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PROTESTANTISM, ROMAN CATHOLICISM, AND THE THIRD REICH

1933—1939

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Who serves Hitler serves Germany;
Who serves Germany serves God.
—Baldur von Schirach

We worship strange gods: that is
our misfortune.
—Paul De Lagarde

CHAPTER I Prologue: the Background of the Struggle

Amid the nations of the West, Germany stands out still as the great enigma, of all lands the most puzzling to those who attempt to fathom her history or to comprehend her people. Germany, the last nation to achieve hegemony in Europe--and the one to lose it most rapidly. Bismarck forged his empire of Blood and Iron for William I only for it soon to crumble before the juggernaut of the first great world cataclysm. Weimar, "the most democratic of republics," was imposed by Versailles upon an unwilling populace--but it was all fantasy. The German people never referred to their new government as a republic--it was merely called "the State". But the story of their grievances and claims of back-stabbing are too familiar to merit repetition here; suffice it to say that the methodical building with Blut und Eisen soon was supplanted by the cry of Blut und Boden as the Third Reich assumed its position among the community of apprehensive European states. And yet strangely enough, this first practical experiment by the theorists of National Socialism was the only system of government in Germany ever created by virtually unanimous German initiative. The empire of the Hohenzollerns had been created by the diplomacy and armies of victorious Prussia and the Weimar republic by the victories of the allies, but the third empire emerged entirely from German minds and German impulse. As much as the barbarism of National Socialism was disliked by many classes, it was essential for the attainment of their purposes; if Germany was to destroy Versailles, she had to organize for war,

and she could do this only on a totalitarian foundation. Germany, perhaps the most industrious and ingenious yet the most self-pitying and selfish of European nations, had once again asserted herself. Hopes were high and aspirations leaped as the new Chancellor stood beside the aged von Hindenburg and cried out to his people:

Hold your heads high and proudly once more! You are no longer enslaved and in bondage, but you are free again and can justly say: We are all proud that through God's powerful aid we have become once more true Germans.¹

And indeed, as Adolf Hitler uttered these words he sincerely believed in his own divine direction and in the National Socialist Party as the instrument of God. Ironically enough, his was an attitude similar to that of the Old Testament Hebrew prophets whom he decried with such vehemence; as Israel had felt itself an instrument in the hands of Yahweh, setting an example of leadership for the rest of mankind, so Hitler considered his party and his country chosen by a Germanic god to conquer and rule the other nations of the earth.

To be sure, the National Socialist ideology was clearly a new religion, or perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that it was a very ancient religion refurbished with modern garb and symbolism. It was in a sense a totemism which placed obedience to "the leader" in the position of a religious dogma rather than a device of pragmatic politics. The victory and unification of the

¹ Norman H. Baynes (ed.), Hitler's Speeches, p. 409.

nation was to be a religious absolute and all those who opposed for any reason whatever were considered apostates as well as traitors. Certainly, for orthodox Christians who read Mein Kampf and the twenty-five point program of the newly formed National Social German Workers Party promulgated in February 1920, at Munich, there did exist consolation. Both of these would-be scriptures were most prudent and ambiguous in the realm of the Christian religion. After all, Hitler in Mein Kampf did write that:

...the foundation or destruction of a religion is essentially a harder task than the foundation or destruction of a State, not to speak of a Party. To a political leader the religious doctrines and institutions of his people should ever be inviolable.

And the twenty-fourth point of the Party Program asserted with determination that:

We demand the freedom of all religions in the state in so far as they do not endanger its welfare or defend against the morals and sense of decency of the German race. The Party as such represents the standpoint of a positive Christianity without binding itself to a particular belief.

But what precisely was meant by the phrase "positive Christianity?" Indeed, these were to be the key words which were to be given over to innumerable interpretations and to become the basis for the new brand of Germanic Christianity which was soon to establish itself as the official orthodoxy of the new Reich. Exactly how this concept was interpreted by Hitler, by Alfred Rosenberg, and by the various and hostile religious camps which were to emerge in Germany as the Church controversy continued will be treated in later chapters.

But what was the background upon which these new religious ideologies were introduced? What was the reaction of the German

Protestant in this, the land of Luther, and what was the position taken by the Church of Rome in this, the former territory of the Holy Roman Empire? Which, if either, of these two divisions of Christianity yielded the most and which held out the most tenaciously? In 1934, Professor Albert Einstein remarked that he had long expected some learned society or group of scholars to offer united resistance to the grandiose claims of the new German state, and that his surprise was great when a church he regarded as moribund accomplished what science and secular culture seemed incapable of accomplishing.¹ This indeed was the general reaction among the nations of the West; the Luthern Church particularly was considered an institution of little or divided influence among the German people, and the Catholics were thought of as a coherent but weakened minority who had allowed their Center Party to be disbanded at the will of the Nazis. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that the claims of one religion can be opposed only by another religion; the cool skepticism of German scholarship may well have expressed a negative attitude toward the position of a national and racial faith, but mere negativism is completely powerless unless some other devotion can be placed into competition with the new loyalty.

If the religious conflict of modern Europe had to be divided into three categories of religious loyalty, those three would most certainly be Christianity, communism, and nationalism; National Socialism was the very embodiment of the last of these. It was to offer lip-service to Christianity in order to gain any ally against

¹ Reinhold Niebahr, "The Churches in Germany" American Scholar, p. 344.

the common enemy of bolshevism. However, this was to be only a temporary phenomenon, for each of these three is devoted to an ultimate value which demands the entire and uncompromising allegiance of its devotees. National Socialism could not long survive in peaceful coexistence with either of these other two religions--its very nature is contrary to their precepts. The very fact that these other two are "religions" capable of inciting the whole person to great loyalty made them the mortal enemies of the Nazi creed. But at least the advocates of communism have been more frank in their attitude toward classical Christianity; communism possesses a value more universal than nationalism--the ideal of a classless world. This universal allows them blatantly to seek the destruction of Christianity rather than its prostitution. On the other hand, National Socialism found it necessary to prostitute the existing religion because their doctrine of race and blood fell far short of universal dimensions. However, even though they tacitly allowed the Christian religion to share the devotion of their followers, it could not be a lasting thing. To be sure, the very form of Christianity which they were compelled to tolerate had to be one which confirmed their doctrines of Volk und Blut. Thus there would necessarily be discrepancy among the adherents of Nazism over the degree to which the existing Christian faith conformed to their desires. It was this variance in views of how radical or how moderate the alterations in the orthodox faith ought to be that occasioned such disunity among the German people--greater and more uncontrollable disunity than in any other area under the otherwise rigid totality of Nazi control.

What really happened in the Churches of Germany was a process of purification, a separation of the sheep from the goats, so to speak. That part of the church which had long ago covertly given allegiance to non-Christian ideals now under crisis openly admitted their prostitution of Christian values. It was this group which established the "German Christian" communion, consciously corrupting Christian dogma and formulating a type of bastard Christianity in which the mysticism of blood and race was mingled with the old religion which for them still symbolized an absolute of universal proportions. Immediately this compromise attempt came under attack from two sides, from the advocates of a newer and purer paganism and from those who upheld the tenets of orthodox Christianity. The devotees of the new paganism, probably most accurately symbolized by the person of Dr. Alfred Rosenberg and his Mythus des XX Jahrhunderts wished to reject classical Christianity in its entirety because its universal tendencies raised too many questions about their own religion of race, blood, and mysticism. The other enemies of the German Christians were the advocates of orthodoxy, both Protestant and Catholics, who considered the compromise Christians as apostates from true Christian principles. If Rosenberg best symbolized the new paganism, Hitler was the most prominent representative of the German Christians, and a certain Pastor Niemöller was soon to become the most significant leader of the orthodox, or "Confessional" Church.

But it is not all this simple; there were many smaller schisms within these major divisions with a constant interplay between them. Within the general category of these compromise Christians

were actually two prominent organizations. The German Christians, to whom I have alluded, received official sanction. It was this group who most desired to achieve the "positive" Christianity of the Nazi program. This group was founded on June 6, 1932, and soon introduced the Führerprinzip into the Church and most closely imitated the organization of the Nazi Party. For them, positive Christianity confesses Christ, "in the German form," complying with the "Heroic" piety of Luther. The other group in this category was the German Faith Movement which espoused a more candidly pantheistic doctrine and which drew its inspiration primarily from the mysticism of Nietzsche and the racism of Chamberlain and Gobineau. It opposed what it termed the "static" traditions of Christianity and wished to substitute a "dynamic" religion founded upon the idea of perpetual human progress adapted to a belief in Nordic supremacy. An impersonal deity was substituted for the old god worshiped by Jews, Catholics, and the old Luthern Orthodoxy. The followers of the German Faith Movement believed that Hitler had sprung from God in order to lead the German people, to reveal to them their real nature, and to present them with a new omniscient governing elite.¹ Thus it was that in the realm of German Protestantism Luther became a kind of Janus, simultaneously being a prophet of German mysticism and a disciple of the Judaizing St. Paul.

In addition to these divisions within predominantly Protestant Germany, German Catholicism remained in a category unto itself.

¹ Edmond Vermeil, Germany in the Twentieth Century, p. 166.

While Lutheranism has traditionally shunned political responsibility and power, the Roman Church in Germany has never relinquished its claim of the superiority of ecclesiastical dogma over the political policies of the secular power. In addition, the Catholic church was a strong and influential political power in the German states until the advent of National Socialism. Its political tendencies, as exemplified by its Center Party, on the whole tended along the line of left wing liberalism and were usually controlled with great astuteness. German Catholicism was at the time, and perhaps still is, the most enlightened Catholicism in the world; it possesses political sagacity in addition to the ancient tradition of the Church which denies any temporal state the right to consider itself absolute. Hitler, himself a nominal Catholic, recognized clearly this unyielding characteristic of the Roman hierarchy and was from the first more cautious in his dealings with that church than with the divided, and ostensibly weaker, Protestant churches.

But exactly what constituted this weakness and its consequent reactions within the Protestant sphere? It is this which should probably claim our most devoted attention; Protestantism has always played a most fateful role in the intellectual history of Germany. It lies at the foundation stones of many of what may be called the most characteristically German intellectual movements however much said movements ultimately disassociated themselves from their origin. And there is an additional reason which makes an analysis of Protestantism more particularly revealing; it was Protestantism which contributed more significantly to the crisis which finally

came to a climax with the advent of National Socialism. And yet, as I have before mentioned, it was this self-same Protestantism which greatly contributed to one of the strongest bastions of anti-Nazi sentiment and opposition.¹ Thus, to reiterate, German Protestantism cannot be simply classified either with the pro-Nazi or the anti-Nazi forces. It was both.

The Luthern church, in distinction to either Catholicism or Calvinism, has always disclaimed any criticism of the state; since the time of Luther, it has leaned heavily upon the assurance of St. Paul that the state was an "ordinance of God." This political realism has been more cynically compared to the political doctrines of Thomas Hobbes,² and to be sure, there is much truth in this accusation and in the additional fact that Lutheranism has never been financially autonomous, depending always for its support upon the State. But there is more depth to the problem than this; there must be something in the more immediate pre-Nazi history of the Luthern Church to explain its actions when that crisis did arrive. Perhaps it would be most appropriate to begin by explaining that the Luthern church has always, even under the Weimar regime, been an "established" church. It is indeed true that the Weimar constitution provided for a formal disestablishment of the German church, but in actuality, this had negligible effect upon the actual position of German Protestantism which has until this day retained all the sociological characteristics of establishment. In other words, though the

¹ Carl Mayer, "Crisis in German Protestantism," Social Research, p. 399.

² Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 348.

distance between church and state has been lengthened since the time of the Hohenzollerns, there has never been a distinct separation of the two. German Protestantism has remained built upon the foundation stone of a positive relationship between church and state.¹ This fact should be viewed in light of the previously mentioned acceptance by the German church of the political policies of the secular rulers. As the Augsburg Confession expresses it, the church is "the communion of Saints in which the Gospel is purely taught and the sacraments are rightly administered." Thus the church is conceived as essentially a spiritual order and cannot exercise any prerogative not contained in the spiritual power of the Scriptures. It is for this reason that it necessarily followed that the church, if it was to survive for any length of time as a social institution, had to be sustained by an outside power, the secular power of the state.

Because of its long history of establishment, the German Protestant Church has become primarily the church of the land; one belongs to the church in much the same way that he is a part of a family or a citizen of the state. To be sure, membership in the church has always been so much taken for granted that even groups actively hostile to it rarely sever their formal relationship. In the whole of Germany the number of individuals possessing no church affiliation has hardly ever been over 5 per cent of the total population; in contrast to the approximately 70 million non-church members in the United States, there were in 1945 only approximately

¹ Mayer, op. cit., p. 401.

2½ million in Germany.¹ But despite this large numerical membership, the German church was throughout the latter nineteenth century and continuing up until recent times been threatened with a stifling formalism which reduced all activity. Another important factor is that the German Church, though the "established" church of the nation, has also been a church of class rather than of the entire society. One portion of pre-Nazi society stood in a positive relationship to the church, the other portion, despite formal affiliation, was estranged or openly hostile to it. The social groups possessing this positive relationship to the church at the time of National Socialism's ascension to power consisted of the remnants of feudalism represented by the Junker class, the army and the bureaucracy, the peasantry, and finally the lower middle classes of minor trade and industry. The social alignment which had a negative relationship was, first, the intellectual elite, and secondly, the large masses of the industrial laboring class.² Thus it is obvious that the German church was successful in retaining the allegiance of a large section of society whose economic and political power remained great until the formation of the Weimar republic, and was considerable even until the advent of National Socialism. Thus it ought to be noted that if one of the distinguishing characteristics of German Catholicism is that it has retained the loyalty of all social strata, it was a primary feature of German Protestantism that it lost control of two social groups of fundamental importance--the intelligentsia and the industrial proletariat. Thus,

¹ Ibid., p. 406.

² Ibid., p. 409.

at the time of crisis in the early thirties, German Protestantism presented the picture of a church ostensibly strong in many ways, but weak and divided at its foundation.

How, then, would the German Church react to the onslaught of National Socialist ideology? From all that has been noted, it would most probably be supposed that this church, so ill prepared to offer resistance, would be an easy victim of Nazi tactics. In the light of its passive political attitude, its close alliance with the state, and its positive relationship to the classes from which National Socialism first obtained its heaviest support, it would appear likely that German Protestantism might even be favorably inclined toward the new movement. And to be sure, when National Socialism first established itself, it was met by the great majority of Protestant leaders and theologians with expressions of great enthusiasm. The "national revolution" had come, the rebirth of Germany for which both the state and the church ought to exhibit gratitude. Of course, this cordial attitude did not last long; German Protestantism rapidly divided itself into the several armed camps to which I have already alluded. The courses of action and policies of these several religious groups will later be covered along with the position taken by the Roman Church as the power of National Socialism increased throughout the decade of the thirties. Also necessary for a comprehensive study of this period will be an analysis of the attitude of National Socialism towards the free churches and other various Christian organizations of Germany. Of course, it is true that the free churches in 1933 constituted less than 600,000 members

as compared with the 41 million of the established churches; however as will be seen, these several independent denominations were to play an important role in the propaganda plans of the Nazi leaders.

By far the most important of the German church organizations were the various youth associations over which there developed such a struggle for control between the contending parties. It was largely the issue of these youth organizations with which the Concordat signed in 1933 between Berlin and Rome was concerned; of all the concomitant contests within the general church struggle, it was this fight for the control of the education of these future German citizens which precipitated the most bitterness. And indeed this was only logical, for each contesting group comprehended the vital necessity of controlling the education and religious instruction of the nation's youth. Friedrich Beck, one of the new state's educational theorists, understood all too well the advantages for National Socialism of acquiring the control of Germany's youth when he wrote that the supreme goal of National Socialist education was to make each individual an expression of the "eternal" German:

Whoever wishes fully to realize himself, whoever wishes to experience and embody the eternal German ideal within himself must lift his eyes from everyday life and must listen to the beat of his blood and his conscience....National Socialist education raises the eternal German character into the light of our consciousness....National Socialism is the eternal law of our German life; the development of the eternal German is the transcendental task of National Socialist education.¹

¹ University of Colorado, Readings on Fascism and National Socialism, p. 70.

CHAPTER II Hitler, Rosenberg, and Christianity

In order to better comprehend the nature of the events in the violent church struggle of the thirties, it is first necessary to understand the personal position taken by the leaders and theorists of the National Socialist movement. The most obvious individual in this regard is Adolf Hitler himself; National Socialism, being the totalitarian political philosophy which it is, would naturally be tremendously affected by the opinions and demands of the primary exponent of that philosophy once it was placed into practical application. Also of paramount importance would be the central theorist of that philosophy--in this case, Dr. Alfred Rosenberg. More than any other two men, Hitler and Rosenberg influenced the political, cultural, and religious foundation upon which the new Reich was established. The philosophies of subordinate Nazi theorists and doctrinaires should be observed also, but all of these ultimately reflect the basic tenets inaugurated by Hitler and Rosenberg. If Mein Kampf was the Bible of National Socialism, Rosenberg's Mythus des XX Jahrhunderts (Myth of the Twentieth Century) was its Talmud.

Hitler, as Edmond Vermeil has observed, filled the role of a seer inspired by a biological mystique. He dreamed of a new magical intuition which would reveal to man the meaning of the universe and of his mission on earth. Hitler sincerely believed in the rebirth of humanity brought about by the German race.¹ Wagner's Parsifal was his favorite musical composition, and its plot was representative

¹ Vermeil, op. cit., p. 145.

of his own destiny. Klingsor's castle was the home of all the sorcery from which National Socialism claimed to turn away. This sorcery was the German intellectualism which had gone astray. The Empire of the Holy Grail was Germany, but a Germany which had fallen into apathy because it had allowed itself to be corrupted by foreign influences. The redemptive secret which Parsifal guarded, and the victory he was to win over the forces of evil, were in a poetic form analogous to the tasks which Hitler desired to accomplish in his world. Hitler was in this sense a true mystic, but he was a mystic extremely capable in the realm of pragmatic political maneuvering. He could be just as subtle and prudent as he could be radical and fanatical when such actions suited the occasion. The religious question was one which dictated the most prudence imaginable on the part of Hitler.

The treatment of the religious issue in Mein Kampf merits careful consideration, for it was in this book that Hitler laid down his fundamental attitudes concerning the Christian Church. Hitler has been called, next to Winston Churchill, the greatest orator of the twentieth century; this love for things forensic is reflected again and again in the pages of Mein Kampf. Hitler recognized that it was the spoken word which had set in motion the majority of history's great avalanches, whether political or religious. Perhaps he had in mind the oral teachings of Christ when he advocated the use of oratory for the winning over of converts to the new faith. But Hitler also decried the approach which had been made by former speech-makers of earlier German nationalist movements. The great

mistake of the Pan-German movement in Austria had been that it attacked the Catholic Church. The Los von Rom movement had seemed to many, if successful, to promise a solution to the unfortunate religious division in Germany; it was believed that through such a victory the strength of the Empire could win tremendous profit. But Hitler objected to this movement; he continually condemned Pan-German leadership for giving the people two enemies when all blows should have been aimed at one. When two enemies were provided, the question would be raised as to whether all others are wrong and their own nation or their own movement is singularly correct.¹ Hitler felt that the Pan-German movement in Austria should have asked itself only one question: Is the maintenance of Austrian Deutschtum possible under Catholicism or not? If the answer to this question had been "Yes," the party ought not to have occupied itself with religious matters; but if the answer had been "No," then a religious reformation should have been initiated--and that was not the job of a political party.

Anyone who believes that one can attain a religious reformation through the roundabout method of a political party shows only that he has not the glimmering of an idea how religious conceptions are formed, much less of how dogmas are fashioned and of their effects in the life of the Church.²

Thus, it is possible to observe in these attitudes, based upon the failure of the Pan-German movement in Austria, the future theoretical tactics of the National Socialist Government. There is to

¹ William A. Jenks, Vienna and the Young Hitler, p. 110.

² Adolph Hitler, Mein Kampf, p. 109.

be no open, blatant attack upon the Roman Church; it was to be seen whether Deutschtum could not be maintained under the Catholic faith: hence the later promulgation of the Concordat. However, it should be noted that it is specifically the Catholic Church which Hitler has in mind and not the Protestant.

In the light of the later violent anti-Christian attitudes and propaganda of National Socialist devotees, it is really quite a refreshing contrast to study the pages of Mein Kampf. In this book Hitler compares the greatness of those individuals in history who placed before men high ideals with the transitory fame of scheming politicians; the higher the ideal, the more impossible becomes its fruition. Hitler maintained that it ought not to be by the accomplishment of his aims that the idealist should be judged, but rather by his influence upon the development of humanity. If it were otherwise, the founders of the world's religions would not be included among the great figures of history. The religion of love is in actuality only a pale reflection of the purposes of its founder; its true significance lies in the great principles it laid down and its ethical development.¹

In retrospect, much of what Hitler says in Mein Kampf strikes one as pure irony. Hitler goes on to say that human weaknesses must not blind us to the greatness of Christianity. He could almost be speaking of his own later Nazi hierarchy when he remarks that there undoubtedly have always been unscrupulous individuals who did not hesitate to make religion an instrument of their own political designs.

¹ Ibid., p. 182.

If, he observes, one compares the magnitude of the Christian Church with the average faultiness of man in general, one is compelled to admit that the proportion of good to evil is larger than any place else. Certainly, he writes, even among the priests of the church there are those for whom their sacred office is merely a means of personal aggrandizement; but for every such unworthy representative there are thousands of worthy pastors with loyal devotion to their calling.¹ It is interesting to note that sentiments such as these were never brought to the public's mind during such later anti-religious tactics as the immorality trials against the Catholic clergy in Germany.

Between 1933 and 1939 the attitude of the Nazi leaders continued to betray both hesitation and caution when they were concerned with the religious issue. They refrained from overt action as much as possible, preferring to discredit the churches gradually by nibbling away at them, and men like Goebbels presented Nazism to them as another religion which they had to accept.² During these years, the National Socialists subtly, but repeatedly, contrasted their "Positive Christianity" with what they termed the antiquated dogmas of the Christian Church. And yet Mein Kampf, the Nazi "Bible," had expressly declared the importance of retaining and protecting the dogmas of the church. Without dogmas, Hitler points out, the practical survival of a religious faith is unthinkable. The great masses of people are not composed of philosophers, and for these

¹ Hitler, op. cit., p. 108.

² Vermeil, op. cit., p. 195.

masses, faith is often the only basis for any moral outlook on the world. He believed that the numerous substitutes for such a faith had not proved so well adapted to their purpose as to allow men to regard them as taking the place of the former religious confessions. He apparently believed that what fundamental laws were for the state, dogmas were for religion. Thus, any attack against church dogmas was tantamount to an attack against the very legal foundations of the state, and just as such an attack could only end within the State in total anarchy, so an attack on religious dogma could only end in worthless religious nihilism.¹

It is also extremely interesting to observe the extent to which the Christian Church provided Hitler with models for the National Socialist Movement. He looked at the history of Christianity and observed how in its infancy it had refused to compromise, to come to terms with its enemies; its ultimate success had lain in the "remorseless, fanatical proclamation and championship of its own teaching."² Just as Christianity has succeeded with such tactics, so Hitler planned to replace this outmoded faith with a new one-- and he would utilize the same methods. In this Hitler had somewhat of a misconception of Christianity, or rather he looked only at those aspects of Christian history which appealed to his own proposed schemes. He looked only at the many instances of intolerance in the course of Christian development and assumed this was the sole cause of its fruitful results; he ignored the fact that it has been primarily the universality of Christianity which has secured so many

¹ Hitler, op. cit., pp. 225-226.

² Ibid., p. 294.

adherents for that faith. Assuming that the dominant characteristic of Christianity was intolerance, Hitler planned a counter-intolerance governed by the opinion that compulsion can only be broken with compulsion and terror with terror. Only then could the work of reconstruction be accomplished; only then could Hitler's own Weltanschauung prevail. Hitler believed, of course, his political concepts to be infallible and, as such, that they would triumph over all adversaries. As had happened in Christianity, each halt in the course to victory, each persecution which his movement would endure would only lead to an increase of its inner strength; in the final result, "Providence" would assure his Party's success. Thus, when this success did become fact in 1933, Hitler proclaimed:

I believe that Providence would never have allowed us to see the victory of the Movement if it had the intention after all to destroy us at the end.¹

Certainly a revealing quotation when seen in the light of actual events.

Hitler, great venerator of German history that he was, possessed considerable familiarity with the role which religion had played in the unfolding of Germany's chronicles. As he looked at this background, he became convinced that it was for the present at least, an error to embroil the nation in religious conflicts. This appears rather paradoxical considering later events, but when Hitler wrote Mein Kampf, he at least outwardly expressed every sign of desiring to placate the German churches rather than antagonize them with open hostility. Just how sincere the future Führer was in this position is open to conjecture, but the fact does remain that he continued

¹ Baynes, op. cit., p. 404.

this relatively conservative policy even after gaining undisputed power in the thirties. True, he stepped into the conflict on numerous occasions, but when doing so he remained relatively tactful. The speeches of Hitler, as frequent as they were, contain surprisingly little on the subject of Christianity or of the treatment of the Christian Churches by National Socialism. Most probably he was merely exercising diplomatic restraint, leaving the open attack to his subordinates. In any event, his approach was a far cry from that of Rosenberg, his trusted administrator of cultural affairs. Rosenberg's views will be more closely touched upon shortly; suffice it to say at this point that he represented an extremism ostensibly quite different from Hitler's position. However, it is difficult to imagine that Hitler would long have endured the radical schemes of Rosenberg if he did not fundamentally concur at least with their purpose. Exactly what the planner of the Munich Putsch truly believed on this issue will most probably never be adequately ascertained.

But to return to Hitler's treatment of religion in Mein Kampf: Reiterating his apparent belief that the Church ought not to be attacked, he asserted that nationalists in their "God-abandoned blindness",¹ were stirring up differences between the churches and thus giving the Marxists a wonderful opportunity to achieve their ends. This was a continual subject of Hitler's fears--that the people would be confronted with two enemies simultaneously and thus destroy the effectiveness of his Movement. He felt that religious

¹ Hitler, op. cit., p. 462.

sentiment was still too deeply seated in the German people and that it was the first duty of the leaders of National Socialism to oppose any attempt to make the Movement serve the interests of religious struggles. It could not be permitted that just any inexperienced member of the Party should imagine that he could accomplish what Bismarck failed to achieve:

In the ranks of our Movement the most loyal Catholic must be able to sit side by side with the most loyal Protestant without either of them having to suffer the smallest conflict of conscience with his religious convictions.¹

Hitler thus appeared convinced that the great struggle which they were waging in common against the destroyer of Aryan humanity had forced mutual respect upon both Protestant and Catholic.

If Hitler's views on this subject seem to differ from those of Rosenberg, he was in complete accord with the attitude of Gottfried Feder, one of the original formulators of the National Socialist Party Program to which I have before referred. Feder, like Hitler, firmly believed that Christianity should, at least for the time being, be left along by the members of the Movement. In his commentary Feder asserted that:

Expressions such as 'Christianity has done only harm' merely show that the man who utters them has neither human nor political intelligence.²

He goes on to say that even though all good Christians should disapprove of the cruelties practiced in the name of the Cross by such ecclesiastical institutions as the Inquisition, it was just as

¹ Hitler, op. cit., p. 289.

² Baynes, op. cit., p. 366.

erroneous to condemn the entire religion because of the perversities of a few. How much of his own religious philosophy Hitler derived from Feder is indeed difficult to ascertain, but it is certainly true that the two men reflect exceptionally similar views on the dangers manifest in an open attack upon the Church.

Mein Kampf contains no mention of Hitler's position on the specific question Church-State relationship. However, Charles Macfarland relates the Führer's answer to a question concerning this issue during a personal interview. Hitler answered in the following terms:

The State and the People are one and the same body. The German Church and the People are practically the same body. Therefore there could be no issue between Church and State. The Church, as such, has nothing to do with political affairs. On the other hand, the State has nothing to do with the faith or inner organization of the Church.¹

Yet, despite Hitler's usual prudence in the religious question in Mein Kampf, and in his public statements, he did indulge in numerous charges against the churches; these were practically all focused about the fact that German Christianity had ignored race and the purity of the blood of the nation. Both Christian confessions seemed unconcerned about the desecration and destruction of that noble being, Aryan man--that creation of God's grace toward Germany. Both churches continued to mutually annihilate one another rather than unite against the common enemy of Aryan man. There are, however, in this connection, two passages in the Nazi "Bible" which

¹ C. S. Macfarland, The New Church and the New Germany, p. 52.

portend the coming of future conflict over the churches. One is the statement that "political parties have nothing to do with religious questions so long as these do not...undermine the customs and morals of their own race."¹ The other is that foreign policy is merely a means to an end, and that the end is entirely the advancement of Germany's own national life. The single guiding principle is this: does a thing serve the interests of the people now or in the future? Before this test, "Considerations of party politics, of religion, of humanity...have no place whatever."² To be sure this is a blunt declaration of future Nazi policy.

ROSENBERG

In the course of his conversation with Otto Strasser on 21 May, 1930, Hitler repeated his standby arguments that all revolutions in the history of man are nothing at all save racial conflicts. "If you would only read Rosenberg's new book--the most tremendous achievement of its kind, even greater than Chamberlain's--then you would understand these things."³ In these words Hitler recommended to Strasser that he read Alfred Rosenberg's Myth of the Twentieth Century, a book written prior to 1925, but one which still in 1930 was relatively unknown. In 1933 this book jumped to the apex of the German best seller list--the year is significant; it is the year in which the theories and doctrines contained within this book were placed into practical operation. Despite the fact that Hitler and

¹ Hitler, op. cit., p. 109.

² Hitler, op. cit., p. 497.

³ Baynes, op. cit., p. 989.

Rosenberg were to separate in their attitudes toward a definite religion for the future Germany, the two men were of one accord in their basic opinions on race and blood.

Race, to Rosenberg, was the very image of the soul, and the creations of a race possess a value which is independent to all else. He believed that there is a spiritual-natural law which underlies the cultural decline of one hoch kultur nations such as Greece and Rome. The greatness of their culture was created from the unclouded peculiarity of their blood, and the decline of these civilizations began when their people were untrue to their own creative blood. Rosenberg believed that every race which attains its highest cultural level is then open to destruction or transformation through the influence of foreign blood and ideas. It is this, says Rosenberg, which has happened to modern man; thus it is the great task of the twentieth century to create a new type man from an entirely new mythus of life. This, then, is the message of his book--the proclamation that the arousing of the soul of a race to life is to recognize its highest values; it is race alone which should assign their proper places to every other value in the state, in art, and in religion.¹

Of course it is obvious that such a philosophy forces Rosenberg into immediate conflict with orthodox Christian theology, Protestant and Catholic alike. In his attempt to defend his position, the author of the Mythus indulges in much more forthright opinions regarding Christianity; he does not intentionally evade the issue as

¹ Paul F. Douglass, God Among the Germans, p. 38.

does Hitler in Mein Kampf. Rosenberg condemns the attitude taken by Christian theologians who maintain that the evaluation of nations in terms of race constitutes un-Christian idolatry. And yet, argues Rosenberg, this worship of "Jewdom" has brought about the decay of modern culture and politics. Protestantism especially has proven itself incapable of fighting such decay because it idolizes Jews. It is this false "idolatry" which Rosenberg wishes to be cleansed:

All that the young generation wants is to see the great personality of the creator of Christendom in his own greatness without those falsifying additions which Jewish zealots like Matthew, materialistic rabbis like St. Paul, African jurists like Tertullian, and commentators such as St. Augustine who gave meaningless interpretations, have given us as unnecessary ballast for our minds.¹

All that young Germany desires, he feels, is simply to comprehend the world and Christendom through its own nature and to understand it through the media of Germanic values.

Rosenberg both lauds and condemns Luther; he praises him for his abolition of the exalted and exotic conception of the priesthood and for his "Germanization" of Christendom. Luther, according to Rosenberg, confronted the papacy with the idea of political nationalism, thus leading the revolt of the German people in their quest for freedom and national self-expression. This revolt of Luther prepared the way for what in the twentieth century constituted the scientific and cultural superiority of Germany. However, in the religious realm, the Lutheran revolution was a manifest failure-- it halted at the halfway point and placed Jerusalem instead of Rome at the center of Christianity. Protestantism thus committed the

¹ Douglass, op. cit., p. 39.

great sin of transforming the Old Testament into a book of the people and then idolizing its Jewish letter. "The Old Testament must be done away with as a religious book" cried Rosenberg--or else humanity will never escape the attempt of the past thousand years to mold us spiritually into Jews.

Apparently, however, the Rosenberg's chief detestation was Roman Catholicism--"The Black International".¹ Continuing and elaborating upon the arguments of Nietzsche and Chamberlain, he accused the Roman Church most of all of corrupting the German people throughout the entirety of her history. Rome had always sought temporal as well as spiritual mastery, and thus had continually attempted to emphasize submissiveness and humility as the paramount traits of Christ; in such a manner the ideal of subordinating men to a serf-like position could be developed. St. Paul especially had "Judaized" primitive Christianity, diverting it from its otherwise natural course by placing it in the position of the true Aryan Christ, model of aggressive virtues, a poor and weakling Jew whom God had sent to earth as mediator. Rosenberg believed that the true Rome had been created by the Nordic spirit only to have been corrupted by the fatal mixing of races under later papal domination.

Rosenberg, in his analysis of the New Testament, again and again criticizes St. Paul as the true villain who has led Christianity astray. He maintains that it is the Gospel according to Mark which gives us a portrayal of the true Christ; Mark does not mention a Jesus who is the fulfillment of the Hebrew messianic ideas which

¹ Vermeil, op. cit., p. 165.

Paul and Matthew continually dwell upon. Thus, all of the churches which adhere to the Pauline doctrines are not truly Christian, but creations of the Jew, St. Paul. Jesus, to Rosenberg, was an heroic individual who led a life of glorious resistance--and because of this he had to die. But the Cross had come to symbolize for the Christian world nothing but submission, humiliation and defeat; this interpretation was complete anathema to Rosenberg. In a Nordic nation such as Germany, which placed honor at the center of its existence, such a substitution of humility and resignation in the place of honor could only have occurred in a civilization which had allowed itself to yield to the despicable Jewish theology.

The Christian ideal of love was given a new interpretation by Rosenberg. According to the author of the Mythus, the command to love one's neighbor must be unconditionally subordinated to the ideal of national integrity and honor. There must be, says Rosenberg,¹ an evaluation of the value of love, which will always stand in the service of other values. Rather than a love which leads eventually to subordination and submission, Rosenberg would substitute the formula: love for honor. It should always be remembered that Jesus gave his life as a Lord and not as a slave; Germans must always follow this example of leadership and superiority and never be obsequious or submissive.

But Rosenberg went even further than this revaluation of Christianity, and much further than Hitler in his ideas regarding a religion for the new Germany. Rosenberg appears to acclaim a new faith of the blood which will in reality completely replace the essentially

¹ Douglas, op. cit., p. 43.

non-German Christian religion:

A new faith is arising today: the myth of the blood, the faith to defend with the blood the divine essence of man. The faith, embodied in clearest knowledge, that the Nordic blood represents that Mysterium which has replaced and overcome the old sacraments.¹

The "old sacraments" are, of course, those of Christianity. Rosenberg's new religion is one which exalts the "Volk" above all else; "forms of the state change, and laws of the state pass away; the Volk remains." But exactly what did the National Socialist definition of "Volk" entail? Perhaps at this point an exposition of this tenet of the Nazi ideology would be appropriate.

Ernst Huber, in his book, Constitutional Law of the Greater German Reich,² writes that the new constitution of the German Reich is not at all a constitution in any formal sense of the term. It is a constitution which exists in the unwritten basic political structure of the Reich, and this structure rests on three basic concepts: the Volk, or people, the Führer, and the Party. Huber goes on to argue, with reference to this first concept, that the democracies of the world have developed their conception of the people from an erroneous approach. They begin with the concept of the state and then regard the people as constituting the elements which fall under the jurisdiction of the state. National Socialism, on the other hand, begins with the ideal of the Volk, which constitutes a political unity, and then constructs the state upon that foundation. The state

¹ University of Colorado, op. cit., p. 70.

² Ibid., p. 62.

is thus the form in which the people attain their historical reality. Gottfried Neese echoes this interpretation when he maintains that the central and fundamental principle of National Socialist political theory is the concept of the people:

In contrast to the state, the people form a true organism--a being which leads its own life and follows its own laws...This living unity of the people has its cells in its individual members, and just as in every body there are certain cells to perform certain tasks, this is likewise the case in the body of the people.¹

Neese goes on to explain that the "nation" is to the National Socialist merely a product of the interplay between the people and the state. The vitality of the people, through the organization of the state, realizes itself in the communal life of the nation. Neither individuals, as the age of enlightenment proclaimed, nor states, as in the system of dynastic absolutism, nor classes, as believed by Marxism, are the final realities of the political order. It is rather the peoples, "who stand over against one another with the unqualifiable right to a separate existence as natural entities, each with its own essential nature and form."²

Thus according to this philosophy, the ideal of Volk and race are placed in a superior position to the state and its forms. It is a philosophy which proclaims defense of the Volk a more important thing than the protection of any religious denomination; treason against the Volk is to be considered a more heinous crime than high treason against the state. Rosenberg was in complete accord with

¹ University of Colorado, op. cit., p. 65.

² Ibid., p. 67.

this concept, a concept which was incorporated in the fourth point of the Nazi Party Program:

Only those who are members of the nation can be citizens. Only those who are of German blood, without regard to religion, can be members of the German nation. No Jew can, therefore, be a member of the nation.¹

After their seizure of power, this very same principle was made the foundation of the German citizenship law promulgated in September, 1935.

Rosenberg, commenting upon the above quoted point of the Party Program in his pamphlet, Nature, Principles, and Aims of the N.S. D.A.P., observed that the idea of state nationality prevailing in the world was one which completely ignored the principle of race. According to the existing practice whoever possessed a German passport was considered a German even though the individual might not contain a drop of German blood in his veins. The new emphasis on the supremacy of the Volk must remedy this, for if Germany allowed a wholly foreign race to participate in the German Volk, then the purity of the organic expression would be polluted and the very existence of the Volk threatened.

All of these ideas, and many more, were encompassed within the racial mysticism of Alfred Rosenberg. This mysticism was to provide encouragement and tacit official sanction for the radical German Faith Movement, a movement popularly known as the "New Paganism". It was a movement which was rapidly to gain enough strength to justify its recognition as a religious faith claiming equality with

¹ Calvin B. Hoover, Germany Enters the Third Reich, p. 229.

the Roman Church and the Church of the Reformation, and possessing "equal rights and prerogatives in the universities (and) schools, in dealing with youth leaders, in the care of souls and the like."¹ It was a movement which was to give even the Führer several severe headaches.

Perhaps one more point ought to be made concerning the theories of Alfred Rosenberg; it is a point, however, which is applicable not only to Rosenberg, but one which was corollary to all Nazi thought. When the following statement was written in the Mythus, the author was reflecting the opinion of all National Socialism:

After throwing off the wornout idea upon which it was founded...the United States of North America has the great task...of setting out with youthful energy to put into force the new racial-state idea which a few awakened Americans have already foreseen.²

¹ Douglas, op. cit., p. 59.

² University of Colorado, op. cit., p. 73.

CHAPTER III Protestantism and the Third Reich

The caution with which Hitler treated the religious issue in Mein Kampf has already been observed; indeed, upon reading this book, one might even form the opinion that the author was a loyal supporter of Christianity. However, if one probes deeper into the pages of Hitler's verbose creation, he rapidly comes to a realization of the intensely anti-Christian, albeit "religious" tenets contained therein. When Hitler, in Mein Kampf, expounds his own "conception of the world", he should leave no doubt in anyone's mind about the singular religious devotion which was to be accorded National Socialism:

The conception of the world is not passive, it cannot be content with the role of one party among others, but claims imperiously its own total and exclusive recognition together with the total revaluing of public life as a whole in accordance with its own conceptions. This is why it could never endure, side by side with it, a representative of an "anterior" state. This applies also to religions.¹

Yet because of the shrewd ambiguity of Hitler's phraseology and the famous formula of "positive Christianity", many Protestants -- outside as well as in Germany--were from the first attracted to the Nazi movement. Positive Christianity was thought by many to be simply a more dynamic and vitalized progression of the Reformation church established by Luther. Alfred Rosenberg interpreted the term quite differently:

We realize nowadays that, belonging as they do to a negative Christianity, the central values of the Roman and Protestant churches do not correspond to our soul, that they prevent the full expansion of the organic forces of the peoples of Nordic race,

¹ Forell, Birger, The Third Reich, p. 812.

and that they must let themselves be reinterpreted in the direction of Germanic Christianity. It is in this that the religious efforts of today consist.¹

Thus it was really obvious from the first--to those discerning enough to see--that Rosenberg and the rest of the Party chiefs envisaged at the beginning the elimination of the Christian church from the life of the German people. They merely disguised this hostility with vague assertions until the situation was decided to be ripe for an open attack. In actuality, the conflict waged by the Nazi regime against the Protestant churches began in 1933 and did not terminate until the defeat of 1945; each phase in this warfare was to exhibit more and more ludicrously the true religious aims of National Socialism.

In order to best approach the conflict which was officially initiated by the Nazi government after its seizure of power in 1933, it would be beneficial to explain the situation in which the Protestant churches found themselves at that time of crisis. The economic turmoil which enveloped Germany between 1930 and 1933 had caused a tremendous increase in the membership of the Nazi Party; the Protestant concurrently suffered a great amount of disaffection within its ranks--much greater than was the case in the more rigidly controlled Roman Church. And yet in 1939 there was still in name over 45,000,000 Protestants in Germany; the vast majority of these belonged to twenty-eight churches, of which some were Reformed, and some Lutheran, and to the "Church of the Old Prussian Union," formed

¹ Ibid., p. 813.

in 1817.* This last named institution, composed of some 18,000,000, both Lutheran and Reformed, was the real touchstone within the German Protestant sphere. Thus, taking all this into account, it is obvious that on the eve of the Nazi coup the Protestants lacked the staunch leadership possessed by the Roman Church. This dearth of unified leadership was also coupled with the historical animosity between the several theological tendencies. The propaganda experts of National Socialism were soon to seize upon and exploit these dissensions; one of their favorite phrases was that of the "parsons' quarrel" which brought about nothing but harm for the German people. These same propaganda experts were also to exploit the minor Free Churches by setting them against the provincial churches. In reality, there existed a favorable milieu for propaganda which emphasized the disunity within the Protestant camp. The ideal of a unified Reich was more and more passionately sought with each new generation. At the time of Hitler's bid for power, this desire had reached most intense proportions--and the twenty-eight independent and often quarreling Protestant churches constituted just one more obstacle to the German ideal of a united Empire. Even before Hitler, there had been an undercurrent movement advocating renewal of a formal Protestant Church establishment; and when that last great upheaval of emotion pushed Hitler into power, it was but natural that there would be an accompanying upsurge of hope for a new Church reform.

*Excluding the relatively insignificant "Free Churches," German Protestantism constituted two major divisions--the Lutheran, and the Reformed, or Calvinist. It was from the ranks of both of these denominations that adherents were to be drawn for the new religious movements sanctioned by the Nazis (the German Christians and the German Faith Movement). However, it was also from both the Lutheran and Reformed Divisions that the Confessional Church was to be formed in opposition to the Nazi Religious policy.

It was to those who held these aspirations for a vitalized and unified church that the organization which was soon to be known as the German Christian Movement first made its appeal. There had been discussions within the National Socialist Party concerning relations with the Church for some time, but not until a meeting in Berlin in 1930 that the first concrete plans were made. This meeting was attended by two Hohenzollern princes, Eitel Friedrich and August Wilhelm, together with Dr. Joseph Goebbels and former Court Pastor Doering. Doering directed the conversation and read a paper by Pastor Friedrich Wieneke of the Cathedral at Soldin; Wieneke had come to the conclusion that the swastika could be united with the Cross of Christ--after all, he argued, the former was just as much a symbol of the will of God as the latter was of redemption.¹ Wieneke further believed that National Socialism was a call from God for a renewal of the Church as a genuine fellowship of faith for the German people. The real point, however, was that the Church must be utilized to underwrite the Nazi Movement; but even though the Party in the state and its sister movement in the Church should aim toward the selfsame goal, it was agreed that church and party affairs would, nevertheless, proceed separately. Hitler was soon informed of the movement and was told that it was to be an organization of "Evangelical Nationalists." The Führer, with his shrewd ability to coin names and slogans, suggested that they be called "German Christians," "because it is the soul of the people which must be born again."² Dr. Wieneke suggested

¹ Douglass, op. cit., p. 87.

² A. S. Duncan-Jones, The Struggle for Religious Freedom in Germany, p. 33.

the additional prefix, "Faith Movement," and so the organization which desired to revitalize the Church as the Party simultaneously revitalized the nation was thereafter known as the Faith Movement of German Christians.

However, it was not until June, 1932 that the Movement made its appearance as an active program; by this time the organization had been taken over by a certain Pastor Joachim Hossenfelder who was to lead the German Christian Church for the next year and a half. The character of Hossenfelder may be rapidly ascertained simply by quoting one statement he had made earlier: "Christian faith is an heroic, manly thing. God speaks in blood and Volk a more powerful language than he does in the idea of humanity." It was in this vein that Hossenfelder was to lead his Movement.

The real attack upon the Protestant churches began on 3 April, 1933, at the first Congress of German Christians held at Berlin. The delegates were convinced that the churches could never reform themselves in the right way; consequently reform must come from the outside. The Congress demanded the introduction of the Fuhrer-principle into the organization of the Church and full acceptance of the "Aryan Paragraph" which excluded non-Aryans from office.¹ In the words of the program laid down at that time, "The object of the Faith Movement of German Christians is one Evangelical German Church for the whole Reich. Adolph Hitler's State calls to the church. The Church has heard the call."²

¹ Baynes, op. cit., p. 350.

² Duncan-Jones, op. cit., p. 35.

Among those whom Pastor Hossenfelder had earlier called to serve on his staff was an Army Chaplain, Ludwig Müller. On 17 April of Hitler's first year in power, this same Chaplain Müller called upon the Führer to discuss the religious situation. After his interview, he reported that Hitler did not desire to begin a religious war and that thereafter Müller was to see to it that the religious struggle was to be carried on in the same subtle manner as the political revolution. It is from this point until his final disgrace that Müller was to act as Hitler's official representative in all phases of the religious controversies. Hitler's appointment of Müller to this as yet unofficial position exhibits the trust which he apparently held in the chaplain:

Inasmuch as the events of the last few days have made it necessary to take a stand in relation to a series of questions which concern the relation of the state to the Evangelical Church, I appoint as my representative with full powers to deal with the affairs of the Evangelical Church in so far as these questions pertain to it, Army Chaplain Müller of Königsberg. He has the special commission to promote all efforts directed towards the creation of our Evangelical German National Church.¹

And indeed, Chaplain Müller was to take every action which this prerogative allowed.

On 22 April, at about the same time Müller was being given full powers by Hitler, a certain Walter Bohm was appointed State Church Commissioner for the province of Mecklenburg-Schwerin; this forced appointment precipitated the first truly effective protest against the policy of the government. Bishop Rendtorff of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, in his letter of protest, summed up the tenor of many

¹ Baynes, op. cit., p. 350.

future objections:

Can the state government out of its own strength reinvigorate the life of the church?...and can the renewal of so fine and sensitive a body as the state church begin with an act of force?¹

As a result Bohm was recalled, however, in the future such acts of force were to become more and more frequent.

During this same month of April, the German Church Federation, under directives from Hitler, was authorized to carry through a reorganization of the constitution of the church. This reorganization was managed by Hermann Kapler, president of the Federation, together with Dr. Marahrens, the Lutheran Bishop of Hanover and Dr. Hesse, who represented the reformed section of the church. Hitler also appointed Müller to work along with them to see to it that his wishes were complied with. This group met at Loccum and drafted a manifesto which was issued on 20 May and soon approved by the Church Federation. This "Loccum Manifesto" called for a united German Evangelical Church, of which the various provincial churches would be the components. At its head would be a Reichsbishop, supported by a Spiritual Ministry which would assist him in the direction of the church. There would also be a National Synod, which would be composed of leading personalities in church life.

Thus far, then, agreement had been attained; but when the question of who should be appointed Reichsbishop came up for consideration, a violent controversy ensued. Müller, who had only recently been appointed "Protector" of the German Christians, naturally demanded that he receive the position of Reichsbishop. "The

¹ Douglass, op. cit., p. 183.

Reichsbishop must belong to the S.A. (Sturm Abtheilung) of Jesus Christ," he protested. From this standpoint, the entire object was to introduce the Führer principle into the structure of the Evangelical Church. This would place all control into the hands of one individual; and, of course, that individual must be someone who enjoyed the confidence of the Führer. Otherwise it would be impossible for the Church to be coordinated with the new Reich. However, this purpose was not in the minds of the representatives of the Church; to them the Führer principle ran counter to the entire Lutheran tradition and even more so to the ethos of the Reformed Church with its Calvinist origins. But just exactly what constituted this Führer Principle which the regime was attempting to foist upon the Church? Perhaps it would be appropriate to clarify the theory behind this tenet of National Socialism; if this principle is fully comprehended, it is not difficult to understand why it was feared so much by men associated with more individualistic institutions and environments.

I referred in Chapter II to Ernst Huber's assertion that the three basic concepts upon which the National Socialist State rests are the Volk, the Führer, and the Party. This second pillar of the Nazi establishment is, of course, the one from which the Führerprinzip, or Führer Principle, emanates. The Führer is conceived by the theorists of National Socialism as the infallible leader to whom his followers owe absolute obedience. This principle envisages state government controlled by a hierarchy of leaders, each of whom owes allegiance to his immediate superior but who is at the same time

absolute in his own specific category of jurisdiction. According to Huber's Constitutional Law of the Greater German Reich,¹ a distinction must be made between the supposed will of the people in a parliamentary state, which merely reflects the conflict of the various social interests, and the true will of people in the "Führer-state," in which the collective will of the real political unit is always manifested. Thus, the nature of the plebiscites which are conducted from time to time in a National Socialist state, Huber observes, ought not to be interpreted from a democratic viewpoint. Their purpose is not intended to give the people an occasion to decide an issue, but rather to allow them to express their unity behind a decision which the Führer, in his capacity as the bearer of the popular will, has already made.

According to this principle, the authority of the Führer is not to be limited by checks and controls or by special autonomous bodies; it is always to be free, independent, and unlimited. In theory, it exists for the welfare of the people and is thus free of all outward ties because it is in its inward nature firmly bound to the fate, welfare, and honor of the people. Hence there must be allowed no division of power within the Nazi state which would interfere with the freedom of action of the Führer; this same theory would naturally also be applicable to any churches within the jurisdiction of the state. Perhaps the Führer Principle obtained its most exaggerated expression in the words of Robert Ley, director of the party organization. From Ley's statements we may also quickly surmise the

¹ University of Colorado, op. cit., p. 74.

the direction in which the religious overtones given the Führer's position were ultimately leading. In 1935 Ley asserted that "Germany must obey like a well-trained soldier: the Führer, Adolph Hitler, is always right." But by 1942, his attitude had developed into a far more radical one, as evidenced by his own words when he cried out:

I am born a German and have, therefore, only one Holy Mission: work for my people....The National Socialist Party is Hitler, and Hitler is the party. The National Socialists believe in Hitler, who embodies their will. Therefore our conscience is clearly and exactly defined. Only what Adolf Hitler, our Fuhrer, commands, allows, or does not allow is our conscience. We have no understanding for him who hides behind an anonymous conscience, behind God, whom everybody conceives according to his own wishes.¹

Upon reading this, one is indeed reminded of holy scripture: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me, your Führer!" Or to put it in other words, the Führer Principle was in essence little more than a perversion of a Roman Catholic dogma; it was in reality nothing more than a substitution--a replacing of Papal infallibility with the infallibility of the Führer. When Adolf Hitler spoke ex cathedra, all of Germany must listen.

But to return to the controversy over the appointment of a Reichsbishop. In addition to confessional objection to the incorporation of the Führer Principle into the Church, they also expressed their personal dislike for Müller's audacious self-nomination. The choice then fell upon Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, director of numerous charitable organizations and a man universally respected for

¹ University of Colorado, op. cit., p. 79.

his high character and orthodox Christian beliefs. However neither this choice nor the spirit in which it was made appealed to the German Christians who were determined that the Reichsbishop must come from the inner ranks of the Nazi Movement. Müller declared that if Bodelschwingh were elected, a bitter fight would ensue. "I do not fear this conflict," he angrily asserted, "and I shall know how to fight till victory is won." His prophecy was soon to be fulfilled.

Immediately the German Christians began a campaign to demonstrate that the leaders of the churches were taking an action in opposition to the wishes of the National Socialist government. Telegrams of protest were sent to Kapler, Hitler, and von Hindenburg demanding the appointment of Müller as Reichsbishop. The controversy came to a climax when Dr. Rust, the Prussian Minister of Education, appointed a certain Dr. Jaeger as State Commissar for Church affairs in Prussia. Jaeger in turn nominated a number of sub-commissioners, thus practically usurping the entire administration of the Church out of the Church's hands. On this, Dr. Bodelschwingh retired from office. None of the General Superintendents of the Prussian Church had recognized Jaeger as a legally appointed official, but Jaeger was quick to exhibit his authority. He placed the Prussian Church under police supervision and dismissed numerous pastors as subversive. Among those dismissed was Dr. Otto Dibelius, a man even today well known to the western world for activities as Lutheran bishop in West Berlin. Dibelius replied to Jaeger that he would not allow his duties as priest to be taken from him by any state commissar. "They remain

my duties in the sight of God. I must and shall fulfill them-- certainly at this time at which true spiritual guidance is needed more than ever by the Church."¹ It was this kind of spirit which supplied the opposition with the strength it so badly needed; the spirit quickly spread. Apparently the opposition was more effective than had been imagined by the German Christians, for on 24 June von Hindenburg had an interview with Hitler and soon the newly appointed State Commissars were dismissed. At the same time Hitler placed Church affairs in the hands of Dr. Frick, Minister of the Interior.

Before continuing with this narrative of events in the Protestant Church struggle, it is important for one to comprehend the underlying significance of the Müller regime. The church envisaged by Hitler and the German Christians was not a State Church, since such an institution would be parallel to the State itself--and such things just could not be in the Third Reich. Rather, the Church was incorporated into the State. At its head was the Reichsbishop who exercised complete control over the church. True, he was to work through a Spiritual Ministry, but they were in actuality only subordinates who carried out his orders. He was to be advised by a National Synod, but this really possessed no power of initiative and was nothing more than an ecclesiastical Privy Council. The members of this Synod were not the representatives of parties, but were only outstanding church leaders who were allowed to give counsel only when the Reichsbishop desired it. Indeed, this arrangement established the monarchical principle in the church as it had never been done before in Germany; only now the divine right principle of

¹ Duncan-Jones, op. cit., p. 47.

absolutist monarchy had been renamed--it was now called the Führerprinzip of National Socialist Dictatorship.

On 28 June, Chaplain Müller announced that he had assumed the chairmanship of the German Church Federation, and by 7 July Jaeger had gone to the extent of appointing him head of the Church of the Old Prussian Union. Only one position remained to which the aspirations of Müller could aspire--the office of Reichsbishop. In order to "acclaim" someone for this position, it was necessary to elect a synod, even though its only function would be to answer affirmatively to what had already been accomplished by State action. To elect Müller, a large German Christian majority was necessary even though his only opponent was von Bodelschwingh. On the eve of the election of delegates to the Synod, even Hitler assisted by speaking on the radio, requesting the German people to support the German Christians. During the course of this address, the Führer made clearer than ever his own position on the religious issue:

National Socialism has always affirmed that it is determined to take the Christian Churches under the protection of the State. For their part the Churches cannot, for a second, doubt that they need the protection of the State...in consideration for this protection, the State must require from the Churches that they in their turn should render to it that support which it needs to secure its permanence. Churches which fail to render to the State any positive support in this sense are for the State just as worthless as is for a Church the State which is incapable of fulfilling its duties to the Church... Therefore the State cannot afford to be indifferent to the religious affairs of its day and neither can, on the other hand, the Churches be indifferent to "Volkic-political events and changes....The State has no interest in negotiating with twenty-five or thirty Churches....The powerful State can only wish to extend its protection to such religious organizations as can in their turn become of use to it.¹

¹ Baynes, op. cit., pp. 375-376.

The election resulted in a victory for the German Christians. However, before the Synod could meet to officially choose a Reichsbishop, Müller was also "acclaimed" as first bishop of Prussia and proceeded to alter the Prussian Church by the usual tactics of disallowing all future synods, establishing the Führer Principle, applying the "Aryan Paragraph" to all pastors, and expelling all political suspects from office. However, this elevation of Müller to the Prussian dignity occasioned one of the most momentous developments in the Protestant Church struggle. Just prior to the selection of Müller for his Prussian office, a relatively small party had been formed for the purpose of upholding the rights of the Church. This group, composed of both Lutheran and Reformed clergy, had desired to call itself "The Evangelical Church", but since that name had been forbidden, it adopted the title "Gospel and Church". One third of the members of the Prussian Synod at the time of Müller's appointment belonged to the "Gospel and Church" party. When Müller was chosen, this group withdrew because they were not allowed to read a protest against the methods employed at the Synod. It was this same "Gospel and Church" group which was destined to form the nucleus of the Confessional Church which was soon to establish itself as a firm defender of orthodox Christianity and mortal enemy of the German Christians.

On 21 September, the first German National Synod was convened at Wittenberg, where Luther had first nailed the 95 Theses to the door of the cathedral church. However on this occasion a quite different event occurred--Ludwig Müller was formally chosen by the Synod as Reichsbishop and immediately formed his Spiritual Ministry

which was charged with the task of re-codifying Church Law. This was ostensibly a great victory for the German Christians; certainly Müller felt triumphant when he proclaimed that "the political Church struggle is over, the struggle for the soul of the people now begins."¹ Little did he realize how true this statement was to be, for the Church soon was to experience a great revival of strength. Reichsbishop Müller soon found himself confronted with innumerable difficulties as he attempted to enforce his dictatorial regime -- a true turning point was soon to come. On 13 November, at one of the great German Christian demonstrations in the Berlin Sportpalast under the direction of Bishop Hossenfelder, Dr. Krause, a layman, created a sensation by a speech which rapidly brought discredit to the entire Müller administration. Krause called for the entire abandonment of the Old Testament, the revision of the New, and a complete re-writing of Protestant theology. Upon this, a storm broke over all of Germany and any previous semblance of dictated unity among the Churches was destroyed. Müller was soon forced to capitulate before the great upsurge of protest and Krause was removed from his office in the Movement. However by this time, the renewed controversy had caused the formation by a group of orthodox pastors of the Pfarrernotbund, or Pastors' Emergency League. This League, which contained a formidable membership of approximately 3,000 pastors, met on 18 November in Westphalia where they demanded the removal of the Reichsbishop from the German Christian movement. The next day they read from their pulpits a denunciation of the Church Government for its failure to defend the faith. As a result of all this, the

¹ Duncan-Jones, op. cit., p. 51.

position of the Reichsbishop was severely shaken, but he still retained power and continued to push forward his policy of forcing the Church into line with Party policy. His next step in this direction involved the Youth question.¹

The Youth struggle had really begun in June 1933 when Baldur von Schirach had taken over the leadership of the Nazi Youth Movement. Von Schirach had at first promised that the various organizations would retain their individuality, but within a month the whole of the Protestant Evangelical Youth was placed under the direction of Müller. Then on 19 December, Müller on his own responsibility handed over the entire Evangelical Youth under Erich Strange to von Schirach. According to the new arrangement, no one who was not a member of the Hitler Youth could participate in the Evangelical Youth and all sport and political education up to age eighteen was to be controlled by the Hitler Youth leaders. This was indeed a milestone in German Church-State relations. In one stroke, the Reichsbishop had done everything in his power to hand over the youth of the Church to the Party; it was one more successful step in the Nazi campaign for the possession of the minds and bodies of the German people.

The early months of 1934 were marked primarily by the rise of the free Synodical Movement. On 7 January the Emergency Pastors' League met at Halle and drew up a protest against the illegal actions of the Church since "the elections of last year brought a new leader into our Church."² Also as this protest was being read from the

¹ Douglass, op. cit., p. 144.

² Duncan-Jones, op. cit., p. 69.

pulpit, a new opposition movement was brought on the scene. It is probably most appropriate to refer to this new development as the synodical movement, since it consisted of local synods of clergy and laity who met to discuss the dangers which they felt menaced the church. This movement, which began in West Germany where the Reformed Church has always predominated, held its first synod on 3 January at Barmen; after attending a lecture by Karl Barth, they drew up a lengthy statement rejecting various errors which were undermining the Church. It was their assertion that the government of the church could not be controlled by an ecclesiastical "Führer," nor could the state coordinate the message of the church with itself. This example was soon followed by a "Free Evangelical Synod" in the Rhineland and a Berlin-Brandenburg Synod, both of which adopted the Barmen statement. Also a Synod meeting at Dortmund proclaimed itself the constitutional Church of Westphalia.

The months of April and May were pivotal ones. Of course, Müller all this time was continuing his devious path and attempting his best to incorporate other churches into the Reichskirche. However, on 22 April, three days after Dr. Jaeger had been appointed to Müller's Spiritual Ministry, the Confessional pastors met at Ulm and officially declared themselves to be the constitutional "Evangelical Church of Germany."* Then on 29 May the first Confessional Synod of the Evangelical Church of Germany assembled at Barmen. Steps

* This was the official title adopted by the Confessional Church Movement; in Germany, the term "Evangelical" is often used interchangeably with the word Protestant.

were taken here to organize what they hoped would be a virtually free church; their aim was to obtain recognition by the Nazi government as the genuine representative of the Protestant Church instead of the regime of Reichsbishop Müller. Created at this meeting of the Confessional Synod was an "inner" group called the "Council of Brethren" which came to be regarded by the opposition as the real government of the Church. This council was headed by Pastor Karl Koch, President of the Westphalia Synod, and included two bishops who were later to play a more significant role in the Church struggle-- Hans Meiser of Bavaria and Theophil Wurm of Württemberg. Berlin was represented on the Council by Pastor Martin Niemöller. Also at this meeting of the Synod, a six point confession was adopted which defined the attitude of the "legal Church" with regard to the totalitarian philosophy of the State; no philosophy other than Christian revelation should be regarded by a true Protestant as of more than secondary value--the Church could serve only one master and did not dare place its ceremonies and facilities at the disposal of any program but its own.¹

The events which occurred at the Barmen Synod indicated that Bavaria, Westphalia, and southwestern Germany had almost completely renounced any Church authority dictated by Müller. Yet despite this, when the Reichsbishop conferred with Hitler on 18 July, twenty-two of the twenty-eight regional Churches had been united under his authority; of course all of these contained considerable dissenting minorities who rejected the Müller administration. Among the churches yet to assimilated at all were those of Bavaria, Württemberg, and Baden.

¹ Douglass, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

In retaliation to all this opposition, Müller, on 9 August, convened a National Synod in Berlin which would consist only of loyal Nazis. Within three hours this submissive Synod sanctioned the taking of an oath of obedience to Adolf Hitler by all pastors, retroactively legalized all of Müller's acts since his election to office, and delegated all its legislative powers to the Reichsbishop.¹ The result was that loyalty to God was identified with loyalty to Hitler and the Lutheran and Reformed Churches officially ceased to exist in Germany; there was now legally only one Evangelical Church. In addition, this "National" Synod legalized the incorporation of the Churches of Hanover, Württemberg, and Bavaria; however, popular support of Bishops Meiser of Bavaria and Wurm of Württemberg caused those provinces to remain intact--the "Solid South" of German Lutheranism remained unincorporated in the Reichskirche.

On 23 September, Müller was officially installed as Reichsbishop amid Nazi pomp and ceremony in the cathedral of Berlin; "the altar was flanked with a combination of swastika banners and the cross banners of the German Christian Party."² That same morning a declaration of protest against Müller's elevation was read in all Confessional pulpits. The declaration asserted that the church struggle "involves the surrender of the fundamental authority of the Gospels of the Reformation" because of efforts to create a "Nordic-Christian hybrid religion."³ In October another strongly worded protest took place when the Confessional Synod met at Dahlem. It was

¹ E. T. Bachmann, "Protestantism in the Nazi State", Lutheran Church Quarterly, p. 9.

² New York Times, September 24, 1934, p. 1.

³ Ibid., p. 12.

announced that, in view of the fact that the Reichs Church Government had been destroyed, new organs of church administration had to be established. The Council of Brethren was called to take over the leadership of the German Evangelical Church, and a new council was drawn from this to manage business affairs of the church.

For a while now, it appeared that tension between the two opposing church divisions was going to be eased. The much-hated Jaeger resigned from his "church political functions" and Müller appointed a Council of Bishops to take over his duties. Then, on 30 October, Bishops Wurm, Meiser, and Marahrens obtained an interview with Hitler at which time he promised to take "no further interest in the dispute and would leave the Church to deal with its own problems."¹ However, the truce could not last long; Müller began additional attempts to "coordinate" more churches under his administration and Dr. Frick published two decrees prohibiting further discussion of the Church question in the Press, in pamphlets, or in books. Then on 8 November a great Confessional demonstration in Berlin demanded the resignation of Müller--who promptly refused to do so. In view of this refusal, the Confessional Synod announced that the Provisional Church Government of the entire Evangelical Church was to be placed in the hands of a committee chosen from their own ranks. Also, until such time as a true National Synod could be brought into being, the Council of Brethren would act in its place. Then on 23 November, this new Provisional Church Government issued a request for the support of all Churches and religious organizations throughout Germany.²

¹ Baynes, op. cit., p. 353.

² Duncan-Jones, op. cit., p. 95.

Of course, the Nazi hierarchy was infuriated by this event, and Hitler's promise to leave the Church to manage its own affairs was rapidly ignored. For a time overt action was postponed because of the approaching Saar plebiscite and the consequent desire for apparent unity. However, Müller was quick to act; he published a decree forbidding all Church officials to recognize the Provisional Church-- which he claimed had no right to exist. Dr. Frick backed him up with threats to withdraw financial aid from those churches supporting the Provisional Church Government. Of incidental interest is the dismissal of Karl Barth by a disciplinary court from his position within the Confessional Movement; he was charged with refusal to take the oath of allegiance to Hitler.

Thus, as 1934 drew to a close, there existed no longer merely a controversy between the Church Government and an opposition--two claimants for the control of the Church now stood face to face. New tactics would have to be adopted by both sides if the deadlock were to be broken.

As 1935 opened, the Provisional Church Government appeared to be in an excellent situation. The Reichsbishop had not succeeded in destroying it and he had at the same time lost much of his own prestige. The German Christians were now in a minority but adamantly refused to relinquish any of the power they had obtained; the Confessionals likewise increased their firmness, continuing to maintain the position that only a church completely free from State control would be able to claim the loyalty of true Christians. The German Christians therefore increased their attacks on Provisional Church

supporters; professors of theological faculties in universities were forbidden to take side publicly in the church dispute and over seven hundred Prussian pastors were arrested. Soon the first pastor was sent to a concentration camp, while simultaneously state grants were withdrawn in Baden. Yet all this was not enough, and soon the German Christians began to revolt against their own tactless Reichsbishop whose singular aim now seemed to be merely to salvage his own position. In February, Müller was informed by his erstwhile supporters that he was of no further use to them. However, the Reichsbishop refused to resign, claiming he still enjoyed the confidence of Hitler--yet he had lost even that. He continued to retain his title--and his salary--but by the beginning of April, former Chaplain Ludwig Müller had disappeared as an active protagonist from the church scene.

Müller was now discredited, it was true, but it by no means resulted that his place was taken over by the Provisional Church Government. Now, indeed, the Provisional Church found itself face to face with the raw power of the Nazi State without any sort of smoke screen. Now the issues which were to arise were to be less of a constitutional and more of a fundamental nature--this was largely a result of the greatly increasing propaganda in favor of the "new paganism" in the press, the theatre, and particularly in the schools. The actions of the government now made it at last obvious that the State desired to identify itself with the radical Rosenberg heathenism--no longer would there be even an attempt at compromising National Socialist and Christian ideologies. Arrests,

among them Niemöller's, continued to be the order of the day as the government began to aggressively support the paganistic ideals of the German Faith Movement inspired by Rosenberg. The German Christians had been too moderate for the tastes of men such as Rosenberg and Ley--now a more active and rabid religion was to be sanctioned. This new pet of the Nazis was given a grand initiation on 26 April with a gigantic demonstration at the Sportpalast in Berlin. At this gathering Count Reventlow described the terrible decay of the German Churches and the longing of the people for a truly native religion--a longing which was being met by the German Faith Movement; "God has revealed Himself to us through Adolph Hitler."¹

Still, all of these events only served to strengthen the unity of the Confessional Church which held its third Synod at Augsburg on 4 June. At this Synod, an appeal was made to the State to release imprisoned members of the Confessional Church and to allow freedom of publications and assembly in the religious sphere. However, at the same time the Synod was meeting, other events were occurring which were to affect the Confessionals more than any business accomplished at their conclave. In June a new law was published which established a new method for determining legal questions concerning the Evangelical Church. The Courts had up to this time upheld the protests of the Confessionals and protected them somewhat from the arbitrary power of the Reichsbishop; this naturally infuriated the Nazi leaders who saw to it that a new system was created. In the future all church questions were to be withdrawn from the

¹ Duncan-Jones, op. cit., p. 102.

ordinary courts and made subject, without the right of appeal, to the decision of a Bureau of the Ministry of the Interior. The significance of this act, which for all practical purposes placed them under police control, was rapidly comprehended by the Confessional Church leaders who drafted a strong protest. However, it was to do no good; this law, in fact if not in theory, created a State Church without even the limited legal shield which had protected the church from the Reichsbishop's dictatorship. The significance of this event cannot be underestimated; the Reich Constitution guaranteed by Hitler in 1933, which promised that "the rights of the Churches will not be curtailed, their relation to the State will not be altered", had been blatantly disregarded. This event reveals once and for all the radical determination of the Nazi hierarchy to gain control of the Church at all costs; the scene was not set for State dictatorship.

This dictatorship was quick in its arrival. On 19 July it was decreed that the post of Reich Minister for Church Affairs had been established and that a certain Dr. Kerrl had been appointed as first holder of said office. Kerrl entered upon his position at a time when the Party was enjoying unusual success in its conquest of the German populace; GÖering had just declared all out war on "political Catholicism," Himmler had recently forbidden all Confessional youth activities, and the conservative, relatively Christian Stahlhelm, an organization of war veterans, had just been dissolved. Indeed, the Nazi leadership had good reason to feel proud of itself and to expect the most from Kerrl. And to be sure, Kerrl was quick to move;

he soon appointed himself president of a new Bureau for settling legal disputes in connection with the Evangelical Church and rearranged the financial organization of the church. Soon after this "reform" had been put into operation, the first trial of Kerrl's strength took place when on 16 September a Prussian Confessional Synod was summoned to Berlin. At the Synod a representative of Kerrl, Herr Stahn, threatened "very unfortunate consequences" if the Church did not conform to the wishes of Kerrl. Yet despite this, the Synod refused to surrender their faith to the threat of force, rejected the new Legal Bureau as contrary to the order of the Church and defended Jewish membership in the Churches. The Synod terminated with a request to the Reichsminister to restore legality to Church affairs. But Herr Kerrl was to do the exact opposite. On 30 September, Kerrl issued a decree which went beyond any prior action taken by the Nazi regime against the Church. This decree was entitled the "Law for the Safeguarding of the German Evangelical Church"--certainly a humorous name in light of the law's true purpose. This decree contained one very comprehensive and revealing paragraph:

The Reich Minister for Church Affairs is empowered, for the restoration of orderly conditions in the German Evangelical Church and the Regional Evangelical Churches, to issue ordinances with binding legal force.¹

With this act, Kerrl obtained an authority over the Church which even Reichsbishop Müller had never been capable of exercising;

¹ Duncan-Jones, op. cit., p. 113.

open dictatorship now existed within the Church. The great question was just how Kerrl was to make use of his autocratic powers--the question was rapidly answered. The new Reichsminister soon conceived the idea of forming "Church Committees" for the purpose of establishing peace and harmony within the Church. His plan called for committees nominated by himself and which would thus derive their authority indirectly from the State. However on the other hand, the committee members would be "Churchmen" who could employ ecclesiastical principles whenever feasible. Accordingly when the first committee, the Reichs Church Committee for the whole Church, was appointed, Dr. Zoellner, a much respected name in the Lutheran Church, was chosen as its first head. In addition to this central committee, four regional committees were soon appointed. Undeniably, the appointment of these committees were hailed with relief even by many loyal Confessionals who hoped that it would usher in a respite in the church controversy--but their hopes were soon dashed. In the official Appeal issued by the Reichs Church Committee soon after its formation, one sentence obliterated all hope for peaceful compromise: "We affirm the National Socialist development of the people on the basis of Race, Blood, and Soil."¹ One can observe immediately the influence of the German Faith Movement--it was the old story over again, the attempt to incorporate the Weltanschauung of Rosenberg's brand of National Socialism into the faith of the church. Criticism was quick to come.

The first protest against this racial affirmation came from the Churches of the South, from Württemberg in particular. The

¹ Baynes, op. cit., p. 354.

Württemberg pastors questioned the fact that the committees claimed to be the only "interim" establishments; when, asked the pastors, had any State in history voluntarily abandoned the control it had once gained over a church? They further requested Zoellner to understand the destruction which his actions would cause in his own Lutheran Church. With all the good intentions in the world, Dr. Zoellner could not rescue Christianity unless he did away with the double foundation, secular as well as spiritual, upon which the committees had been constructed. These pastors of Württemberg comprehended the situation perhaps far better than even they realized. The Reich Church Committee was off to a bad beginning and the situation soon grew worse as they claimed more and more dictatorial powers. Numerous "German Christian" bishops were appointed to the various provinces in order to aid in the administration of committee decrees. These bishops actually turned out to be more of a hindrance than anything else to Kerri and Zoellner by their refusal to comply with and carry out instructions. In addition, the Confessional Movement was able to retain all of its organizations intact and actually to gain in influence. This was too much for Kerri, who soon began more aggressive tactics against the Confessionals. On 28 October a censorship was imposed on all Church publications, and during November police prevented the inauguration of two colleges for reformed theology. Then on 28 November, the trustee funds of the Confessional Movement were subjected to confiscation by the Secret Police. Henceforward, all church communications and procurement of revenue would be considered illegal.

In December Kerri intensified pressure against the Confessionals. On 2 December a still greater acquisition of dictatorial powers was made when Kerri issued a decree prohibiting all executive or administrative functions on the part of Church groups or associations. This decree represented an even clearer statement of the Reich Committee's desire to be the whole government of the Church--and it brought quick response. The Provisional Confessional Synod for Berlin-Brandenburg meeting at Dahlem on 4 December passed a resolution claiming that Kerri's latest action was a blatant attack upon the life and freedom of the Church. Dr. Zoellner seemed to sympathize with these protests but by this time his committees had become virtually powerless; Kerri had taken practically all affairs into his own hands. Kerri, now possessing complete power, soon threatened that defiance, if persisted in, would lead to charges of high treason against the State. Corollary to this, Pastor Martin Niemöller was, in December, prohibited from speaking anywhere within the Reich and his radical pamphlet, Die Staatskirche ist da,¹ was confiscated by police.

As 1936 began, the struggle was again at a relative deadlock. At the beginning of 1935, the Confessional Church appeared to have gained the ascendancy for the first time, but as it turned out the year was to produce many disappointments for the Confessionals-- by the end of the year they were back on the defensive. They still lacked complete unity and truly strong leadership, but their courageous stand had won sympathy for their cause among increasing numbers of people in other parts of the world as well as Germany. The

¹ Baynes, op. cit., p. 254.

next development in the controversy was reached when a Confessional Synod for the entire Reich met at Oeynhausen on 17 February. The protest formulated at this time destroyed the unity of the Provisional Government administration and a new Council of Brethren and Executive Committee was appointed. Also appointed was a new provisional executive committee for the Provisional Church Administration, the most prominent member of which was the now foremost Confessional leader, Pastor Niemöller. Then in the spring, this new Confessional administration decided to address a direct appeal to Hitler to determine just how much governmental support and approval was to be given to the ever-increasing anti-Christian forces. This was to be a private memorandum, speaking very frankly to the Führer himself; it closed with this sentence:

We pray for freedom for our people, that it may in the future be allowed to go its way under the sign of the Cross of Christ, that our grandchildren may not curse their fathers because they have indeed built and left behind them a State on earth, but one that excludes the Kingdom of God.¹

As if in reply to this memorandum which probed so deeply into the true heart of the issue, Hess released a decree forbidding Nationalist Socialist officials to hold office in any church body or religious organization. Then came a temporary lull in the struggle as the Olympic Games absorbed the attention of an apprehensive world.

In July the opposing sides again took up their weapons as the Confessional Memorandum to Hitler was published in the foreign press after a raid by the police on the offices of the Confessional Church. This "treasonable document" was to serve as an excellent.

¹ Duncan-Jones, op. cit., p. 132.

excuse for more drastic suppression of the Confessionals. With the publication of this document, the Provisional Church thought it best to explain to its own members the circumstances which had led to the writing of the memorandum. Consequently a manifesto addressed "To Evangelical Christianity and to the Authorities in Germany" was promulgated and read from all Confessional pulpits. This manifesto, which the New York Times described as containing sharpness of language comparable only to the ninety-five theses of Martin Luther, said in part:

Three years ago millions of Evangelical Germans welcomed the new beginning in the life of our people with warm hearts. They did so with all the more joy because the government of the nation had said in its first proclamation of February 1, 1933, that it would 'firmly protect Christianity as the basis of our whole moral system.' It is absolutely fantastic for Evangelical Christians to think that official organs in the German Fatherland turn against the gospel of Jesus Christ. But it is happening, nevertheless. (Now) the conception of the world contained in the Rosenberg Mythos, which exalts man and demeans God, ... is taught.¹

The tone of this manifesto reflects the still existent element of disbelief among German Protestants that their own government was the mortal enemy of Christianity. With their traditional acceptance of temporal authority it was only with great reluctance and hesitation that they took up offensive arms against the State, yet with all their handicaps they continued to be the most effective domestic opposition which the Nazi hierarchy was to face. This particular manifesto, for example, led to quite positive results; for the first time the "German Christian" bishops whom Kerrl had appointed protested against the new paganism. So strong were these and other

¹ New York Times, August 23, 1936, p. 12.

reactions that Hitler himself issued from Berchtesgaden a warning against the excesses of the new German heathenism. Hitler was an astute politician, and as such always wished to avoid open conflict with the church--he saw something had to be done to avoid the appearance of allowing Kerrl to be absolute Church dictator. As a result, he intervened and ordered a free election for a new Church Synod to be held on 11 April. Hitler intimated that the church would also be allowed to formulate a new constitution in complete freedom. As it turned out, these proposed elections were never held and a new constitution was never promulgated--the date for these were again and again postponed until the entire idea faded into oblivion. However Hitler's intervention did result in a positive accomplishment for the Confessional Church; the prospect of new elections restored once again unity of action--the Lutheran regional churches were drawn tighter than ever into cooperation with the Confessionals against the "German Christians."

Yet despite all this, Kerrl remained dictator of the church and the arrests of Confessional pastors continued. Also financial pressure was applied through decrees which placed pastors completely under the control of state finance agencies; for Protestants, most of whom possessed families, this worked a much greater hardship than it would upon Catholic priests. The State understood this also. In addition to the controlling of individual salaries, the government did its best to prevent the Confessional Church from being self-supporting by denying all collections for use by the church. Frick,

in June, issued a statement decreeing it a crime to contribute any money to the Confessionals or to any organization not approved by Kerrl. To be sure, Kerrl soon was in control of all Church finances throughout the Reich.

The year 1937 was, despite constant pressure, one of continual protest by the Confessional Churches. In July a conference of Confessionals met at Cassel to draw up an appeal to the State requesting a personal hearing--an appeal which was to remain unanswered. Soon after, a statement signed by ninety-six pastors protesting Rosenberg's "theology" was signed. However, this was not read in the churches since Goebbels threatened that pastors who did so would be brought before the People's Court on charges of treason. The concluding paragraph of this statement ran: "If Herr Hitler fails to give a guarantee of the freedom of belief, then faith in the Führer will crumble."¹ In actuality, this faith had crumbled long before.

In 1937 was also held the great Oecumenical Conference at Oxford, an event which did much to inform the rest of Christendom of conditions which existed in Germany. Since the "Free Churches" were involved in this Conference to a great degree, perhaps a few words describing the Free Church establishment in Germany would be appropriate. The four most significant Free Churches--the Baptists, the Methodists, the "Evangelical Community in Germany," and the "Union of Free Evangelical Communities"--had organized even before 1933 into a body to jointly represent them, the "Association

¹ Baynes, op. cit., p. 255.

of Evangelical Free Churches." This association, and the Churches it represented, were from the first spared the ferocity of State persecution which the Lutheran and Reformed Churches sustained; the Nazis understood the propaganda value which these small denominations could serve. It cost the government of Hitler nothing to hold outside the Church struggle what was actually only a handful of people-- 100,000 to 150,000 out of the entire Protestant population.¹ The Nazis realized that this small group of people had, among the Methodists and Baptists all over the rest of the world, millions of fellow-sectarians who naturally would judge the conditions in Germany in accordance with the idea which the German Baptists and Methodists conveyed to them. Thus world opinion was for some time cajoled before it grasped this propaganda trick, but the Oxford Conference was an event which enlightened many people who had hitherto been misinformed. No representatives of the Confessional Church were allowed to attend the World Conference, whereas representatives of the Free Churches attended armed with nothing but praise and defense for the Nazi regime. However, by 1937 this propaganda presented too much of a contrast with other actions taken by the National Socialists; the result was a censure by the Oxford Conference of the anti-Confessional tactics used by the leaders of the Third Reich.

During the last days of 1937, Kerrl had delegated the powers of State administration of the Church to a Nazi jurist, Dr. Werner, whose mission was to destroy the Confessional opposition by administrative means. Indeed, 1938 with all of its political crises

¹ Forell, op. cit., p. 826.

did not see relaxation in the religious strife; if anything, there was an intensification. Early in the year Pastor Niemöller was tried on numerous counts, but finally released, only to be taken into "protective custody" by the secret police who soon transferred him to a concentration camp. One of the most courageous and outspoken leaders of the Confessional Movement had been eliminated. In April Werner decreed that all pastors must take the Civil Servants' Oath:

I swear to be loyal and obedient to the leader of the German Reich and people, Adolf Hitler, to respect the laws and to carry out my official duties, so help me God.¹

Of course, the fact that this oath implied acceptance of National Socialist ideology made it difficult for any pastor conscientiously to adhere to its terms--but those who refused were soon on their way to join Pastor Niemöller.

From this time forward no effort was spared which might render the Confessionals completely impotent; with the impending world crisis the Nazi government desired more than ever to liquidate all domestic controversies. Hitler reflected this attitude when he asserted:

I will never allow anyone to divide this people once more into religious camps each fighting the other. In this field we have had experiences enough in German history: we do not need to collect any others.²

Thus Hitler desired to solve the problem of religious differences by eliminating those churches which had so long warred with one

¹ Duncan-Jones, op. cit., p. 147.

² Baynes, op. cit., p. 392.

another; he would have his unified national church whatever the cost.

That last ominous year of peace and political crisis, 1939, was also a year of crisis in the struggle against the Church. It was also a year of extremely paradoxical actions and statements on the part of the Nazis. In March Werner issued decrees abolishing the right of parishes to choose their own ministers and proclaiming that all Church officials would thereafter be treated as civil servants and therefore subject to the "Aryan Paragraph." Soon after the Confessional minded theological schools at the Universities of Heidelberg and Leipzig were ordered closed. All this came almost immediately on top of a most surprising and unusual speech delivered by Hitler before the Reichstag on 30 January 1939.¹ During the course of this speech, Hitler proclaimed:

I should like to make before the German people the following solemn declaration: (1) No one in Germany has in the past been persecuted because of his religious views, nor will any one in the future be so persecuted. (2) The National Socialist State since 30 January 1933 from public moneys...placed at the disposal of both Churches the following sums:

Fiscal year	1933	130	million	Reichsmark
"	"	1934	170	" "
"	"	1935	250	" "
"	"	1936	320	" "
"	"	1937	400	" "
"	"	1938	500	" "

The Führer then went on to assert that:

This state has only once intervened in the internal regulation of the Churches, that is when I myself in 1933 endeavored to unite the weak and divided Protestant Churches...into one great and powerful Evangelical Church.

¹ Baynes, op. cit., p. 398.

If this was not the most fallacious speech ever delivered by Hitler, it was certainly the greatest propaganda maneuver he ever perpetrated.

In reality, as the preparations for war became more and more intense in Nazi Germany, the pressure on the "non-conformist" Churches likewise increased. However, when war actually did come, a tendency to concentrate on the national struggle apparently caused a cessation in the religious conflict--but that is beyond the concentration of this study. In World War I, Germany's concentration on winning the war caused most religiously divisive issues to be relegated to the background as imperial Germany, like all other nations involved, felt it possessed divine guidance:

If Harnack talks of the Czar as desiring the destruction of Protestant Kulture, the Archbishop of Cologne speaks of 'schismatic Russia' in alliance with 'infidel France' against our God-fearing Kaiser.¹

But such was not to be the case in World War II. All countries in the last great conflict were not quite so permeated with the messianic devotion to a "war to end all wars." The Christian Church in Nazi Germany could not claim allegiance to a "God-fearing Führer"; rather, the Führer himself had been elevated to the divine throne by the devotees of a new religion. To be sure, each German soldier still wore emblazoned upon his belt buckle the inscription Gott mit Uns--but that god was none other than Hitler. Yet there still existed an entrenched stronghold of orthodox Christianity within the Nazi State--it was weakened certainly, but nevertheless it existed where all other opposition forces had long before been liquidated. The

¹ S. W. Baron, "The Impact of War on Religion," Political Science Quarterly, p. 556.

rest of the world seemed to realize this, and it provided the enemies of Germany with a genuine religious issue. This time, indeed, the very foundation stones of the Judeo Christian heritage were under attack.

CHAPTER IV Roman Catholicism and the Third Reich

"The Catholic Church," remarked Adolf Hitler, "is a really big thing. Why, what an organization! It's something to have lasted nearly 2000 years! We must learn from it. Astuteness and knowledge of human nature are behind it."¹ Thus the Führer expressed his attitude toward the Church into which he was born--the Church which he respected yet detested. Hitler respected the Roman Church because of its power as a temporal institution; he held it in contempt for the Christian ethical precepts which it maintained, for the ideal of brotherly love had little in common with the racial theories of National Socialism. Hitler was far from being the first ambitious individual to recognize the genius of the Roman See; the fallacy was that he comprehended only a few facets of that genius.

Catholicism in Germany, like Catholicism in so many places, represented in pre-Nazi days a formidable and unified structure, quite unlike the divided Protestant denominations. To be sure, under the Weimar regime, Catholicism was strongly organized within a political organization known as the Centrum, or Center Party; this party possessed great influence with the government primarily because it usually represented a moderating element. Together with the Socialists it thus normally acted as a force on the democratic side. More than any other party, the Center represented all strata of German life; also it was a party in which the laity always played a dominant role. The Catholics had been active even before World War I, but had then been somewhat hindered by Bismarck's Kulturkampf;

¹ T. L. Jarman, The Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany, p. 183.

when the iron chancellor toppled, anti-Catholic attitudes largely did also. Thus Catholicism no longer possessed the taint of anti-Prussian sectionalism which long had characterized it because its fortresses were practically all in Bavaria.

From its earliest origins, Catholicism looked with doubtful eyes upon National Socialism. There developed a mutual hate between Catholics and Nazis; Catholics on one hand condemning the racial doctrines and brutal methods of National Socialism, and the Nazis on the other detesting the Roman Church because of its internationalism, its categorical moral standard, and its strong political influence. In addition, the Nazis blamed Catholic support largely for the success of the hated Weimar Republic. Catholicism recognized this enmity and urged its followers to oppose Hitler and his party in that fatal election which finally brought the Nazis to power. National Socialism had also recognized the Catholic opposition which it would face at an early time, quite unlike the case with the Protestantism. However, despite all this mutual detestation, it ought also to be pointed out that there existed a fairly large amount of sympathy for Nazi ideals among the Catholic youth during the first days of the Third Reich. Perhaps this will aid in explaining the rapidity with which "political" Catholicism yielded when Hitler wielded the whip. It should also be noted in this regard that the anti-Nazi sentiment among German Catholics was not at first supported by opinion in the Vatican. The Pope during the Nazi bid for power was Pius XI, a man obsessed with fear of Bolshevism who had come to believe that National Socialism, with its avidly anti-Communist tendencies, would support the position of the Church in return for

favorable political support.¹ Hitler was to take rapid advantage of this sympathetic attitude by sending the former Chancellor, von Papen, to Rome to negotiate a Concordat--but more concerning this shortly.

What would most probably be considered the first real clash between National Socialism and the Roman Church in Germany took place in September, 1930. The vicar of a parish in the province of Hesse requested his bishop for specific instructions on the attitude he ought to take with regard to believers in the racial doctrines of the Nazi theorists. The Bishop of Mainz was quick to reply; he laid down three rhetorical questions:

1. Can a Catholic be a registered member of the Hitlerian Party?
2. Has a Catholic Priest the right to allow members of the Hitlerian Party to take part collectively in the services of his Church?
3. Can a Catholic who adheres to the principles of the party be allowed to receive the sacrament?²

The answer laid down by the Bishop was a resounding "no." This same sentiment was expressed soon afterward by a declaration of all Bavarian bishops in 1931 when they condemned the five major errors of National Socialist racialism:

1. Racialism places race above religion.
2. It rejects the revelations of the Old Testament, and even the ten commandments of Moses.
3. It does not recognize the primacy of the Pope in Rome because his is an authority 'situated outside Germany.'
4. It fosters the project of a 'dogma-less national Church.'
5. Under Article 24 of its program it proposes to set up the 'moral feeling' of the

¹ Duncan-Jones, op. cit., p. 165.

² d'Harcourt, The Third Reich, p. 800.

Germanic race as a criterion for Christian¹
moral laws, which are essentially universal.

Thus the lines of enmity were drawn, lines to which so many Roman Catholics were faithfully to adhere during the whole of the Nazi era.

The replies to these early condemnations by German Catholicism of National Socialism were severe; the Nazi leaders declared that the Church used spiritual aims merely as screens for secular ambitions. "Political Catholicism" was the term continually used in the writing and speeches of the Party hierarchy. It was claimed by the Nazis that the Church condemned them only because their party constituted an obstacle to the political ambitions of Rome. It was asserted by the Nazi leadership that their party was such an integral part of the nation that an attack on the Party was tantamount to an attack on Germany itself. Thus loyalty to the Church was apostasy to the nation. The Roman Catholic was classed with the Jew and the Marxist; all were seen as plotting the destruction of the Fatherland. The Catholic, like the Jew, had accepted Versailles without hesitation.

However, it was not until 1933 that the National Socialist Party was able to give its anti-Catholic hostility material backing and legal sanction. Perhaps the best summary of aims with regard to the Roman Church was expressed by Hermann Göring in a speech delivered very soon after Hitler's successful grasp for power. In this particular speech, Göring asserted that in the black, red, and gold flag of Weimar he saw the symbol of all that had to be overthrown-- the "Black International" which was Roman Catholicism, the "Red International" which was Socialism, and the "Yellow International"

¹ Ibid., p. 801

which was Jewish finance. Shortly after this speech was made by Göring, Hitler himself delivered an address which took a quite different tone with regard to Catholicism; Hitler, the master diplomatist, was again utilizing his periodic "appeasement" policy. But Hitler had a definite purpose in mind; he needed the assistance of the Center Party in passing the famous Enabling Bill which would give him virtually dictatorial powers over the Reichstag, and consequently over all of Germany. Hitler received this cooperation from the Center, much to the chagrin of many Catholic historians and apologists.

The two speeches cited above graphically exemplify the Nazi policy of alternating between violence and adulation; it was a policy which was to be adhered to throughout the decade of the thirties, possibly more so with regard to the Roman Church than with any other institution. The above incident is, however, perhaps the most controversial. When Hitler saw that he must have the aid of the Center, he made another speech before the Reichstag which was the very epitome of honey-coated appeasement. And it worked; Hitler acquired the requisite number of votes and the Center granted him full powers. As I have before said, this action on the part of the Center has been the subject of continuing controversy, especially among Roman Catholics themselves. Ludwig Kaas, the chairman of the Center during the crisis, is particularly condemned for yielding to Hitler's wishes. The conservative Kaas did not notice the tremendous changes which had taken place in the party structure of the later Weimar regime. He did not realize the weakening which had occurred in the Center and among the Social Democrats; instead he continued

to "negotiate" with the new National Socialists, a party with which no one could use the customary parliamentary code. Of course this latter fact is today well known, but at this early time not many recognized the treacherous characteristics of the Nazi Party; to be sure, only after Munich did everyone fully comprehend the true nature of National Socialists cunning. Therefore, it appears to me somewhat narrow to so vehemently criticize men such as Kaas for their failures at such an early period:

History has long decided that this political dilettante (Kaas), a prelate relying on obsolete political tactics in these supremely fateful years which demanded of the Center Party the most crucial political decisions, was anything but a political leader, or rather, was a contributor to the catastrophe of 1933 which he helped to bring about.¹

Certainly, there is merit and truth in this statement, but it is also the result of much unreflective hindsight. Kaas was indeed a pathetic figure, but he deserves a little more consideration; Kaas was nothing more than an ecclesiastical Neville Chamberlain.

As soon as Hitler achieved his aims and was in a position of undisputed power, the Nazi "appeasement policy" quickly terminated and numerous actions were taken by the new regime against the Roman Church. In the same month of July that the then emasculated Center Party, now under the ineffective leadership of Brüning, dissolved itself, numerous Catholic organizations were liquidated by order of the State and increasing numbers of priests were arrested for "activities hostile to the state." And yet, this same month of July,

¹ Joseph N. Moody (ed.), Church and Society, p. 471.

1933, was also one of appeasement alternating appeasement with enmity for the Nazi leaders; July saw the signing of the famous Concordat between the Vatican and the Third Reich. This event is most significant, for it is one of the most important episodes in the entire history of the Church-State relations under the National Socialist regime in Germany.

What was the background of this Concordat, this agreement between two seemingly incompatible and incongruous powers? The answer to this question is a varied one, and one open to much conflicting opinion, depending on whether a Catholic or a Protestant is speaking. The Concordat with the Roman See was signed on 20 July 1933, the Reich being represented by Vice-Chancellor Von Papen and Rome by the Papal Secretary Pacelli, who was later to ascend St. Peter's throne himself as Pius XII. The preamble to this Concordat ran, in part, as follows:

His Holiness Pope Pius XI and the President of the German Reich, inspired by the common wish to secure and promote the existing friendly relations between the Holy See and the German Reich and wishing to regulate permanently the relation between the Catholic Church and the State for the whole extent of the German Reich in a manner which shall be satisfactory for both parties, have determined to conclude a solemn agreement which...shall secure a uniform treatment of the questions which are the subject of this agreement.¹

This "solemn agreement" was not to be long respected. There is no need here to relate in detail all the provisions of the Concordat; however, there are two clauses which bear notice. Article 31 describes the nature of the confessional associations which would be able to claim state protection; protection would be given only to

¹ Baynes, op. cit., p. 372.

purely cultural, religious, or philanthropic organizations. Other organizations would be protected only to the extent that they would be able to guarantee their activities to be independent of any political purposes. Article 32 provides that in return for state protection of church organizations in Germany, the Holy See would issue regulations which would exclude the clergy and the members of religious orders from membership in or action in behalf of political parties. These articles were to be sources of constant disagreement throughout the thirties; however at the time of the signing both Rome and Berlin apparently were quite satisfied. After all, the Vatican still had undisputed authority in the appointing of bishops, archbishops, etc., Catholic Schools in Germany were theoretically protected, and a great new barrier against Bolshevism had been erected. Hitler also felt proud of his accomplishment; he had accomplished more than the great Bismarck had been capable of doing! On the day after the signing of the Concordat, Hitler delivered a speech in which he announced:

We are happy that in Rome yesterday we succeeded in signing a Concordat on the basis of which all political action in the parties will be forbidden to priests for all time, happy because we know what is wanted by millions who long to see in the priest only the comforter of their souls and not the representatives of their political convictions. Thus the political fight for power is finished.¹

Perhaps the political fight was over, but the spiritual one was just beginning. A great many German Catholics felt that the Concordat had sacrificed too much--they believed that the Church had not gained much more than she had hitherto possessed while the State, on the

¹ Baynes, op. cit., p. 374.

other hand, had become the sole judge of the activities of the clergy. Consequently Catholic protests were rapid in coming. However from the beginning there was to be a difference in the nature of the struggle between the State and Catholics as compared with the Protestants; with Catholicism it was to be primarily an internal struggle fought for the very soul of the Church, for Protestantism it was a struggle against external forces. Catholicism thought of National Socialism as a danger to the entirety of Christian theology while Protestants fought mostly to prevent the "Aryan" heresies from being forced upon the churches.

The first significant manifestation of the latent anti-Nazi undercurrent broke to the surface in December 1933 when Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich began preaching a course of sermons on the Old Testament. He taught, to an overflowing congregation, that without the Old Testament scriptures, it was impossible to understand the New with its fulfillment of the Old Covenant. The Cardinal also provoked the Nazi leaders to wrath by relating all the barbaric and sordid aspects of Germany's early tribal history rather than the glorious and heroic tales dwelled upon by the devotees of the new paganism. Faulhaber believed that:

The best form of ancestor worship is to renounce all that is evil in one's forefathers, the indolence and the drunkenness of the ancient Germans, and, on the other hand, to accept as a sacred inheritance all that is good in them.¹

Faulhaber, unlike so many of his fellow Catholics, also recognized that they were fighting the same battle as the Protestants: "To

¹ Duncan-Jones, op. cit., p. 167.

our separated brethren we stretch forth our hand to make common cause with them." The Nazi reaction to these pleas of the Munich Cardinal were quick to come; in the early months of 1934, Rosenberg was appointed Cultural Director of the Party and condemned Faulhaber outright: "When a Nazi puts on his Brown Shirt, he ceases to be either Catholic or Protestant." A month after this statement was made, Rosenberg's Mythus was placed on the Index by the Vatican.

Hitler had waited until the Concordat was safely signed before putting into operation one of the theories closest to his heart-- the Sterilization Law. Hitler and his subordinates knew that Catholic reaction to such a law would be adverse; therefore its announcement was postponed until five days after the signing of the Concordat. Thus, in fact, the spirit of the agreement was broken in intent before it was ever signed. To the Catholic reaction which immediately arose against this law, Hitler replied in a speech before the Reichstag on 30 January 1934:

If the Churches were to declare themselves ready to take over the treatment and care of those suffering from hereditary diseases, we should be quite ready to refrain from sterilizing them. But as long as the State is condemned to raise from its citizens enormous sums...for the maintenance of these unfortunates, it is compelled to adopt the remedy which prevents such undeserved suffering to be handed down to posterity.¹

Thus Hitler, with his usual adroitness, passed over this slap in the face of Rome with a mockingly conciliatory tone.

Because of the claim of the Nazi Party over the "body and soul" of the German people, it is not surprising that the question of the

¹ Baynes, op. cit., p. 383.

education and control of German youth soon became a burning one. The instruction of the young had always been a vital concern of the Roman Church in Germany; under Weimar special guarantees had been made to parochial schools, and this had been confirmed by Article 24 of the 1933 Concordat. But this was worth nothing; the campaign against Catholic institutions began first in prevalently Catholic Bavaria where "plebiscites" were held to determine whether the people desired the maintenance of the Church Schools or the new "Community Schools" established by the Nazis. Naturally the Community Schools were "preferred"; "One People, one Reich, one Führer, one School!" was the cry, and a vote for the Church School was considered by the authorities as a vote against the very sacred person of the Führer. Soon this action was followed up by State seizure of numerous Catholic teachers' training colleges; thereafter every teacher in Germany was to be merely a vehicle of the Nazi movement, one who proclaimed the ideas of Adolph Hitler. A school paper from Kiel, written in 1935, is quite revealing about the "confession of faith" to which each teacher and pupil must adhere:

We believe that God has revealed Himself to us in our German blood and German consciousness, in our German home and German history. That is our German Faith. We regard the word "heathen" as an honorable term, not as reproach. We are proud of our German Faith, our Northern Heathenism....Whoever has thoroughly grasped the thought of Race must reject the Jewish foreign religion in every form, Catholic or Evangelical.¹

Perhaps the greatest struggle in the realm of education issued from the relations which developed between the Hitler-Jugend, or

¹ Duncan-Jones, op. cit., p. 170.

Hitler Youth, and the many Catholic Youth Organizations which existed in Germany. Reichsbishop Müller had, in 1934, succeeded in incorporating the Protestant Evangelical Youth Organizations into the Hitler Youth; the Catholics took heed and did their best to resist the same fate, relying on the protection "insured" them by Article 21 of the Concordat. But neither Baldur von Schirach, leader of the Hitler Youth, nor Hitler intended to honor this agreement. Hitler at an early date declared that he would not tolerate opposition groups of a religious character within the Hitler Youth:

We claim and proclaim that all German youth organizations other than ourselves have lost every reason for their existence. These organizations must vanish and leave Hitler Youth a clear field. That youth associations should continue to exist on the fringe, protected by I know not what private concerns of the Churches,¹ is in itself a situation that we cannot tolerate.¹

Thus the ground was laid for complete control of Germany's youth; despite letters of protest from the Vatican, the usurpation of Roman authority over the minds of its youth slowly but certainly continued. However, it must be noted that all youth organizations in Germany at the time of the Nazi coup, those under the direction of Roman Catholicism held out the longest against the advances of the State-- much longer than those under the auspices of the Protestant churches. Encouragements from such men as Cardinal Schulte of Cologne seemed to instill renewed resistance into the ranks of the Catholic youth. Of course it must also be taken into consideration that the Protestant organizations were boldly seized at a very early date; the Nazis

¹ d'Harcourt, op. cit., p. 808.

were more tactful with their dealings toward the Catholic associations because of the greater rigidity with which Rome clung to its rights and property. Actually it was not until that final law of 1 December, 1936 declaring "the whole youth of Germany within the territory of the Reich is included in the Hitler Youth," that all Catholic Youth Organizations finally yielded to the Nazi onslaught.

The suppression and arrest of the Catholic clergy became more and more intensified from 1934 onwards. The Nazis used well the old Bismarckian Law against abuse of the pulpit--practically anything a priest said from the pulpit could be used against him, anything which reeked of "political Catholicism." To be sure, this term was used again and again with tremendous success against the activities of the Church. For example, Göring issued an order indicating determination on the part of the government to limit severely or terminate all corporate activities of the Church. Since, he said, all gatherings of an ecclesiastical character were forbidden unless they took place within the church building. In the summer of 1935 the Papacy vehemently protested this and similar actions as direct breaches of the Concordat, but it was to no avail; Göring replied with an edict against "political Catholicism" in which he portrayed virtually all Catholic activities as "political." "We do not tolerate," he asserted, "those endeavors which were formerly borne on the shoulders of the Center Party."¹ But Goring, like numerous other high Party officials, recognized the danger inherent in an outright attack upon the Church; circumspection must always be used

¹ Duncan-Jones, op. cit., p. 180.

so that the clergy will not become martyrs. Yet there were to be many such martyrs.

In the latter part of 1934, Catholic scholars had published a series of Studies exposing the errors of Rosenberg in his Mythus--the Catholic press had indeed been a strong weapon. From the first the Nazis recognized this fact and continued to do everything within their power to suppress all expression of opinion. The Roman Catholic Church had in pre-Nazi days a very excellent and widely read press. Such newspapers as Germania and the Kolnischer Volkszeitung were national newspapers and influential organs of public opinion. Catholic papers such as these retained a fair amount of independence for a while even after they had been "coordinated" with the government. Then an old acquaintance of Hitler, Max Amann, was appointed virtual dictator of the press and began an all-out campaign against the Church press. A very old Catholic paper, Der Badische Beobachter, was the first to go under Amann's orders--the reason, it had displayed the word Christus on its front sheet. Then in April 1935, Amann issued two decrees which practically wiped out the Catholic press. The Roman bishops of Germany quickly protested that these regulations were an infringement of the Concordat, but as usual such action was ineffectual. The Bishop of Trier, Dr. Bornewasser, particularly called on his people to continue reading Catholic publications, but soon there were none to read.

The tactics utilized by the National Socialists against the Catholic Youth and press are indicative of the approach used in all other areas of life in which the Church has possessed influence. The

Nazis attempted to substitute their own devices for everything hitherto within the hands of the Church; thus they published "Pagan Peasants' Calendars" to replace those showing the Saints Days of the Church, and forced the people to read their own newspapers and publications rather than those printed under the auspices of Rome. They attempted to defame the clergy in the eyes of their people by bringing them before state tribunals on charges of smuggling, embezzlement, and immorality. This last charge was directed primarily at religious orders, beginning in 1936 with the trial of two hundred members of the Franciscan Order.¹ But the year 1936 also saw the most powerful protests on the part of the German Catholic hierarchy. On 28 August of that year, the Catholic bishops of Germany met at Fulda amid an atmosphere of grave anxiety. There they drafted an explosively worded protest against the actions of the State against the Church; a pastoral letter was also written which was to be read from all pulpits throughout Germany. This letter contained a somewhat conciliatory sound by mentioning the common danger of Bolshevism, but nevertheless the letter was confiscated by the government and condemned as Christian demagogy. The Fulda Conference had appointed the Cardinals of Breslau, Munich, and Cologne to initiate discussions with the State, and Cardinal Faulhaber was actually successful in obtaining an interview with the Führer. During this interview he affirmed the devotion of Catholics to the Fatherland, but pointed out the innumerable infractions to the stipulations of the Concordat which had been perpetrated by the government. But his breath was wasted on the deafened ears of Hitler who engaged in his usual

¹ Duncan-Jones, op. cit., p. 199.

evasive manner; as always on the religious issue, the dictator of the Reich remained taciturn, leaving his actual desires to the words and actions of subordinates. The bishops could only report to the Vatican that the position of the Church in Germany remained unaltered. Thus it was time for the Papacy itself to take action.

When the Vatican did at last speak, it was with devastating force. Pius XI had at last come to the realization that Communism was not the only great enemy of the Church, for he now comprehended fully the true significance of National Socialism. Therefore he ascended the throne of St. Peter and prepared to speak ex cathedra to his German subjects, but the utmost secret had to be maintained. The method adopted was entirely unprecedented and took the Nazi regime by complete surprise. Because he realized that to publish an Encyclical in Rome would be ineffectual, since it would not be allowed to enter Germany. Pius ordered that the Encyclical be written in German and smuggled across the frontier. Then during the evening of 18 March, 1937, clerics rushed about the countryside distributing hundreds of copies to the rural Deans who in turn saw to it that each parish priest secured one. Then on Palm Sunday morning, the Papal Encyclical, Mit brennender Sorge (with burning sorrow), was read from every Catholic pulpit in Germany. The effect was profound. Pius, in his Encyclical, first explains how he came to sign the Concordat with Germany in 1933. He states that at the time he was anxious not to lose even the slightest opportunity of protecting the Church's existing rights in Germany; also he did not want it said that there would have been religious peace had it not

been for the Pope's refusal of the State's offer of friendship. The Pope then detailed all Nazi violations of the Concordat and vehemently condemned:

1. Those who take the race, the people, the State or the form of government, the active rulers, and deify them with idolatrous worship.
2. Those who refuse to accept the Old Testament.
3. Those who try to sever, from true belief in God and His revealed commandments, the Natural Law which is the foundation of law and jurisprudence.
4. Those who deny that God-given rights which each individual possesses are inalienable and who assert that they can be disregarded by the state or suppressed.
5. Those who threaten international life with a perpetual state of war, and whose doctrines menace the very existence of the community.¹

Indeed, this is a pronouncement against everything for which National Socialism stood. Pius truly understood the narrow and tenuous under-structure upon which the Nazi faith rested when he declared:

None but superficial minds could stumble into concepts of a national God, of a national religion, or attempt to lock within the frontiers of a single people, within the narrow limits of a single race, God, the Creator of the universe, King and Legislator of all nations before whose immensity they are 'as a drop in a bucket'.²

Such a resounding denunciation of the Third Reich called for a reply, and such a reply was quick to manifest itself. An all out attack was proclaimed, an attack to do everything possible to efface the prestige of the Church in the eyes of the German people. Now instead of the smuggling and immorality trials which had gone before, the Reich initiated charges of high treason against numerous priests who were thus held up before the nation as traitors to everything

¹ Moody, op. cit., p. 257.

² Francis J. Powers, Papal Pronouncements on the Political Order, p. 42.

German. In addition to this the indictments for immorality were resurrected and also the most severe financial pressure yet was brought to bear on the Roman Church throughout the whole of the Reich. All of these tactics reflected an attitude of fear on the part of the Nazis, fear lest the Church augment its esteem in the minds of the people. Up until this time no institution with power behind it had dared to openly condemn the Nazi State in such a violent manner. Hitler himself exemplified this apprehensive attitude when he broke his reticence on the religious issue long enough to declare, shortly after the proclamation of the Encyclical, that:

We cannot permit that this authority, which is the authority of the German people, shall be attacked by any other power whatever. That applies also for all Churches. So long as they concern themselves with their religious problems the State does not concern itself with them. But as soon as they attempt by any means whatsoever--by letters, Encyclicals, or otherwise--to arrogate to themselves rights which belong to the State alone we shall force them back into their proper spiritual, pastoral activity.¹

Thus the suppression continued unabated throughout the remainder of the thirties. Anschluss took place and the number of Catholics in Greater Germany was increased to twenty-seven million, but this did not diminish any the persecution of the Church--if anything, it increased. Hitler was indeed bringing to fruition the threats which, according to Nathaniel Micklem, he had promised in 1936:

Providence has caused me to be a Catholic, and I know better (than Bismarck) how to handle this Church. If she will not accommodate herself to us, I will loose upon her a propaganda that will exceed her powers of hearing and sight....I will bring back

¹ Baynes, op. cit., p. 389.

to life the forgotten atrocities of her history, and I will show the people how the parson really lives and is debauched....They shall bend or break--but, since they are no fools, they will bow their heads.¹

To be sure, they did bow under the heavy blasts of Nazi pressure, but they never broke. In that final year of 1939, the Roman Church in Germany still held firm despite its scarred exterior. Certainly a great many Catholics had completely given themselves over to the new cult of National Socialism or compromised their faith, but the majority still retained their allegiance to the Holy See. But perhaps the most startling thing is that despite the intense hatred which the Nazis exhibited toward the Church of Rome, they continued to feel an uncomfortable apprehension in all their dealings with this institution which possessed so much strength and authority behind it. Hitler especially felt this, possibly because of his own nominal Catholicism and knowledge of the potency which existed within the monolithic structure of the Church. Indeed, with a kind of awe, the Führer looked to this institution for guidance in the formation of his own Party:

The clergy...maintains its instinctive contact with the emotions of the people and thus are assured the astonishing youthfulness, the mental adaptability, the iron strength of will which are embodied in the Church. Here is the model for the Movement.²

¹ Nathaniel Micklem, National Socialism and The Roman Catholic Church, pp. 157-158.

² Baynes, op. cit., p. 338.

CHAPTER V Epilogue: The Significance of the Struggle

If this great conflict which raged in Germany under the Third Reich proved nothing else, it proved that even the most total of totalitarian states cannot entirely annihilate all opposition within its borders, especially if that opposition is sustained by an ideology as potent as that of the Christian Church. Not even in a country such as Germany, in which the Church has traditionally yielded to the demands of the temporal authority, could such a narrow and confining philosophy as that of National Socialism successfully cope with the universal demands of Christianity. The churches of Germany were undermined, weakened, and battered, but they never collapsed.

Undoubtedly, National Socialism constituted the gravest danger hurled at German Christianity since the threat of the Turks, and as in that much earlier crisis, defeat was not admitted. In this great struggle, the Christian Church, Protestant and Catholic alike, became more symbolic than anything else; indeed, this symbolical significance in the long run far outweighed the actual tangible achievements made during the struggle. It was only in the churches of Germany that there developed a rabid spiritual opposition to National Socialism, conducted by men holding firm to ideals and sustaining whatever Nazi persecution heaped upon them. But what were the results of this courageous stand? Certainly, this struggle instilled a new vitality within the structure of the church, a vitality and strength which acquired for the German churches a moral prestige far greater than it has possessed for many years. And yet

this struggle did not solve the innumerable problems which have beset German Christianity for so long--it merely brought them further into the open.

There have been many who have claimed that the paganism of the Third Reich was the final blow at the ineffective Protestant Church in Germany, but such a view is narrow and neglects one very important aspect of the problem--tradition. Protestantism, like Catholicism, has been so long embedded in the very essence of German life that it could not just suddenly disappear as a factor in the life of that country. Through their unexpected exhibition of strength during the Nazi crisis, German Protestantism and Catholicism both acquired renewed moral capital which greatly increased their prestige in the eyes of the German populace as well as in those of the other nations of the world. The Roman Church left the conflict, ruffled, but with renewed strength; but then again, the Catholic organization in Germany had been strong before the Nazi ascendancy and one would have expected a show of strength on their part. The world was not disappointed; as is usually the case, eternal Rome outlasted the temporary thorns which from time to time in history have pierced her side. The really amazing phenomenon was the courageous showing given by German Protestantism, a grouping of divided denominations from which no one expected any opposition of consequence. This, then, is perhaps the most remarkable and significant result of the entire struggle--a new foundation of unity was discovered by the Protestant church in Germany, a new closeness to the people.

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