

The American MERCURY

CATHOLICS AND THE NAZIS

BY THEODORE MAYNARD

I WRITE as an American Catholic. This does not mean that I have any commission to speak for those of my faith; they are divided on

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Professor Maynard therefore writes on the controversial subject of Catholics and the Nazi menace with an authority that recommends it to all Americans. We present it as a forceful contribution to an important discussion without necessarily implying that it exhausts the subject, or that it resolves all questions arising from the activities of the noisily pro-Nazi minority among Catholics and men like Father Coughlin. — THE EDITORS.

the political issues of this war. My purpose is to indicate some of the factors which may account for that division. There I may be challenged and there I may be wrong, but at the same time, I challenge anyone to prove me wrong in my statement of principles.

The impression prevails in certain circles in this country that the Catholic Church sympathizes with fascism. Such an impression is no doubt partly due to the circumstance that Rome is the center of both Italian Fascism and Catholicism. The impression may have been confirmed in the support given by many (though by no means all) Catholics here and abroad to Franco in the Spanish War. It is further confirmed for some minds

by the tinge of anti-Semitism found in Father Coughlin's utterances.

Nevertheless, these impressions are erroneous. While there are Catholics who, like other people, appear eccentric or stupid or inconsistent or illogical, and though they may be (again like other people) swayed unduly by personal or political or nationalistic passions, they do not represent the mind of the Church. Fascist Catholics are far more often to be found in Europe than in America. Hitler has his little group of Catholic stooges. But the Belgian Rexists are refused the sacraments when they appear in uniform and similar ecclesiastical action is taken in Holland. In any case, they are only a handful. The European Catholic view was expressed by Monsignor Jan Sramek, a Czech refugee, in the London *Tablet*:

We are fighting for the very existence of Christianity. It is the duty of every Catholic in the whole world, whatever nation he belongs to, to realize that nowadays there is no such thing as neutrality. All Catholics must participate in the fight for the preservation of Christian morals. The chief task of Christianity, to be undertaken once the battle is won, is the building up of a lasting peace based on Christian principles and the real ideology of European civilization, national freedom and economic justice.

Hitler recognizes clearly, as does the Church, that Catholicism and

totalitarianism are absolutely irreconcilable. American Catholics, with very few exceptions, also recognize this fact. The only real disagreement among them is over what measures may be politically expedient and strategically advisable. Though this disagreement is profound and often bitter, there is, as there must always be, unanimity in opposition to Nazism.

The antagonism between communism and Catholicism is too well known to need further discussion here. It might, however, be pointed out that the Church never issues a "blanket" condemnation; only specific propositions are dealt with. Consequently, the Church must condemn the avowed Godlessness and materialism of Bolshevism, but it must equally reprobate the unavowed Godlessness and materialism so often prevalent among the defenders of capitalism and it is far from completely identifying the rights of property with our present economic system. Even under present conditions, the Holy See has several times attempted to arrange a concordat, a *modus vivendi*, with the Kremlin, as it has made concordats with Hitler and Mussolini and Franco. For the Church is always ready to make what terms it can with any government. It is not committed to this or that par-

ticular political mode, though modern democracy (which is derived from scholastic philosophy) appears to be the system most consonant with its own constitution and the one under which it enjoys most freedom of action.

The mode of operating under concordats therefore does not imply any approval of the political system with which the concordat is made. It is merely the best — sometimes the only — method possible in certain circumstances. This is true of Italy, Germany and the recent arrangement with Spain. But the Church has no illusions — it knows that the concordat will be observed only insofar as it suits the convenience of the state. It also knows that a concordat is better than nothing; at least for a time it may result in peace and a measure of ecclesiastical freedom. In no sense is it an alliance with the state or an imprimatur upon its ideology.

The policy of the Church is decided by one man, the Pope, though of course he works in consultation with his advisers. No infallibility attaches to his political decisions, which may be reversed by his successors. Yet, as a matter of practical necessity, his policy has to be accepted by loyal Catholics. Still more — and in this case as a matter of absolute necessity — the

principles he lays down have to be accepted. With regard to Nazism and fascism (as well as Bolshevism), the reigning Pope and his predecessor have spoken in unequivocal language. They have made working arrangements with totalitarian governments for the safeguarding of Catholic interests. At the same time, they have made it plain that it is impossible to reconcile totalitarianism with Catholicism.

Pius XII took his stand on the matter little more than a month after the war. In the only encyclical he has yet issued, titled "The Function of the State in the Modern World," he decried the kind of civil authority which "puts itself in the place of the Almighty and elevates the State or group into the last end of life, the supreme criterion of the moral and juridical order, and therefore forbids every appeal to the principles of natural reason and of the Christian conscience." He went on to declare that the success of such systems could be only material and transitory, and he added: "To consider the State as something ultimate to which everything else should be subordinated and directed, cannot fail to harm the true and lasting prosperity of nations."

Mussolini has been willing to suffer the Church in order not to in-

crease his difficulties, as Franco is now trying to use it for his own ends. But Hitler, like Stalin, looks upon it as the enemy to be destroyed. If Hitler has been a shade less murderous than Stalin, his methods are likely in the long run to be more successful because the Nazi program calls for the eradication of Christianity by a process of education which is intended to change the shape of man's mind. If Hitler triumphs, Christianity will virtually disappear in Europe by degrees.

Hitler would, of course, welcome the cooperation of the Church, on his own terms. That is, he would be very glad to have the Catholic organization — for which, as an organization, he has often expressed the highest regard — put at his disposal. He has succeeded in deluding a small minority but even in Germany the Catholic body as a whole has stood out against him. A year ago, he produced what purported to be a pronouncement of the German hierarchy in his favor. Possibly his doctoring of documents succeeded in hoodwinking some people, though it was conclusively shown, both by the Roman authorities and by the secular news agencies, that Dr. Goebbels' manipulation of this matter amounted to forgery.

The true attitude of the German hierarchy was expressed this spring by Archbishop Groeber of Friburg, in a pastoral printed in the *Osservatore Romano*, in which he described the present situation in the Reich as going "beyond the religious ruin of the Sixteenth Century." As a good German, he protested: "Not only is our faith belittled as a thing of the past but we are rebuked as being anti-German. . . . It is now absolutely certain that the future of the people is being built on an anti-Christian foundation."

The facts are that, despite the concordat, everything possible is done to make the practice of Catholicism as difficult as possible. Mass is permitted at hours allowed by the Gestapo, when its attendance is inconvenient for all and out of the question for many. Sermons are censored. But worst of all, the religious orders suffer wholesale suppression, the monasteries and convents are often taken over for the use of the secret police and Catholic schools and youth organizations are *verboten*. Instead, the young are indoctrinated from childhood in the pagan German myth. Already, perhaps, the greater part of young men and women are lost to the Church because of this propaganda. It might almost be said that the only ones able to re-

sist it are those of mature mind and the little children still too small to be clutched by the Nazi machine, who are sometimes taught in secret by their parents.

What has happened in Poland seems to have surpassed the imagination for horror. We do not need to go to British propaganda for this; it was Cardinal Hlond who gave out the facts about wholesale massacre, and of clerics in concentration camps being obliged to clean the latrines, and of bishops forced to sweep the streets in front of their own cathedrals. But nobody is allowed into Poland to see what is going on. Even the Papal Nuncio has been excluded.

II

Hitler and his Italian *Gauleiter* have given the world a rosy picture. It was announced that the Holy See had recognized the new Croatian government, though nothing of the kind happened. The new puppet king was received before and not after his appointment and the murderous Dr. Pavelich was given an audience, which could not be refused, as a private person instead of premier. The so-called "Apostolic Delegate" has no diplomatic status. He is an "Apostolic Visitor," with functions limited to

that of an observer for the Holy See. Difficult as the Pope's position has been in Rome, he has been careful to guard against even the appearance of recognizing the conquests of Hitler. The Nazis find it inadvisable to direct their rage openly against the Pope, so they turn it without restraint against the local ecclesiastical authorities.

We come around again to the Nazi concept of peace with the Church — or, for that matter, of peace with any nation. It is the peace in which the lion lies down with the lamb, with the lamb inside the lion. Even while trying to extract a momentary advantage by minor concessions to such little fascist groups so foolish as to trust him, Hitler has no illusions at all as to the irreconcilable nature of Catholicism and his own ideas. The moment these groups have served their purpose — in which so far they have been of very slight and constantly diminishing use — the Nazis intend to absorb them into an absolute uniformity with their own system. It cannot be otherwise. While the Church exists, the triumph of totalitarianism remains incomplete. More surely than any other of National Socialism's intended victims, Catholicism can never be National Socialism's agent.

It might even be argued that Hitlerism is a more dangerous enemy to the Church than Stalinism. Only by an historical accident, or series of accidents, is irreligion tied to Bolshevism and it may conceivably be discarded in time. On the other hand, National Socialism is inextricably rooted in the myth of the sacred German blood, which has created a new religion that is perhaps all the more powerful because it is so preposterous. No kind of ascent is possible under the Nazi system. You are either an "Aryan" or you are not, and all the "lesser breeds without the law" are disdained in varying degrees. Hitler starts with a comprehensive denial of human equality. As there is only an Aryan God, who is no more than a concept of composite Germanity, there can be no universal fatherhood of God any more than there can be any brotherhood of man. To say that God does not exist, as the Bolshevists do, is bad enough but it is a proposition that can be met by argument, whereas the Nazi doctrine, being irrational and "mystical," cannot be met at all except by a rejection as resolute as its own affirmation.

But the Catholic Church must not necessarily reject a dictatorship considered in its strictly political aspect. Dollfuss attempted a mild

Catholic dictatorship in Austria; Salazar is now attempting one in Portugal. Kept within due bounds, a dictatorship of this kind is not oppressive either to society or the Church. But we know from experience how easily it may be transformed into an instrument for oppression. We know that it is, of its very nature, likely to become aggressive. If Hitler had confined himself to Germany with his purges and persecution and the horrors of the Gestapo, we, as Americans, would have no right to interfere, however much we loathed his proceedings. Even then, however, the Church would have had to speak and it did speak while Nazism was so confined. As things stand, civil liberties and religion everywhere are threatened and we have reached the point where we must be prepared to die if we wish to live. It is a situation with which the Church has often been familiar in the course of its history; for America, it is without precedent or parallel.

It is somewhat surprising, therefore, that American Catholics should be infected with isolationism. On the principle of opposition to totalitarianism, they are virtually unanimous; but on the question of political action, there are factors that tend to confuse them.

Like so many other Americans, they are not always free from that ancestral animosity towards England which still smoulders sullenly and which was fanned by the question of war debts. Certain Irish elements, unable to forget Oliver Cromwell, have their ancient grudge. Then, too, there is the German "hybris" which has been stimulated by the German victories and by propaganda. Finally, nearly all are at least to some extent affected by their memories of the last war. They believe they were dragged by British cunning into something which was no concern of theirs; now they like to think they are too cagey to be caught a second time. Above all, because they do not want to fight, they keep telling themselves that what is going on is a European war between rival imperialisms.

This is the stock in trade of all isolationists. Catholic isolationists do no more than repeat the arguments of Senator Wheeler and Mr. Lindbergh. Even Ireland is no longer much of a stick with which to belabor Britain. The original Catholic contribution to the discussion — it is not very original and monstrously un-Catholic — is anti-Semitism. The moronic mob following Father Coughlin has come to think of communism as a

Jewish affair and of course the "international bankers" are Jewish. Father Coughlin has been repudiated time after time by responsible Catholic leaders and *Social Justice* is not classed as a Catholic magazine. It makes no difference — millions of Americans still believe that Father Coughlin speaks for the Church. These people should be reminded of the unequivocal words of Pope Pius XI, who, speaking to a group of Belgian pilgrims on September 6, 1938, said: "Anti-Semitism is inadmissible. We are spiritually Semites."

To make matters worse, Archbishop Beckman of Dubuque, speaking over the radio last July 28, gave strong anti-Semitic implications to his speech, implications that were made all the more emphatic by the inflection of his voice. Time after time, he said he was addressing "American Catholics and Christians in general" or "American Christians" — pointedly excluding his Jewish fellow-citizens. He declared the war to be "not a holy war, or a just war, but a conflict of imperialisms to restore the shattered boundaries of international finance." He did not mention Father Coughlin, though his argument was largely Coughlinite, but quoted instead from Father Coughlin's enemy, Cardinal

O'Connell, who has been an isolationist of a different stripe. His Grace of Dubuque took the precaution of admitting that he did not speak for the Catholic Church. His obvious purpose was to counteract the radio speeches delivered on April 30 and July 7 by Bishop Hurley of St. Augustine, who was obliquely referred to as "a cleric recently returned from abroad." The reference might have been more definite: Bishop Hurley had been attached to the Papal Secretariat of State.

The first of Bishop Hurley's speeches (delivered before the Russo-German war) was an attack on the isolationists, "those dyspeptic moralists [who] are the dupes of a few men who have no interest whatever in morals, but who are seeking to divide and discourage us in America." In his second speech, delivered early in July after Hitler had invaded Russia, Bishop Hurley pointed out that though the Holy See and our government have pursued independent policies, "he who runs may read, nevertheless, a striking parallelism between their attitudes where moral questions were at issue." He urged that "since our problem is primarily a strategic one, it should be left to the Commander-in-Chief" and then proceeded to castigate Catho-

lic isolationists, in particular, where previously he had attacked isolationists in the lump:

Among them is a small but noisy group of Catholics. We have suffered long from their tantrums. We have blushed with shame when they acted up before company as tantrum children will do in every family. Years ago they established the crank school of economics; latterly they have founded the tirade school of journalism; they are now engaged in popularizing the ostrich school of strategy.

III

The question arises as to which of these two eminent ecclesiastics comes nearest to expressing the Catholic point of view. The Bishop's political opinions I leave out of the discussion, as about these there may be legitimate disagreement. But what of his basic view of totalitarianism?

Here there is no room for doubt. Pius XI in a single month (March, 1937) published three encyclicals. The first, the *Divini Redemptoris*, condemned atheistic communism but at the same time advocated the rebuilding of the world of labor on Christian instead of capitalistic foundations. The second, *Mit brennender Sorge*, protested against the persecution of the Church in Germany and condemned Nazi racial theories, as well as the Fascist doc-

trines that would deify the state. The third, *Nos es muy*, was addressed to the bishops of Mexico on the rights of Christians as citizens. Together, they covered the ground completely — and this before the war broke out.

The isolationists, and especially some of the Catholic isolationists, took fresh heart with the invasion of Russia. Whatever Hitler's past offences, was he not now the champion of Christian civilization against atheistic communism? Surely now the Pope would bless the crusade! But on that subject the Pope maintained an eloquent silence. His radio speech to the world, delivered on June 29, was a lofty and moving exposition of the ways of Divine Providence. "God's hour will come — the hour of liberation" was the burden of his address. To the whole world, the Holy Father gave his blessing.

Now let us consider the attitude of the Catholic press, as expressed by its three chief organs of opinion.

The editors of the *Commonweal* differ about the war, and have sometimes indicated their differences by signing their editorials. Michael Williams, now only a weekly contributor to its pages, has always been strongly interventionist. Philip Burnham, on the other hand, is somewhat pacifist in his

political philosophy. Yet he has admitted into his paper views that are at variance with his own.

Perhaps more representative of general Catholic opinion is the Jesuit review, *America*. It has been, and still is, moderately isolationist, though one may notice in it, as in other Catholic papers, a gradual change in policy. The *Catholic World*, while definitely anti-Roosevelt and more belligerently isolationist in policy than either *America* or the *Commonweal*, has been equally as definite in its condemnation of all brands of totalitarianism. Father Gillis is by all odds the ablest Catholic editor of our time. I prophesy that he will be the last isolationist die-hard.

Not in these periodicals but in some of the diocesan weeklies one encounters what Bishop Hurley calls "the tirade school of journalism." Though these papers have condemned totalitarianism — and they could not very well do otherwise in view of the Papal pronouncements — I have often had the feeling creep into my mind that some of them are rather perfunctory in their attacks on Nazism and fascism and it is only when, like Archbishop Beckman, they get on the subject of "Britain and Bolshevism" that they are really able to put heart and soul into it.

Of one thing, however, we may be perfectly sure: the moment America gets into the war openly, nobody will be more vociferously patriotic than these writers.

Meanwhile, the official attitude of the American hierarchy is explicit in its condemnation of Nazism and one may safely assume that this is the attitude of almost all American Catholics. Even Father Coughlin is not a Nazi, although he sometimes sounds like one and he is certainly anti-Semitic. But he represents only himself and his group—a rude minority voice which proves, if it proves anything, the length of the Church's forbearance.

When Hitler invaded Russia, a distinguished group of Catholics issued a manifesto as a full-page advertisement in many of the diocesan papers, indicating full approval of Bishop Hurley's speeches. A majority of the names on the list were Irish. Their statement blended sound Catholic principles with political wisdom. It reaffirmed that communism is the enemy of religion but concluded:

At present the Nazis alone possess the physical strength necessary to implement their war upon the Church and upon every other spiritual aspect of human nature. They must be destroyed if we hope to save Christianity. The murderer of priests, ministers and Jews

does not become the defender of religion just because he attacks another gangster who happens to be an atheist. Hitler's attack on Russia must not be allowed to confuse us. Hitler is still our greatest enemy and he must be stopped even if that means that we and the Soviet are temporarily on one side in the effort to resist a common enemy.

I do not know precisely what proportion of American Catholics would subscribe to all of the unmistakable implications of that statement. Nor does anybody else know just how many isolationists there are among them. Even as to how the country as a whole is divided on the question of entering the war we have only the polls to guide us. There is no reason to suppose, however, that American Catholics hold opinions very different from their fellow citizens. It is possible that there may be a somewhat higher percentage of isolationists among them but if so it can be only a slight difference. If you call a man a fascist because he supported Franco, then there are many American Catholic fascists. But that would not be just, and I say it as one who did not support Franco. In the Spanish War, the issues were clouded; they are now crystal clear. American Catholic fascists are neither American nor Catholic.

No two ways of thought can be more opposed than Catholicism and totalitarianism.

► *It's not too late for the USA
to clean its aviation house.*

AMERICA REPEATS EUROPE'S AVIATION MISTAKES

BY MAJOR ALEXANDER P. DE SEVERSKY

THE experience of the Old World lies spread under the eyes of the New World, as precise as a chart, if only we cared to read and understand it. American military aviation, specifically, is today almost an epitome of Europe's on the eve of World War II: we are repeating most of Europe's mistakes while imitating few of its virtues.

In recounting my personal observations in the aeronautical world of pre-war Europe, my purpose is to underscore those features which, it seems to me, hold concrete lessons and warnings for Americans at this time. I spent the seven months before the outbreak of the war in aviation circles in France, Germany, England, Italy and other countries. I was not studying the situation in the void, but trying to sell American planes to Europe. Consequently I came into unusually intimate contact with aeronautical officials, from Ministers down; with manufacturers and designers of aircraft; with rank-and-file pilots.

France was living in a fool's paradise of false safety behind its "impregnable" fortifications. It was a paradise in which nearly everybody made fat commissions and complicated "deals" and flaunted the kind of patriotism that paid dividends. Munich had awakened a section of the government and the public to the need for defense, but the preparedness under way was mostly of the verbal variety.

Military aviation was organized as a separate Ministry. But it existed meekly, almost by sufferance, in the shadows of the French Army, whose prestige was predominant. Aviation was just about tolerated and no more. It had neither efficiency nor discipline. Worst of all, *it had no clear over-all strategy.* Airplanes were built or bought, accepted or rejected, without reference to a precise plan for holding the skies of France and conquering the skies of potential foes; even without sensible relation to existing ground forces. Aviation was looked upon chiefly as the