

## N A Z I L I T U R G Y

MODERN men are inclined to disregard the power of ideas. With Hitler and a number of his lieutenants dead and the others in captivity it seems to them that Clio has written *finis* to the short, though comprehensive chapter, "National Socialism". Our age is wont to see things purely in terms of politics and politics in terms of material power. If this were true, National Socialism would have found its end with the destruction of its material power and its organisation. National Socialism, however, was not only a political machinery, masses and guns, it was also, and above all, an idea. When the Nazis spoke of totality they avowedly wished to make it clear that they would not confine themselves to economics and politics, or indeed, confine themselves to anything. Their idea was that of an all-embracing *Weltanschauung*, a definite order of values with the claim to be absolute, or in other words, a religion.

While insane national pride, injured by the defeat in 1918, together with economic and social pressure created an atmosphere suitable for revolution, the real core of the Nazi movement lay in a much deeper stratum of the people's minds. The revolution against the religion of love and the spirit of the Sermon of the Mount—prepared during centuries and manifest in Bismarck's fight against "Ultramontanism"—rose immediately after 1918, sponsored by Hitler's forerunner and temporary companion Ludendorff. His wife Mathilde, especially, attempted to preach a romantic mysticism in form of a queer combination of pantheism and Wodan idolatry, which seemed to her the adequate expression of the Teutonic religious spirit. This experiment failed since the theatrical nightly ceremonies in woods and the sight of spectacled German schoolmasters growing wild beards and drinking beer from wassail-horns proved too much even for the most romantic German little bourgeois. The Nazis were much too clever to commit themselves to this comedy and, without openly condemning it, passed it over in silence. The sect of "German Christians" rising at the same time was anxious to demonstrate that the Galileans were blue-eyed and fair-haired Aryans of Nordic race, and that Christ himself belonged to them and fell a victim of his race to Jewish national hatred. While refuting the Old Testament as a whole, their theology (*sit venia verbo*) concentrated on the cumbersome attempt to combine the Gospel with Teutonic heroic ideals. Some small congregation of this queer sect are still left in Germany. Though the Nazis did not acknowledge them as their people, they cherished some kindly feeling towards them since they seemed useful for

splitting the Christian camp and, moreover, were always willing to emphasise the "Divine vocation of the Führer".

All these movements, however ridiculous in themselves, show that right from the beginning the revolutionary uprising of the masses in Germany was not confined to a social political revolution, but originated from, and penetrated into, the deepest spheres of spiritual life. The Nazis were well aware of this situation and had no doubt that they would achieve very little with a purely political programme, however radical it might be. What they wanted and bluntly expressed in all their literature was the totality of power over the whole of the German nation and every individual. They knew that their ideas were irreconcilable with Christianity and above all with the Church. Thus, from the beginning, they regarded the supernatural Church, with her clear and uncompromising doctrine, her hierarchical structure and her championship of the freedom of human personality, as the enemy number one. They knew very well that they could not fight this opponent, either with some ethics floating in the air, or with childish romanticism. Thus, with truly German thoroughness and logical perseverance, they set out to wage the inevitable war against the Church with a new *Weltanschauung* to which the whole German nation was to be systematically trained and educated. Masters in organisation, as they doubtless were, they started at once to build the machinery necessary for this bold enterprise. Alfred Rosenberg was entrusted with the task of educating the Germans to the Nazi ideology and to wage war against the churches. His book, *Der Mythos des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, became the bible of the new religion and earned him the nickname of "Our Kultur Pope" in high ranking Nazi circles. An elaborate net-work of *Weltanschauung* education officers soon covered the whole of Nazi Germany. The districts (Kreise) combined in provinces (Gau) as the administrative structure all had their educational personnel and directors of education and were subordinated to the headquarters of education, Rosenberg's office in Berlin. They were supported by the S.D. (*Sicherheitsdienst*, i.e. Security Service), the carefully selected elite of the Gestapo, which had to record continually the mood of the populace, current and significant incidents, and had to report even remarks overheard in the streets. Their main task, however, was to keep close watch on the Church, the clergy and the congregations in churches.

The Nazis would not have taken so much trouble in this matter of *Weltanschauung*, even throughout the war, if they had not fully realized that this fight on the ideological field was quite as serious

as the war itself. It was the struggle for their spiritual survival and for their ideas. Evidence steadily increases to show that what the Nazis called their struggle on the "home front" was mainly their fight against the Catholic Church. The Church was their great enemy and they attempted to oppose her by opposing her absolute and eternal order of values with a new revolutionary order of values. The supreme and absolute value was to them the German race, and materialistic collectivism of blood and soil. To this supreme value everything was subordinate. Even the conception of God was subordinated to this supreme racial *collectivum* by the claim that God must be "artgemäss", that is to say must fit the German mind and feeling. The moral order was subordinated to the race by declaring that morals depend upon the German moral feeling and that law is what benefits the German people. The universal Church could not but be seen as the chief enemy of such doctrine. The more the Nazis feared the Church, the more they tried to imitate her and to make her visible forms and ecclesiastical language their own. Hardly a speech of Hitler's omitted some reference to the Almighty or to providence, so that the Pope found himself obliged to warn people of men, who, without possessing any clear conception of God, misled people by misusing God's name in vague references to some mysterious supernatural power. Nazis liked to talk of the "sacrament of blood", they tried to replace the conception of the Mystical Body of Christ by a crude materialistic collectivism and used even the language of the Church to this end. They attempted to displace the *Communitas Sanctorum* by a racial community and a veneration of national heroes. The immortality of the soul was to be replaced by the alleged physical immortality of the race in which the individual was said to live on eternally in his children and grandchildren. The whole scheme was crowned by a mystical deification of the Führer, who was to be regarded as a semi-supernatural being led by mystical inspiration and in whom blindly and "fanatically" to believe was the religious duty of every German. They regarded the unshakable faith of masses of Catholics in their Church as the actual source of her power without, however, being able to realize that faith, only in the truth, can mean strength. In their contempt for truth, they demanded of their followers "fanaticism" and believed that this was the true source of power. Seeing the churches overcrowded at High Masses and festive services, they believed that the external beauty and music in the ceremonies, exercised a mysterious power on the people in an emotional sensual way, at-

tracting them to the churches. So they were anxious to imitate the ceremonies and liturgy and to replace the ecclesiastical liturgical life by the invention and introduction of ceremonies of their own. They firmly believed in the omnipotence of organisation and machinery; they could not grasp that a tradition cannot artificially be built up and that the strength of ecclesiastical liturgy is derived from heights inaccessible to them. Their trend of thought is clearly reflected in a secret instruction from the educational headquarters at Berlin, in January, 1941: ". . . These ecclesiastical ceremonies of the Catholic Church and her forms of solemnities, with the strong accent laid upon emotional values in man and the emphasis laid on the sensuous element in man, constitute up to now, the main attraction of the Church. The ecclesiastical celebrations on Sundays and the ceremonies at the decisive stages of individual human life provide the only reason why great numbers of people entrust themselves to the guidance of the Church. The National Socialist creation and forming of ceremonies and solemnities will have therefore a particular significance in the future. When new forms are introduced for the ceremonies of giving names to children, of ordination of Youth, of marriages and funerals, without establishing a new caste of priests or a new cult, no motives will be left to innumerable human beings for their loyalty to the Church . . . "

The educational officers were anxious to fulfil these instructions. They read papers on National Socialist *Weltanschauung* and performed a series of strange ceremonies which cannot but be called a liturgy of Nazi religion. The Nazis concocted a kind of liturgical calendar in which National Socialist holidays were to become a tradition gradually displacing the liturgical year of the Church. What the Nazis called Life feasts (*Lebensfeier*) were attempts to replace the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and marriage. They performed queer ceremonies on occasion of a birth, giving the child a name (names of "Jewish Christian origin" were proscribed); then they celebrated ceremonially the day when children left the school at the age of 14. The children had to take an oath of allegiance on this day in which they committed themselves to eternal loyalty to the Führer and the race. The ceremonies of marriage were particularly distasteful by their crude mixture of cheap sentimentality and a rude and blunt emphasis laid upon racial breeding.

One of the most symptomatic "liturgical" ceremonies was the Yule Feast, the winter solstitial celebration meant to displace Christmas. We may give here as an illustration a brief excerpt

of this ceremony. It was circulated from central authorities as a pattern and model of a Yule Feast.

## YULE FEAST

Prelude: *Organ — Fanfares.*

1st Speaker: We belong to the race that struggles into light from darkness!

(*Organ begins pp, continues crescendo and turns into C-minor.*)

1st Speaker: Behold! The threshold shines  
That delivers us from darkness.  
Beyond it beams the light  
Of coming glorious days.

2nd Speaker: Return to us, thou beaming flame,  
Shine thou radiant light again!

3rd Speaker: Turn thy path, thou all-giving sun  
Lest deadly rigidity shall prostrate us.

Chorus with orchestra, song: "Sun—roll thy wheel!"<sup>1</sup>

1st Speaker: Human beings are we,  
But little in the universal space  
The almighty flame, however,  
Gave us fire of the spirit  
That we thinking may consider  
Life's eternal meaning.

2nd Speaker: All that is, passes by:  
Yet, the new is rising,  
In death eternally renewing  
The creation in eternal cycles of becoming.

3rd Speaker: Life is beaming,  
Is being permeated by flames.  
Thinking is fire,  
Is glowing, blazing.  
Faith is blazing,  
A burning glow.

All: Faith is blazing, a burning glow!

Solo song (tenor) "Comrades, you shall be the torchbearers of German Faith."

1st Speaker (*strongly calling*):  
Stand above the dust!  
You are God's judgment!  
Brightly glows our faith  
At the threshold of young light!

(*Organ ff in C-major.*)

Fanfares, kettle-drums (*and so on . . .*)

1st Speaker: The melody of wheels is silent,  
And thy hands, O German Folk,  
Experience the Holy Day, silently  
Dawning, while through thy land,  
The magic weaves The Yule Feast's night.

All (*devotedly whispering*): O Holy Night! (*and so on . . .*)

Three Hitler-Youth and three German Maids light torches in the fire bowl and stride solemnly to the Yule tree. They light the candles during the following words:

1st Speaker: This light shall shine for the heroes  
Who gave their lives for Germany.

2nd Speaker: This light shall shine for the Wives  
And Mothers of our dead.

3rd Speaker: This light shall shine for all German mothers,  
They give immortality to our race.

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<sup>1</sup> The Swastika is the symbol of the rolling sun-wheel.

1st Speaker: This light shall shine for all our soldiers  
On all the battle fronts.

2nd Speaker: This light shall shine for all Germans abroad.

3rd Speaker: For our German Fatherland  
Its victory, its immortality  
Shall shine this light . . .

(And Finally):

All (enthusiastically): Flaming we rush on  
To the final German fight!

Chorus "Germany—sacred word"

Allocution by the educational leader: Salute to the Führer.

It is hardly conceivable that this monstrous blend of Wagner's Ring and the goose-step should have attracted people.

Though all the time before the war and specially after the occupation of Catholic Austria the attack on the Church was carried on with utmost brutality, Hitler most significantly did not dare to continue during the war. He ordered a "truce", as he called it, in the cultural struggle for the duration. This meant that compulsion to secede from the Church, previously frequently imposed on party members, was temporarily lifted, while, however, the educational activities, the strict supervision of the clergy and a permanent secret war against the Church were carried on.

It can be said that, on the whole, the establishment of a new liturgy did not meet with great success in Germany and was a failure as far as the Catholic districts were concerned. The Protestants lacked a single united authority to give them a lead and a clear dogmatic structure to oppose the thorough scheme of the Nazis, and had to be satisfied with some courageous individuals making their stand here and there, while others looked for some *modus vivendi*. Thus the Protestant camp constituted no serious problem to the Nazis. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, with her clear-cut dogmatic doctrine, her hierarchical authority and her universality, was the real enemy. The reports of the Security Service and the educational officers are concerned almost alone with the Catholic section of the people and with the Church. A report of an educational officer clearly expressed this: ". . . The Catholic Church does not cease to hover like a black shadow over all our efforts to establish a uniform ideological co-ordination of the German people". Another report, addressed to Rosenberg himself, complains: "The populace submissive to the Church adapts itself only very reluctantly and with greatest difficulty to our design of solemnities and ceremonies". Another education officer complains about difficulties he met among Catholics in arranging a Yule Feast. "A schoolmaster refused to have anything to do with a Christmas celebration in which the Holy Child is not in the centre of the Feast". He goes on to complain: "Those Catholics

simply take it for granted that the party has to give way to the Church. The people don't want any revival of ancient Teutonic folklore and customs since the parish priest labels them as 'pagan'. The proud consciousness of traditions and modes of life of our own race is lacking in these people. This pride was thoroughly eradicated by the Church. Wherever the sense of this consciousness has disappeared it is very hard to re-establish self-confidence on the ground of National Socialism."

Another report of a party district leader complains about a mission having been held in his district and says: "All the people rushed to the church in the morning, at noon and in the evening, men and women alike. It was a disgraceful spectacle. This zeal of the people would be worth something better. We shall, I am afraid, need much hard work and shall experience many disappointments before we succeed in winning the hearts of these people."

It is now plain that the hard fight the Nazis had to put up on their inner front was the fight against the Catholic Church. While the resistance against the Nazis in Germany was regarded from outside as some underground movement of the Left and propaganda was entirely guided by this conception, the events proved how erroneous this idea was. The Nazis had hardly any *political* or *social* trouble to encounter on their home front. The fight was a fight of ideas, for absolute values and ultimate ends. Marxism in all its shapes and shades is in its ideological background much too closely akin to National Socialism to be able to oppose it effectively in a fight of ideas. Liberalism had no ends to offer but mere means. It could not oppose a dogmatic system such as the Nazis had built in their *Weltanschauung* with general phrases of humanism or slogans of the French Revolution. It lacked a solid ideological or philosophical foundation. Thus it was only the Catholic Church which—though materially powerless against the Nazis—could take up the fight and not only withstand them, but, in fact, be a deadly danger to them.

This fact is not merely of interest as an historical record. Ideas cannot be exterminated by material power. The war with Germany is over, but the war of ideas will still have to be fought. Unconditional surrender of the Nazi *ideas* can be achieved only by one single weapon, the sword of the spirit in the hands of that spiritual power to which it was promised: *Et portae inferi non praevalerunt adversus Eam.*

WALTER C. BREITENFELD.