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CHAPTER 1

WAITING FOR HITLER

Rudolf Hess, the son of a German wholesale merchant and student at the University of Munich, wrote a prize-winning essay answering the question: “What Kind of a Man Will Lead Germany Back to Her Previous Heights?” When he met Hitler in 1920, he was struck by the parallels between what he had written and the man who was now in his presence. Hitler was stirred by the essay and impressed with the man who had such uncanny insight. Little wonder they became close friends.

First and foremost, said Hess, this individual had to be a man of the people, a man whose roots were deeply embedded

in the masses so that he would know how to treat them psychologically. Only such a man could gain the trust of the people; that, however, was only to be his public image.

Second, in reality such a man should have nothing in common with the masses; for when the need arose, he should not shrink from bloodshed. Great questions are always decided by “blood and iron.” The public image must be kept separate from the actual performance.

Third, he had to be a man who was willing to trample on his closest friends to achieve his goals. He must be a man of terrible hardness; as the needs arise, he must crush people with the boots of a grenadier.¹

Hitler vowed he would be that man. He would give the appearance of being one of the masses, but in reality he would be quite another. When brutality was called for, he could act with force and decisiveness. He would do what the individuals among the masses could not. He would not shrink from cruelty.

Privately Hitler prepared for war; publicly he gave speeches about his desire for peace. Privately he enjoyed pornography; publicly he insisted on right conduct, no swearing, no off-color jokes in his presence. At times he could be charming and forgiving; most other times he was monstrously cruel, as when he insisted that those who conspired against him be “hung on a meat hook and slowly strangled to death with piano wire, the pressure being periodically released to intensify the death agonies.” Privately (and sometimes publicly) he prided himself in his honesty, yet often he reveled in his ability to deceive. “The German people must be misled if the support of the masses is required,” he mused.

Hitler engineered the atrocities seen in *Schindler's List*, a movie that dramatized but a small slice of “the final solu-

tion.” He was a cauldron of contradictions. During his days in Vienna he saved dried bread to feed squirrels and birds and just months after coming to power signed three pieces of legislation to protect animals; yet he worked himself into a frenzy of delight over the pictures of great capitals in Europe in flames. He was especially ecstatic at the bombing of Warsaw and London, and angry with the commandant of Paris for not setting that city on fire.

He could weep with tenderness when talking to children and rejoice over the completion of another concentration camp. Compassionate and even generous with family and friends, he would become filled with vindictive rage at anyone—including close friends—who stood in the way of his agenda. He could be charming or brutal, generous or savage. “He who spoke the words of Jesus,” said Robert Waite, “hated all mankind.”

Hitler holds a fascination for us because his dictatorship enjoyed such wide support of the people. Perhaps never in history was a dictator so well liked. He had the rare gift of motivating a nation to want to follow him. Communist leaders such as Lenin or Mao Zedong arose to power through revolutions that cost millions of lives; consequently, they were hated by the masses. Hitler attracted not only the support of the middle class but also of university students and professors. For example, psychologist Carl Jung grew intoxicated with “the mighty phenomenon of National Socialism at which the whole world gazes in astonishment.”

Hitler arose in Germany at a time when the nation was a democracy. He attained his power legitimately, if unfairly. The nation was waiting for him, eager to accept a demagogue who appeared to have the talent needed to lead her out of the abyss. *The people yearned for a leader who would do for them what democracy could not.*

THE EARLY MIRACLES

Hitler's report card was filled with such astounding achievements that many Christians saw him as an answer to their prayers. Some Christians, I have been told—yes, I said Christians—took the picture of Christ from the wall in their homes and substituted a portrait of Hitler. Winston Churchill observed Hitler in 1937 and said that his accomplishments were “among the most remarkable in the whole history of the world.” Here is a partial list of what he was able to do without the obstructions inherent in a democracy:

1. He revived a collapsed economy in five years.
2. He erased the shame of Germany's defeat in World War I by reclaiming the Rhineland and discarding the unfair Treaty of Versailles.
3. He gave millions of Germans attractive vacations through his *Kraft durch Freude* (“Strength through joy”) program.
4. He established training schools for those who were unskilled and brought the nation to full employment.
5. He brought crime under control.
6. He built freeways and promised the production of a car that ordinary Germans would soon be able to afford.
7. He gave Germans a reason to believe in themselves, to believe that they could become great again.

If he had died before World War II, one historian mused, he would have gone down in history as “Adolf the Great, one of the outstanding figures in German history.” But Hitler didn't die before World War II; he didn't die until the German people had surrendered their personal rights, until laws were enacted that led to the extermination of more than 8 million

people, and until Germany and several other countries were destroyed in a war that killed 50 million people in the greatest bloodbath in history. He didn't die until *thousands of pastors joined the SS troops in swearing personal allegiance to him*.

Of course the Germans did not know that it would turn out that way. But let's not overlook the fact that they wanted a dictatorship; they yearned for a strong leader who would bypass the slow pace of democratic reform. People were starving, political crimes were multiplying, and Germany found herself under a cloud of national shame. The democratic process was stalled with more than two dozen different parties vying for political power. Democracy might be preferable when times are good; a dictatorship works best when times are bad. For Germany the times were bad, very bad.

But we are still left with a nagging question: Why did the German people, and more particularly the church, not part ways with Hitler once his real agenda became known? We might understand their initial deception, but why did so many hundreds of thousands of Germans directly or indirectly participate in the atrocities that became so much a part of the Nazi agenda? These multiplied thousands of otherwise decent Germans boycotted Jewish businesses, participated in mock trials, and brutally controlled the prison camps. In short, Hitler had helpers, millions of helpers, who did his bidding no matter how despicable their assignments became.

Is it true, as some have suggested, that the Germans of Hitler's era were somehow half-man and half-demon, the likes of which will never appear on the earth again? Was historian Friedrich Meinecke correct when he suggested that the Nazis were a "fluke" or "accident" of history that will, in all probability, never recur? Or were the Germans not only human but fully human, simply human without the veneer,

human without the constraints of society and God?

The answer, as we shall discover, is that the Germans of the Nazi era—indeed Hitler himself—were all too human. Just read headlines about atrocities in Sudan, starvation in North Korea, or the strangulation of children in our neighborhoods, and it becomes clear that raw humanity is not very pretty. Evil held in check often erupts when the conditions are right. When the restraints are gone, when people are desperate, and when power is up for grabs, the human heart is laid bare for all to see. *We are naive if we think Nazi Germany cannot happen again. In fact, the Bible predicts that it will.*

THE CONFLICT OF CHURCH AND STATE

The story of how Hitler crushed the church in Germany is, of course, the primary focus of this book. In passing, we should note that he banned prayer in schools, changed Christian holidays into pagan festivals, and eventually forced the church leadership to accept his outrageous demands. His political machine swallowed the church whole because the church had lost its biblical mission. Thus the state not only interfered with religious practices, but controlled them. A powerful state has always been a threat to the existence and influence of the church. Whether the threat be Nazism, Communism, or humanism, *a state that is hostile to religion will always attempt to push the church toward forced irrelevancy.*

Even without a dictatorship a state can marginalize the influence of the church. As the state expands its powers, it can initiate laws that limit the church's freedoms. Consider the phrase "the separation of church and state." Interpreted in one way, it can mean that the church should be free to

exercise its influence and practice religion without interference from the state. That kind of separation is exactly what the church in Germany so desperately needed.

However, here in America the phrase “separation of church and state” is given a sinister twist by civil libertarians. To them it means that religious people should not be allowed to practice their religion in the realm that belongs to the state. Religion, we are told, should be practiced privately; the state must be “cleansed” of every vestige of religious influence. By insisting that the state be “free for all religions,” organizations such as the ACLU in effect make it free for none!

Here in America, where church and state are separate, our conflict is quite different from the predicament of the church in Nazi Germany, where religion and politics had always been wedded in a close, if stormy, marriage. Yet this study of Germany will force us to grapple with the same questions the German people faced seventy and more years ago.

- What is the responsibility of the church when the state adopts unjust policies?
- For Christians, where does patriotism end and civil disobedience begin?
- Is silence in the face of injustice the same as complicity?
- Are small compromises justified if they might prevent the state from crushing religious freedom?
- How can the church effectively spread the gospel while fighting an unpopular battle for social justice?
- What warning signs are there when the church buys into the culture of the day and can no longer stand against prevalent evils?
- What is the relationship between a church’s theology

and its ability to withstand the crushing power of the secular state?

The answers to these questions are not easy. Whether in Europe or America, tension has always existed between church and state. To appreciate the struggle in the Third Reich, we must understand the history of the First and Second Reichs, where the seeds of the church's deception were planted. And the Third Reich will help us to understand a coming Fourth Reich that will dwarf Hitler in the magnitude of its scope and cruelty.

That word *reich* is best translated as "empire" or "kingdom." To the German ear it has almost a sacred tone. How well I remember my parents, German-speaking people who emigrated to Canada, teaching us the Lord's Prayer: *Dein Reich komme, dein Wille geschehe* . . . For the Nazis that word *reich* would come to express the mystical and eternal German kingdom.

Join me as we take a quick tour of the relationship between the church and reich in European history.

THE FIRST REICH (800–1806)

Charlemagne (Charles the Great) was crowned emperor by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day in the year 800. Charlemagne was praying in front of a crypt in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome while Leo sang the Mass. Then without warning, Leo placed the crown on Charles's head as the congregation gave its blessing. Charles was both surprised and pleased; he left St. Peter's determined to use the sword to build the one universal, Catholic church. His conquests brought unity to Europe and began the Holy Roman Empire (an empire that

Voltaire said was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire).

Nevertheless, Charlemagne cemented the growing unity of church and state that was begun during the days of Constantine (274–337). During the first two centuries AD, the church was persecuted by the Roman Empire; when Constantine conquered the city of Rome in 312, the church married its enemy and became corrupted by it. The sword of steel (the state) would now exist to promote the sword of Scripture (the church). The coronation of Charles the Great was the high point of the fatal marriage.

Though Charles had mistresses and a limited education, he saw his role as the protector of the doctrines of the church. Since infant baptism was the law of the land, anyone who was baptized as an adult upon profession of faith in Christ was persecuted and even put to death. It was not that Charles was interested in theology; rather, he believed that the universal church had to remain universal, encompassing everyone within the boundaries of the empire. Religion unified the diverse countries, and infant baptism would keep future generations “Christian.”

Of course the state also persecuted those who differed in their interpretation of the Mass and those who spurned the authority of the pope. Such “heretics” were tried, imprisoned, or even put to death. Interestingly, many true believers claimed that little changed when the Roman Empire was “christianized.” Previously, they were persecuted by pagan Rome; next they were

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persecuted by religious Rome. Either way, the sword hurt just as much!

This uneasy relationship between church and state (sometimes cozy, sometimes competitive, and often corrupt) did not end with the Reformation of 1517. Even today the church in Europe (both Catholic and Protestant) is supported through taxes. Of course the so-called golden rule often applies: Whoever has the gold has the rule! In my opinion, the marriage of church and state is always detrimental to the mission of the church. Either the church will change its message to accommodate the state's political agenda, or the political rulers will use the church to their own ends. Regardless, the purity of the church is compromised.

This unholy unity contributed to the paralysis of the church during the Hitler era. At the very moment it should have been condemning the politics of the day with one unified voice, the church found its existence dependent upon the goodwill of the state. The church had a history of allegiance to its militaristic Prussian heroes. In the fourth century Constantine had the cross of Christ emblazoned on the shields of his soldiers; in the twentieth century, the Nazis wrapped the Cross in the swastika, making the cross a weapon to further Hitler's agenda. But I'm ahead of the story.

To return to the history of the First Reich: From 1273 to 1806, the Holy Roman emperors were, for the most part, Germans from Austria, known as the Habsburg dynasty. The conflict between church and state continued until the last centuries of the empire, when the emperors lost much of their power and rival kingdoms arose throughout Europe.

Where does Germany fit into all of this? During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the territory of Brandenburg/Prussia arose and was ruled by a succession of powerful

kings. The Brandenburg Gate in the heart of Berlin was built in honor of the territory that bears its name. The beautiful palaces of the Prussian kings can still be admired today on the outskirts of Berlin. Prussia, as we will learn, became involved in a series of wars and eventually brought unity to the German-speaking people of Europe.

In 1804, the pope tried to crown Napoleon Bonaparte in the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, but Napoleon snatched the crown from the pontiff and crowned himself, signifying that, unlike Charlemagne, he had won the right to be emperor on his own merits! Napoleon's goal was to substitute a French empire for the German one that had dominated Europe for so many centuries. After crushing Austria, he turned on Prussia; and when he marched victoriously into Berlin, the First Reich had come to its end.

However, following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, the state of Prussia was recreated, and French dominance soon ended. In fact, Prussia rebounded from French rule with a deepened sense of nationalism and, through a series of wars, unified Germany. Thus the conditions were right to inaugurate a Second Reich.

THE SECOND REICH (1871–1918)

Picture Germany as a collection of about three hundred independent states, each having its own organization, often its own currency, and even separate weights and measures. What might be done to bring unity to the fragmented German states?

Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898), the shrewd new premier of Prussia, had the political savvy to know that only war could unify the German-speaking peoples of Europe. He

reversed the defeat suffered under Napoleon and prepared a powerful army. The consummate politician, he provoked a war with Austria, bringing that country under Prussian control. Next, he lured France into battle, turning the tables on the very country that had defeated Prussia under Napoleon's able leadership. Germany at last was unified—and powerful!

To add insult to France's defeat, Bismarck had Prussian King William I brought to France to be crowned in the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles as the head of a new, unified empire. He was crowned Kaiser (Caesar) Wilhelm, sending a clear message that his agenda was to reclaim every country that once belonged to the old Holy Roman Empire and bring it under German rule. Thus the Second Reich had an auspicious beginning.

If the First Reich prepared the way for Hitler by unifying church and state, the Second Reich contributed to the paralysis of the church by teaching that there must be a split between private and public morality. Bismarck claimed to have had a conversion experience to Christianity while visiting in the home of some pietistic friends. But he was faced with the realization that as a political statesman, he had to violate the moral principles that governed his private behavior as a Christian. He reasoned that when acting as a servant of the state, a man was not bound by the same morality he should have as an individual. *The state, it was argued, should not be judged according to conventional law because its responsibilities went beyond ordinary human values.*

This dichotomy—which some would say goes back to Luther, who insisted that the peasants obey their leaders no matter how tyrannical—was taught in the German churches. Paul's teaching that we should be subject to political authorities was emphasized (Romans 13:1–2). The laws of the state

were to be obeyed without asking for a moral rationale for what one was commanded to do. As Bismarck said, "I believe I am obeying God when I serve my king." A commitment to high national honor was a sacred duty.

Those who participated in the atrocities of the Third Reich frequently appealed to this distinction to defend their actions. When asked how they could reconcile their brutality with their humanistic values, they often replied, "Well, that was war, and obviously one has to do his duty, no matter how hard." In the words of the notorious Eichmann, "I had to obey the laws of my country and my flag."

Bismarck agreed with his Prussian predecessor Frederick the Great, who once boasted that "salvation is God's affair; everything else belongs to me!" This double standard became known as the doctrine of the "two spheres," a subject to which we shall return when we discuss the role of the church in Nazi Germany. That doctrine is still found among politicians today who say that privately they oppose abortion or the imposition of gay rights upon society, but they don't think that their private views should influence their input into public legislation.

Under Bismarck a *Reichstag* (German Parliament) was formed, and Bismarck was named prime minister and later chancellor. Though a new constitution was written, the Parliament had practically no power but was merely a forum for the discussion and debate of political issues. Both Bismarck and the Kaiser shared a contempt for individual freedom and democracy. Only a monarchy, they believed, could deal with all the problems of a loosely knit Germany that needed to be kept in line. Bismarck deeply believed the expression he coined on the day he was installed as prime minister: "The great questions of the day will not be settled by resolutions

and majority votes . . . but by blood and iron.”

In 1871, when Kaiser Wilhelm was crowned, he laid the cornerstone for the massive Reichstag in Berlin. If you have visited the city or seen pictures of the structure, you should be reminded that it stands as a monument to the Second Reich.

When World War I began in 1914, most Germans were hungry for war, believing that war was, in the words of Prussian General von Moltke, part of God’s creation, “enfolding the noblest virtues of courage, self-renunciation, loyalty, and willingness to sacrifice with one’s life.” They also believed that the war that began in the summer would be won “before Christmas.”

No one wanted war more than Adolf Hitler, who was twenty-five years old at the time. He volunteered for service and later reflected, “I am not ashamed to say that, overcome with rapturous enthusiasm, I fell to my knees and thanked Heaven from an overflowing heart for granting me the good fortune of being allowed to live at this time.”²

Thanks to America’s decision to enter the war, Germany surrendered on November 9, 1918. Kaiser Wilhelm II was humiliated and, to save his life, fled to the Netherlands,

where he spent the rest of his days studying occult writings to try to understand why Germany had lost the war. After all, his soothsayers, including the famous Houston Chamberlain (whom we shall meet again in a future chapter), had assured him that the superior Germans were destined to win.

When Hitler heard the news

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of Germany's defeat, while recuperating from an attack of mustard gas, he had a mystical vision that he believed was his "call" into politics. He cried for the first time since the death of his mother. He then knew he was destined to play a role in Germany's future. The world eventually would have to cope with the consequences of that decision.

With the defeat of Germany and the formation of a new constitutional government, the Second Reich had come to an inglorious end.

THE THIRD REICH (1933–1945)

Given a legacy of militarism—the exaltation of the state above ordinary morality—we can see that Germany was waiting for a dictator to lead her out of her humiliation. Let's trace the roots of the tree that bore such bitter fruit.

The Philosophical Roots

Some people think that philosophers sit in ivory towers and spin theories that have little to do with the life of the ordinary, hardworking citizen. But in point of fact, philosophers have often ruled entire countries (Karl Marx is but one example). What is taught in philosophy classrooms today is believed by the man on the street tomorrow.

Germany has had its philosophers too, brilliant men who gained a wide audience through their teachings and writings. They prepared the soil and even planted the seeds of nationalism and fanned hatred of the Jews. Whether they knew it or not, they were preparing the way for Hitler. Let's meet just two of them.

Georg Hegel (1770–1831) held the chair of philosophy at Berlin University. His dialectical philosophy, which inspired

Marx, preached the glorification of the state, saying it was “God walking on earth.” Individual rights, he believed, simply got in the way of the state as supreme authority. The state, he said, is “the moral universe . . . and has the foremost right against the individual, whose supreme duty is to be a member of the state . . . for the right of the world spirit is above all special privileges.”³

War, Hegel taught, was the great purifier that was necessary for the ethical health of the people. As for private moral virtues such as humility and patience, these must never stand in the way of the state’s agenda; indeed the state must crush such “innocent flowers.” Here is the ultimate justification for the doctrine of the two spheres: Private morality should be private! State morality was something different altogether.

Hegel predicted that Germany would flourish again since she represented the highest form of dialectical development. Let the French do as they wish; let Russia and Britain grow strong, he said. The laws of history are on Germany’s side. She deserves to rise again, and arise she will.

As might be expected, Hegel denied the uniqueness of Christianity and argued that the Old Testament had to be rejected because of its Jewish roots. A pure Christian faith could be had only by a pure race, namely the Germans. Thus, a new Christianity would have to evolve that was suited to the higher German spirit.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), the son of a Lutheran pastor, wrote a bitter assault on Christianity, accusing it of weakness and of being the cause of Germany’s ills. In his *Anti-christ*, he wrote, “I call Christianity the one great curse, the one enormous and innermost perversion, the one moral blemish of mankind. . . . I regard Christianity as the most seductive lie that has yet existed.”⁴ Christianity, he said, with its emphasis

on the virtues of mercy and forgiveness, made Germany weak.

Nietzsche, you will remember, proclaimed that God was dead. He wrote, "Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the grave diggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead and we have killed him." The churches, he said, were tombs and sepulchers of God.

Nietzsche faced the frightful implications of atheism without blinking. Listen to how he described what the death of God means for man: "How shall we, the murderers of all murderers comfort ourselves? . . . Who will wipe the blood off us? What water is there to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it?"⁵

Nietzsche knew that with God's death there was no answer for man's guilt, no one to wipe the blood from our hands. Since God was dead, a successor would have to be found. Nietzsche knew that in an atheistic state the strong would rule the weak. He proclaimed the coming of the master race and a superman who would unify Germany and perhaps the world. A coming elite would rule from which this superman would spring. He and those around him would become "lords of the earth." This man would be "the magnificent blond brute, avidly rampant for spoil and victory."

Nietzsche, who died in 1900, did not live to see the rise of the Third Reich or the spread of atheistic Communism. But his prediction that the twentieth century would be one of bloodshed was, unfortunately, all too true. With God out of the way, humans would be unrestrained; there would be no fear of judgment, no belief in the virtues of morality. When humans realized that history was based on raw power, there

would be universal madness. (Note that Nietzsche himself was insane for the last eleven years of his life.) As Ravi Zacharias put it, Nietzsche understood that man “in stabbing at the heart of God, had in reality, bled himself.”⁶

Nietzsche reinforced the prevailing philosophy in Germany that a genius was above the law, that he should not be bound by the morals of ordinary men. Private virtues simply stood in the way of the greater virtues of control and power. Compassion made a state weak; unbridled power made a state strong. It was not the meek but the ruthless who would inherit the earth. The superman would crush cherished virtues so that he could rule the world. Listen once more to these chilling words from Nietzsche’s pen:

The strong men, the masters, regain the pure consciousness of a beast of prey; monsters filled with joy, they can return from a fearful succession of murder, arson, rape, and torture with the same joy in their hearts. . . . To judge morality properly, it must be replaced by two concepts borrowed from zoology: the taming of the beast and the breeding of a specific species.⁷

Is it any wonder that Hitler was so mesmerized by Nietzsche that he gave a copy of his writings to his friend Benito Mussolini? Hitler often visited Nietzsche’s museum in Weimar and posed for photographs of himself staring enraptured at the bust of that great man. Nietzsche, many historians believe, would have abhorred Hitler’s excesses, particularly his anti-Semitism. Be that as it may, Hitler adopted him as a spiritual brother and interpreted his writings to suit his purposes. Whether justly or not, Nietzsche’s writings were used, in the words of one historian, “to unleash all the devils of hell.”

Hitler considered himself the superman of Nietzsche’s

philosophy. He rejoiced that the doctrine of God that had always stood in the way of brutality and deceit had now been removed. Once man had replaced God, the way was clear for Nietzsche's superrace led by a superman to dominate the world.

Perhaps now we can better understand the concentration camps. Ideas do have consequences, and the notion that God was dead freed humans to do as they pleased. With God cast down, man was free to rise up and pursue his unrestrained lust for power.

Viktor Frankl, the great psychiatrist and author who survived the Holocaust, wrote this stinging critique:

The gas chambers of Auschwitz were the ultimate consequence of the theory that man is nothing but the product of heredity and environment—or, as the Nazis liked to say, “Of Blood and Soil.” I’m absolutely convinced that the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Maidanek were ultimately prepared not in some ministry or other in Berlin, but rather at the desks and in the lecture halls of nihilistic scientists and philosophers.⁸

It has been said that after God died in the nineteenth century, man died in the twentieth. For when God is dead, man becomes an untamed beast.

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Theological Roots

Germany was (and still is) the hotbed of liberal scholarship that stripped Christianity of its uniqueness. An influential theologian named Ludwig Feuerbach would have agreed with the New Agers of today that the doctrine of God should be more properly interpreted as the doctrine of man. The Incarnation, he said, teaches us that the Being who was worshiped as God is now recognized as a man. Man must no longer be second in religion; he is first. According to Feuerbach, that man is God is the highest ethic and the turning point of world history. *If Christ was divine, it was only because all of us are.*

German scholars “demythologized” the New Testament, that is, stripped it of its myths so that a kernel of truth could be found. Some theologians openly stated that the miracles of the New Testament should be forgotten and the attention of the masses fixed on the miracle of the rise of Germany to its place of leadership in the world. Little wonder that they were willing to hide the cross of Christ within the swastika.

Along with the humanization of God came the deification of man. In Weimar, Goethe had eloquently argued that man must replace God as the center of art, philosophy, and history. As a child of the Enlightenment, he believed that religion had to be rethought and made to glorify man rather than God. He could never have dreamed, however, that in exalting man he was opening the door to unrestrained evil. It is not a historical accident that Buchenwald, one of the Nazi concentration camps, was only six miles from Weimar, the seat of the Enlightenment. Hitler had, I am told, perverted delight in setting up a death camp near the city that prided itself in tolerance and the glory of man.

If, as Frankl said, the ovens of Auschwitz were prepared

in the lecture halls of Europe, we can also say that those ovens were fueled by liberal scholarship that glorified man and declared God to be irrelevant. Such doctrines undercut the ability of the church to stand against the atrocities of the Third Reich. Substituting human ideas for the revelation of God, *the Third Reich reinterpreted the Cross of Christ to advance a pagan agenda.*

Political Roots

Germany was badly stung by its defeat and humiliation after World War I. Political chaos was rampant throughout the major cities. In Munich, the Communist party, encouraged by the successful revolution in Russia in 1917, was attempting to seize control. Political organizations were forming both to the right and the left. In Berlin, riots and social instability forced the Parliament to leave the Reichstag and move to the National Theater in Weimar to form a new government based on democratic principles and ideals.

So it was that on November 9, 1918, the Republic was proclaimed. After six months of debate, a constitution was adopted that, on paper at least, appeared capable of bringing about a stable democracy. It incorporated ideas from England, France, and the United States. The people were made sovereign, and the constitution declared that “all Germans are equal before the law.” The phrase “For the German People” was engraved on the Reichstag, where it can still be seen today.

The attempt at democracy might have succeeded were it not for the Treaty of Versailles that had been drawn up by the Allies. It restored Alsace-Lorraine to France, and territories Bismarck had conquered to Belgium, Denmark, and Poland. In addition, Germany had to make war reparation payments of 132 billion gold marks, or about \$33 billion, a sum it could

not possibly pay.

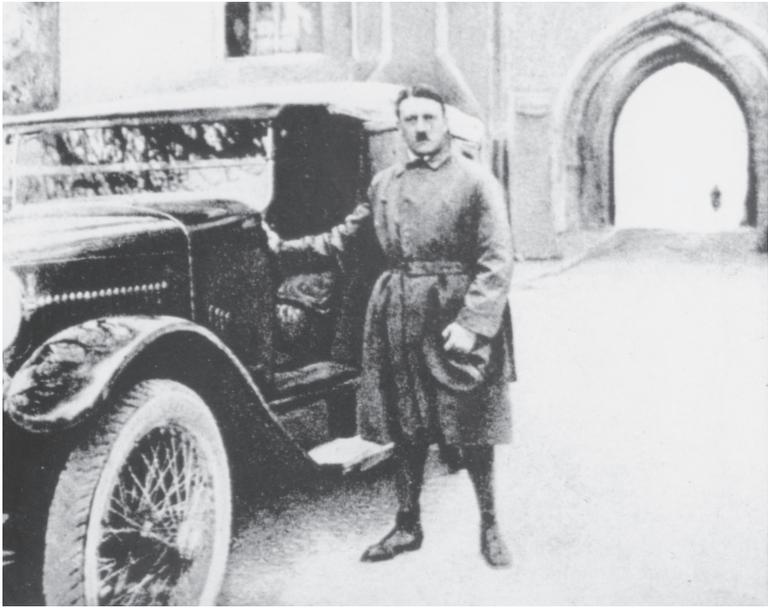
The treaty in effect disarmed Germany. It restricted the army to 100,000 men and prohibited it from having tanks or planes. The navy was reduced to little more than a token force. Then, in a final act of humiliation, Germany had to agree to take responsibility for having begun the war, and the treaty demanded that it turn Kaiser Wilhelm II over to the Allies along with eight hundred other war criminals.

Britain warned that if Germany did not sign the treaty, she would initiate a blockade around Germany and in effect starve out the Germans. The Allies were insisting on an immediate reply from Germany with the deadline set for June 24, 1919.

Finally, with the agreement of the provisional leader of the Republic, Field Marshal von Hindenburg, and with the approval of the National Assembly, the treaty was ratified. Four days later it was signed in the Hall of Mirrors in the palace at Versailles, the very place where the Second Reich had had its heady beginning when Kaiser Wilhelm I was crowned in 1871. Not only had Germany lost the war; she had also lost her dignity.

Economic Roots

The Republic, for all its good intentions, was now blamed for accepting the unfair terms of the treaty and for the subsequent economic crisis. The German mark, which had at one time been valued at 4 to a dollar, fell to 75 to a dollar, then 400 to the dollar. By 1923 it had fallen to 7,000 marks per dollar. When Germany defaulted on its war payments, the French president commanded his troops to occupy the Ruhr area. Thus the industrial heart of Germany was cut off from the rest of the country.



Hitler leaving Landsberg Prison in 1924.

That act triggered the final strangulation of Germany's choking economy. Immediately after the action of the French in January of 1923, the mark plunged to 18,000 per dollar, and by November it took 4 billion marks to equal a dollar. In effect, the mark was canceled.

There is a story, perhaps fictitious, of a woman who filled her wheelbarrow with German marks and left them outside the store, confident that no one would bother stealing the money. Sure enough, when it was time to pay for her groceries, she walked outside only to discover that the bundles of money were left on the ground but the wheelbarrow was gone! We might smile at the story, but Germans found nothing to smile about. Their savings were totally wiped out. They had lost faith in their government. The people suffered immeasurably, and the worst was yet to come.

In 1923, Hitler's dramatic attempt to overthrow the Bavarian government failed (the Putsch that will be briefly described in the next chapter). He was convicted of treason, and after his incarceration in Landsberg Prison, he decided to gain power through the political process. *He would use democracy as the path to power, then crush that democracy once he gained control.*

The economic outlook improved in 1925–1929 as unemployment decreased and retail sales went up. Ten years after the war had ended, the German Republic seemed to come into its own. The Nazi party was all but dead. But with the passion of world conquest burning in his breast, Hitler simply would not give up. He kept waiting, hoping that Germany would experience more bad times.

The worldwide depression of 1929 gave Hitler the opportunity he sought. Revolutionary that he was, he could thrive only in bad times, when unemployment was high, inflation was rampant, and anger and mistrust were spreading throughout Germany. This was his time to capture the nation, not by war but by constitutional means.

When Austria's biggest bank collapsed, it forced the banks in Berlin to close temporarily. Germany was unable to make its war payments; millions were unemployed as thousands of small businesses were wiped out. Deprived of jobs and ravaged by hunger, the Germans were willing to do anything to survive.

Hitler was delighted with the economic crisis; these were fertile times to gain the ear and vote of the masses. He campaigned against the Treaty of Versailles and assured Germans that if given a chance the country could become great again. Eventually, his time would come.