

## INTRODUCTION

A captured German soldier wrote the following comment about his internment in an American POW camp during World War II: *“Again and again, our failure was pointed out to me, often rather overwhelmingly, and then I was assured that nothing like Hitler could ever have risen or been tolerated in the United States. I smiled patiently because I was, and am, of the opinion that ‘Hitler’ waits and lurks everywhere in some form or shape.”* (Littel, p-54)

That wasn't the plea of just another ex-Nazi to excuse himself. Wilhelm Niemoeller, like his brother Martin, was a pastor and stalwart of the anti-Nazi Confessing Church. Like most other Confessing Church pastors, those who weren't murdered outright or sent into concentration camps like Martin, Wilhelm was drafted and sent to the front lines to be killed. A high percentage of those pastors were killed. The Confessing Church, a small group that broke from the “mainline” Protestant Churches, was persecuted because the members had the spiritual insight to see the Satanic roots of Nazism, and the courage to oppose it - the courage that springs from a living faith in Christ.

“Hitler” does indeed walk abroad today in other forms and shapes, but the spiritually blind cannot see him, not as he really is. Nor can the spiritually blind anticipate the end result of such doctrines of demons as Nazism.

Warnings are often sounded about America going down the path the Nazis trod, and in reality we are already far down the path, further than the Nazis in some ways. The average American, though, like the average German of that day, is blissfully unaware of his destination. The "US" journey down that well-trodden path (that we might call the 'American Church War') is a subject I'll leave largely untouched until the Epilogue, after we've completed our look at the German Church War.

The conduct of a supposedly Christian Germany and its Churches during the Nazi era is inseparably linked to the Jewish Holocaust, and all the other holocausts of World War II. Antagonists of the church, that is, antagonists of Christ, and also of historic western Christian civilization, have correctly charged that the Christians and their institutions (the now infamous “Right Wing”) helped raise the Nazis' Third Reich to power. They can cite census data right through the Holocaust years showing the German people to be overwhelmingly Protestant and Catholic church members, quote anti-Semitic church policies, and determine the number of baptized Lutherans and Catholics in any particular SS death squad. In their view, the relatively few voices of opposition to the Nazi regime coming from the church (and that mostly in defense of the church not the Jews) were merely "the best of a bad lot" and the Christian church stands condemned of racism, hypocrisy, impotence, and ultimately, of irrelevance.

Apologists for the church have pointed out, with equal justification, that it was voices from within the church that most courageously opposed the inhuman (and un-Christian) policies of Hitler's Reich. The celebrated Christian martyrs of the Church War are offered up as proof of the church's innocence of Jewish blood - and of the church's relevance in the modern world.

At the Nuremberg War Crime Trials, on the way to his date with the hangman (that he cheated by suicide), former Nazi bigshot Herman Goering delivered a very telling portrait of “the church” as he saw it:

*“I myself am not what you might call a church goer, but I have now and then, and have always considered that I belonged to the church and have always had those*

*functions over which the church presides - marriage, christening, burial, et cetera - carried out in my house by the church.” (Littel/Locke p-24)*

I don't know if the church performed that one last function for Herr Goering, or what direction his spirit took afterward, but if his understanding of the church is all there is to it, a few rituals to be endured for the sake of the ethnic tradition into which one is born, then the critics of the church are correct and the 'church', and 'Christians', stand condemned. But there is far more to Christianity than meets the eye of the unbeliever, and the Church War was as complex as the nation that produced Bach's *Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring* and Nietzsche's 'obituary of God'. The same nation that produced in one generation Dr. Joseph Mengele's wanton cruelty in the name of medical science and the *Herrenvolk*, the emerging "Master Race", and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's self-sacrifice in the name of Jesus Christ, Servant, Savior, and rightful King.

To begin with, ... no, I won't go there, not now at least. I was tempted to define the 'true' church, or to distinguish between the 'visible church', and the 'invisible church', between the institutional Church, and the Body of Christ, but those deep and controversial theological issues are too much for me to tackle in my little excursion into history. Yet, we cannot help but ponder on such questions as we are introduced to the characters and events of the German Church War.

We will see many different models of 'the church' and will have ample opportunity to consider what constitutes the 'true church'. Likewise, we will be introduced to many characters in the course of the Church War whose lives are spread out for the judgment of history; many who are considered 'Christian'. We can recognize Ethnic Christians like Goering whose understanding of Christianity was so shallow and malleable it offered no obstacle to any evil. Then there are Cultural Christians whose worldview and behavior conform to the basic tenets of Christianity, beginning with recognition of a moral authority transcending the state and a willingness to abide by that authority regardless of the consequences.

In studying this period though, we must recognize not only the diversity of Christian man, but also recognize the development of post-Christian western man, in which Germany was slightly ahead of the rest of the western world. Those designations – Ethnic Christian, Cultural Christian, Post-Christian - represent only theoretical end members in the complex triangulation of German society in the Nazi era. The colors and shadings of theology, politics, and character; the unique circumstances, experiences, and fears; the dumb luck each man experienced, all these and more variables go into determining what men's lives show.

“Hold on!” you say; I've left out the most important factor in what men's lives show. Yes, the spiritual factor; the passion for Jesus proclaimed by Christians on their way to brutal deaths in the Roman forum, the “spiritual awakening” pietist preachers like Father Bodelschwingh called men to experience. The mystery Jesus proclaimed: *“Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”* John 3 (NIV)

That spiritual factor will influence every turn of events in our story by its presence or absence, strength or weakness, but I will leave it to you to fathom the depths of men's souls – if you dare, for we cannot look into men's hearts and judge them as God does.

Having no spiritual x-ray, my work must content itself, for the most part, with the open books of men's lives, and with examining the cultural influences that shaped, and reshaped Germany into

the Nazi monstrosity. We can more accurately judge the spiritual state of a people than of a person individually it seems to me. I'm also interested in re-examining the sense of Christian shame and guilt that has been so assiduously cultivated over these last decades by enemies of Christianity and their unwitting Christian allies.

It must be admitted that the Christian church did fail to stop the Jewish Holocaust and all the other holocausts of World War II. It is a lie, however, that few Christians opposed the Nazi agenda. Whether the Catholic and Protestant

Churches, as they existed in Germany in the 1930s, could have stopped the Nazis is debatable, and the answer depends on our definitions of church and Christian. That powerlessness was the culmination of centuries of failure to change men's hearts, including the Jews. It was also the result of decades of failure to maintain the dominance of Christian cultural norms. The unprecedented brutality and carnage of the Nazi era and World War II are the result of a failure even to comprehend the impact of losing Christian culture.

The lessons of the Church War include the ease with which a nation can slip its cultural moorings, and the danger of drift. Those who have no anchor cannot feel the pull of the current. Those who have no fixed reference point on the shore and see only the others swept along with them in the "mainstream" can have no idea of how far they are being carried by whatever popular currents are flowing through their society.

It is one of the greatest ironies of all time, and one of the greatest triumphs of the Father of Lies, that secular and neo-pagan enemies of Christ today condemn the Christian churches for not stopping the Holocaust, and yet assume no guilt at all for their own spiritual brethren perpetrating it. They gloatingly pronounce that the moral claims of Christianity perished in the Nazi death camps. Yet, it seems to me that a proper reading of the history shows the opposite to be true – that the moral claims of a secular, anti-Christian society perished in the death camps. For if a waning Christianity failed to stop the Holocaust, then so too did the ascending handmaidens of secularism – rationalism, science, and democracy. Hitler's party was democratically elected; not by a majority of the popular vote, that's true, but by a plurality of voters and the Nazi Reich was given absolute power by the legal action of the German Parliament.

Upon Hitler's assuming power (and long before in many cases) jurists, philosophers, theologians, scholars of all disciplines, and men of science, especially medical doctors and psychiatrists, all avowed disciples of scientific rationalism, flocked to the Nazi cause, where they were absorbed into the Nazi's deep, dark irrationalism and the self-destructive delusion of power, and even of their own godhood. It was German intellectuals and men of science who transformed the Nazis' early pulp magazine anti-Semitism into *Rassenkunde*, the "science of racial hygiene" that dominated German university curricula during the Nazi era and led directly to the extermination centers.

It was Medical Doctors and Psychiatrists operating on the principles of this new "science" who signed the death warrants, at so much per head, of every man, woman, and child who entered the gas chambers whether in the euthanasia holocaust of tens of thousands of "unproductive national comrades" or millions of Jewish, Polish, Russian, etc., etc. "*untermenchen*" (subhumans).

Let's return for a moment to the Nuremberg War Crime Trials, some of the most inspiring, shattering, disheartening, but altogether enlightening and interesting reading (available online through the Library of Congress, by the way). One Richard Hildebrandt, former official in the

domestic euthanasia program, and later head of the SS Race and Resettlement Office (RuSHA) was tried for war crimes, and crimes against humanity. On the charges against him for his part in the “mercy killing” of German citizens, the American military Tribunal had this finding: ***“It is our view that euthanasia, when carried out under state legislation against citizens of the state only, does not constitute a crime against humanity.”*** (Trials of War Criminals, Vol. V, p-162)

Rather chilling isn't it, to know that American military officers - judges and attorneys in their civilian lives - saw Hitler's genocidal dictum as superseding the principle on which our republic was founded, that “all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...” including “life”. If that's not a chilling revelation now, perhaps later on when we've had a close look at the euthanasia program, you will find it more so.

Hildebrandt was given a twenty-five year prison sentence for crimes against Poles and Russians in his role as head of RuSHA. He was then given over to Poland, where he was hanged for those same crimes.

In the final analysis, neither rational enlightenment nor science, nor law based on them, possesses any true moral system of its own (at least as Christians would recognize morality). In Nazi Germany, the institutions of learning and the practitioners of science and law eagerly served the hand that fed them. Only splintered segments of Christianity refused to be led off into the dark, thus the Church War of the 1930's.

Unfortunately, Christians had to fight on two fronts – a civil war against the apostasy of the baptized, and against the power of the state. This one fact stands out in stark relief in examining those times, however: our condemnation of the Holocaust, our abhorrence of it, comes from the traditional Christian perspective of our culture that all human life has God given value.

There is nothing in any scientific system, nor in any modern political philosophy to condemn the Holocaust, or any other of the countless bloody horrors bespattering the history of mankind; no more than there was anything in the pre-Christian Roman worldview to condemn setting starved lions on children for the amusement of crowds at the Forum, or in Hindu theology to condemn ecstatic worshippers throwing the elderly, sick, and unwanted children under the Juggernaut's giant log rollers, or burning alive wives on their husband's funeral pyres, or in Aztec theology to condemn their priests cutting out the beating hearts of human sacrifices and joining their god-king and his royal retinue in dining on their victims' flesh.

By their lights it is good to destroy the weak, the minority, the non-conforming, the non-productive. Hitler, Goering and the rest were condemned for violating the old fashioned Christian morality of the war's victors, battered and worn thin as it was even then. When the last shred of the Christian worldview is gone from our culture...what then?

Here we arrive at the threshold of a very great danger for our times. Hitler had a messianic complex, more in the Wagnerian mold than the Christian, but he saw himself taking on the sins of his people, and in a sense he did. By “his people”, though I don't mean the German people, but those who share with Hitler a common worldview, and a common spirit. A sigh of relief went up when Hitler's reign of terror ended, and today he is the universal bogeyman. In how many languages and cultures do people accuse their enemies of being new Hitlers?

Yet, most people know nothing of Hitler or Nazism beyond the names. Hitler personally is made to bear the iniquity of his people, freeing those who share much of his worldview to inhabit the top echelons of government, business and industry, to rule the institutions of higher learning, and

even to wear the mantle of Christianity in the vast emptiness of spiritually dead churches. From those perches they have continued the work Hitler so mightily championed, Satan's agenda – turning good into evil and evil into good, destroying true Christianity, morality, decency, the family, and human life.

Library shelves are crowded with volumes psychoanalyzing Hitler – his alleged sexual perversions, his alleged self loathing over his alleged Jewish blood, his alleged boyhood traumas, his undoubted WW I traumas, etc., etc., etc. I would be among the last to say that Hitler was entirely sane, but how does his insanity explain the multitude of his followers who put the euthanasia program and Final Solution into practice? Were they all insane?

Were Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin insane when they caused the death of tens of millions of “undesirables” in the Soviet Union? How about all the rank and file Reds who manned the thousands and tens of thousands of firing squads murdering the aristocracy, bourgeoisie, priests and the Christian faithful. Or those who conducted relentless raids on the kulaks (small landowning farmers and, thus, “class enemies”), causing millions of them to starve and sending countless thousands more to die in the “Gulag Archipelago” of forced labor camps, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn labeled it? Hitler had the success of the Bolshevik genocide as an inspiration (with hardly a murmur of protest in the west from that day to this, much less charges of “insanity”), and many more inspirations back to the dawn of history.

Hitler was a man of his time, a time when men and nations, freed from the specter of an Almighty God, were besotted by Social Darwinism and the delusion of strength. A few years before Hitler, Mussolini began making Italy into a warlike Fascist state. Mussolini declared, *“Only war carries human energies to the highest level and puts the seal of nobility upon people who have the courage to undertake it.”* (Wallbank, p-361) Il Duce was less successful in getting the rank and file Italian fired up for death and glory however. The Japanese also were laboring under a fascist, racist imperialism and, as much of Asia and the Japanese themselves know, the appeal of death and glory was very successful in Japan.

The catalog of what our nominal Christian culture calls atrocities and genocides, great and small, is nauseatingly long and crosses all racial, religious, ethnic, and national lines (need I list them?). Was all this great mass of humanity insane? Or is it the followers of the man from Galilee who prophesied that the meek will inherit the earth who are insane? Sigmund Freud said so, as we shall see in a chapter on the philosophical and theological background of the Church War.

Have we overlooked the possibility that Hitler was acting according to a perfectly natural ethical system, that history informs us is the norm for humankind? Have we been so enamored by Rousseau's idealization of “natural man” that we've forgotten the Biblical conceptions of the fall of man, and the depravity of “natural man”, and of a spiritual enemy who stalks up and down the lands seeking whom he may devour – concepts that were inspired by the creator God. Or, if you doubt that, concepts inspired by thousands of years of painful human experience.

War Comes to God's House is not a biography of leading figures of the German Church War. Nor is it a memorial to those little known Christians who were victims of the Church War - though they deserve better remembrance. Nor is this a condemnation of those who failed to stop the rise of Nazism and all its evils. Declaring what this book is not is much simpler than describing what it actually is. *War Comes* is ... a history perhaps? (Academic purists might strongly disagree); the journal of an odyssey of personal discovery? (Please, not that! Although I do admit to dragging the reader to a lot of sights I find fascinating while ignoring so many other noteworthy ones.). A critic might flippantly declare it simply a lengthy exercise in the three r's of pop

journalism in this age of blogging – ranting, raving, and ‘riting. Perhaps there is more than a little of all these elements in it, *War Comes* is a rather large 'book' after all.

Let's just call it a story from a particular time and place, containing history and biography, a fairly easy dose of philosophy and theology, and the observations and opinions of a distant observer with an intense interest in the subject - and a deep debt to real historians, philosophers, and theologians. It is, you will find, more a book of questions than of answers, with a collection of characters who confront the great questions of life in different ways.

Why should you read this book (let's call it a 'book' for simplicity's sake)? Since you have opened it, you must be interested in the subject. It is the importance of the subject that makes this book worth the reading, not any virtue of the author. Yet I do, perhaps, contribute something of value to the subject, beyond a great deal of labor. I am not a member of the fraternity of prominent academics and the toast of leftish cocktail parties, nor a Hollywood celebrity playing the role of a serious thinker. Nor, again, am I a faux-conservative celebrity peddling controversy. I am, as far as you my dear reader is concerned, a nobody. Therefore, you will more likely check my facts, question my motives, and consider my opinions carefully. If I drive the narrative toward some conclusions, you will evaluate them on their merits, not on my authority as a celebrity.

Having spent the greater part of my sixty-odd years in pursuits other than ferreting out the secrets of mankind's past, my observations are surely lacking in some ways. However, I do believe I bring a perspective that's sorely lacking in most academic and many popular treatments of the subject. Much (but by no means all) of that which has been written about the rise of Nazism and the German Church War has come from the perspectives of the detached, purely secular historian, or the liberal/left slanted academic world. Those perspectives cannot gain a clear view into the heart of the Church War. They do not understand faith in God, at least in a God who intervenes in history and controls the destiny of men and nations. They do not understand belief in the authority of Holy Scripture or hold a worldview shaped by Biblical revelation.

Most writers of the Liberal/Left persuasion have so utopian a view of man that they must make the very concept of sin disappear in order to make mankind fit their exalted image. And the political Left never understands love of one's own land and people, culture and heritage. These are crucial issues underpinning the complex cultural struggles that gave rise to Nazism and the Church War.

Kindly note here, dear readers, the favor I have just done you in deleting some long, soul-searching explanations of why I differ on the above issues. It saves your time and my much cherished privacy. Just trust me when I say that I do understand faith in a God who controls the destiny of men and nations; I do understand belief in the authority of Scripture, and the older I get the more I rely upon it; I do not hold a utopian view of mankind's nature, but I do understand love of one's own people and culture, imperfect as they may be.

On other points, however, I am somewhat at a loss. As an American, proud of a heritage of hard-scrabble farmers, shop keepers, school teachers, and itinerant preachers, I don't understand respect for, or nostalgia for monarchy and hereditary "nobility". Yet, these are also key factors in the Church War story. The accusation is made that the Christian heroes of the Nazi era were members of the old elites who opposed the Nazis, not from true Christian conviction, but only to preserve their elite status against the upstart Nazis. Though there were many "little people" who opposed the Nazis, it is quite true that the leadership of the Protestant and Catholic opposition were of the upper crust. Of their motives, you will have to judge for yourselves.

For myself, however, I believe that I see an analogy among American evangelicals. Wealthy suburban “fundamentalist” churches take the lead in the American culture wars, just as it was in Germany. The smaller, poorer, more rural churches in America, though many cling tenaciously to orthodoxy, are content within their own communities. I see in this country many of the divisions that weakened the churches in the face of the Nazis; but I will leave it to you, my dear readers, to draw your own conclusions about that also.

Then there is the matter of church doctrine and polity. As a Baptist, I don’t really understand hierarchical churches such as the Catholic and Lutheran who “dispense grace”. But these issues were bandied about a great deal in the Church War, and I must deal with them as best I can. My conception of Christian faith has more to do with forming an individual relationship with Jesus Christ, then joining the visible church for worship, fellowship, instruction, and celebration of the sacraments as symbols of acts of grace dispensed directly by the Divine hand. That (except for the concept of communion) would place me closer to the camp of German Pietism which, I contend, formed the core of Protestant opposition to Nazism.

However one may wish to categorize *War Comes*, it is written and dedicated to the next generation, because the ageless forces seen uncommonly clearly in the German Church War three quarters of a century ago are shaping our future even now. *War Comes to God’s House: The German Church War, Euthanasia, The Holocaust... and US* is the story of ordinary people caught up in the desperate struggle mankind has faced ever since the Garden of Eden. That struggle is seldom seen more clearly than in the Nazi era “Church War” however, and so it is well worth studying. The “Church War” was the key to the tragic events of that era, and understanding that era will help us understand our own.

I’ll leave this overlong introduction now with only one further comment. The history of the German Church War, World War II, and all the associated holocausts is distressing and depressing; but on the other hand, knowing that these terrible things have transpired and the sun still rises helps me rise to face it.

A word of warning though, as Mr. Bilbo Baggins discovered, you can never tell where the pathway outside your own front door will lead you. These events cannot be understood in isolation and, if you choose to come along on this excursion, we will tread many long and strange paths in coming to a better understanding of the German Church War as the struggle of two diametrically opposed world views that will continue until the end of this age.