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The Christian Nazi myth refuted

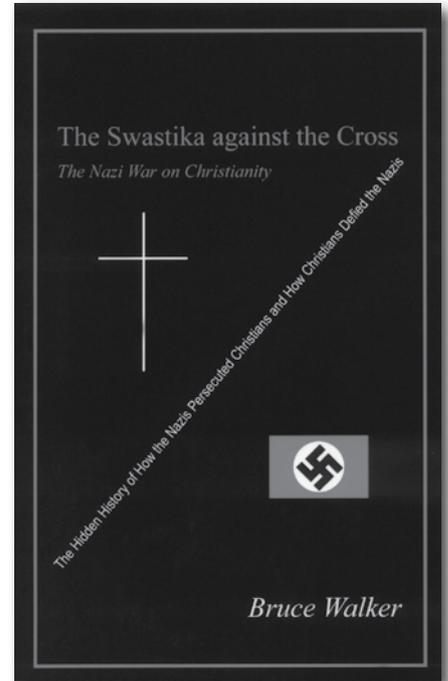
A review of
The Swastika against the Cross: The Nazi War on Christianity
by Bruce Walker
Outskirts Press, Parker,
CO, 2009

Lita Cosner

Many anti-Christians turn to the Nazis for an example of the sort of evil that can be committed in the name of Christ. The myth that the Nazis were Christian is so common that many Christians cannot adequately answer it. If the Nazis *had* been Christian in name, all this would have proved is that not all who claim to act in Christ’s name are consistent with His teachings. But far from being Christians, the Nazis were *opposed* to Christianity and sought to stamp it out. In less than 100 pages, Bruce Walker, in *The Swastika Against the Cross*, sets out to document the Nazi’s opposition to Christianity using sources that were mainly written before and during the Second World War. As Walker points out, “The authors of these books had no idea how history would unfold; they did not know that the world would be plunged into a global war or that six million Jews would be exterminated in horrific fashion” (Introduction).

Was pre-Nazi Germany Christian?

In the era leading up to Nazi Germany, Germany and the rest of Europe was characterized by growing hostility to Christianity. Instead, Europe was enamored with Darwinism and Communism: “Karl Marx and Charles Darwin captured the hearts and minds of men. . . . God was unnecessary; man was self-made, the survival of the fittest was the preferred method of improving the



human race provided by the only god that still existed—nature” (p. 2).

Germany, more than any other country, embraced both naturalism, fueled by Marxism and Darwinism, and the hatred of Christianity and Judaism that the new philosophies inspired. In fact, the same people wrote anti-Semitic propaganda were generally very anti-Christian as well. Over 100,000 Germans formally abandoned their professed faith between 1908 and 1914. More than that many left Christianity *every year* after World War I, and many who remained Christian did so only in name (pp. 4–6). By the time Hitler came to power, Christianity was barely present in Germany as a cultural force, much less a dominant or influential power.

Was Hitler Christian?

Those who want to create a link between the Nazis and Christianity sometimes quote Hitler’s speeches where he referred to God or the Almighty or Providence. But the God

he speaks of is not the Christian God. This can be seen in the style in which he invoked God or Providence: “This intercession was usually offered in the form of a thinly-veiled ultimatum to the effect that the Nazi state ... expected the Almighty to do his Germanic duty” (p. 9). God in German speech came to mean whatever any particular speaker wanted to mean.

Nazis saw their own movement as a religion distinct from, and incompatible with, Christianity. The teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount were thought to be “an ethic for cowards and idiots” (p. 17). “Teaching, as it did, precepts of mercy, he [Hitler] scoffed at it as effeminate and altogether incompatible with his war plans which called for, in his scheme, a virile German people insusceptible to ethics and compassion” (p. 25). They wrote books like *Why No More Christianity*, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, and *Jesus Never Lived*, which were filled with propaganda against Christianity that nearly equaled the propaganda against Jews (pp. 17–21).

While the Nazis retained the name Christianity for their state religion, it was one stripped of its core beliefs. The Minister of Religion for the Third Reich made the statement: “The Apostle’s Creed is no longer the statement of Christianity. There has now arisen a new authority concerning what Christ and Christianity really is. That new authority is Adolph Hitler” (p. 20). Children of Nazis were taught to pray to Hitler instead of to Jesus. A sort of baptismal service was held

for children, baptizing them not in the name of Christ, but “as new hereditary links into the ‘ancestral chain’ and were charged to guard their blood ‘so that descendants for a thousand years after you will be thankful to you — for God is pure blood!’” (pp. 22–23). Hitler himself claimed to be “a heathen to the bone” (p. 26).

One of the reasons Nazis hated Christianity was because it united people of all races, which was completely contrary to their goal of segregation of the “inferior races” from the “pure” Aryan race (p. 27). Hitler hoped to apply the theory of natural selection to manufacture a superior race of mankind; so had to repudiate the Christian claim that all humans have equal worth.¹

Nazi persecution of Christians

While the Nazis did not publicize their opposition to Christianity outside Germany, inside Germany there was little attempt to hide the escalating persecution of Christians. From the first year after they came to power, the Nazis restricted Catholic education and other religious organizations, while the secret police arrested Protestant pastors and engaged in violent intimidation of Christians (pp. 34–35). A year later, they started sending Christian pastors to concentration camps (p. 36). By August 1935, “Jail sentences and attacks on individuals [were] nothing new”, and in December of that year it was forbidden for church associations to appoint pastors, instruct or give announcements from the pulpit, or perform numerous other functions essential to the church (p. 38). Eventually the sale of the Bible was prohibited, as was the rental of property for religious purposes. Even collections for the families of pastors in concentration camps were prohibited, and the Gestapo seized any money that was raised for that purpose (pp. 39–40). In 1938, Austrian monks and nuns were sent to concentration

camps when the Nazis occupied the country (p. 44). In areas that did not have synagogues to attack and vandalize, the Nazis targeted Christian churches (p. 46).

In addition, the Nazis discouraged any youth involvement or instruction in the Christian faith. Only clergy were allowed to teach religion, which led to the disbandment of any classes or studies led by laypeople. Even clergymen were arbitrarily banned from these classes when they did not teach religion according to the Reich’s instructions (p. 51). Only Hitler Youth members were eligible for the best jobs in civil service, and the Nazis prohibited those in Catholic organizations from joining Nazi organizations simultaneously. Businesses who wanted valuable government contracts began to discriminate against those not involved in Nazi organizations. Christian education was especially denigrated—anyone who attended a Christian school was prohibited from entering the civil service, and private companies faced pressure not to hire them either (p. 52). While Catholic youth were particularly singled out for this discrimination, Protestant youth were also targeted. The Nazis declared that all Evangelical youth groups were to be incorporated into the Hitler Youth, and during the initiation were required to state that “German blood and Christian baptismal water are completely irreconcilable” (p. 53). By 1939 all religious schools were closed and those who had received a Christian education were virtually unemployable. “It was made clear ... that to vote for the Confessional school was to vote treacherously and against the new Germany, and against the express wishes of the Führer himself” (p. 54).

Once children were conscripted into the Hitler Youth, they were taught that Christianity was a useless superstition, and that praying and going to church was a waste of time. “The Hitler Youth was intended to pound Christianity out of children” (p. 54). They understood that if they gained the minds of the youth that they



Nazis especially focused on persuading German youth to leave Christianity and to embrace their ideology.

controlled the future of the country. The Nazis were clear about their goal to completely eliminate Christianity and its ethics from the minds of German youth: “With parties and gifts the youth will be led painlessly from one faith to the other and will grow up without ever having heard of the Sermon on the Mount or the Golden Rule, to say nothing of the Ten Commandments” (pp. 55–56).

The Nazi campaign against Christianity was extensively documented by General William Donovan at the Nuremberg trials, and is posted online at the *Rutgers Journal of Law and Religion*.² The anti-Christian nature of Nazism was well understood by its opponents of the time, such as Winston Churchill, who said during his address after Chamberlain’s ill-fated attempt at appeasement at Munich, 1938:

“... there can never be friendship between the British democracy and the Nazi power, *that power which spurns Christian ethics, which cheers its onward course by a barbarous paganism, which derives strength and perverted pleasure from persecution, and uses, as we have seen with pitiless brutality, the threat of murderous force. That power cannot be the trusted friend of the British democracy ...*”³

German Christianity’s response to Nazism

Even though Christians who professed their faith openly were subject to discrimination from the Nazis, they constituted the only true opponents the Nazis had in Germany (p. 59). The Communists, while thought to be opponents to the Nazis, partnered with them to destroy common opponents. Academia was easily corrupted; university students were among the most susceptible to Nazi propaganda (p. 62). Christians were the only ones who openly spoke out against the Nazis; Catholics and Protestants banded together to defend Christianity against the Nazi paganism which threatened to destroy them (p. 63). The Nazis recognized the

unique character of their Christian opponents, saying that

“... the National Socialist leaders have found and will find that the Christian church is an embarrassment. It cannot be fashioned as readily as are cultural institutions. They will find men in whose convictions in their sphere are as unyielding as those of Hitler himself in the political realm. They have to be reckoned with” (p. 64).

When the Nazis tried to “revise” the Bible to fit with Germanism and demanded that ethnically Jewish pastors be removed from the ministry, many Lutherans refused to comply because it was contrary to Christianity. Many of these pastors were removed and punished for their resistance (pp. 65–66). Many times “Jews sent to concentration camps were met there by Christians of conscience who arrived before the Jews” (p. 69). This took real courage on the part of the Christians, because, unlike the Jews, they could earn their freedom by renouncing their faith and becoming loyal to the Nazis. Christians who were too vocal about their opposition to the Nazis could expect to be tortured and killed or thrown into a concentration camp.

Christianity and anti-Semitism

Often, atheists blame Christian anti-Semitism for building the foundation which led to the persecution of Jews in the Holocaust. While Christian anti-Judaism (and Jewish anti-Christianity) has a long history, in the 19th and 20th centuries, both Christians and Jews recognized that their faiths had common ethical teachings, and Christians proclaimed persecution of Jews to be un-Christian, while Jews started to admit that Christianity was a social good, even using terms like “Judeo-Christianity” to describe the ethics common to both faiths (p. 74). Interestingly, this started to become really pronounced just as the Nazis were beginning to persecute the Jews.

As Walker showed earlier in his book, those who were the most vehemently anti-Semitic were also opposed to Christianity. But it was Christians who risked their own

well-being to help Jews. In 1933, Cardinal Faulhaber stored the religious objects of Bavaria’s synagogue in his palace to protect them from destruction. Pastors and other Christian leaders spoke out against the boycotts of Jewish businesses that year, which is probably why the official boycott only lasted one day (p. 77).

The next year, “the World Baptist Congress ‘deplored and condemned as a violation of the law of God, the Heavenly Father, all racial animosity and every form of oppression or unfair discrimination against the Jews’” (p. 78). Christians unanimously refused to exclude Jewish people from their congregations, affirming that to impose “a racial law as a prerequisite of Christian communion ... loses Christ himself, who is the goal of even this human, purely temporal law” (p. 78). Gentile Christian support for these Jewish Christians was critically important, because while non-Christian Jews could turn to Jewish relief agencies, they would not give aid to Christian Jews; “if real Christians in Germany did not help them, no one would” (p. 81).

While much Church aid and effort was spent on helping specifically Christian Jews, Christians also had sympathy for the plight of non-Christian Jews as well, and opposed the anti-Semitic racism which inspired the persecution of the Jews in Germany. The Church’s statements against anti-Semitism were never limited to support Christian Jews; some went as far as to say, “No believing Christian and no humane-minded person can be an anti-Semite. ... [T]he New Testament is inseparably connected with the Old, and we Christians with our Jewish heritage” (p. 83). As a result of the Christians’ courageous defense of the Jewish people in Germany, Freud and Einstein, both secular Jews who had previously held Christianity in contempt, publically acknowledged the Church for its support of Jews (pp. 85–86).

Useful resource, flawed style

The Swastika Against the Cross has many of the flaws one might expect in

a book of its size. At times, one would like more elaboration in his statements. The short length of the book leaves little room for extra details that might make this a truly excellent study, but the space might have been used more effectively. Sometimes he uses footnoted sound bites to argue his point (although there are “meatier” parts), rather than putting the evidence in the text. Some flaws may also stem from the fact that the book is self-published and lacked the editing expertise that it badly needed. He has the odd habit of including an extended quote, then paraphrasing that quote exactly. This becomes repetitive. In one chapter, he repeatedly introduces a certain authority, quotes the authority, then tells the qualifications of that authority, which is an odd way of proceeding, and also adds to the repetitiveness of the book.

These weaknesses might be outweighed by the readability of such a short book, easily finished in an afternoon, which would not intimidate laypeople. The author meticulously documents his sources for those interested in further study, making the lack of detail slightly less an obstacle. In any case, the goal of this book was not to be a comprehensive resource, but to refute the allegation that Christianity was the dominant ideology behind Nazi Germany. Walker does accomplish that, though better style and more efficient use of space would have made it easier on the reader.

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Eating and keeping moral cakes

A review of
The Darwin Myth: The Life and Lies of Charles Darwin
by Benjamin Wiker
Regnery Publishing,
Washington DC, 2009

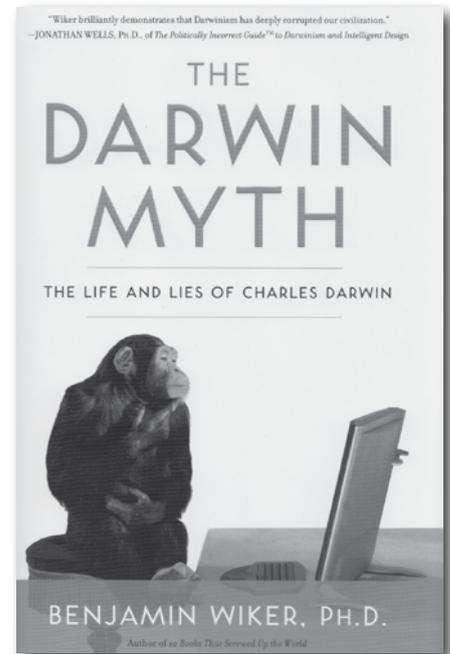
Don Batten

Benjamin Wiker is a Discovery Institute Senior Fellow. His academic background suggests he is probably from a Roman Catholic theological tradition.

The dust jacket summarises the content pretty well:

“In *The Darwin Myth*, Wiker reveals (my comments in parentheses):

- Why Darwin didn’t “discover” evolution (Erasmus Darwin, Lucretius and probably even earlier).
- How Darwin set out to create a godless version of evolution.
- Why many of his best friends and allies criticized Darwin’s theory, and how he never refuted their objections (St George Mivart is mentioned in particular, plus Lyell, Henslow, and even Wallace, as criticising Darwin’s materialism; in insisting that natural selection was sufficient to explain all).
- How “social Darwinism” is not a misapplication of Darwinism, but is Darwinism (Wiker has a chapter on Darwinism and Nazism).
- Why Darwin’s theory supported natural slavery, an institution he abhorred.
- How much of what we know about Darwin comes from his *Auto-biography*—which at key points is downright misleading (Two “lies” are detailed, although



the author repeatedly acknowledges Darwin’s gentlemanly and sympathetic character—summarized on pp. 148–9:

1. Darwin’s attempt to portray sympathy as a peak achievement, even objective, of aimless evolution; that is, that morality has a basis in naturalism. Wiker rightly exposes this fallacy: “Darwinism cannot but collapse morality into the survival of the fittest.”
2. That as a young man Darwin was a scriptural fundamentalist who subscribed to the church’s *39 Articles* and only lost his faith as a result of the evidence seen while on the Beagle. “This I maintain, was simply Darwin fitting his life in the standard Enlightenment Whig history of progress from superstition to science ... it is not a small lie ...”. I think that calling these “lies” is a bit over-the-top. Something closer to a lie would be Darwin’s insertion into later editions of *Origin* of “by the creator” regarding the first life