periphery to the centre, both symbolically and spatially. Three pieces stand out, each carved by Berlin sculptor Hermann Möller. Above the altar hung a shining gold-plated crucifix depicting a muscular, heroic Christ – body rigid and head erect. Here was the embodiment of the Aryan Jesus celebrated by German Christians and spoken of by Nazi leaders (see fig. 1).25 To the left stood the oak baptismal font, which fused the Christian celebration of baptism with images of the ideal Nazi family. On the front, representing Jesus’ invitation to all children to come to him, a robed, bearded Christ figure is standing with his arms around a German boy, who looking up and raising his arm. It is an ambiguous image – the boy may be reaching up towards Christ or offering up a Hitler salute. On the other side of Christ is a pious German girl, with her head bowed and her hands folded. She is praying. On either side of the font were images representing the ideal Nazi woman and man. She is a solid but kindly mother – her hair pulled back in a bun – cradling a baby. He is a reverential member of the Nazi Party paramilitary SA (Sturmabteilung), dressed in a trench coat, holding his hat while bowing his head in prayer (see fig. 2). To the right of the altar was the raised oak pulpit, depicting a contemporary version of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus, dressed in a traditional robe, is surrounded by a cross-section of contemporary German society. Prominent positions are given to a soldier, who stands with folded hands just behind Jesus, an SA-Man, who looks somewhat like the Nazi hero Horst Wessel, and a member of the Hitler Youth (see fig. 3).

23 Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, Christenkreuz und Hakenkreuz., loc. cit. (Note 10)
24 Ibid.
25 Figures 1–4 are from the personal photo collection of the author, taken 23 June 2008.
Fig. 1: Crucifix
At the opposite end of the sanctuary, the choir loft was dominated by an impressive 50-stop, 3,300-pipe Walcker organ. Inaugurated in Advent of 1935, the organ was already famous across Germany, having been employed in public performances during the 1935 NSDAP party congress in Nuremberg the previous September.26

Finally and most dramatically, a massive triumphal arch 11 metres high and 1.65 metres thick spanned the entire front of the sanctuary. It consisted of 800 ornamental tiles – a combination of 36 Christian, pastoral, National Socialist, and military images designed by Berlin sculptor Heinrich Mekelburger. Among the Christian symbols were the Greek letters Alpha and Omega, the symbols of the four gospels, a crown of thorns, a Luther rose, a cross, a chalice, a dove (representing the Holy Spirit), a crown, the scales of Christian justice, the symbol of the Protestant Inner Mission, and the Chi-Rho symbol for Christ. The pastoral

26 Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, Christenkreuz und Hakenkreuz., loc. cit. (Note 10)
symbols included various plants, tools, and people, representing the bounty of nature and the human arts and crafts. Intermingled with these were a series of National Socialist and military symbols, including relief masks of SA-Men and soldiers, German eagles clasping wreaths and swastikas, other larger swastikas, the symbol of the National Socialist People’s Welfare Organization, and an Iron Cross sitting atop oak leaves (see fig. 4; note that the Nazi symbols were removed from the tiles after 1945). At the apex of the church, looking down over parishioners, were relief masks of Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, head of the famous Bethel Institution; Paul Gerhardt, the famous German hymn-writer; Martin Luther; Jesus Christ; and Adolf Hitler. Of note, present among the design sketches but not incorporated into the triumphal arch itself was the symbol of the German Christian Movement – a cross with a swastika at its centre (see fig. 5).  

Taken together, these seven important elements of the church design and décor comprised a dramatic, symbolic fusion of Christian theology, Protestant patriotism, and Nazi ideology.

**Martin Luther Memorial Church – Construction**

Such a dramatic fusion of Protestant, German, and Nazi symbolism raises several important questions about the Martin Luther Memorial Church. Whose idea was this church? How did it come to be decorated in such a political manner? Was it a local initiative or the brainchild of high church officials eager to celebrate their allegiance to Hitler? And what does the existence of the Martin Luther Memorial Church suggest about the relationship between Christianity and Nazism, the German Protestant Church and the Hitler regime? In answer to these questions, I would like to make three observations about the church as a product of church-politics, of National Socialism, and of local decision-making.

![Ornamental Tile Design](image)
German Christian Church Politics in Mariendorf

First, the Martin Luther Memorial Church was not the product of German Christian church-political pressure. Long-time pastors Hermann Rieger and Max Kurzreiter were church-political neutrals in 1933, and worked with parish councillors from across the church-political spectrum.28 Generally, German Christians comprised the majority. Already in the Old Prussian church elections of 13 November 1932, they had captured seven of the sixteen positions on the Mariendorf Parish Council.29 In the church elections of July 1933, the Mariendorf Parish was one of a small minority of Old Prussian Union Church parishes which held a conventional election, rather than affirm a unity list of candidates drawn up by church leaders. Just under seventy percent of parishioners voted for the German Christian list of candidates. As a result, 11 of the 16 parish councillors were members of the German Christian Movement.30 At first, although everyone seemed to agree that the construction of a new church was of paramount importance, German Christians actually tried to block the start of construction. On 11 April 1933, even as Pastor Rieger was preparing his building proposal, eighteen members of the Mariendorf German Christian Group, led by parish councillor Ernst Maschke, lodged an official complaint against the choice of Dr. Curt Steinberg as head of the construction project. The group, which included at least five elders from the parish council, wrote to both the Prussian Superior Church Council and the Mariendorf Parish Council. They were upset about an outstanding case against Steinberg relating to the construction of the Zehlendorf parish hall, a dispute which they felt invalidated him from overseeing the construction in Mariendorf. The group also opposed the beginning of construction on account of what they believed to be the poor state of the church finances, arguing that »the parish budget has become so unclear that it amounts to a cover-up of the actual state of affairs, or in any case it is not possible to demonstrate at present that there are any cash assets available, but rather a debt of 15,000 RM.«31

Pastor Rieger forwarded the matter to his superiors in the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory, then wrote a lengthy response on behalf of the majority on the parish council. He explained that everyone on the parish council agreed that a new church needed to be built according to the plans of Dr. Steinberg. Almost unanimously, he claimed, the councillors agreed »that the church should be

28 Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, Christenkreuz und Hakenkreuz, loc. cit. (Note 10)
29 Hermann Rieger, »Aus der Gemeinde – für die Gemeinde,« Friede und Freude (Mariendorf Parish Newsletter), December 1932, ELAB 1 10 12/768.
30 Hermann Rieger, »Aus der Gemeinde – für die Gemeinde,« Friede und Freude, July and August 1933, ELAB 1 10 12/768. Vote totals in Mariendorf were German Christian: 3204, Gospel and Church: 1466, for a total of 4670 out of 6882 potential voters. In Brandenburg as a whole, based on results from 1940 out of 2317 parishes, 1741 parishes employed unity lists while 199 parishes held conventional elections.
31 Mariendorf German Christian Group to the Mariendorf Parish Council, 11 April 1933, EZA 7/11735.
begun as soon as possible. As for the complaint against Steinberg’s supervision of the construction project, the parish council had reviewed the incident in Zehlendorf and almost everyone – including eight of its German Christian members – agreed that the matter had been sufficiently clarified. Concerning the charges of a cover-up of the church finances, Rieger explained that some of the German Christians were new to the parish council and did not yet understand the accounts. In fact, there had been over 400,000 RM in the church building fund, but 169,000 RM had been lent to other church accounts. At present, the parish had over 226,000 RM on hand and would therefore borrow about 124,000 RM of the 350,000 RM estimated construction costs. After outlining the parish’s financial position in greater detail, Rieger concluded that the loan for the church construction could be managed without even raising church taxes. The pastor reiterated the need to begin construction quickly, before material costs rose, adding that only two or three German Christian parish councillors still opposed the plan. The consistory agreed with Rieger’s point of view, and the German Christian group’s complaint seems to have died out sometime in the summer.

Midway through the construction of the church, the parish building committee began to deliberate on the name they should give to the new Mariendorf church. Two choices stood out: ›Martin Luther Memorial Church‹ and ›Ludwig Müller Memorial Church‹, the latter named for the Reich Bishop and former national leader of the German Christian Movement. The building committee was evenly divided between the two names, but Pastor Rieger rejected the ›Ludwig Müller‹ option. In a letter to the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory, he explained how the cornerstone had been laid in 1933, the memorial year (450th birthday) of the reformer, and the building would be »powerful, and suit the stature and character of Dr. Martin Luther.« Twice the consistory balked at the name. Provost Otto Eckert, a German Christian himself, felt it was too long and would invariably be shortened to ›Luther Church‹. Couldn’t the parish, he asked, find a name »that ties in with the local historical traditions of the area«? Three months later, however, the consistory relented and approved the name, though even then Eckert lamented that he would have been pleased if »short, striking church names would be chosen in Berlin, such as ›For the Love of God‹, ›On the Mountain‹, ›In the Meadow‹ or similar. Perhaps even yet you will find a meaningful, German name, tied to the soil and pointing to heaven.« In the end, however,

32 Pastor Rieger to the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory, 30 May 1933, EZA 7/11735.
33 See also excerpts from the Mariendorf Parish Council minutes, 7 April 1933, EZA 14/6604.
34 Ibid.
35 Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory to the Prussian Superior Church Council, Berlin, 26 June 1933 and 4 August 1933, EZA 7/11735.
36 Minutes of the Building Committee meeting of 7 June 1934; Letter from Pastor Rieger to the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory, 22 June 1934, ELAB 1 10 12/544.
37 Letters from the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory to Pastor Rieger, 18 July 1934 and 17 October 1934.
the building committee and parish council opted for the name ›Martin Luther Memorial Church‹.38

As the construction of the Martin Luther Memorial Church reached the finishing stage, there was yet another curious decision made with respect to the German Christian Movement. As Pastor Rieger and the building committee decided on the church’s décor, they appear to have opted intentionally not to use the symbol of the German Christian Movement – a cross with a swastika mounted at its centre – in the church. This symbol was the only one from among the model designs for ornamental tiles which was not adopted for use in the triumphal arch which spans the front of the sanctuary.39

Towards the end of the construction, yet another church-political controversy erupted in the parish, when on 28 May 1935 a Mr. Westermann, Gustav Bellingkrodt and other members of the Confessing Church filed an official complaint with the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory, hoping to block the appointment of pastoral candidate Dr. Kaumann to the position of the third pastor in Mariendorf. By way of background, local German Christians had been agitating ever since 1933 for the new position of third pastor to be filled by a member of the German Christian Movement and Nazi Party.40 In principle, Pastors Rieger and Kurzreiter were favourably disposed to this idea. Already in November 1934, the two pastors and parish council announced their approval of a German Christian request to hold one service a month in which a German Christian pastor would preach.41 Since 1934, Dr. Kaumann had been involved with the local German Christians in Mariendorf, and by 1935 he had been nominated as a candidate for the new pastoral position.

In opposition, Westermann and Bellingkrodt alleged that Kaumann had demonstrated in an April 1934 speech to the local German Christian group that he held theological views contrary to the Word of God and the Old Prussian Union Church’s confession of faith. Kaumann’s speech, »The Duties of a Pastor in the New State,« had revolved around the establishment of a victorious church in the people’s state (»Volkstaat«) of Adolf Hitler. Westermann and Bellingkrodt objected to Kaumann calling for the establishment of »Adolf Hitler’s church-state« (»Kirchenstaat Adolf Hitlers«) as the end goal of the creation of »the people’s church in the people’s state.« They objected to Kaumann’s assertion that the National Socialist world view rested »largely on Christian thought«, and to his claims that the German Christians represented a »new world« destined to replace the »old world« of the traditional church. They claimed Kaumann attacked the role of the parish pastor as leader of the parish church, noting that many German
Christians wanted to place parish leadership in the hands of lay people, and particularly the local leaders of the German Christian Movement. They asserted that Kaumann’s call for a transformation of the church, »which must be 100 out of 100 National Socialist,« contravened the World of God as the sole rule of faith, adding that no one was even one-hundred percent Christian, since everyone remained a sinner before God. They argued that the application of the Aryan Paragraph within the church, which Kaumann had affirmed, was a contravention of Scripture, since Paul wrote that »Here there is neither Jew nor Greek« and that the gospel had the power to save all who believe, »principally the Jews and also the Greeks.« Westermann and Bellingkrodt then claimed that Kaumann attacked the institutions of the Old Prussian Union Church, including synods, and argued that Kaumann’s celebration of the incorporation of church youth groups into the state youth movement contravened the Word of God. Christ, they argued, had invited the children to come to him and had charged Peter to »Feed my lambs! Feed my sheep!« This meant that youth work was a direct outgrowth of the Gospel, a core matter of faith. For all these reasons, Westermann and Bellingkrodt, representing a larger group of parishioners loyal to the Confessing Church, opposed the appointment of Dr. Kaumann as third parish pastor in Mariendorf. 42

Both the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory and the Prussian Superior Church Council eventually rejected the complaint of Westermann and Bellingkrodt. Provost Otto Eckert from the consistory replied that the *Neue Tempelhofer Zeitung* article couldn’t be relied upon to be an exact reproduction of Kaumann’s speech, and that the Kaumann’s use of »church-state« to describe Adolf Hitler’s government was probably not what Kaumann meant, since he used »people’s state« more often in his speech. He added: »Since the National Socialist world view is largely informed by Christian thought, it does not simply follow that pastor Dr. Kaumann no longer wants to be bound to the Word of God.« Indeed, Kaumann had also asserted: »Our religion remains Christ, the Lord; only Christ is our victory banner.« Eckart also claimed that Kaumann was simply calling for the church to reach out especially to National Socialists who were far from the church, citing Christ’s injunction that it is the sick who need the doctor. How better, Kaumann said, to fulfil Jesus’ commission to go into the world than to be in the midst of and bound to the nation? Eckart also countered the complainants on the issue of youth work, arguing Kaumann’s views did not amount to a contravention of the Word of God. 43 The Prussian Superior Church Council largely reiterated the consistory’s point of view, adding that Westermann’s complaint was submitted after the window of time for complaints had closed. Still, the Prussian Superior Church Council agreed that Kaumann’s speech had been »strongly politically coloured,« and that it was »certainly understandable« that Westermann

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42 Mr. Westermann and Mr. Bellingkrodt to the Prussian Superior Church Council, 7 September 1935, EZA 7/11735. This letter repeats and develops an earlier version of the complaint.
43 Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory to Mr. Westermann and Mr. Bellingkrodt, 23 July 1935, EZA 7/11735.
and his colleagues would be angered by statements sharply attacking the institutions and conditions in the »old church,« given Kaumann’s »impulsive style« and »greatly exaggerated formulation of individual statements.« However, taken together, these faults did not justify the complaint against the appointment of Kaumann to the third pastoral position in Mariendorf.\footnote{Prussian Superior Church Council to Mr. Westermann, 28 October 1935, EZA 7/11735.}

Nonetheless, Westermann, Bellingkrodt, and others in the Confessing Church seem to have accomplished their goal, if parish councillor Maschke’s frustration over the continuing non-appointment of Dr. Kaumann was any indication. Maschke wrote in October and November 1935, lamenting the fact that the Prussian Superior Church Council had not yet appointed Kaumann. In fact, the case concerning his appointment found its way to the Brandenburg Church Province’s Legal Committee, where Kaumann’s appointment was overturned and a new election process begun. The result was the appointment of a less radical German Christian candidate, Pastor Georg Schaade, at the end of 1936.\footnote{Letter to the Legal Committee of the Brandenburg Church Province, 27 February 1936; »Decision,« n. d.; Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory to the Mariendorf Parish Council, 1 October 1936; »Grußwort des Pfarrers Schaade,« Friede und Freude, January 1937, ELAB 1 10 12/768.}

Finally, when the time came to dedicate the Martin Luther Memorial Church, Hermann Rieger chose not to invite Provost Eckert, his superior in the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory, to dedicate the church. Rather, he wrote to his friend Johannes Eger, the former general superintendent in Magdeburg and a member of the Old Prussian Union Church leadership friendly towards the Confessing Church. This decision was entirely church-political. As Rieger put it in his invitation to Eger, »If you decline, then the danger exists, that Provost Eckert will be asked. But that would arouse a very great annoyance among the Confessing Group and keep many away from the celebration.«\footnote{Hermann Rieger to General Superintendent Eger, 4 December 1935, ELAB 1 10 12/768. A few days later, having received a positive response from Eger, Rieger wrote to Provost Eckert, asking him not to be upset that the parish had invited General Superintendent Eger to dedicate the new church, since »Eger is known to our parish, because he often spoke here during his time in office in Berlin.« Tactfully, Rieger made no mention of Eckert’s German Christian church politics as the real motivation for not inviting him to dedicate the new church.\footnote{Hermann Rieger to Provost Eckert, 11 December 1935, ELAB 1 10 12/768.}

In sum, then, the neutrality of the two Mariendorf pastors, the inability of the local German Christians to block the start of construction or the involvement of architect Steinberg, the decision against naming the church after the German Christian leader Ludwig Müller or employing German Christian symbols in the church décor, the successful Confessing Church opposition to the appointment of the outspoken German Christian pastoral candidate Kaumann, and the avoidance of the German Christian Provost Eckert all demonstrate that although the German Christians comprised a majority on the Mariendorf Parish Council, they
Martin Luther Memorial Church and National Socialism

The second observation about the construction of the Martin Luther Memorial Church is that it was both supported by and a reflection of the Nazi Party and state. The matter of state support for church-building during the Hitler era is rather mundane, as it turns out. Simply put, the National Socialist government continued supporting and regulating various aspects of ecclesiastical construction and church art, as previous political regimes had done. In the first instance, Curt Steinberg, head of the Berlin-Brandenburg Church Building Authority since 1915, continued in his role of overseeing church construction projects, including the Martin Luther Memorial Church. Indeed, Steinberg embraced National Socialism and adapted easily to Hitler’s aesthetics. In 1945, he quickly shed his Nazi political convictions in order to hold onto his position, outlasting the Third Reich and retiring in 1953.48

The two leading artists employed by the Mariendorf Parish – Heinrich Mekelburger and Hermann Möller – were also connected to the state. Both were members of the Berlin Artists’ Association (Verein Berliner Künstler), through which the Reich Ministry of Science, Education, and Public Instruction regulated visual artists in the Third Reich, distributing commissions to association members. Mekelburger, who designed the ceramic tiles in the Martin Luther Memorial Church, focused primarily on church art, but had also been commissioned by the German state and Nazi Party.49 Möller, an award-winning sculptor, carved the baptismal font, crucifix, and pulpit. He was eager to receive the commission from the Mariendorf Parish and appealed to the Reich Ministry for financial support for the project, based on five factors: he and his family were »long-time supporters of the National Socialist Movement« (his sons were both NSDAP members and SA-Men, and one of them worked in the Propaganda Ministry); he had not had a noteworthy commission for years and had found himself in continuous economic distress; the Mariendorf Parish had already promised long ago to employ him for the wood sculpture in their new church; he was the only notable sculptor in his church district; and he was a senior member of the Militant League for German Culture (Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur), as well as a member of the Reich Culture Chamber (Reichskulturkammer).50 In support of

48 Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, Christenkreuz und Hakenkreuz, loc. cit. (Note 10).
49 Ibid.
50 Hermann Möller to the Reich Culture Ministry, 29 September 1934, EZA 14/6604; Reich and Prussian Ministry for Science, Education, and Public Instruction to the Prussian Superior Church Council, 7 June 1935, EZA 7/11735
Möller’s request, the Prussian Academy of Art wrote a reference to the Prussian Ministry for Science, Culture, and National Education, in which the Academy described Möller’s training and a previous award-winning public commission he had undertaken. Depicting him as «an artist well-trained in his craft, even if he possesses no particularly strong originality,« the Academy of Art nonetheless affirmed that Möller would be «entirely suitable« for the Mariendorf church project.51

Along with Möller, the Mariendorf Parish also submitted a request to the Prussian Ministry of Science, Culture, and National Education for financial assistance for the carving of the pulpit. In reply, church officials were instructed to direct their request for aid to the President of the Prussian Building and Finance Department, which they did. Finally, in June 1935, the Reich Minister for Science, Education, and National Instruction informed the Prussian Superior Church Council that it would, indeed, contribute 1000 RM towards the cost of the carved pulpit.52

If the process of obtaining state-regulated artists and a modest amount of state support for the artistic furnishings of the Martin Luther Memorial Church was fairly mundane, the traditional celebrations associated with the construction of the church were not. In fact, the rituals of construction – and particularly the cornerstone-laying and topping-out ceremony – linked the construction of the church both to the resurrection or rebirth of Germany under Nazi rule and to the Nazi struggle against unemployment.

On 22 October 1933, the cornerstone was laid in a grand ceremony. As the Neue Tempelhofer Zeitung reported, General Superintendent Karow and Superintendent Schulze accompanied Mariendorf pastors Rieger and Kurzreiter and the parish council, along with a host of other church leaders (including the local German Christian group), civic officials, and construction personnel.

The ceremony – attended by roughly 2000 parishioners – was explicitly linked to the revival of German fortunes under National Socialist rule, in large part because the parish requested that local streets be decorated with »the flags of the national renewal, in order that the day would be formally marked as a day of rejoicing.«53 Indeed, the ceremonial deed (Urkunde) written by Pastor Rieger and read out to the crowd by Rector Janetzke – a member of the Gospel and Church party, which stood against the nazification of the German churches – repeatedly

51 Prussian Academy of Art to the Minister for Science, Culture, and National Education, 13 September 1934, EZA 14/6604.
52 Prussian Minister for Science, Culture, and National Education to the Regional Bishop of the Old Prussian Union Church, 2 October 1934; Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory to the Prussian Superior Church Council, 12 January 1935; Reich and Prussian Minister for Science, Education, and National Instruction to the Prussian Superior Church Council, 7 June 1935, EZA 14/6604.
linked the fortunes of the Mariendorf Parish with the important political events of the day:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In the memorable year 1933, in the ninth year of the presidency of Field Marshal von Hindenburg, the first year of the People’s Chancellor Adolf Hitler, the year of the powerful awakening of the German nation to a new national life, the year in which our nation – torn apart by many parties – has been welded together into unity, the year that brings the memory of the four hundred and fiftieth birthday of Dr. Martin Luther, the year that gives us the powerful struggle for faith and interiorization and hope, we place today, on 22 October 1933 the cornerstone of a new church …

»As Adolf Hitler, the great leader of our nation given to us by God in the year 1933, has called for a battle against the colossal unemployment in our nation, the ecclesiastical bodies consider that the time has come to build. They desire, in turn, to help alleviate the unemployment crisis.«

The topping-out ceremony (Richtfest) featured the same mix of religious and political language. As Pastor Rieger thanked construction workers for their service, he infused their work with deep political significance: »As the tower points to heaven, so too the community – united in work, faith, and national identity – feels itself drawn upwards to Almighty God, who has been holding his hand visibly over this creation.« Rieger noted that the construction of the church brought with it a »joyful collaboration in the construction of the new state,« and that the construction workers were »following the call of the chancellor« and placing themselves »at the front in the struggle against unemployment.« Rieger continued: »About 3,300 work days have been allocated so far, and everyone has experienced a special joy over the fact that it was granted to them to complete the construction of the new church in the new Germany.« Following Rieger’s speech, the crowd sang the German anthem and the Horst-Wessel Song. Finally, Fritz Arendsee, District Leader of the German Christian Movement, greeted the crowd. He declared that it was thanks to the Führer that such Christian rituals could be celebrated at all, a grateful reference to the Nazi suppression of German communism. In response, Arendsee called for a triumphal union of church and state: »The kingdom of God must be built into the Third Reich, and then Germany would be unconquerable.«

It is within this context of general enthusiasm for the National Socialist renewal of Germany – common to German Christians, church-political neutrals, and members of the Gospel and Church Movement and its successor, the Confessing Church – that the interior décor of the Martin Luther Memorial Church must be interpreted as an unambiguous identification with Hitler’s National Socialist Movement. If the church bells and vestibule merely added National Socialism to the traditional mixture of throne, altar, and military heroism, then the

54 Ibid.; Hermann Rieger, »Grundsteinlegungsurkunde,« Friede und Freude, November 1933, ELAB 1 10 12/768.
55 Ibid.; Hermann Rieger, report on topping-out ceremony, Friede und Freude, June 1934, ELAB 1 10 12/768.
sanctuary confirmed the parish’s desire to understand Protestant Christianity in the symbolic language and ideological values of Nazism. The crucifix portrayed Jesus in the Nazi and German Christian image of the heroic Aryan fighter. The baptismal font validated the idealized Nazi family, with the woman as the nurturing mother and the father as the servant-fighter (in the process legitimizing the SA as a positive force). The pulpit placed Christ in the midst of the Nazi racial community, offering privileged places for a soldier, an SA-Man, a Hitler Youth, nurturing mothers, and productive workers. And the triumphal arch presented as equal a wide array of Christian, pastoral, and Nazi symbols, intermingled with one another.

The Role of the Mariendorf Parish in the Construction of the Martin Luther Memorial Church

The third observation about the construction of the Martin Luther Memorial Church is that it was the product of a collaborative and largely local decision-making process. The first stage in this process occurred when Pastor Hermann Rieger and the building committee reworked the building proposal in 1933, significantly cutting the proposed cost in order to gain the approval of the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory, and doing so largely by cutting out the ornamentation for which the church became known. Originally, in August 1930, Pastor Rieger and the Mariendorf Parish put forward a proposal for the construction of a new church building with a budget of 470,000 RM, including significant allocations for a triumphal arch with decorative tiles, along with a decorative altar and pulpit. In February 1933, knowing how difficult it would be to justify construction of a new church in difficult economic times, Rieger’s new proposal called for a budget of only 372,000 RM, achieved by reducing the spending on interior decoration from 61,500 RM to 42,600 RM and slashing the budget for furnishings from 52,000 RM to 24,800 RM. Interestingly, Rieger and the building committee planned for a triumphal arch which included decorative tiles with various designs, but only allotted 300 RM (later 1000 RM) to pay for them. The plan also included modest sums for altar, pulpit, and organ, but with question marks beside »altar« and »pulpit,« and an asterisk beside »organ,« along with the phrase »sum inadequate.« Clearly, they were unhappy with the prospect of eliminating the planned ornamentation.

In April 1933, the Mariendorf Parish Council authorized the securing of a 350,000 RM mortgage for the church construction. However, even at that modest cost level, higher church officials expressed »concern« about whether they should grant permission to begin construction, »in view of the overall difficult economic situation« and »even if it could be kept to a very simple construction

56 Estimation of costs from 8 August 1930 and 16 February 1933, ELAB 1 10 12/537.
57 Excerpt from the Mariendorf Parish Record Book, 7 April 1933, EZA 14/6604.
design and in normal times could be readily produced." In response, Pastor Rieger wrote to the consistory, making yet another pitch to gain the approval of his superiors. Going back 50 years into the history of the Mariendorf Parish, Rieger explained the long-standing and now pressing need in a parish with only a tiny village church now wholly unable to meet the demands of a rapidly growing community, not to mention the low cost of building materials and the potential to create jobs, as Adolf Hitler had spoken of in his recent Labour Day speech. Soon after, Rieger and parish leaders visited officials from the Old Prussian Union Prussian Superior Church Council, where they proposed that Dr. Steinberg, the architect and project leader, could alter the construction plans. If necessary, perhaps even the tower could be left out of the initial phase of construction. Within a few weeks, the Mariendorfers changed their mind and begged not to build the church without a tower. Rather, they argued, savings could be achieved by plastering the inner and outer surface of the nave, instead of decorating it with ornamental tiles, and by building the massive arch out of wood instead of masonry and tiles. By August, after extensive negotiations with parish representatives, the consistory withdrew its initial objection to the building of a church with a tower, which in view of the overall difficult economic situation would raise concerns. Having heard the pastor and parish council make its case, consistory officials believed, that the parish would not encounter difficulties through the construction and the necessary taking on of a mortgage. Additionally, however, the consistory confirmed that the church shall be constructed in a very simple construction style according to the enclosed plans of Dr. Eng. Curt Steinberg. It would be built with seating for 832 and at a cost of 350,000 RM. The parish council would guard against serious cost overruns by soliciting numerous labour quotes and watching costs carefully. Interestingly, the Mariendorf Parish Building Committee pleaded with the consistory officials not to make the approval of construction dependent upon the production of the building in this very simple style, but rather to give it a free hand in this matter. But the consistory maintained that the construction must be in a simple style and that the parish was responsible to stick to the plans.

Once approval had been obtained and construction begun, however, Pastor Rieger and the Mariendorf building committee began working almost immediately to return the stripped out ornamentation into the construction plans. Minutes from the many meetings of the building committee chronicle the changes

58 Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory to the Prussian Superior Church Council, 26 June 1933, EZA 7/11735.
59 Mariendorf Parish Council to the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory, 5 May 1933, EZA 14/6604.
60 Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory Councillor Müller letter (K II/5928), 27 June 1933, EZA 14/6604.
61 Mariendorf Parish Council to the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory, 10 July 1933, EZA 14/6604.
62 Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory to the Prussian Superior Church Council, 4 August 1933, EZA 7/11735.
in the project and show how they worked together with architect Steinberg, the commissioned artists, and Ilse Bergbau GmbH, a company which produced ornamental tiles. To do that, they had to raise more money. Already on 26 February 1933, the building committee had begun this process, appealing to associations throughout Mariendorf to support the inner decoration of the church. The building committee decided to create a »golden book« to record the names of donors, and to reach out to potential donors with a cover letter graced with the image of the church.63

During the early phase of construction, the building committee remained optimistic it could complete the construction of the Mariendorf church for 330,000 RM, some 20,000 RM less than they had budgeted, thanks to ›decided savings in the construction.« What they were hoping was that various contractors would lower their prices out of good will towards the parish.64 By April 1934, however, Pastor Rieger and the building committee knew they were starting to exceed their budget. As a result, they proposed that the parish council decide to take collections towards the inner decoration of the church on those Sundays in which there was no designated offering scheduled.65

Confident in their decision to reintroduce the hoped for decoration to the church, the building committee ordered its first batch of ornamental tiles on 15 November 1934. These were delivered on 26 January 1935, 15 February 1935, 6 March 1935, 4 April 1935, and 22 October 1935. A subsequent order for tiles with relief faces was placed on 12 April 1935 and delivered 31 May 1935. In all cases, the orders and relevant delivery slips were signed by Pastor Rieger.66 As the construction progressed to the point when regular decisions about the décor were required, a fairly consistent decision-making pattern emerged. Indeed, the ornamental tiles and the artistic furnishings – the pulpit, the altar, and the baptismal font – were all approved through a process of collaboration, in which project leader Steinberg usually made proposals, which were then discussed and recommended by the building committee – usually after consulting sketches or models, which were either brought to committee meetings or viewed by the committee in an artist’s studio. Only then would the building committee make a recommendation to the parish council, which in turn made the final decision to approve the plan and expenditure.

From the summer of 1934 onward, there were more alterations to the construction plan, adding further unbudgeted costs to the construction project. In June 1934, Steinberg suggested that the five altar windows should reflect the confession of faith.67 Then, at Steinberg’s suggestion, the committee agreed that Möller would design the altar, and that a decision would be made based on a model

63 Minutes of the Building Committee meeting of 26 February 1933, ELAB 1 10 12/544.
64 Minutes of the Building Committee meetings of 15 and 28 August 1933, ELAB 1 10 12/544.
65 Minutes of the Building Committee meeting of 4 April 1934, ELAB 1 10 12/544.
66 Orders and delivery slips, various dates, ELAB 1 10 12/312.
67 Minutes of the Building Committee meeting of 27 June 1934, ELAB 1 10 12/544.
he would produce. In January 1935, the building committee visited Möller’s workshop, in order to view models of the four evangelists whose representations would support the altar. On other occasions, the building committee decided on the baptismal font (with its three figures), the bells, the altar, and the pulpit. Month by month they deliberated, sometimes making changes, as the artists and Steinberg worked with them. For instance, the final decision on the pulpit design followed this same process. In December 1934, Steinberg laid out technical drawings before the building committee and made suggestions. The others agreed and approval was given to Mekelburger’s design.68

By the summer of 1935, the building committee was grappling once more with significant cost overruns and delays, while still finalizing aspects of the interior decoration and furnishings, and planning the closing phase of construction. On 5 June 1935 the building committee decided to inform the parish council of a 30,000 RM cost overrun. In early July, the topics of conversation were the cross, the altar lighting, and the pulpit, the cost for which had risen to 5000 RM, double the budgeted amount. By mid-July, however, the most pressing issue was the slow pace of work. The building committee grew angry about increasing delays, demanding that Steinberg account for the slow pace of construction. Part of the problem may have been the building committee itself, for in fact many final decisions relating to the church interior had not yet been made. This explains Pastor Rieger’s letter to sculptor Möller two days later, asking for models for the altar lights, which were to be in the form of four angels. In mid-August, the building committee tackled decisions over windows, as well as the relief masks of Chancellor Adolf Hitler and President Paul von Hindenburg for the vestibule, for which Rieger was charged to obtain quotes.69

Throughout the construction process, various firms contributed specialized architectural drawings of decorative components of the church interior, including the Berlin firm C. F. Rochlitz, which contributed designs for the clock, and Ilse Bergbau, which adapted the designs of Berlin sculptor Heinrich Mekelburger to create the array of ornamental tiles which eventually covered the church’s triumphal arch.70 At the end of January 1935, an artist from Ilse Bergbau drew sketches of 37 tiles (two images were subsequently cut out from the blueprint) and wrote out the titles of eight other tiles (not yet sketched), sending them to the Mariendorf building committee. Most of the ornamental tiles were already in production, while the rest would be available within a matter of four to six weeks.71

70 Blueprints, p. 10, ELAB 3/211; »Zusammenstellung der an den Bildhauer Meckelburger in Berlin C2 gezahlten Beträge für Bildhauerarbeiten und Modelle für die Grube ›Ilse‹ für figürliche Darstellungen« and various handwritten invoices from Mekelburger, ELAB 1 10 12/312.
71 Blueprints, p. 10, ELAB 3/211.
From the beginning of construction on, Pastor Hermann Rieger, his colleagues on the building committee, and the entire parish council participated in a continuous collaborative process with architects, artists, and material suppliers, reshaping and upgrading the construction project. They made these improvements without any written consultation with superiors in the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory, and by the end of construction, no one knew exactly how much money had been spent to build the Martin Luther Memorial Church.

Repeatedly, officials from the finance departments of the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory and the Prussian Superior Church Council demanded accounting reports from the Mariendorf Parish Council. Just as often, they were rebuffed. For instance, two months after the dedication of the church, officials in the finance department of the Prussian Superior Church Council wrote to the consistory finance department, noting that »it has come to our attention that the original estimated costs for the construction of the Martin Luther Memorial Church have been significantly exceeded.« They wanted to know what measures consistory financial officials had taken to mitigate against cost overruns, and for those same officials to provide a final accounting for the project.72 But the consistory financial officials were in the dark about the true extent of the cost overruns in the Mariendorf Parish. They thought costs had risen from 330,000 RM to 372,000 RM, but must have been greatly surprised at the answer they received to their 10 March 1936 request for the Mariendorf Parish Council to explain the cost overrun and provide a final accounting within eight weeks.73 Before they got their answer, consistory finance officials would write the parish council at least nine more times between 1936 and 1938, each time demanding a final accounting of costs related to the construction of the Martin Luther Memorial Church.74

Finally, on 31 May 1938, the Mariendorfers sent a closing financial statement to the finance department of the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory. Although the budget had been a modest 350,000 RM, final construction costs had ballooned to 484,657.15 RM, an overrun of 134,657.15 RM, or over 38 percent! Needing to explain such a massive overrun, the parish council quickly defended its decision-making:

»The overrun is caused by the fact that, during construction, improvements, embellishments, and enlargements (sacristy, organ, bells) have been undertaken – partly at the suggestion of Dr. Steinberg and partly at the wish of the parish. In

72 Finance department of the Prussian Superior Church Council to the finance department of the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory, 26 February 1936, EZA 14/6604.
73 Finance department of the Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory to the Mariendorf Parish Council, 10 March 1936, EZA 14/6604.
every case, these have been decided upon by the building committee and the parish council. The overrun is therefore a conscious and deliberate one. The parish council has approved the entire overrun in its 27 May 1938 meeting.«\textsuperscript{75}

Much of the overrun was spent on the decorative aspects of the church which embody the synthesis of Nazi and Christian symbolism. For instance, the interior use of ceramic tile was estimated at 42,600 RM, but with the addition of the decorative tiles employed, the total came to 53,025.71 RM. Furnishings were supposed to cost 24,800 RM, but with the extravagantly carved pulpit, altar, crucifix, baptismal font, and Walcker organ, the actual total was almost double the estimate: 46,675.18 RM.\textsuperscript{76}

**Conclusion**

I have argued that the Martin Luther Memorial Church was not the product of German Christian church-political pressure, that it was supported by and a reflection of the National Socialist Party and state, and that it was the product of a collaborative and largely local decision-making process. In the details of this church-building process we see a snapshot of the cultural milieu of Protestant Berlin between 1933 and 1935. It is surely not the only snapshot, but it suggests that whatever the politics of the »German Church Struggle,« Mariendorf Protestants from across the church-political spectrum had no qualms about partnering with the new Nazi state. More importantly, throughout the design, construction, and celebration of their new parish church, they strove for a symbiotic and symbolic fusion of their Christian faith and their National Socialist politics. There is no evidence of any hostility on the side of the Nazi Party and state or of any crisis of conscience or conflict of principles on the side of Mariendorf church leaders. What stands out is how smoothly everything unfolded.

Indeed, the high volume of church-building in the Third Reich and the specific case of the Martin Luther Memorial Church do not support the notion that the Nazi regime was fundamentally and unwaveringly hostile towards Christianity and its churches, but rather suggest a regime which could find common ground with the Christian churches in a metaphor of rebirth – one that was open, at least from 1933 to 1935, to partnering with churches in the Nazi ›renewal‹ of Germany.

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\textsuperscript{75} Letter from the Mariendorf Parish Council to Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory, 31 May 1938, ELAB 1 10 12/409.

\textsuperscript{76} Final accounting, ELAB 1 10 12/409.