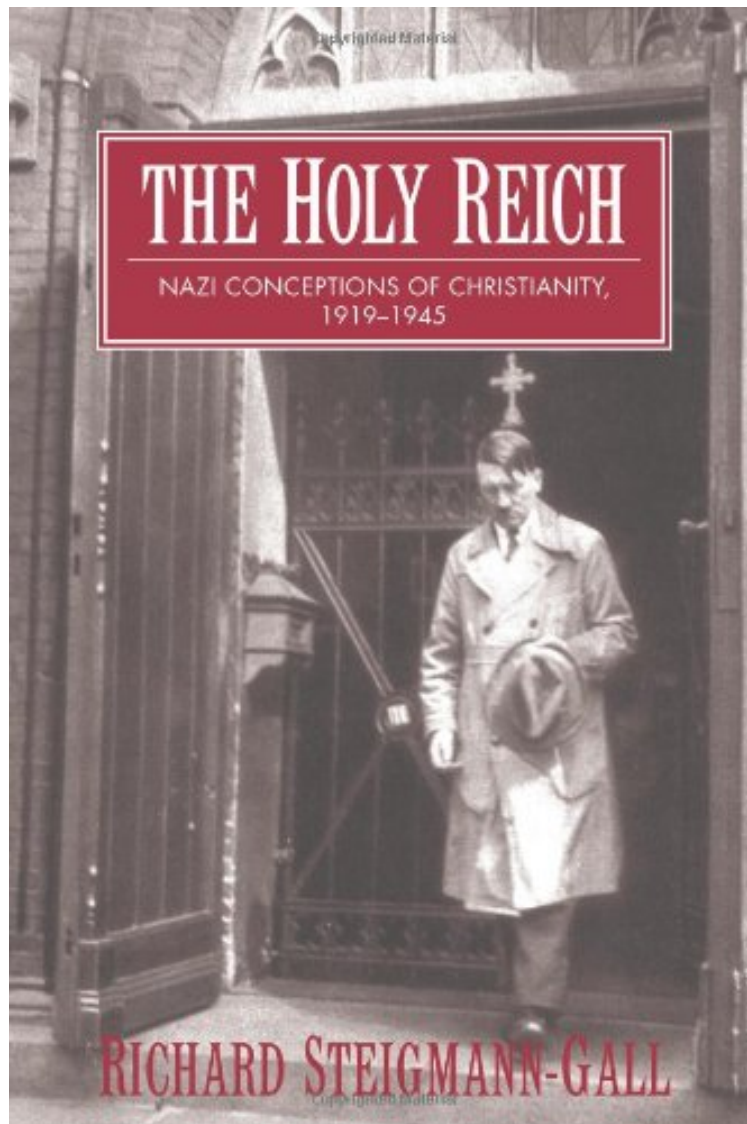


(Read free ebook) The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945

The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945

Richard Steigmann-Gall

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#992789 in Books Richard Steigmann Gall 2004-07-12Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.98 x .79 x 5.98l, .93 #File Name: 0521603528312 pagesThe Holy Reich Nazi Conceptions of Christianity 1919 1945 | File size: 79.Mb

Richard Steigmann-Gall : The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945:

13 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Was Hitler a Christian?By Peter S. BradleyAccording to Richard Steigman-Gall, the answer seems to be (a) when? and (b) what do you mean by Christian?Steigman-Gall's honest and objective unravelling of those points makes for a fascinating examination of a religious culture that was not

monolithic, but which offered, particularly in the form of "Liberal Christianity" something which could be used by any group with its own particular ideological agenda. Over the course of his work, Steigman-Gall shows the movement of National Socialism from an attempt to incorporate a form of Protestant Christianity into the National Socialist movement to a decision to abandon Protestantism and Christianity altogether. Steigman-Gall begins with a description of the religious identity of National Socialism that is compatible with a thread of German Protestantism, but a thread that ultimately can't pull all of Protestantism into the National Socialist orbit. Steigman-Gall's methodology is to look exhaustively at the personalities and groups that provided the interface between the Nazis and Christianity. The names and acronyms fly fast and furious, which is why I eventually started a list of names and the page numbers of their appearance so that I could keep straight who the DC, DBG, BK were, and what side they were on. According to Steigman-Gall, the Nazis positioned themselves religiously under the rubric of "Positive Christianity." Under Steigman-Gall's description, "Positive Christianity" was a Protestant German project. The leaders of the attempt to unify the division of Germany into often antagonistic Catholic and Protestant "confessions" under the heading of "Positive Christianity" were themselves Protestants who did not find a conflict between their Christianity and their German nationalism. Catholic contribution to this movement is essentially missing in that Catholic members of the National Socialist party were either "nominal Catholics," such as Hitler and Goebbels (See "The Holy Reich", p. xv) or openly apostate, such as Himmler. The "Catholic" Himmler expressed his hatred of the temporal power of the Catholic Church and stated his belief that "to be Protestant was to be German and to be German was to be Protestant." (Id., at p. 234 - 235.) Protestant Nazis were prone to "display far less anticlericalism toward their church than did Catholics who regarded their confession its temporal message as innately antithetical to their politics." (Id., at p. 27, 125.) Herman Goring remained a practicing Lutheran throughout his Nazi career. (Id., at p. 120.) Positive Christianity had its roots in a theological movement that identified the nation and the race - the Volk and the state - as God-ordained. This movement was called the "theology of the orders of Creation ("Schopfungsglaube") and was advocated by influential Lutheran theologians. (The Holy Reich, p. 34 - 36.) The "orders of creation" theology was a reason that eventually there was no Protestant active protest against the euthanasia of the disabled, despite the fact that there was such an active protest by Catholic clerics. Another movement that suggested a possible marriage of National Socialism and Protestant Christianity was "liberal Christianity." Liberal Protestant theologians, including Adolf von Harnack, engaged in a hostile anti-semitic rhetoric which reached the point of arguing for the removal of the Old Testament from the Christian canon. (Ironically, this position has also been expressed by the New Atheist debater Christopher Hitchens.) With such scholarly cover, Nazis eventually appropriated Christ as the original anti-semite and socialist by appealing to Christ's scourging of the money-lenders from the Temple as the laudable original act of anti-semitism. Throughout his book, Steigman-Gall points out the disparately unfavorable treatment of Catholicism as compared to Protestantism. For example, in Mein Kampf, Hitler opined that Protestantism was a better defender of the "interests of Germanism" because of Protestantism's roots in German nationalism. Hitler was willing to recognize Martin Luther as a "volkish hero equaled only by Richard Wagner and Frederick the Great." (The Holy Reich, p. 63.) Hitler's attitude toward Catholicism was more ambiguous, but many in the National Socialist movement unambiguously equated Catholicism with Judaism as a "supranational power" that the Nazis were fighting against. (Id. P. 64.) Hitler was recorded in private moments as expressing his belief that Catholic allegiance to Rome was inimical to the independence of true German character; Nazi leaders publically expressed their belief that "ultramontanism" - Catholic allegiance to an authority "over the mountains", i.e., the Pope - was a threat to German national interests. (Id., at p. 65 - 66, 70.) As Nazi entrenchment in power continued after the so-called "Seizure of Power" ("machtergreifung") in 1933, Nazi antipathy to the ultramontane nature of the Catholic Church became more open. (Id., at 119.) In 1934, Catholic civil servants were expelled from the government. (Id., at p. 120.) Nazis attempted to court Protestants into joining a "national church" which would become the "established church" of Germany. However, despite the willingness of Protestant churches to accept much of the Nazi program, many Protestants found that attempt by Nazi sympathizers in the "German Church" to remove the Old Testament was a "bridge too far." This attempt led to the formation of the Pastor's Emergency League by Wilhelm Niemoller and others. (The Holy Reich, p. 164.) The Pastors' Emergency League eventually became the "Confessing Church", which gradually took a more oppositional stance toward the Nazis. Eventually, Hitler gave up on the idea of integrating Protestantism into the Nazi state, although he expressed his disappointment to Niemoller by saying "inwardly stood closer to the Protestant Church" and that he had expected a different attitude from Protestant pastors than from Catholics. (Id., at p. 168.) After the turn from Protestantism, Hitler and the National Socialists began a movement against Christianity. (The Holy Reich, p. 259.) The chief architect of this movement was Martin Borman. Under Bormann, there was a mass exodus of Nazis from the churches and expulsion of clergy - which meant Protestant clergy - from the Nazi party. (Id.) With respect to Hitler, Stegman-Gall concludes that "even though he never converted to paganism, Hitler nonetheless became increasingly opposed to Christian institutions, and on the face of it, to the Christian religion as well." Interestingly, Stegman-Gall notes that Hitler never turned against "Jesus," or at least his conception of Jesus as the "original anti-semite." In this regard, Hitler retained something of an adherence to a form of liberal Christianity that permitted Christ to be removed from history. I was motivated to read "The Holy Reich" after hearing Christopher

Hitchens describe Fascism as a form of "right wing Catholicism." I was honestly surprised to find the depth of the interaction of a form of Christianity - liberal Protestantism - with the National Socialist agenda. The more I read, though, the more I realized that it should have been obvious that religion is a project with many strains, and that liberal Protestantism, with its willingness to deconstruct the text in favor of some all-inclusive social theory, i.e., "Christ, the Marxist," or "Christ, the Feminist" or, in Hitler's case, "Christ, the anti-semitic warrior," would be conducive to the Nazi project. Reality, and, therefore, history, is more complex than the Manichean comic book approach of a Christopher Hitchens. So, was Hitler a Christian? Well, it depends. He was not a Christian in any orthodox sense of the word in that his Christianity involved Jesus the Jew being the first anti-semite. He may have viewed himself as a Christian at some point in his career, but that was a waning attachment by the end of his life. As a Catholic I approached this book with some trepidation, particularly in light of the picture showing Hitler leaving what appears to be a Catholic church. Obviously, publishers have to sell books and playing on the prejudice of those who want Hitler to be a Catholic, or a Christian, serves that end. To the extent that members of the "religion poisons everything" crowd actually read this book, hopefully they will be induced to think about the complexity of history as it is really played out. I also recommend *Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism: Religious Identity and National Socialism*, which makes many of the same points concerning the earliest phase of National Socialist party. 3 of 5 people found the following review helpful. An Excellent Overview of the NSDAP's Attempt To Create A State Church By R. Bowman While I knew some of the basics, this is a well-researched and documented work covering the relationship of the NSDAP to the various Christian confessions in 1930's Germany. Of course some of the history goes back to Luther's schism with the Church, the devastating wars that resulted, Bismarck's Kulturkampf, and so forth. Many today are sensitive about the role the churches, particularly the Evangelical Church, played during the Third Reich and attempt to disown all responsibility. This book explores the roots in 19th century liberal Christian thought and shows some of the concepts did not spring from the NSDAP. It also explains how the pagan influences, while present, were marginalized. The role of the Catholic Church is also examined. Political Catholicism had a strong history, particularly in the Centre Party. In many ways this was a defense against the discrimination of the majority Evangelicals, but it did give the Catholics a history political activity that was unacceptable. There was also the distrust of the Pope that is still seen in some circles in US politics. I am sure the book upsets those who feel every Christian whole-heartedly opposed national socialism, but the facts have to be presented. 2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. VERY GOOD By Chris Bower Profound research was done by the author in understanding the mindset of German Nazi leaders of probably one of the most confusing and complex times in European history. So much of what I thought I knew was thrown away to the realities that Nazi Germany was not as simple as most have been taught nor is it completely understood today.

Analyzing the previously unexplored religious views of the Nazi elite, Richard Steigmann-Gall argues against the consensus that Nazism as a whole was either unrelated to Christianity or actively opposed to it. In contrast, Steigmann-Gall demonstrates that many in the Nazi movement believed the contours of their ideology were based on a Christian understanding of Germany's ills and their cure. He also explores the struggle the "positive Christians" waged with the party's paganists and demonstrates that this was not just a conflict over religion, but over the very meaning of Nazi ideology itself. Richard Steigmann-Gall is assistant professor of history at Kent State University. He earned his BA and MA at the University of Michigan, and PhD at the University of Toronto. He has earned fellowships and awards from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism in Israel, and the Max-Planck Institut für Geschichte in Göttingen. His research interests include modern Germany, Fascism, and religion and society in Europe, and he has published articles in *Central European History*, *German History*, *Social History*, and *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte*.

From Publishers Weekly A number of studies have examined the relationship between Nazism and the German Christian churches (most notably Klaus Scholder's well-known *The Churches and the Third Reich*). There are, of course, also studies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth and others that explore the relationship between the Reich and the church in terms of the Christian protest against Nazism. Steigmann-Gall, a history professor at Kent State, adds a new chapter to the story by investigating the way that Christianity functioned within the Nazi party itself. Using party pamphlets and writings of key members, he demonstrates that as early as 1920 the group declared that it represented the standpoint of a positive Christianity, which provided the tenets of its anti-Semitic and antimaterialist stance. Many of the Nazi elite believed that their own party doctrine and Christianity shared common themes such as the opposition of good against evil, God against the devil and the struggle for national salvation from the Jews and Marxism. This positive Christianity enfolded both Catholicism and Protestantism, for the Nazis believed that confessional disunity presented the greatest challenge to national unity. Steigmann-Gall examines the leaders of the party and shows how many of them contributed to the view of an intimate relationship between Nazism and Christianity. He also explores how the Nazis identified the Jews with the Devil and believed that God would liberate them from this evil. Although this revised dissertation plods along in workmanlike fashion, Steigmann-Gall uncovers new information and helpful

insights about the period. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. "Uncovers new information and helpful insights..." Publishers Weekly

"In the crowded field of Third Reich History, *The Holy Reich* really does have something original to say...The Holy Reich should prompt a critical re-evaluation of the nature of Nazi ideology...an uncomfortably thought-provoking work of admirable scholarship." Times Higher Education Supplement

"The Holy Reich is a brilliant and provocative work that will recast the whole debate on Christianity and Nazism. We have come to realize that Christianity embraced Nazism more than we used to believe. Now, in a work of deep revisionist import, Richard Steigmann-Gall shows us that the embrace was more than reciprocated." Helmut Walser Smith, author of *The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town*

"The Holy Reich is both deeply researched and thoughtfully argued. It is the first comparative analysis of the religious beliefs of leading Nazis and a timely reminder of the intimate relations between liberal Protestantism and National Socialism. This is an important and original book by a talented young scholar that deserves as wide a readership as possible." Michael Burleigh, William Rand Kenan Professor of History at Washington Lee University and author of *The Third Reich: A New History*

"There has been a huge amount of research on the attitude of the Christian Churches to the Nazis and their policies, but astonishingly until now there has been no thorough study of the Nazis' own religious beliefs. Richard Steigmann-Gall has now provided it. He has trawled through a lot of very turgid literature to show that active Nazis from the leadership down to the lower levels of the party were bitterly opposed to the Catholic Church, but had a much more ambivalent attitude to Protestantism and to Christianity in a wider sense...Far from being uniformly anti-Christian, Nazism contained a wide variety of religious beliefs, and Steigmann-Gall has performed a valuable service in providing a meticulously documented account of them in all their bizarre variety." Richard J. Evans, Professor of Modern History, University of Cambridge

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"A vast and important subject has finally received the comprehensive analysis it deserves. Steigmann-Gall's fundamental argument--that the Nazi movement was both intimately and intricately, positively and negatively related to Christianity--will hearten those who see Nazi Germany not as an efficient totalitarian system, but as a nonsystem of constant institutional and personal conflicts.... Highly recommended." Choice

"Steigmann-Gall makes an important argument and supports it energetically and resourcefully" The Catholic Historical - Doris I. Bergen, University of Notre Dame

From the Inside Flap

There has been a huge amount of research on the attitude of the Christian Churches to the Nazis and their policies, but astonishingly until now there has been no thorough study of the Nazis' own religious beliefs. Richard Steigmann-Gall has now provided it. He has trawled through a lot of very turgid literature to show that active Nazis from the leadership down to the lower levels of the party were bitterly opposed to the Catholic Church, but had a much more ambivalent attitude to Protestantism and to Christianity in a wider sense. Even those who, like Himmler and Rosenberg, advocated a kind of pseudo-Germanic paganism, retained at least some Christian elements amongst their religious beliefs. Most preferred a Nazified form of Protestantism that saw Jesus as an Aryan anti-Semite and bent Christian principles to serve racial interests. Far from being uniformly anti-Christian, Nazism contained a wide variety of religious beliefs, and Steigmann-Gall has performed a valuable service in providing a meticulously documented account of them in all their bizarre variety. Richard J. Evans, Professor of Modern History, University of Cambridge

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