The Churches in Nazi Germany

The Nazis needed the support of the Churches

The Nazis saw the Churches as a threat - an alternative source of authority / alternative focus for loyalty

Since the Nazis could not afford to alienate the Churches, their policy was generally one of conciliation and compromise

The Churches also shared some beliefs with the Nazis e.g. belief in importance of family life / anti abortion / anti contraceptives / anti communist / belief in social order. Catholic Bishop Burger: "The aims of the Reich government have long been the same as those of the Catholic Church"

The Catholic Church was guaranteed religious freedom and the right to conduct its affairs without interference from the state e.g. could continue to make its own appointments without political interference

The Church continued to have a role in education e.g. church schools

In return, the Pope promised to stay out of German politics

The Concordat had the effect of undermining support for the Centre Party

It quickly became obvious that Hitler had no intention of respecting the Concordat

They adopted Nazi-style uniform, salutes and marches. Their slogan was 'The Swastika on our breasts and the cross in our hearts'

One of the leaders of the Confessional Church was Pastor Martin Niemoller. He was arrested by the Nazis in 1937 and sent to Dachau concentration camp (he survived the war)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a leading member of the Confessional Church. During the war he joined the resistance against the Nazis. He was arrested in 1943 and later executed

In all, some 800 pastors were arrested and many were sent to camps

The Confessional Church opposed the regime's attacks on religion, but remained silent about the persecution of Jews

Conclusion: Overall, the Nazi were unsuccessful in their aim of destroying religion. However, they were able to reduce the influence of the Churches over people, and weakened them as a source of resistance to Nazi policies. Although a number of individual priests and pastors spoke out against aspects of the regime, the Churches were more concerned about ensuring their own survival

Roughly 1/3 Germans were Catholic / 2/3 Protestant. The Protestant Church had more members than any other organisation in Germany, including the Nazi Party

The Nazis tried to bring the Churches in Germany under their control

Typical questions

What impact did Nazi rule have on Germany Churches?

How successful were Nazi policies towards the German Churches?