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HIST-318 – Nazi Germany

### **“A Muddled Path” – The Convoluted Relationship Between Nazism and Christianity**

A few months after Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933, the nation celebrated the 450<sup>th</sup> birthday of another famous German – Martin Luther. As historian Richard Steigmann-Gall recounts, the “grand” celebrations were a joint effort of the Nazi Party and the Protestant Church.<sup>1</sup> At the celebration in the provincial capital of East Prussia, Königsberg, Gauleiter Erich Koch spoke of how the recent Nazi seizure of power was comparable to divine will, and even compared Hitler to Luther. Koch, as it turns out, later became the Reich Commissar of Ukraine, where he was responsible for the murder of thousands of Jews and dissidents. Clearly, his actions qualify him as an unwavering Nazi. Surprisingly, though, he was also the president of his provincial Protestant synod in 1933, and retained his church membership until 1943.<sup>2</sup> In his postwar testimony, Koch would maintain that, “I held the view that the Nazi idea had to develop from a basic Prussian-Protestant attitude and from Luther’s unfinished Reformation.”<sup>3</sup>

While Koch’s insistence on intertwining Nazism and Christianity was certainly an extreme viewpoint among the Nazi leadership, Nazism and Christianity have a more muddled relationship than most Nazi scholarship acknowledges. Typical of this argument - that Nazism and Christianity were incompatible and diametrically opposed - is historian Ernst Piper, who states , “...that National Socialism was a profoundly anti-Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Steigmann-Gall, Richard. *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

movement...is a fact."<sup>4</sup> Steigmann-Gall represents the other polar extreme of Nazi scholarship, with his insistence that Nazism had strong ties to Christianity, and, more controversially, that scholars have been actively ignoring those ties in order to whitewash Christianity and vilify Nazism as part of a post-1945 ideological imperative.<sup>5</sup>

As is the case with most diametric historical orthodoxy, the most accurate depiction lies somewhere in the middle ground. When combining both points of view into a synthesis, several key themes emerge as truisms in the convoluted relationship between National Socialism and Christianity. First, as much as Hitler wanted and (to an extent) succeeded in making Germany into a Nazi state – a monolithic organization with one, unified stance on all issues – it was inexorably made up of dissenting individuals. Different strains of Nazi religiosity took hold with various party leaders, and the end result was an overall muddling of Nazi policy towards Christianity, despite relatively clear-cut individual religious views. Second, Hitler himself was an inconsistent religious ideologue, and the overall Nazi attitude toward Christianity, fittingly, took on this uncertain, multi-faceted character. Lastly, in search of a simple, coherent narrative to explain the relationship between Nazism and Christianity, much of the scholarship on this topic has taken on a bipolar, contradictory quality that does a disservice to the nuanced, complicated historical reality.

Steigmann-Gall's book features excellent examples of high Nazi officials like Koch, Hans Schemm, Wilhelm Kube, and Walter Buch, who all harbored intensely Christian notions of National Socialism. On the other hand, works of ideologically opposed historians like Gilmer Blackburn, Ernst Piper, and John Conway feature prominent anti-Christian

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<sup>4</sup> Piper, Ernst. "Steigmann-Gall, The Holy Reich." *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 1 (2007): 47-57, 47.

<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Reich*, 267.

Nazis like Alfred Rosenberg and Martin Bormann. There were an even greater number of more religiously centrist Nazis like Goebbels, Göring, and Hitler himself, whose equivocations about religion appear in scholarship across the board. Ultimately, the totality of scholarship suggests that the Nazis failed to execute a unified plan with regard to Christianity. Different strains of religiosity took hold with different party leaders, and even though most Nazi leaders had clear-cut religious viewpoints, the end result was still muddled.

One of the most-cited primary sources about the Nazis' public stance toward Christianity is "Point 24" of the NSDAP Party Program of 1920. Commonly attributed to Gottfried Feder, it reads:

"We demand freedom for all religious confessions in the state, insofar as they do not endanger its existence of conflict with the customs and moral sentiments of the Germanic race. The party as such represents the standpoint of a positive Christianity, without tying itself to a particular confession. It fights the spirit of Jewish materialism within us and without us, and is convinced that a lasting recovery of our *Volk* can only take place from within, on the basis of the principle: public need comes before private greed [*Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz*]." <sup>6</sup>

"Positive Christianity" was the official party line for the NSDAP, and Point 24's inherent vagueness has spawned a fierce debate among historians as to its sincerity in promoting Christian values. Steigmann-Gall identifies three major Christian elements in Point 24, namely, "...the spiritual struggle against Jews, the promulgation of a social ethic [*public need comes before private greed*], and a new syncretism that would bridge Germany's confessional divide."<sup>7</sup> Steigmann-Gall's bias is towards proving collusion between Christianity and Nazism, and thus he minimizes the somewhat plausible explanation that positive Christianity was a mere political ploy designed to capture German votes.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 15.

However, the three tenets he identifies are empirically shared between Nazi party policy and Church policy. More importantly, it showcases a Nazi proclivity to work with the Christian religion instead of working against it. Though certain prominent Nazis (Rosenburg, Bormann) were certainly avid anti-Christians, Nazi policy as a whole sought to engage Christianity, even if it did so haltingly. As historian John Conway puts it:

“...there never was a consensus among the leading Nazis about the relationship between the Party and Christianity. As Baldur von Schirach later commented: ‘Of all the leading men in the Party whom I knew, everyone interpreted the party program differently [...] Rosenberg mystically, Goering and some others in a certain sense Christian.’ Ambiguities and contradictions were numerous.”<sup>9</sup>

Though this “ambiguity” is an accurate *overall* description of Nazism’s relationship with religion, many individual Nazi leaders tended to see the issue in more black and white terms.

Take, for example, Martin Bormann’s statement that, “National Socialism and Christianity are irreconcilable...Christianity has invariable tenets...which have stiffened into dogmas incompatible with reality.”<sup>10</sup> Bormann was head of the party chancellery, and later became Hitler’s personal secretary. In a position of great power, he vociferously argued for the *kirchenkampf* – an all-out Nazi attack on Christian influence – both Catholic and Protestant.<sup>11</sup> Though the program was never fully carried out, Bormann did lead efforts to seize Church property in newly annexed lands, remove religious iconography from schools, and generally persecute what he saw as an evil influence on society.<sup>12</sup>

If Bormann is the prototype of an anti-Christian Nazi, then one need not look far for the opposite. Indeed, Bormann’s his father-in-law, Walter Buch, was a strong believer in the

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<sup>9</sup> Conway, John S. Review of Steigmann-Gall, Richard, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. June, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Conway, John S. *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches, 1933-45*. New York: Basic Books, 1968, 383.

<sup>11</sup> *The Holy Reich*, 244.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

compatibility of Christianity and National Socialism. Buch, a devout Lutheran, was the head of the party's Supreme Court, and had the power to "discipline, expel, and punish all party members, and none of his judgments could be overturned save for Hitler's direct intervention."<sup>13</sup> Buch often compared the struggle of Jesus Christ to that of the NSDAP, and characterized Point 24 as, "the cornerstone of our thinking...just as Christianity only prevailed through the fanatical belief of its followers, so too shall it be with the spiritual movement of National Socialism."<sup>14</sup> Here were two prominent Nazi officials – related to each other, no less – who had fundamentally different understandings of the relationship between the Nazi party and Christianity. Though both men were rabid anti-Semites and dedicated Nazis, for Bormann, Christianity was an evil to be fought, and for Buch, it was an inspiration for his Nazism that he held close. With individuals like Buch and Bormann in power, it is no wonder that Nazi policy towards the Church, and particularly the Protestant Church, was so muddled.

To briefly summarize: Nazi policy towards the Catholic Church was almost unilaterally prosecutorial, whereas policy towards the wide spectrum of Protestant Churches was still controlling, but more lenient and sympathetic. After the initial signing of the *Reichskonkordat* with the Holy See on July 20, 1933, Hitler's regime flagrantly disregarded the very rules it has just agreed upon with the reluctant Catholic Church. Germans started making fun of Pope Pius XI, arresting ostensibly homosexual clergymen, and generally persecuting Catholics all over the Reich.<sup>15</sup> In early 1937, the Pope finally denounced Hitler in a public encyclical, which enraged the fuhrer and caused further

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<sup>13</sup> *The Holy Reich*, 22-23.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Harrigan, William. "Pius XI and Nazi Germany, 1937-1939." *The Catholic Historical Review* 51, no. 4 (1966): 457-486, 457.

crackdowns on German Catholics.<sup>16</sup> For many Nazis, Catholicism hearkened back to an atavistic form of Christianity that was not Germanic, acknowledged the validity of Jewish beliefs represented in the Old Testament, and was not sufficiently nationalistic.<sup>17</sup>

Protestantism, however, was much more conducive to German nationalism and racism. Importantly, it could also already claim the majority of the German population as adherents. As they were historically quite conservative and nationalistic, many Protestant churches welcomed the Nazi acquisition of power.<sup>18</sup> Hitler even allowed democratic Protestant Church elections to continue until 1937, long after the last vestige of democracy had left the national and local governments.<sup>19</sup> Hitler was planning to nazify the Protestant Church under Reich bishop Ludwig Müller, but when Marin Niemöller's Confessional Church and Pastor's Emergency League began to protest nazification efforts, Hitler had to ease off and allow the churches some autonomy.<sup>20</sup> Protestant leaders recognized the tenuousness of this situation and so, as Bendersky points out, "...there was no official church-wide protest against Nazi treatment of the Jews...the Protestant churches remained silent. The only public proclamation by a German religious institution condemning the Nazi policy of genocide came from the Prussian Confessional church in 1943."<sup>21</sup> Though they did try to manipulate and in many ways minimize the impact of Christianity in Germany, the Nazis knew that 95% of the population belonged to Catholic or Protestant Churches, and they could ill-afford to be perceived as enemies of Christianity.<sup>22</sup> Steigmann-Gall notes that

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 461.

<sup>17</sup> Steigmann-Gall, Richard. "Christianity and the Nazi Movement: A Response." *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 2 (2007): 185-211, 192.

<sup>18</sup> Bendersky, Joseph W.. *A Concise History of Nazi Germany*. 3rd ed. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007, 146.

<sup>19</sup> *Christianity and the Nazi Movement: A Response*, 193.

<sup>20</sup> Bendersky, 146-7

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 147-8.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

even inconsistently religious Nazis like Hitler, Goebbels, and Göring all nominally remained members of their churches for their whole lives, even though those memberships stood at odds with some of the private comments these men made about religion.<sup>23</sup>

Clearly, Nazism featured a wide variety of religious beliefs, even among its top officials. Some – like Rosenberg and Bormann – were anti-Christian almost from the outset, and were actually seen as radicals in the Nazi party for their insistence on the inadequacy of Christianity.<sup>24</sup> Rosenberg's *Myth of The Twentieth Century* railed against both Protestantism and Catholicism, and advocated a kind of neo-Paganism that represented (to be fair) a discernible minor milieu in the Nazi Party, but was nonetheless dismissed by Hitler as overly radical.<sup>25</sup> Some Nazis – like Buch and Koch – saw their Nazi identity as inexorably tied to Christianity, and based their philosophies on Luther-inspired ideals of reformation and anti-Semitism. Nazis who pushed this Christian tie too far – such as Artur Dinter (a former Gauleiter and great admirer of Christ) and Hans Kerrl (who wanted to reconcile Christianity and Nazism as Minister of Church Affairs) – were marginalized and stripped of power by Hitler, who considered them radicals of a different stripe.<sup>26</sup> Party officials held multifarious points of view, which led to peaks (like Protestant Church elections enduring until 1937) and valleys (like attempted state control and nazification of the Protestant Church). Though individual religious views among Nazi leaders were often quite clear-cut, their inevitable clash caused Nazism on the whole – primarily through its game of cat and mouse with the Protestant Church – to be rather fickle and muddled with regard to its overall policy on Christianity.

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<sup>23</sup> *Christianity and the Nazi Movement: A Response*, 205.

<sup>24</sup> *Christianity and the Nazi Movement: A Response*, 200.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid* and *The Holy Reich*, 257.

<sup>26</sup> Piper, 50-51

Another explanation for the uncertain, multi-faceted nature of Nazi policy towards Christianity can be found in the religious beliefs of the Fuehrer himself. Although Hitler had many advisors, confidants, and officials in his inner circle, the Nazi state was his brainchild, and he often ultimately held the authority when making key policy decisions.

Unsurprisingly, then, Hitler's religious beliefs have been the subject of great scrutiny by a whole host of historians. Different sources reveal different stances by Hitler, but the overall picture is strikingly similar to that of the zigzag policy path tread by his regime. Namely, Hitler was cognizant of religion's importance and acceded to some Christian tenets, but was caustically against those belief systems and tenets deemed insufficiently nationalistic or Germanic.

Hitler was raised by a devout Catholic mother, and though he stopped with Catholic sacraments at an early age, he never formally left the church. Steigmann-Gall points to the infamous *Mein Kampf* as an excellent source for determining Hitler's early religious beliefs. "In its pages," the historian states, "Hitler gave no indication of being an atheist or agnostic or of believing in only a remote, rationalist divinity. Indeed, he referred continually to a providential, active deity."<sup>27</sup> In speeches, Hitler would refer to Jesus as "the true God" and "our greatest Aryan leader," and slyly alluded to himself as a Messianic figure in the process, saying his Nazi movement would complete "the works which Christ had begun but could not finish."<sup>28</sup> Some historians, such as Ernst Piper, believe that this version – Hitler's version – of Christianity had little in common with certain Christian concepts laid out in the Bible (namely, Jesus as a Jew, and the message of overall racial equality).<sup>29</sup> It was certainly

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<sup>27</sup> *The Holy Reich*, 26.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Piper, 50.

an intentional distortion of Christianity and Piper has a point, but Hitler obviously still saw value in utilizing Christian symbolism, rhetoric, and allusions. A smaller sub-sect of historians make the somewhat extremist claim that Hitler “was in fact a hater of Christianity who simply posed otherwise for the sake of politics.”<sup>30</sup> Steigmann-Gall points out that much of this theory is based on controversial works like *Hitler Speaks* by Hermann Rauschning and *I Knew Hitler* by Kurt Lüdecke. Both are advertised as memoirs of statements that Hitler gave in private but, as Steigmann-Gall details, both have been called into question by researchers, and both are considered to have strong fraudulent or exaggerated elements.<sup>31</sup> It is already clear from more reputable evidence that Hitler espoused an untraditional, conflicted kind of Christian belief before World War II, and to portray that as an unequivocal hatred of Christianity is both disingenuous and unnecessary.

As his reign progressed, Hitler’s religious views underwent significant modifications. As Steigmann-Gall writes, “It is only after the failure [to unify and Nazify the Protestant Church] that we begin to see some of the anti-Christian remarks for which he is so famous.”<sup>32</sup> In public, the main form these remarks took was anticlericalism, as opposed to anti-religiousness, which Hitler only espoused occasionally, and always in private.<sup>33</sup> Take, for example, Hitler’s assertion in a January 30, 1939 Reichstag speech that, “...the German priest as a servant of God we shall protect, the priest as a political enemy of the German state we will destroy.”<sup>34</sup> Though this is still a measured condemnation, it employs a much more caustic and combative tone than many of Hitler’s earlier cited remarks about Christianity. One can also see Hitler making the tendentious suggestion that Christianity as

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<sup>30</sup> *The Holy Reich*, 28.

<sup>31</sup> *The Holy Reich*, 28-29 and *Christianity and the Nazi Movement*, 197.

<sup>32</sup> *The Holy Reich*, 252.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 253.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*.

a societal institution and as a potential political enemy should be regarded as discrete entities. In private, and in particular as expressed in Hitler's *Table Talk*, the fuehrer was more disillusioned with Christianity than he was letting on in public. Particularly scathing is Hitler's (alleged) declaration that, "The heaviest blow that ever struck humanity was the coming of Christianity; Bolshevism is Christianity's illegitimate child. Both are inventions of the Jews."<sup>35</sup> Bolsheviks and Jews were two mortal enemies of the Nazi party, so this is about as strong of a condemnation as Hitler could employ. From declarations like this, historians like Gilmer Blackburn infer bold conclusions such as Blackburn's opinion that, "In many respects the Christian confessions in Germany with their moral codes...represented a far greater obstacle to Hitler's designs than did the few hundred thousand defenseless Jews who lived within the borders of the Reich."<sup>36</sup> Blackburn is correct in pointing out that the legions of Protestants and (to a lesser extent) Catholics that lived within the Reich borders had more societal rights than the Jews. Hitler was undoubtedly frustrated by Protestant troublemakers like Niemöller who he could not suppress as effectively.

The arc of Hitler's Christian belief, however, is not quite so simple as to go from a largely "true believer" to a complete skeptic. Even during World War II, as Steigmann-Gall notices, Hitler commented positively on cornerstones of Christian belief. Also in *Table Talk*, Hitler comments that, "The Ten Commandments are a code of living to which there's no refutation...they're inspired by the best religious spirit."<sup>37</sup> That quotation is jarring, but even more jarring is the fact that Christianity shares the Ten Commandments with Judaism,

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<sup>35</sup> *The Holy Reich*, 254.

<sup>36</sup> Blackburn, Gilmer. "The Portrayal of Christianity in the History Textbooks of Nazi Germany." *Church History* 49, no. 4 (1980): 433-445, 435.

<sup>37</sup> *The Holy Reich*, 256.

which seems to not trouble Hitler at all. Steigmann-Gall also recounts a Hitler rant against U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had recently claimed that Nazism was anti-Christian: “What repulsive hypocrisy that arrant Freemason, Roosevelt, displays when he speak of Christianity!...He acts on principles diametrically opposed to those of the religion of which he boasts.”<sup>38</sup> Despite making no claim to be Christian, Hitler is still irritated that Roosevelt should call himself Christian. Had Hitler truly abandoned Christianity – as he suggests elsewhere in *Table Talk* – and had so little regard for the tradition, than he would have felt no need to defend it against Roosevelt’s “repulsive hypocrisy,” which he does. Though Hitler definitely soured on Christianity as the war progressed and his conflict with the Protestant Church grew, he never completely abandoned it like his contemporaries Rosenberg or Bormann did.

For perspective, Steigmann-Gall and other historians have wisely pointed out, “Hitler’s capacity for self-contradiction is well-documented.”<sup>39</sup> Any chance at a definitive grasp at Hitler’s true, inner religious beliefs and machinations likely died with him in the Führerbunker on April 30, 1945. However, using the information that historians do have access to, the imprint that arises of Hitler’s religious beliefs is convoluted, messy, and fraught with change. Considering that overall Nazi policy towards Christendom (and particularly Protestants) was equally muddled, it is somewhat appropriate that national-level beliefs regarding Christianity largely took on the character of their fuehrer’s personal beliefs.

Lastly, much of the scholarship on the topic of the relationship between National Socialism and Christianity, perhaps in search of a simple, digestible narrative, tends to be

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<sup>38</sup> *The Holy Reich*, 256.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 257.

rather bipolar and contradictory. Very few sources in this area of study seem cognizant of the nuanced, messy historical reality, and some sources seem willfully ignorant of that subtlety. Even Steigmann-Gall's largely balanced and commendable study occasionally veers into over-simplifying at times. To a certain degree, this is inevitable in historical studies of fairly recent events, but the scholarship on this issue seems particularly rooted in certain convictions and assumptions that are partially, if not completely, erroneous.

A key early player in simplifying the Nazi Christianity narrative was Otto von Habsburg, the last crown-prince of Austria-Hungary and a fervent anti-Nazi. Von Habsburg's 1942 article in *World Affairs* put into words a viewpoint that many historians then set out to prove. As von Habsburg writes, "there is complete incompatibility between the German regime and the Christian religion."<sup>40</sup> He later goes on to name Alfred Rosenberg as "the man who today is charged with the ideological leadership of Germany" and warns against the advent of a new German neo-pagan religion.<sup>41</sup> While von Habsburg is not entirely incorrect, he definitely overstates Rosenberg's influence, overstates the popularity of neo-Paganism in Germany, and completely omits prominent examples of cooperation between Christendom and the Nazi state. This is somewhat understandable given von Habsburg was writing in 1942; there was a war on, and the Allies, in his view, had to win at all costs. However, when contemporary historians like Ernst Piper, Gilmer Blackburn, and John Conway accept some of von Habsburg's theses as basically correct and make their own arguments informed by his biased perspective, they are practicing something less than objective history.<sup>42</sup> This truism – Nazism as an inherently anti-

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<sup>40</sup> Von Habsburg, Otto. "Christianity and National-Socialism." *World Affairs* 105, no. 2 (1942): 75-82, 75.

<sup>41</sup> Von Habsburg, 80.

<sup>42</sup> Conway review of *The Holy Reich*, 1, Blackburn, 434, and Piper, 47.

Christian movement – has been remarkably persistent. Historian Doris Bergen, writing in 2007, explains that, “popular opinion and much of the older scholarship assume an explicit and persistent antagonism between the two systems of belief and practice [Nazism and Christianity] that is not borne out by the historical record.”<sup>43</sup> Bergen speculates that, given the horrific destruction that Nazi Germans and their accomplices caused, it is unsurprising that Christians worldwide might prefer to downplay or deny ties between Nazism and their faith.<sup>44</sup> There is a case to be made for that opinion, but the enduring truism of Nazism as a fundamentally anti-Christian movement smacks more of lazy scholarship and confirmation bias than anything else. This first generation of historians, upon encountering some evidence for Nazi anti-Christian beliefs that fit their personal worldviews, focused on that simplistic evidence to the detriment of the messier, more complete picture that better reflected reality.

On the other end of the spectrum, Richard Steigmann-Gall’s 2003 book argues for greater collusion between Christendom and Nazism. Though this inevitably appears to have greater veracity in contrast with the flimsy anti-Christian orthodoxy of many of his predecessors, *The Holy Reich* can also fall victim to overstatement and oversimplification.

As historian Martyn Housden argues:

“It is impossible to avoid wondering whether concern with the place of Christian belief in the Third Reich really does get to grips with the heart of that particular political phenomenon, or whether (for very many individuals) some more important (general or personal) motivation overshadowed their professions of religious belief. In this light, we can ask whether Germany really did experience a ‘Holy Reich’ between 1933 and 1945, or whether such an image (if it existed all) was more the cynical exploitation of a contemporary cultural resource, or even a hypocrisy of religiously-minded careerists.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Bergen, Doris. "Nazism and Christianity: Partners and Rivals? A Response to Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*. Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945." *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 1 (2007): 25-33, 25.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Housden, Martyn. Review of *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945*, (review no. 397) URL: <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/397>. Date accessed: 28 April, 2012

Essentially, Housden questions whether Christianity played a major role in making the Nazis who they were, or if it was just a minor contributing factor. Housden also notes wryly that the blurb on the back of the book says it is “an important and original book.”<sup>46</sup>

Steigmann-Gall definitely wants to make an innovative and original argument, and thus is prone to overstating the importance of his own chosen factor – Christianity – in the greater context of Nazi atrocities. That’s not to say that Christianity was not a factor – as much of Steigmann-Gall’s research empirically and definitively shows - but highlights that *The Holy Reich* can, at times, suggest a grand Nazi and Christian collusion that simply did not exist on such a high plane. The book, however, hardly ever suggests the diametric opposite of the over-simplicity narrative (with regard to Nazism and Christianity) so prevalent in earlier scholarship.

In summary, the reign of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party from 1933-1945 was a complex time to be a Christian. Though there were clear-cut neo-Paganists, true believers, and moderates all prominent in the Nazi ranks, the main thrust of Nazi policy towards Christendom was a muddled, zigzag initiative that pleased almost no one. Fittingly, Nazi religious policy was remarkably similar to the personal religious beliefs of its fuehrer, Adolf Hitler. Hitler harbored multifarious religious philosophies over the course of his 12-year reign, and it is exceedingly hard to pin him in any ideological corner. Lastly, much of the scholarship on the relationship between Christianity and National Socialism is fraught with over-simplistic tendencies and confirmation bias that does a disservice to the nuanced, intricate historical reality of that relationship. The depiction of Nazi Christians and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Christian Nazis becomes more fully fleshed-out with each new discovery, but progress will be slow as long as the drive for a simplistic, easily digestible narrative remains.

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