

## GERMANISM AND CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION

A LETTER from the Anglican Bishop of Chichester on May 30 of this year raised an interesting question. "In his speech on May 21," he wrote, "Hitler made a great point of his strong desire for the friendliest relations with the British people. But the British people are lovers of freedom and loathe and abhor religious persecution. Their friendship cannot be won while freedom is denied and religious persecution prevails." And noting that Hitler has proclaimed that Germany can give a lasting contribution to the great work of bringing about a resurrection of the West, he pointed out that "the resurrection of the Occident is not to be achieved by making the race principle into a religion, and attempting to substitute it for the Christian faith which has given its distinctive character to our common Western civilization and which has been the source and inspiration of many of its highest values."

These firm and clear words had immediately a considerable echo, and an interesting discussion followed in the *Times* and other papers. Dissenting voices were not lacking, some speaking from the purely political standpoint, others from that of psychology. The former remarked that friendship between peoples is a matter of mutual interest that has nothing to do with community of ideas or sentiments, but is governed simply by utility. The latter feared that blame or criticism of the methods of Hitler and his government could serve no purpose and would only aggravate the sufferings of those persecuted for their religion or race.

Discussion in the press continued for several months, with the intervention of men noted for their moral standing and intellectual authority; nor would it have died down (for the questions raised were such as must arouse a passionate interest in a very wide zone of those anxious for the defence of culture, religion, or freedom), had not the problem of the Italo-Abyssinian war revealed itself as one of urgent concern to the peace of Europe. At bottom, the same arguments hold good to-day in respect of both Germany and Italy.

## BLACKFRIARS

Under different aspects, the two countries have taken up the same position towards the moral values of Christianity.



It is not the first time that, under a political colour, an attempt has been made to subvert Christian civilization and to crush freedom. The positivist influences which dried up the most vital sources of religion and morals and debased the significance of human freedom, are but of yesterday; they still prevail among a wide zone of the middle classes and of the organized proletariat. Nor is it anything new for governments and parties on the Continent to engage in anti-clericalism, even in religious persecution. Azaña is of yesterday, Combes well within living memory.

What is most disturbing to the public mind to-day in the case of Germany is the attempt to replace the Christian religion and civilization by a barbaric religious mysticism, founded on the race, nourished by pagan myths and rites, and vitalized by a collective effort to remake a new Germany as centre of a new civilization.

A great number of Frenchmen and Spaniards were able, legally and morally, to fight Combes' legislation and Azaña's policy, in various fields, religious, political, and economic, and no one could identify Combes with France or Azaña with Spain. But in Germany, opposition is rendered practically impossible by the total lack of legal and moral freedom, by the suppression of legitimate means of defence (speech, the press, propaganda, associations), and by the identification of Hitler, of his Nationalist Socialist Party and of the Race Principle, with the existence, character and future of Germany.

This identification, which is not only symbolic but practical, hampers Catholic clergy and Protestant organizations in their defence of religious principles, of Christian faith and morals. Most significant is the cry of the Catholic Bishops in their letter of August 20 of this year, a cry repeated with every paragraph: "Stand fast in the Faith!"

The chief danger lies in the assertion of the Race Principle, an assertion that is not only theoretical, pseudo-scientific and even metaphysical, but practical, sentimental,

mystical, political and legal. To us who are not Germans, this divinization of the race may appear childish folly, but Germans accept it with gravity, conviction, obstinacy, faith, enthusiasm. They have finally found a basis for their superiority, for their rights as a people and for their mission in obedience to a new "multiplicemini"; they will remake a Western civilization that will dominate the world, at a time when the old civilization is mortally sick, doomed to inevitable death. And this conception is not the delirium of a few fanatics or merely a professorial thesis; it is the new Gospel that is being spread through every class in order to create a new spirit, a new Germany at the head of the world.

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A French writer, François Perroux, who though not of the first rank knows his Germany thoroughly, in an interesting book just published,<sup>1</sup> makes a searching analysis of the Germany of to-day, correcting many false impressions that are current, and bringing out how the conception of the Race coincides with the idea of the People. "It is the German people that is the supreme reality, not the German nation. The People is a whole, with definite racial, historical and psychological characteristics. One cannot enter a People; one cannot leave it at will. A man may enter a nation by becoming naturalized, he can leave it by acquiring foreign nationality." This is the German view. For them the nation is static and determined within historical or arbitrary limits; the people is moulded by nature, it is a living whole in process of perpetual becoming.

Thus the image is built up of a racial unity—a people of one blood; an end to be sought—the maintenance of the purity of blood; a vitality derived from nature herself and evolving with unity of command, as by an inexorable determinism.

To deny the value of human personality, which Christianity has raised to supernatural ends, means always to fall into those doctrines by which the individual is absorbed in the collectivity. The whole movement towards State

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<sup>1</sup> François Perroux, *Les Mythes Hitlériens* (Bose Frères, M. and L. Rion, Lyons).

exaltation tends in this direction. But there are differences. Mussolini's formula, "Nothing outside the State, everything in the State, everything by the State, everything for the State," implies an act of surrender and a subordination to the State as end, voluntary on the part of the Fascists and by them to be imposed on others. It has therefore a pseudo-ethical value, as ultimately reposing on an act of will. But in the germanic formula there is an immanence that suppresses any will seeking any other object. The race is the whole, the immanent; within it individuals move as a herd, as though driven by an inward determination imprinted in their nature by the blood. The sole condition of life and hence the sole moral and social law is that the blood must be pure, that the bodies in which such blood circulates must be healthy, that the racial whole must be powerful.

Max Hermant, who is well known in France and elsewhere as a brilliant writer, in his widely read book *Idoles Allemandes*<sup>2</sup> tries to define and analyze "Germanism," as the basic characteristic of the German people and almost as though it were the determinant cause of the present phase.

"To become aware of this fact, to express it, to proclaim it, to define the German nature, to discover within it a mysterious law, to formulate that law, to transform it into a method, to assert its ethical value, to accept it, finally, as supreme norm and to submit to it wholly—such is the task of that ever present but never concrete moral entity that we may call Germanism. First it notes data, then it makes assertions, and, knowing itself for what it is, wills to be what it is" (p. 23). All this is well expressed and brilliant, but it has a defect, the conception of that "moral entity" as though it had an intelligence and will of its own such as to become a kind of deterministic force in the activity of millions and millions of Germans and through countless generations.

Every people which has a language of its own, a unitary or moral centre, a traditional conception of life and social values, and whether or no it possesses political unity, comes

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<sup>2</sup> Editions Bernard Grasset, 1935. 8th edition.

to develop certain qualities, to create certain currents of ideas and to express itself in particular ways in art, philosophy and life. It has been the mistake of positivist sociology to seek to resolve into a social whole, as into a real entity (psychological or bio-mechanical), the associative life of men and their flux and reflux of thoughts and activities, which spring always from single individuals, even when transported into the field of life in common.

Max Hermant certainly does not conceive of Germanism as a tragic racial heritage imposed on millions of men, but only as an awareness of their racial qualities, good or evil, raised by a mystic or mysterious will to ends and action of their own. Even under this second aspect, the present Hitler phase would be justified according to Max Hermant's thesis, as the logical consequence of three or five or ten centuries of Germanism, which has passed finally from an unconscious, instinctive and primitive stage to full consciousness, intellectual and voluntary, and to organized expression. Many Frenchmen are of opinion that the antithesis Germany—France is a collective and necessary antithesis; and they express in political terms what Max Hermant has expressed sociologically.

The truth is that in Germany, as among every people, there are always various currents, various modes of feeling, a diversity of focal points in every field, religious, political, cultural, artistic, economic, domestic. And though these currents and these forms of organized life express themselves in the language of each country, they cannot be reduced to a common denominator implying an impassable barrier and an insuperable sociological condition. One cannot be deterministically German, as one is not deterministically Latin or Anglo-Saxon. If it were so, Christianity could not be the religion of all, but only of certain peoples, and certainly not of Germany.

Now the conflict to-day, and not in Germany alone, is between the dualistic and transcendent Christian conception, and an anti-Christian, monistic and immanent conception of life. In this conflict all are engaged, consciously or unconsciously. And in every country, including Germany,

opposing currents face each other, and many souls are troubled by the conflict itself and the impossibility of establishing and solving it in its real terms. The reason is that the monistic-immanentist current seeks to fetter all men to a collective entity, whether this be the State, the nation, the class, or the race. Therefore all State-exalting, nationalist and class currents, Fascism, Racialism, Bolshevism, Communism, implicitly and often explicitly repudiate freedom, all and every freedom—not only political freedom (which would be the least important, and which is valuable principally as a method), but the freedom which expresses itself in personal autonomy, in respect of human personality, in respect of the individual conscience, in respect of the moral, cultural and religious life of each and all.

The State, class, nation, or race, seeks to control souls. Therefore all becomes a monopoly: power, education, economy, religion, culture. Therefore all freedom is denied. But this is not enough. Hidden in every soul there is a place kept free for the worship of God and for the defence, if need be by death, of the rights of conscience. Nazism in Germany wishes to occupy even this place, presenting itself as a religion, a mysticism, a collective pantheism, of which the concrete idol is Germany, and of which rites and symbols are taken from ancient paganism in repudiation of Christ, of faith, of Christian morals and civilization.

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It may indeed be salutary that matters should have reached this stage, in order that true Christians, Catholics and Protestants, should have a deep-seated reason for continuing the struggle for remaking, if need be with their blood, a Christian nation, setting a barrier to apostasy and reasserting the undying values of the Gospels.

No "Germanism," conceived as a mystic and racial force, as an inward and inexorable urge, can prevent a clash between the Christian and the racial conceptions.

The clash between Nazism and the Jews did not produce practical and tangible results because the Jews framed their defence badly. They invoked their German nationality, precisely at the time when the Nazis were emphasizing

diversity of race; they invoked personal liberty when the Nazis were asserting the higher interest of the collectivity; they could not take their stand on a religious principle, because many had abandoned their religion and because Judaism is only a particular religion, not a universal one.

The Christians, Catholics and Protestants, should have invoked the principle of Christian brotherhood and distributive justice in favour of the Jews; this would have been a first line of defence against the race theory. They lacked the courage to do so, for defence of the Jew was unwelcome to traders who had suffered by Jewish methods of competition, to the unemployed who saw in the exodus of the Jews a chance of finding posts or work, and to the fearful, for it would have brought them into collision with the victorious party.

And so the battle was lost for both Jews and Christians. The turn of the Christians came, in spite of the fact that Hitler, in his speech of March, 1933, had declared that Nazism would defend the two main Christian churches of Germany. In respect of the Protestants, Hitler's government strove to create an organic unity, which would put an end to the various churches diversified by territory or tendency—a unification that would be not only administrative, but in conformity with the new regime. In respect of the Catholics, he hastened to negotiate a Concordat with Rome, to take the place of the particular Concordats already signed with Bavaria, Baden and Prussia. Hitler promised support on a basis of mutual loyalty.

Those who believed in his attitude did not reckon with the fundamental theory of the Germanic Race; they thought that the loss of all freedom would be compensated by a religious tranquillity that meant at the same time political conformity. Not all were of this opinion, but the pro-Hitler currents prevailed. Neither for Protestants nor Catholics did matters turn out as they expected.

The antithesis is striking, in both theory and practice. They thus lost the instruments of defence which liberty gives, and confined themselves to a purely religious defence. The situation goes from bad to worse. The struggle against

Nazism must start from the negation of the Race Theory, in the name of two principles, one human, the other religious, Christian. By the first we affirm the universality of humanity and the value of the person. By the second we affirm equality in the love of God and one's neighbour. Freedom, signifying personal, human right—Christianity, signifying a duty of brotherly love, since all are children of the same Father in Heaven.

The modern error lies in having separated and opposed humanism and Christianity. It has turned humanism into a religion, and made the Christian religion a private matter of conscience, or else a sect or church that would be the affair only of priests and pious ladies. What we must do is to re-establish the union and synthesis of the human and the Christian. The Christian is in this world and must transform it in accordance with religious values, and the human must be penetrated by Christianity. Therefore it would be an error to attack Nazism either solely in the name of freedom or solely in the name of the Christian religion as something apart from life as a whole. The battle must be waged in the name at once of the human values implied by integral freedom, and of the Christian religion which orders these values and sanctifies them to nobler ends.

This struggle is not something peculiar to Germany. It exists in every country, especially in those of Western civilization, for the apostasy from Christianity, though not everywhere equally declared, is everywhere present, and the cult of a collective entity, State, Nation or Class, substituted for God, has succeeded the failure of the cult of the individual, who by science, and in the name of Progress, was to attain his own bliss.

The liberty which the peoples are losing under the dictatorships is the most tangible and plastic; but so much liberty has been lost even under modern democracies, in social organization, in individual life, and even in the very fount of liberty, the human spirit, that everywhere there is need to fight for it and rewin it. And this struggle and reconquest can only succeed if it is carried out in the name of the Christian spirit and its moral values.



England and France, the only great countries left in Europe where political liberties have survived, are to-day troubled by the doubt if and how they should defend Christian values and human liberties. Can it be just to intervene in the politics of other countries? It is not only just, but a duty. We can do little to help those who carry on the struggle, whether in prison or in concentration camps, or in the factories and churches. But our solidarity and our support may serve to make the reasons of the struggle more evident, to bring out the moral values at stake, and to create a zone of immunization in the rest of Europe.

Therefore we should encourage all enterprises that throw into relief the sacrifices and efforts at resistance that, in the name of liberty and in the name of religion, are being made not only in Germany but in Russia, Mexico, Italy, everywhere, in short, where the values of human personality are denied, and where persecutions are organized in the name of a deified State or of a government that claims to be absolute arbiter of good and evil.

It is true that often our words will not reach those who struggle, who suffer and who fall. It is true that the dictators may be irritated by foreign public opinion. But right, morality, religion, civilization will prevail, sooner or later, over violence and tyranny. Truth triumphs over error if men will fight for it.

In Germany itself, heroes and martyrs are not wanting. One day they will have their place in a calendar that will have ousted that of Wotan, Ostara and Frika—or rather, that of the Hitlers, Goerings, Rosenbergs and Streichers.

LUIGI STURZO.