

BOOKS

Luther as Lucifer

The Germans

by Erich Kahler

edited by Robert and Rita Kimber
Princeton University Press, 295 pp.,
\$13.50

Reviewed by
Charles Lam Markmann

The core of the state is power," the revered Prussian historian Heinrich von Treitschke preached less than a century ago. "The state is not there for the citizens. It is an end in itself. . . . Under certain conditions, the state will control human life as much as it is able to." Quoting this, Erich Kahler points out that "by tying each individual to a specific function within the whole, the Prussian state carried out the political implications of Lutheran theology. At the same time, it provided the archetype of the modern total state, not only because it assumed control over every sphere of public and private life, but because of its entirely undeological, indeed anti-ideological character." The Nazis said simply: "Whatever serves the state is right" (*Recht ist, was dem Staate nützt*). And, Kahler concludes, the totalitarian National Socialist state was "both a natural outgrowth of the Prussian experiment and a natural refuge for the German individual who longed to escape from the complexity and loneliness of freedom."

Books like this are unfashionable these days; *tant pis*. It is Kahler's thesis that here is such a thing as national character, and that it both shapes and is shaped by those who inherit it and in their turn contribute to it. *The Germans*, Kahler's own revision of a series of lectures on German cultural history delivered at Cornell in 1951–52 and at the University of Manchester in 1955–56, had been almost

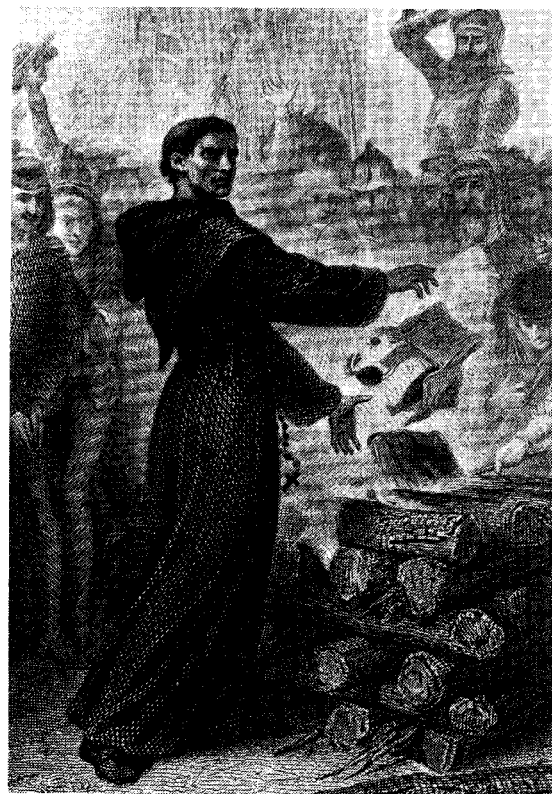
Charles Lam Markmann, a critic, novelist, translator, and journalist whose latest book is *The Buckleys: A Family Examined*, is at work in situ on a study of the two German republics.

wholly prepared for publication when he died in 1970. The work was completed by the editors, who in their foreword most usefully explicate its relationship to Kahler's earlier book, *Der Deutsche Charakter in der Geschichte Europas* (*The German Character in the History of Europe*), which was published in Zürich in 1937. His "basic assumption," the editors assert, "is that a nation, just like an individual, is possessed of a distinct 'character' and that it, too, proceeds in its growth from childhood to maturity." Germany, according to Kahler, is unique in Europe in that "she did not experience normal growth and never achieved anything like maturity, . . . and achieved national coherence only in the intellectual realm but never in the political."

Certainly, whether one reads, say, Geoffrey Barraclough or Kahler—both of whom start before the beginning, more than a thousand years ago, before the papal coronation of Charlemagne (Karl der Grosse) as Holy Roman Emperor—the evidence is overwhelming. Germany is unique in that "her population never achieved national homogeneity," in that "she never developed within well-defined geographical limits"—hence the multitude of names for both the country and the people—and, above all, in that she is the only nation in the world whose national evolution has been centripetal, and yet "throughout almost two millennia, her repeated efforts to establish a national center failed. Superficial national unification was finally achieved in 1871, only to be abolished again in 1945." Germany never had a base of her own, Kahler shows: she started as "a universal 'Roman' empire" and was ostensibly united only by being dragooned into a Prussian-ruled empire of kingdoms (until November 1918) and states; "a unified, truly German Germany was never achieved." For all the intellectual strivings of poets and philosophers toward such a goal, the author shows us, the final result was "the narrowly materialistic, Machiavellian German nationalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with its contempt for the humanistic mentality of the Classic and Romantic periods and for the intellect in general."

WIDE READING in *Germanistik*, two periods of residence in the Federal Republic of Germany, and reasonable observation of the German Democratic Republic offer little or no counter-evidence. What has characterized German history

ever since the innumerable tribal wars, Kahler demonstrates, has been a total lack of coherence, of coalescence. The dominant principle in each tribe was *Gefolgschaft*, the "principle of absolute loyalty to an individual leader," who was designated partly by election, partly by heredity: "The people chose their leader . . . as a representative of a special family believed to be endowed with supranatural gifts." It was this, Kahler says, that contributed to "the incapacity of the German kings and emperors to establish leading dynasties," and it engendered "still another paradox in the German character: a powerful drive for independence combined with an equally strong need for submission to a sanctified



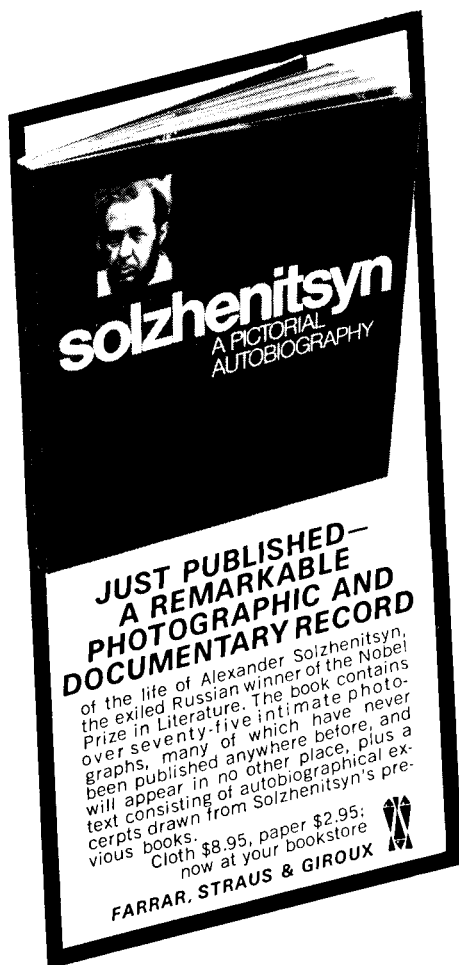
Culver

Luther—"Rebellion and submission."

authority. German history is characterized by the interaction of these two motivations. . . ."

This perpetual dialectic between *Obrigkeits* and *Untertan*, between suzerain and serf, bully and browbeaten, which is perhaps the most shocking feature of daily German life, manifested itself long before the tribes accepted Christianity. But Kahler shows that

by transferring the supreme authority of the church to secular rulers, [Martin] Luther instituted the peculiar authoritarianism of German governments [to which the Basic Law of the BRD and its current Social Dem-



"This book should be read by everyone concerned with the threat of hunger and mass starvation."

—EUGENE J. McCARTHY



photo: Cimarrut

Facing Starvation

Norman Borlaug and the Fight Against Hunger

by **Lennard Bickel**

"A wonderful book, moving in its simplicity and urgency. Telling about Norman Borlaug's remarkable life and character, it opens up what he rightly thinks is the most important subject on earth: the threat of mass hunger, which would not leave any of us untouched." —ANTHONY LEWIS

New York Times

\$8.95 at booksellers

READER'S DIGEST PRESS
distributed by E. P. Dutton

ocratic regime are no exceptions] and the peculiar submissiveness of the German middle class, the mentality of *Obrigkeit* and *Untertan*. In fact, there is hardly any aspect of the character and history of modern Germany, including National Socialism, which cannot be traced back to Luther.

Though European history offers no other personality whose impact on a nation was comparable to his, Kahler says (and presently proves) that Luther's own "anxieties, his inner insecurity, and his insatiable yearning for support and approval reflect the conflicts of Germanic man caught between a dying paganism and an unattainable Christianity." Kahler sees in Luther the epitome of that national inferiority complex of the Germans which he cites in those words again and again in this book and which he was by no means the first (or the last) to recognize.

None of this is going to appeal to Marxists any more than to rigid partisans, doctrinaires, and anti-realists of any sort, and least of all to those who are so quaintly denominated *social scientists*. Nonetheless, it is worth reflecting that Freud, who was considerably superior to his followers in spite of his limitations, more than once warned them (and the rest of us) that one poet's or philosopher's insight was worth more than a carload of sociologists and their camp-followers. Kahler was a philosopher who was a historian and who might have been a poet; above all, he knew that nations are composed of persons and that history is in a sense biography.

Luther, Kahler asserts, "is the prototype of the modern German. He embodied the society that produced him and at the same time [he] created the society that came after him." It was Luther who preached that the slave who revolted against his master was a sinner because he violated his master's right of property in him. In his own life, which Kahler reviews in great detail, Luther frequently evidenced "that curious combination of rebellion and submission that is such a basic element of the German character." Luther himself wrote: "A Christian is a free man, subject to none. A Christian is a dutiful servant, subject to all"—as Kahler justly points out, an equation of freedom and submission, an "interpretation of freedom as submission [that] is a characteristically German interpretation . . . a pervading motif in German thought and history." Even when Luther attacked the ecclesiastical princes' religious abuses and worldly power, "he could not con-

done actual revolt against them simply because they were *princes* as well as ecclesiastics, that is, they were secular authorities to whom the population owed unquestioning obedience." Thus he laid "the foundations of German middle class morality, . . . dividing the human being into a creature whose spirit and soul were totally free but whose body was totally subject to the demands of state and society." It was Luther, Kahler amply demonstrates, who taught the Germans not to make a revolution unless the law permitted it: "Here we see the modern, middle-class-German mentality at its most absurd. Who else but a German would ask whether his oppressor had made it legal to rebel against oppression?" Yet here is the fundamental explanation for the Social Democrats' terror of a republic without a Hohenzoller in 1918,¹ for the opprobrium in which most Germans still hold the men who tried to end the Hitler nightmare on July 20, 1944, for the epithet of "traitor" applied to former Chancellor Willy Brandt by the Christian Democratic/Christian Social Union for his participation, first in Germany and then in exile after 1935, in the fight against National Socialism. "Hitler," Kahler says, "understood the German mind well enough to see that the people would accept his coup d'état only if it were accomplished 'with the permission of the Reichspräsident.'"

Why Kahler insists on Luther's responsibility for the modern German character and, ultimately, for the Germans' embrace of Hitler—"Hitler gave them what they wanted"—is shown by Kahler's analysis of Luther's works. He "had limited the authority of the conscience to spiritual matters alone. In practical and political affairs, the individual conscience was forced to submit unquestioningly to 'the God-given authority of the state,' no matter how corrupt that state might be." And Kahler quotes Luther "God would prefer to suffer the government to exist, no matter how evil, rather than allow the rabble to riot, no matter how justified they are in doing so." And from this came that "faith without content, a discipline without justification," in which "technology and ethics became one," in which Germans "never asked what the machine was accomplishing as it functioned. . . . Under the aegis of Lu-

1. William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, New York, 1959; Simon & Schuster; Kai Dietrich Bracher, *Die Deutsche Diktatur*, Köln, 1969; Kiepenheuer & Witsch.
2. *Rotbuch—Wer ist Willy Brandt? Wer ist Herbert Wehner*, published anonymously by CSU Landesleitung, München 19, n.d. [1972].

theran doctrine," and with the unintended but invaluable assistance of Stefan George, the muddled idealist, and of Ernst Jünger, the philosopher who despised the Nazis but did most to help them, "secular authority in Germany assumed absolute power over the people, and the people willingly acquiesced" to Hohenzollerns and to Hitler alike. "The German burgher gives thanks, as for a gift, for every new yoke imposed on him by the law factory in Bonn," the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of Munich noted a few years ago. And only now Bernt Engelmann has attempted to tell German history as it is in a new book called *Wir Untertanen (We the Browbeaten)*.³

The Germans is a very dense book: one is amazed how much vital history and cogent analysis and interpretation are packed into fewer than three hundred pages. One might wish that the editors had rectified some of the occasional chronological hopscotches characteristic of university lectures presented serially, and that there had been some thoughtful condensation of the many chapters devoted to Luther and the other Reformers. What is especially regrettable is the Anglicization of foreign names, especially in a book full of kings and dukes and grand persons of many nations. It is much easier to distinguish among Henry, Henri, Heinrich, and Enrico, or among William, Guillaume, Wilhelm, and Guglielmo, than among a gaggle of Henrys or Williams who must each time be equipped with nationality labels. But this was the author's, not the editors', doing, for Kahler wrote his very valuable book in English—and an English that most of his colleagues born to the language may well envy. □

3. Munich, Gütersloh, Vienna, 1974: C. Bertelsmann Verlag.

FRASER YOUNG LITERARY CRYPT NO. 15

*A cryptogram is writing in cipher.
Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle.
Answer on page 45.*

MVKEKFGXKHI, K OJGV,
KN HMM MOHJF MFXI
YFSJHJAHJS GFS OVJ-
DYJFHXI YFAMF-
NAKMYN QXGEKGV-
KNL.

SJGF KFEJ

Here's How You Can Sponsor A Child



Here's What You Do

- Fill out your name and address on the coupon.
- Indicate your preference of boy or girl, and country.
- Or . . .
- Check the box marked "Choose any child who needs my help," allowing us to assign you a child from our emergency list.
- Enclose your first monthly check. The cost is only \$15 each month to help a child who needs you.

Here's What You Will Receive

- In about two weeks you'll receive a Personal Sponsor Folder with photograph and information on the child you sponsor and a description of the project where the child receives help.
- Later on . . . a "welcome letter" from the overseas field office.
- Progress reports on the child when you request them.
- A Christmas greeting from the child.
- The opportunity to write directly to the child. You will be given the mailing address and detailed instructions on mail to your child's country.
- Letters from the child answering your correspondence. You receive the child's original letter and an English translation from an overseas office.
- And the satisfaction that comes from helping a deserving child.

Here's What Your Sponsored Child Receives

- In children's homes: supplementary food, clothing, medical care, and dedicated housemothers.
- In Family Helper Projects: school supplies and clothing, medical assistance, emergency food and shelter, and family guidance from a trained child care worker.
- Special aid depending on the country and the type of project.
- Psychological support because the child knows *you* care.

Sponsors are urgently needed for children in: Brazil, India, Guatemala and Indonesia.

Write today: Verent J. Mills

CHRISTIAN CHILDREN'S FUND, Inc. Box 26511, Richmond, Va. 23261

I wish to sponsor a ☐ boy ☐ girl in
(Country) _____
☐ Choose any child who needs my help.
I will pay \$15 a month. I enclose first payment of \$ _____. Send me child's name, story, address and picture.
I cannot sponsor a child but want to give \$ _____.
☐ Please send me more information.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____
Registered (VFA-080) with the U.S. Government's
Advisory Committee on Voluntary Foreign Aid.
Gifts are tax deductible. Canadians: Write 1407
Yonge, Toronto 7. **SR1370**