**1. What was the Relationship between the Nazi Party and the Church?**

• Hitler wanted to replace Christianity (which he regarded as a “religious Versailles”) with Nazism.

• The church had mixed attitudes towards Hitler. He was considered as a lesser of two evils for Communism was based on Atheism.

• Hitler was not sure what his policy towards the Christian Church should be. He had two options:

**Use them!**

• It was unlikely that Hitler could simply destroy the Churches in the short term.

• The Churches shared many common ideas of the Nazis, e.g.

* Importance of family life
* Anti-communism
* Anti-Semitism
* Nationalism (in 1936 priests accompanied troops as they entered the Rhineland).

**Destroy them!**

• Christianity was an alternative belief system to that of Nazism and promoted pacifism and non-materialism.

• This made highly irritating to a regime which placed so much emphasis on expansion, wealth, conflict and aggression

Hitler’s conclusion was that he would exploit then destroy them. He talked of “positive Christianity” and aimed to gain control and support of the Churches through agreements, then gradually undermine their powers.

**2. What did Hitler do to the Church?**

**A. Catholic Church**

• Key point: 22 million members. An international Church.

• **1933**: Hitler signed an agreement (**Concordat**) with the Catholic Church – Hitler agreed to leave the Catholics alone if the Pope kept out of German politics: the Catholic Church viewed the Nazis as a barrier to the spread of communism.

• **1937**: Hitler started a concerted attack on the Catholic Church (arresting 200 priests on charges of financial and sexual impropriety[[1]](#footnote-1)). Pope Pius XI issued a Papal Bull (declaration) entitled "Mit brennender Sorge" ("**With burning anxiety**") over what was going on in Germany. Despite this, there was never a total clampdown on the Catholic Church in Germany. It was a world-wide movement with much international support.

**B. Protestant Church**

• Key Point: 40 million members, 28 state churches, mainly Lutheran and Calvinist. Therefore more divided than Catholics.

1. Hitler creates a **Reich Church** – an umbrella organisation of all 28 Churches.

2. Within this, Hitler gives his support to the "**German Christians**", who believed that pastors should take an oath of loyalty to Hitler and that any member of the church who had Jewish ancestry should be sacked. Their leader, Ludwig Muller, was given the title of "Reich Bishop" in 1933. Their slogan was “The swastika on our breasts and the cross in our hearts”.

3. Those who opposed Müller (and wished to maintain Protestant religious autonomy of practice and belief) broke away from the Reich Church to form the "**Confessional Church**" in September 1933. By the time it was banned in 1935 it had over 5000 clergy. It was led by Martin Niemöller, who was sent to a concentration camp for 7 years where he was kept in solitary confinement – despite the fact that he had been a heroic U-Boat commander in World War One. Many other Confessional Church members suffered the same fate.

**C. Pagan Movement**

• Hitler then set up the “**German Faith Movement**” as an alternative to Christianity. This used the swastika rather than the Christian cross as its symbol. The Bible was replaced by "Mein Kampf" which was placed on the altar along with a sword. Only invited Nazis were allowed to give sermons in a Reich Church.

• Over the course of the next few years the Churches came increasingly under attack, so that by 1939 all RE lessons and Church schools had been abolished; however, although this suggests that Hitler had been successful in controlling the Church, in practice the laws were difficult to enforce and many Nazis remained Christian themselves!

**4. How did the Church Respond (React) to the Nazi State?**

Fill in this table using any sources available to you. Print it off when you have finished.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Catholic** | **Protestant** | **Pagan** |
|  | **Catholic Church** | **Reich Church** | **German Christians** | **Confessional Church** | **German Faith Movement** |
| **Key details, characteristics, people:** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **1. What Hitler did** |
| (a) Conciliatory approach |  |  |  |  |
| (b) Hostile approach |  |  |  |
| **2. Reaction of Church** |
| (a) Co-operation with the regime |  |  |  |  |  |
| (b) Opposition to the regime |  |  |  |  |
| **3. Assessment** |
| Success for Hitler? |  |  |  |  |  |
| Failure for Hitler? |  |  |  |  |  |

1. Attacks on Church schools meant that amount of kids at Church schools fell from 65% to 5% between 1935-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)