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Hitler and Christianity

For many people, such a question seems rhetorical. They “know” Nazism was disgorged from the mouth of Christendom and that, it’s safe to say, every official in the Third Reich was baptized as a child. (Of course, the atheistic creed of communism was also born in Christendom, and baptized also were militant atheists Madalyn Murray O’Hair, Christopher Hitchens, and Richard Dawkins, and author of *The Satanic Bible*, Anton LaVey.) As for *Hitler’s Children*, released at the height of WWII, it could have been propaganda designed to convince a primarily Christian nation that it had a vested interest in victory.



As it turns out, and not surprisingly, moviemakers and others who braved the stormy days of our clash with fascism were far better acquainted with it than the revisionist historians who peddle the Christianity-birther-Nazism narrative. What was it they knew? It was that the Nazis were not one of the fruits of Christianity, but of its rejection. The Third Reich sought to replace the ancient faith with a neo-pagan “religion of the blood” with Adolf Hitler as the godlike figure at its heart. For they realized Christianity would ever be an impediment to their aims and knew that, ultimately, it had to be destroyed.

Hitler’s Final Solution for Christianity

While this fact is well documented, the lie peddled in its stead has proved harder to sink than the *Bismarck*. But about six years ago came a godsend in the form of papers and the person of Jewish attorney Julie Seltzer Mandel, a woman whose grandmother was a survivor of the Auschwitz concentration camp. While a law student and editor of the Nuremberg Project for the *Rutgers Journal of Law and Religion*, Mandel gained access to 148 bound volumes of rare documents — some marked “Top Secret” — compiled by the Office of Strategic Services (or O.S.S., the WWII forerunner to the CIA).

After scouring the papers, she published the first installment of them in 2002, a 120-page O.S.S. report entitled “The Nazi Master Plan: The Persecution of the Christian Churches.” Reporting on these O.S.S. findings in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Edward Colimore wrote: “The fragile, typewritten documents from the 1940s lay out the Nazi plan in grim detail: Take over the churches from within, using party sympathizers. Discredit, jail or kill Christian leaders. And re-indoctrinate the congregants. Give them a new faith — in Germany’s Third Reich.” He then quotes Mandel: “A lot of people will say, ‘I didn’t realize that they were trying to convert Christians to a Nazi philosophy.’... They wanted to eliminate the Jews altogether, but they were also looking to eliminate Christianity.”

Without a doubt, Hitler often made vile anti-Christian statements. For instance, according to Allan Bullock in his book *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, Hitler once hissed, “I’ll make these d**ned parsons feel the power of the state in a way they would have never believed possible.... This filthy reptile raises its head whenever there is a sign of weakness in the State, and therefore it must be stamped on. We have



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no sort of use for a fairy story invented by the Jews.” Bullock also reports that Hitler said, “The heaviest blow that ever struck humanity was the coming of Christianity.... The deliberate lie in the matter of religion was introduced into the world by Christianity.” (Bullock derived both quotations from the book *Hitler’s Table Talk*.)

Seeming Contradiction

While this is convincing, a seeming contradiction must be explained, one that provides ammunition for Christianity’s critics. Although Hitler did make virulently anti-Christian statements, he sometimes made pro-Christian ones and appeared as a man of faith. For instance, in a 1934 speech in Koblenz, Hitler said, “I know that here and there the objection has been raised: Yes, but you have deserted Christianity. No, it is not that we have deserted Christianity; it is those who came before us who deserted Christianity.... National Socialism neither opposes the Church nor is it anti-religious, but on the contrary it stands on the ground of a real Christianity.” In an April 12, 1922 speech published in *My New Order* he said, “My feeling as a Christian points me to my Lord and Savior as a fighter.” Then, portraying himself as a defender of the faith in a 1933 Berlin speech, he said, “We were convinced that the people needs and requires this faith. We have therefore undertaken the fight against the atheistic movement, and that not merely with a few theoretical declarations; we have stamped it out.”

There are many other such pro- and anti-Christian Hitler quotations (and no small number of bogus ones, I might add), all existing within a maelstrom of fierce debate between Christians and atheists about Hitler’s worldview. So how do we reconcile these contradictory statements? The O.S.S. report provides the answer. Columnist Joe Sharkey wrote about the relevant passage in the *New York Times*:

According to Baldur von Schirach, the Nazi leader of the German youth corps that would later be known as the Hitler Youth, “the destruction of Christianity was explicitly recognized as a purpose of the National Socialist movement” from the beginning, though “considerations of expedience made it impossible” for the movement to adopt this radical stance officially until it had consolidated power.

Really, this is just common sense. Hitler was many things, but a clumsy politician was not one of them. He knew that until he had “consolidated power,” he would have to erect a façade for a Christian people and the Church; this is probably why virtually all his pro-Christian statements were rendered publicly and *before* he had closed his iron fist around the German neck. In contrast, his anti-Christian vitriol was spewed privately — and, it seems, with great passion — and often after he achieved absolute power, when he could bear his dark soul with impunity.

Moreover, when analyzing this, it’s easy to understand the political benefit derived from pandering to Christian masses, for if he inspired their opposition while seeking power, personal glory would have eluded him. But what political end was served by impugning their faith? What reason could he have had to utter such things unless ... unless he *meant* them? And does this really surprise anyone? Politicians are like water, taking the shape of the vessel in which they find themselves.

Then, I would call attention to Hitler’s talk of a “real Christianity.” Hitler was referring to the Nazis’ effort to co-opt the faith, with a perversion they called “Positive Christianity.” This involved, among other things, the idea that Jesus was a member of the Nordic race who battled Jews. Moreover, it was contrasted with “Negative Christianity,” which is what the Nazis called the age-old doctrines of the Protestant and Catholic churches. Despite this, some atheists will still claim that this profession of “faith” made Hitler a Christian. But as dignitaries of the German Evangelical Church said in 1936 (as



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presented in the *Time* magazine article “Churchmen to Hitler” on August 10 of that year), “Nazi spellbinders use the terms positive and negative Christianity ‘in the manner in which the truth is withheld from a person who is ill’ — i.e., to mask the Government’s real efforts ‘to deChristianize the German people.’”

Many atheists will also wonder why Hitler went out of his way to attack atheism. And, undoubtedly, he did often rail against it with a bishop’s zeal. But this is easily understood. In their battle for primacy in Weimar Germany, the Nazis were vying for power with the communists, *who were avowedly atheistic*. Now, against the backdrop of a wounded nation with a listing economy and hyperinflation, Marx’s message held appeal for many. Thus, the best way to defeat these foes was to attack their Achilles Heel: their godlessness. For the post-World War I Germans were a needy people, a hungry people, but their churches were not as empty as their stomachs. Truly empty, though, is the fancy that Hitler’s lip service to Christianity had to mean he didn’t attack the faith. It is like assuming that the Hitler-Stalin Pact means he didn’t attack the Soviet Union.

Then we have the matter of Hitler’s disdain for Charles Martel. Martel was a storied Germanic (Frankish) leader of the Middle Ages, a hero, a warrior, a man many consider to be that era’s greatest general. As such, you might expect Hitler to have held him in high esteem. But Martel did something that, in the eyes of the Fuhrer, was unpardonable: he saved *Christendom* from extinction.

The year was 732 A.D., and Islam, born a mere century before, appeared an unstoppable force. After conquering the old Christian lands in the Middle East, North Africa, and Iberia (present-day Spain and Portugal), the Umayyad (the first dynasty of the Muslim Caliphate) was plowing through France. Then came October 10 and what historian Edward Creasy characterizes as one of the 15 decisive battles of the world, the Battle of Tours. Outnumbered and outmatched in weaponry and confronted with what was thought an impossible task at the time — for infantry to resist armored cavalry — Martel stopped the Muslim march into Europe cold. Yet Hitler took a very dim view of the triumph. Addressing this in the *Brussels Journal*, Paul Belien wrote:

“Had Charles Martel not been victorious,” Hitler told his inner crowd in August 1942, “then we should in all probability have been converted to Mohammedanism, that cult which glorifies the heroism and which opens up the seventh Heaven to the bold warrior alone. Then the Germanic races would have conquered the world.” Hitler told Albert Speer that Islam is “perfectly suited to the Germanic temperament.” If the Muslims had won in Tours, the whole of Europe would have become Muslim in the 8th century and “the conquering Arabs, because of their racial inferiority, would in the long run have been unable to contend with the harsher climate and conditions of [Europe]. They could not have kept down the more vigorous natives, so that ultimately not Arabs but Islamized Germans could have stood at the head of this Mohammedan Empire.”

It is not surprising that a warrior such as Hitler would reject Christianity, for it is not a warrior creed. Its teachings run counter to the urgings of the flesh, to the desire for glory, vengeance, and power. For instance, one of its enduring images, of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey, holds no appeal for those who crave the sword. This is why many in biblical times rejected Jesus as Lord, as they expected a king leading legions that could deliver them from their Roman oppressors. It is why, later on, those Romans worried that acceptance of Christianity would feminize their troops. And, it is why, 1,500 years thereafter, Hitler realized that the Holy Spirit could slay his spirit of conquest.

Of course, this is not to say that Hitler was prepared to pray toward Mecca. Nor do I say he was a conventional atheist — or that he was not. What does seem certain is that he viewed religion as a



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device. As he said in chapter 10 of *Mein Kampf*, “And yet the great masses of a nation are not philosophers. For them, faith is the only basis of morality. Until a substitute be available, only fools and criminals would think of abolishing religion.” This is a very telling statement, bespeaking of a man who lacks belief in religion but has great belief in its utility. After all, a person of faith holds that his religion reflects Truth and thus wouldn’t dream of abolishing it. But Hitler was no Karl Marx; he obviously felt the “unwashed masses” needed this opiate, at least until a substitute could be provided. Not only that, it seems he was intent on prescribing a designer drug.

In chapter five of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler spoke of this utility of faith, saying, “Nearly all attempts to exterminate a doctrine and its organizational expression, by force without spiritual foundation, are doomed to failure.” While he was not addressing the destruction of Christianity when making this observation, it is certain the Nazis applied this principle to that dark endeavor. For sure, unlike the communists, Hitler was too clever to suppose he could simply replace Christianity with the state; something more suitable was needed. Jehuda Bauer, professor of Holocaust Studies at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, reveals what it was in his piece “The Trauma of the Holocaust: Some Historical Perspectives”: “They [the Nazis] wanted to go back to a pagan world, beautiful, naturalistic, where natural hierarchies based on the supremacy of the strong would be established, because strong equaled good, powerful equaled civilized. The world did have a kind of God, the merciless God of nature, the brutal God of races, the oppressive God of hierarchies.”

This pagan orientation is no secret; it has been noted by many and was reflected in the Nazis’ most obvious symbols. The swastika, for example, is a pagan symbol whose consistent use dates back to Neolithic India (an area now part of Pakistan) and which is considered sacred in Jainism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The Nazis also made wide use of what are known as “runes,” symbols in ancient Germanic alphabets used for casting spells, divination, and invoking magical spirits. Members of the SS attended classes wherein they were taught the meaning of the runes, and many Nazi organizations had their own special rune. For instance, we have all seen the two crooked S’s of the SS; they are actually “Sig-Runes.” Some other runes used by the Nazis were the Hagall, Tyr, Leben, Toten, Odal, and Eif runes.

Religion of the Blood

Of all the Nazis, none was more enamored of this paganism than Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, second most powerful figure in Germany for much of the war and the man who ordered the deaths of millions in concentration camps. A devoted occultist, Himmler was taken with Hinduism’s rigid caste system and teaching on reincarnation, and he traveled with a copy of the *Bhagavad-Gita*; he launched a mission to locate the “Aryan Holy Grail,” believing it would bestow supernatural powers; and he had his own personal occultist, Karl Maria Willigut, who thought himself descended from the Norse god Thor and was called “Himmler’s Rasputin.” Himmler was also the chief architect of the new German religion.

This faith that was to supplant Christianity was a “religion of the blood,” an amalgamation of ancient pagan elements with a pungently racial flavor. It had been advocated by Nazi Commissioner for Philosophy and Education Alfred Rosenberg, an occultist who wrote the book *Laying Out the Tenets of the Nazi Religion*. Mark Weitzman, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, explains the Nazi conception of this religion in the documentary *Nazis: The Occult Conspiracy* (note: all the experts cited here on rendered their commentary in that work): “He saw blood, particularly in a religious sense, as the determining factor. In other words, a church had to be a church of the blood, rather than a church of faith or a church of belief. The blood tied together the Nordic races. So for Rosenberg, the blood, racial stock, racial identity, became the keynotes of this new ideology.”



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Yet it gets stranger. The documentary also tells us that some Nazis believed they were descended from a race of Aryan god-men who fell from grace “through evil and vice”; a flood then “wiped these beings off the face of the earth,” except for a few who found their way to India and the high peaks of Tibet. They then mated with inferior races, thereby rendering their blood impure and losing their great powers.

To call these beliefs outlandish is an understatement, and to claim every Nazi subscribed to them would be overstatement. Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, for instance, only seemed to value pagan lore as a propaganda tool, and it’s unclear to what extent Hitler embraced it. Yet certain Nazis, most notably Himmler, were so devoted that they actually launched expeditions to Tibet to find the descendants of these Aryan god-men. They endeavored to prove their theories and, through multigenerational selective breeding within an elite genetic pool, expedite evolution and recreate the Aryan superman.

While the Nazis never succeeded in replacing Germans with improved versions, they were in the process of replacing elements of Christianity. In order to inure the citizenry to the religion of the blood, elements of it corresponding to those of Christianity were introduced. *Mein Kampf* replaced the Bible in schools. The Nazis had their martyrs, the 16 men who died in Hitler’s failed 1923 coup attempt; the “Temple of Honor,” the shrine in which the martyrs were interred; an annual religious-like ceremony in their honor; and the Rite of the Blood Flag (a Nazi flag stained with the blood of those martyrs, blood which Hitler called the holy water of the Third Reich). SS soldiers even supplanted priests and ministers and presided over some marriages and used the Tyr-Rune as a grave marker in place of the Christian cross. Then, author on grail mythology John Matthews revealed, “One picture we have shows a full tableau of such a ... Hitler shrine for the purpose of baptism of infants, an SS altar in place of a crucifix; a picture of Hitler and the babe would have been presented, if you like, into the community of Germanic warriors through this kind of tableau.”

Then, the Nazis sought to reverse what the Church accomplished more than a millennium before. As history professor Dr. George Mosse put it, “People need festivals to mark the year and they [the Nazis] tried to substitute the pagan festivals for the Christian festivals and shaped them in their own image.” And, of course, at the center of this spiritual coup was Hitler, the man who would be God.

Having said all this, some will still not be convinced of the Nazis’ anti-Christian neo-paganism. Old prejudices die hard — new ones do, too. Yet it is no secret to scholars, be they Hitler’s contemporaries or ours. In 1937, Pope Pius XI called Nazism “aggressive paganism,” and, in our age, the World Jewish Congress averred, “It is true that the National Socialist regime adopted a pagan ideology which rejected the Church.” So why the revisionist history? The obvious answer is that this is a front in the overall war against Christianity. Yet it isn’t just any front.

More than any other historical figure, Hitler is viewed as the devil incarnate, the embodiment of evil. To portray the Nazis correctly — as a foe of the Church, one the Church engaged in spiritual battle — would have had two effects. First, it would have made Christianity the white knight in the darkest of man’s chapters, thereby giving it ironclad credibility. Then, since the left is also a *foe* of the Church, it would have made the left and the Nazis, at least in terms of spiritual foundation, appear as *allies*. And with the culture war starting to become red hot, the left could ill-afford such guilt by association. The Nazis, therefore, were not to be thus portrayed; they couldn’t be. It is ironic that the very people who accuse the Church of philosophical kinship with the Nazis have themselves, in their effort to establish that link, embraced that infamous principle of Hitler’s propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels: “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.”



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And what of Hitler's faith? Well, believe it or not, a little understanding of man's nature is far more instructive than testimonials and intelligence reports. As that overrated philosopher and great influence on Hitler Friedrich Nietzsche so famously said, "If there were gods, how could I endure it to be no God! Therefore there are no gods." When the ego consumes the heart and soul and a man is too busy looking down on others, he does not look up and see that to which he pales. This brings to mind a certain song children might have sung in the Third Reich, one containing a very sad line: "Hitler is our Lord." I think he was his own as well.



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