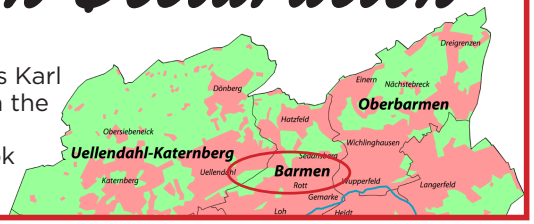
OCTOBER 25: REFORMATION SUNDAY

The Barmen Declaration

The Theological Declaration of Barmen, drafted by theologians Karl Barth and Hans Asmussen, is in the Book of Confessions—one of only three additions to the book made in the 20th century.



In 1934, representatives of Germany's Protestant churches gathered in Wupperthal, Barmen, and wrote a letter to the German people on the unity of the church and its freedom in Jesus Christ. We remember this modest text because of its situation—it accused the official church of Nazi Germany, the Reichskirche, of error.

Antisemitic and nationalistic sentiments inside German Christendom had been stoked during the period of celebration in 1917 of the 400th anniversary of Luther's Theses. By 1933, a movement of Protestants called *Deutsche Christen*, which sought to further align the churches with Nazi ideology, had taken control of Germany's pan-church assembly. The Theological Declaration Concerning the Present Situation of the German Church, without naming the Nazis, holds that the *Fuhrerprinzip* is incompatible with Christianity (Book of Confessions, 8.12), it avers that the Church does not orient itself based on "prevailing ideologies and political convictions" (8.18), and it says: "We reject the false doctrine, as though the State, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the Church's vocation as well" (8.23).



The banner representing Barmen was designed by the duo Avery and Marsh, better known for their musical theater and hymns. It shows the swastika struck through and the cross rising.

Few German Protestants opposed the Nazis. Only about 10 percent of German ministers were members of the Confessing Church. And the drafters made clear that Barmen was a theological document, not a political one. Wilhelm Niemöller—brother of Martin Niemöller, a Barmen drafter—wrote in 1956: "The confessing Church has never, neither during Hitler's reign nor afterwards, made a point of being understood as a 'resistance movement,' or as an 'opposition,' or as a 'front.' It wanted to witness the one Word in our world and time."

In preparing a new Book of Confessions for the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in 1965 and 1966, the General Assembly's Committee of Fifteen selected Barmen to represent modern Christendom.

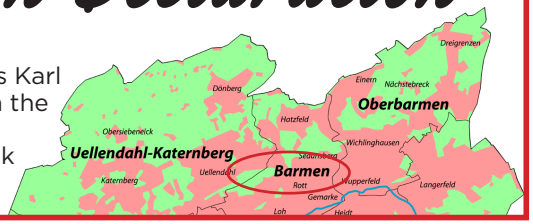
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