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The National Socialist Heresy

GERTRUDE FARION

THE National Socialist theory can be called a heresy in the fullest sense of the word. Grown on the soil of a predominantly Christian civilization, it has used its Christian heritage to lend weight and dignity to forces of an entirely alien origin. In doing so it has, in the manner of all heresies, indeed emphasized some truths which had not been sufficiently stressed in the preceding age. But it endeavoured to do so with illegitimate means. Its success can only be accounted for by the depths of the need it professed to meet.

There can be no doubt to-day that the age of liberalism has come to an end. Its conception of man and his part in the universe is being replaced by one of distinctly different character. What distinguished the liberal era from its predecessor and from the age which we have only just entered upon is its excessive individualism, its subjectivism, and the strangely dessicated quality of its spirituality. Especially on the Continent these elements were found in the extreme. The autonomous personality of the Kantian philosophy had developed into an isolated atom, unable to penetrate to the reality of things, unable to establish contact with the world. Dim thought impressions, which did not justify any conclusions as to its real nature, were the only undeniable evidence of the outer world. This isolated individuality was similarly excluded from the reality of his fellow beings. Each was shut off from the other by an impenetrable wall, a fact regretted by some and gloried in by others. In himself the individual presented no harmonious whole. Philosophy and psychology had taught him to look upon himself as a mere bundle of qualities: will, emotions, and intellect, all unco-ordinated. The reality that man's personality is built round a centre, that each faculty has its separate function and that their co-operation depends entirely upon the relation of that centre to its Creator, was known to only a few. Instead, one of the faculties, the intellect, was granted precedence over the others. Training was, in all departments,

devoted solely to its development. The truths it was, by its very nature, unable to grasp did not exist, and reality was limited to the intellectually perceptible. That the individual, cut off as he was from all reality, should have indulged in a veritable orgy of subjectivism, was the inevitable result of this attitude. If reality as such was unattainable to him, nothing could prevent him from presenting the wildest conjectures as a solution to the world's problems.

Yet this whole attitude eventually led to its own defeat. Reality began to assert itself, and the barrenness of pure intellectuality was revealed. The experience is well described in a passage by Philipp Hoerdt, one of the National Socialist educational authorities, in his book: *Der Durchbruch der Volkheit und die Schule* ("The Eruption of Nationality and the School.") "We doubt the spirit, we doubt our ability to grasp reality. We have been too cruelly led astray in nearly all departments of life by the deceptive veil of our ideas, our thoughts *about* things. In the State and in economics, in ethics and in science, the experience was too terrible that the whole edifice of our tenets, doctrines and beliefs crumbled to pieces because it was incapable of even encompassing reality, to say nothing of mastering and shaping it. Is not this the famous "collapse of idealism," which is being discussed in all streets, that the impotence of thought when faced with reality, the absolute gulf between the two was made unmistakably manifest? Do not our hearts involuntarily assent when we read in a criticism of the "bourgeois idealism" that it replaced reality by metaphor, deeds by phrases, thoughts by quotations; it cannot bear truth, and least of all the truth that death stands at the end of life" (p. 38).

Gradually the spirit of the age swung back from the atomism, individualism, and subjectivism of the past towards a greater sense of harmony, unity, and a new orthodoxy. The first thing to be destroyed was the isolation of man. In Germany, this discovery was closely connected with the Youth Movement, which dates as far back as the last decade of the nineteenth century, and brought to young people of all classes the realization of the existence of nature as well as that of their fellow beings. Nature was now no longer a collection of disconnected impressions, but a hard reality to be fought, to be enjoyed, to be loved. And

suddenly a bridge was found from man to man, and the true meaning of fellowship discovered. To this new sense of community all the great corporate movements of our day bear ample witness. In the discovery of a reality outside him, man became aware of his own nature as a thinking, willing, and feeling whole. He no longer experienced the shattering sensation of frustration which invariably follows upon the attempt to approach life with one faculty alone. And inasmuch as the quest for reality had led him to the feet of his Creator, he became aware of that unification of his being round a God-centred heart. What could then be more natural than that this sense of harmony and relationship with the world and his fellows should find expression in a new orthodoxy. In the years following the defeat, efforts were made to reinterpret the great Christian truths in a language intelligible to earnest seekers, because it was adapted to the needs of the day. For it was clear from the outset that only Christianity can really meet man's spiritual need. However, this promising development was overshadowed by the coming of National Socialism.

It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that National Socialism started on the basis of "positive Christianity," as the party programme has it. However little the reality of National Socialism might tally with this claim, the fact remains that this is the standard by which it must be judged. In shrewd appreciation of the situation, National Socialist theorists endeavoured to supply the spiritual need of the people. They attempted the threefold task of tearing man away from his isolation, providing fulfilment for his entire personality, and giving a meaning to his life. The roots of man's isolation were seen to lie in the barren intellectualism of the preceding age, and it is in realization of this fact that a ruthless struggle against the spirit was carried on. On the one hand this struggle was directed against the corrosive effects of unbridled intellectuality, on the other against those democratic, pacifist, and internationalist tendencies which, far from arising from the cold intellectualism of the "liberal age," were in reality part of Europe's Christian heritage. This must not be forgotten whenever mention is made of the Nazi's violent opposition to everything democratic countries hold sacred. Its origin lies in the fear of the spirit. In its endeavour to counteract this barren intellectuality, National

Socialism developed the most fateful emotionalism. Once the safe ground of reason was left, the way was open for the most fantastic interpretations of life. "Blood" took the place of "reason," "myth" the place of "philosophy." The people had become so weary of theories about things which left their hearts cold that they were ready to believe at any price. What, then, could be more satisfactory than the mystical qualities of the "blood" and the strange inexplicability of life? They were the only indestructible realities which could not be thought to pieces and made themselves unmistakably felt. Blood and soil are the two things against which the destructive efforts of the intellect are of no avail. In close communion with the soil men now hope to recapture that simplicity and harmony which, in the depths of their hearts, they know to be their birthright, yet for whose loss they have made the spirit responsible. To this stronghold man fled when he despaired of finding an explanation of life and his own part in it. Here his starved emotions and all the other hitherto neglected qualities could find full play. In the belief in the saving qualities of pure blood, he found a solution to the world's problems, which led him to a closer fellowship with his racial equals. Moreover, the very forcefulness with which this new creed was preached, its narrowness and onesidedness recommended it to the wearied people as the new orthodoxy they so ardently desired.

The racial theory which is the centre of the National Socialist heresy contains both nationalist and vitalist elements. It has been correctly termed a vitalistic pantheism. National Socialism still retains the belief in God. But he is not the transcendent God of Christian revelation, awful in His holiness, the God from whom the world fell away, and Who came to seek it in love. The God who figures in National Socialist writings, and whom Adolf Hitler still invokes, is nothing more than a vague spirit pervading the world and lending his divine sanction to all that the German nation and their leader, whom he chose for them, may think fit to do. This God is emptied of all his qualities of power and holiness, and therefore constitutes no serious challenge to the human soul. As he has no grace to bestow, he is unable to loose man from the coils of sin. Nor is there any possibility of real community between the creature and this

divinity. In fact, the homage paid to him resembles more the obeisance of a mighty noble before his liegeland than the abasement of the creature before his Creator.

It is only a consequence of this conception of the deity that man's redemption should be laid into his own hands. Self-redemption is a word frequently occurring in National Socialist writings. This revival of the Pelagian heresy, the belief in man's redemption without the aid of grace, indicates how far this new creed is removed from Christianity. It is the creed of the creature which is emancipating itself from God and seeks to find complete fulfilment in this world. The Germanic hero, of whom Faust is the prototype, finds salvation by his own efforts. The very fact that his aspiration is as immeasurable as it is comprehensive would seem to ensure his final success. When he has roamed the world and drained the cup of experience, his innate vitality of spirit will earn him an eternal reward. According to this theory a mystical quality of perfection lies in the German blood itself, by virtue of which the pure Aryan can be redeemed. This new belief is described by one of its exponents, the cultural dictator of Germany, Alfred Rosenberg, in his *Twentieth Century Myth*, and here what originally seemed mere folly, becomes blasphemy. "To-day there is rising a new belief, the myth of the blood, the belief that in the blood the divine character of man is being defended; the belief, enshrined in the clearest knowledge, that Nordic blood represents the mystery which has overcome and replaced the old sacraments" (p. 129). Such are the saving qualities of this blood that whoever belongs to the chosen race has the key to the secrets of the universe and the right to master all peoples. Yet before the day of final victory comes, the most terrible of struggles has to be fought.

It is an integral part of National Socialist teaching, which herein follows a traditional line of German thought, that the essence of life lies in a continuous struggle against all forms of evil. Here the hero proves his manhood, while the coward is overcome. In the Nazi fight, however, the "evil" is most narrowly interpreted as any political opponent who might contest the Nazi party's claim to complete domination of the nation, and subsequently, the world. Thus what was originally a metaphysical struggle of gigantic dimensions, moreover a struggle which had its definite place in the

Christian interpretation of the world, was misrepresented as a political struggle against foes both inside and outside the borders, and the German nation conceived as a solitary fighter, encircled by an army of powerful foes.

In this situation closest unity within and intense stiffening of the reserve forces seemed essential. Here the State became of supreme importance. In the struggle for existence in which the nation was engaged to save its precious racial heritage, only a totalitarian organization seemed powerful enough to meet all assaults of the enemy. Hence the demand that no centrifugal tendencies should be allowed to weaken the striking power of the State. No department of life can be left outside its interference, and the entire existence of the citizen is submitted to its influence. From birth to death the member of the Totalitarian State lives in organized slavery. He has no private life. He cannot withdraw even into the sacred sphere of religion. The State does not leave even this untouched in its attempt to mould man's very soul. He is robbed of all individuality, for the State has use only for the unquestioning obedience of the soldier. The soldier ideal has indeed become dominant, and the variegated individualism of the past has been replaced by the uniformity of one type with selected qualities, to be brought forth by careful breeding. The physical fitness, courage and ability of the soldier, his ready obedience and unquestioning loyalty to the leader are valued far beyond any of the specifically Christian virtues such as humility, gentleness, patience, and charity. These are, in fact, discredited as subtle attempts of the enemy to undermine the nation's morale and lead it to self-destruction. The true National Socialist is taught to turn a deaf ear to such pleas.

In this simple fighter ideal, which ranges man side by side with his brother, he finds community with others and a double opportunity to transcend the limits of his personality. In the experience of his own insignificance as a mere unit in a vast army of fellow-fighters with the same goal, he finds his self strangely enriched. And through the surrender of his will to the leader, which relieves him from personal responsibility and provides the experience of complete fulfilment, he achieves that inner unity which is the ardent desire of all men.

Thus the genuine experience of community in the Church

of Christ was counterfeited, and man tricked into the belief that the solidarity of those fighting for the same cause was identical with the community of corporate worship. Moreover, the devotion which man owes alone to Him Who is the firstborn of a number of brethren, is lavished on the personality of a political leader. With all the unscrupulous propaganda of which the Third Reich is capable, the personality of Adolf Hitler has been surrounded by the glamour of a messianic mission. His humble origin, the long years of obscurity, his sudden rise to power and astonishing successes, the very fact that he appeared at the right moment to save the nation from profound humiliation, were all interpreted as proofs of his divine origin and message. Such, indeed, was the desolation of the people that they were satisfied to receive spiritual as well as temporal salvation at the hands of a mere man. National Socialists are taught, when in doubt, to act as the *Fuehrer* would, who is believed to be the supreme incarnation of the German spirit. In some mysterious way Hitler is identified with the idea of Germany. And in their frenzied nationalism the vanguard of the Nazi fighters teach that his appearance in history is to be ranked higher than the coming of the Son of Man. To this spirit the following prayer, taught instead of the creed in an elementary school at Wannsee, near Berlin, and written by one of the masters, Dappe, bears ample witness: "I believe in Germany, in the other elder son of Germany, master of himself, conceived under the Nordic sky, born between the Alps and the sea, suffered under Papists and the servants of mammon, calumniated, crushed, reduced to misery . . . tempted by devils of all kinds, risen after decades of public and national misery, ascended to the moral and spiritual universe of Eckehard, Bach, and Goethe, sitting with his elder brother of Nazareth at the right hand of the Almighty, whence he shall come to judge those buried alive and the dead."¹

Of the "positive Christianity" of the party programme nothing but the drapery of vain words remains, empty husks filled with an alien spirit. It is the spirit of Pride which ever haunts the soul of man, tempting him with the old temptation of the *eritis sicut deus*. This is an ever-present menace.

¹Translated from the French. To be found in *L'Enseignement Primaire et l'Education Raciste en Allemagne*. Paris, 1940.

And the contemplation of the fall of Germany may well cause us to hesitate and ponder our own position. Such searching of hearts will lead us to a profound thankfulness and kindle that spirit of humility in which alone the urgent task before us can be approached : the task of rebuilding a Christian Europe.

PSYCHOLOGY, PSYCHOTHERAPY AND EVANGELISM

By Professor J. G. McKenzie. (George Allen & Unwin Ltd.)
236 pp. 10s. 6d. net.

Despite its title this is not a book for specialists and experts only, but for the ordinary reader, being a most valuable analysis of the ways of God with the human soul, obviously written by an ardent disciple of the Master, steeped in the Pauline epistles. The tone throughout is consistently high and the book deserves a very wide circulation amongst evangelists and evangelicals.

Prof. McKenzie contends that man needs more than an intellectual credence, there must be a real conversion, sudden or gradual, resulting in a balanced personality sanctified by the spirit. Without this recognition of a God-centred life of service to man founded upon an *experience* of the love of God no psychological treatment of what is commonly called "nerves" will avail much.

Early psychologists were content to show a distressed patient the root cause of his troubles when traced to source, but it needs St. Paul's doctrine of the Atonement, the Reconciliation, the Cross, and the ultimate identification and unity with Christ to restore a sinner to sanity. Another useful point so ably stressed is that there are many people, possibly the bulk of Church workers, who have never experienced a deep conviction of sin (they may in fact be just honest, good folk in the ordinary meaning of the word), and yet are conscious of a something lacking, some unsatisfied longing, not even an active rebellion against their environment, but frequently only too conscious of a lack of harmony within and having no practical experience of contact with the living God : such need careful, prayerful handling to bring them into union with Christ.

Half-way through the book is a short section on "Moral Disease and Sin," which every Christian worker should read and digest, together with two other short articles on "Sanctification" (pp. 202 to 209), for they contain most excellent food for thought.

May we quote from the last page but one : "Knowledge of our complexes, of behaviour-tendencies that are a source of temptation, humbly accepted and never consented to, may lead and does lead to a stronger reliance upon God, a profound gratitude for His saving power and forgiveness, and an ever-growing desire to put on the Lord Jesus Christ as the one true means of sanctification and fellowship with God."

F. N. D.