

Hitler and Christianity

ALUMNI PRIZE ESSAY

read by

Charles McQuaid

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We are living in an age in which history is being continuously made. In the brief period of a third of a century the maps of three continents have been changed. The dawn of the century brought with it the struggle in South Africa. In the wake of the Great War we find a new Central Europe and the formation of a Soviet State. Still more recent was the expansion of Japan at the expense of China. With the past year came the destruction of an ancient empire, that of Ethiopia. Even now, we read daily of another conflict, the contest which is being carried on in Spain. Its result time alone will unfold. There is, however, another battle being waged. Censored presses have kept the outside public almost completely unaware of its existence. Yet, in one sense, it is even far more important than those which we, ourselves, have witnessed. This is the struggle between the legalized forces of Hitler and the staunch faith of the German Christians.

Germany has been the seat of much religious strife. After her conversion to Christianity by St. Boniface, Germany enjoyed some ten centuries of religious peace. During this time was built up a strong living faith which was to help the nation through future difficulties. The great break came when Martin Luther proclaimed his doctrines and found himself the heart of the Protestant Revolt. A hundred years after Luther's separation from the Church the world saw the outbreak of the Thirty Years War in which Luthereans and Catholics were arrayed on opposing sides. In the nineteenth century the most prominent struggle was that of the 10 year Kulturkampf. The main issue involved was the control of educational and ecclesiastical appointments. While the Church defended her right to assign the offices, Bismarck, in the name of the German government, maintained that it lay within his jurisdiction. In view of these troubles, the need was seen of a new Christian Party for the purpose of confirming the co-operation of Catholicism with the national will.

New religious parties have been formed in Germany, but not, however, along the lines of the projected one. Quite on the contrary, two main anti-Christian bodies have sprung into being. The more radical of these is the German Faith Movement, definitely pagan faction. It has for its aim the abolition of Christian belief and worship. Its followers raise the Nordic man up to almost deific heights. He is to be guarded from all non-Nordic, and consequently "injurious" influences. A non-Nordic religion cannot be acceptable to the Nordic man. He must have one founded on Nordic principles, with Nordic rites and a Nordic god.

The second of these two institutions is the German People's Church Movement. While it is less radical than the former, it rejects dogma, sacrament, and priest. Its teaching is the so-called positive Christianity. This is in opposition to the now-existing form of what they call the negative Christianity of self denial and self repression. Theirs is a teaching of personal freedom and self expression, unrestricted by universal or compulsory beliefs. They have rejected the Old Testament as unfounded and unnecessary. They have re-written the New Testament to suit their own views. It is no longer the uttered word of the Almighty, but rather a constitutional document, drawn up by human hands to govern their man-made society.

Hitler's boast of Christian advance is based on his newly founded religion, the German National Church. His conception of Christianity is that it is an "other-world" religion, which was forced on the Nordic race by Jewish terrorism. When it is believed in, it helps to stabilize existence and stiffen national resistance, as was witnessed by the brotherhood of the trenches. On no account may it interfere with the conditions of this world. Should present Christianity not conform to the views of Hitler, it must be put aside or transformed.

The new "Christian" church which Der Fuhrer and his aides have brought into being is a compromise between the German Faith Movement and the German People's Church Movement. Its teaching is definitely a positive one. The Nordic people are the new chosen race, and their Christ is modeled after the Nordic man. He is not one of suffering and forgiveness, but rather the Christ beating the money changers from the Temple, a stern and avenging judge. The object of this new religion, as given by Rosen-

burg on the establishment of the German National Church, "is . . . to create a feeling of one's own high value; to segregate those who . . . have won for themselves a deep inward confidence of their own nature, who have fought successfully for a heroic conception of life." This explanation, strongly, although not officially is supported by Hitler himself. The aim of the society is the overthrow of Christian world-citizenship. It is meant for Nordics alone. All others must step aside while the glorified man marches onward. The condition of membership is that the candidate recognize the values which have been shown forth in German dramatic art, reaching its highest level in Eckhart, a mystic of the 14th century.

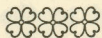
The German Reich is very far-sighted in regard to the future membership of its religious project. The Hitler Youth Society, a vast organization made up of young Germans of the Nazi party, which embraces the majority of the German people, is thoroughly educated in the ways of the new and nationalistic policies of the Fatherland. To obtain an appointment in any department of the civil service one must be a member in good standing of the Hitler Youth Association. The government press, too, has played its part in the education of the people. With its own propaganda, and the censorship of opposition presses, the public is kept unaware of what is really happening.

Although such a state of affairs might be called Christian, in reality it is not so. Christianity, by definition, is the religion based on the teachings and doctrines of Christ, founded on Scripture and Tradition. The religion of the new Germany has bluntly rejected this. With the Old Testament cast aside, and the New re-written, their idol is built upon feet of clay. The object of their society is to raise the Nordic man almost to the heights of the Deity which they have renounced. Their aim is contrary and destructive to true Christian spirit. This, then, cannot be called Christianity, but must be faced in its true light as a pagan revival. It is a paganism such as was never before witnessed. Hitler and his followers have abandoned the God in Whose friendship they were born, turned apostate to their faith, and forced others to accompany them in the worship of their Belial.

The doctrines of Hitler are nationalism in its most extreme form, a nationalism which makes religion absolutely dependent upon the State. But nationalism and re-

ligion are not incompatible, and Der Fuhrer was well aware of this fact when the State, under his control, and the Church first came into conflict. Cardinal Faulhaber, Archbishop of Munich, had laid down a plan by which the two might exist peacefully in the same state. An effort may be made to keep the national characteristics pure and unadulterated under the following conditions: First, that the love of one's country should not lead to the hatred of others. Second, that the individual should never consider himself freed from the obligation of nourishing his own soul by persevering in the means of grace the Church provides. And last, that race culture should not assume a hostile attitude towards Christianity. All these conditions Hitler ignored, a proof of his disregard for true Christianity.

The Churches have not taken all these rebuffs unchallenged, but, insofar as they have been able, have fought back in an effort to preserve their very existence. They are waging a continual campaign in spite of the disadvantages at which the government has placed them. They may not appeal to the public through the public press, and ecclesiastical presses are greatly restricted. Letters from the pulpit are treated as treason; yet this bloodless battle goes on. The Catholic Church is not the least of those engaged in the struggle. To show her disapproval of government tactics she has laid down regulations to govern any intercourse between the two. The chief and most pointed of these is that no Catholic may join the Hitler Youth Party under pain of exclusion from the Sacraments. Nothing can be plainer than this. It is a case of either willingness to suffer for the Faith, or apostasy. There can be no compromise. Hitler's protege, National Socialist Christianity, is not the Christianity of Christ, and "what concord hath Christ with Belial?"



O, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day !

—*Shakespeare.*

But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower, its bloom is dead.

—*Burns.*