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978-0-521-60352-2 - The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945

Richard Steigmann-Gall

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## THE HOLY REICH

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. He demonstrates that many participants in the Nazi movement believed that the contours of their ideology were based on a Christian understanding of Germany's ills and their cure. A program usually regarded as secular in inspiration – the creation of a racialist “peoples’ community” embracing antisemitism, antiliberalism, and anti-Marxism – was, for these Nazis, conceived in explicitly Christian terms. His examination centers on the concept of “positive Christianity,” a religion espoused by many members of the party leadership. He also explores the struggle the “positive Christians” waged with the party’s paganists – those who rejected Christianity *in toto* as foreign and corrupting – and demonstrates that this was a conflict not just over religion, but over the very meaning of Nazi ideology itself.

Richard Steigmann-Gall is Assistant Professor of History at Kent State University. He has earned fellowships and awards from institutions in Germany, Israel, and Canada, and he has published articles in *Central European History*, *German History*, *Social History*, and *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte*.

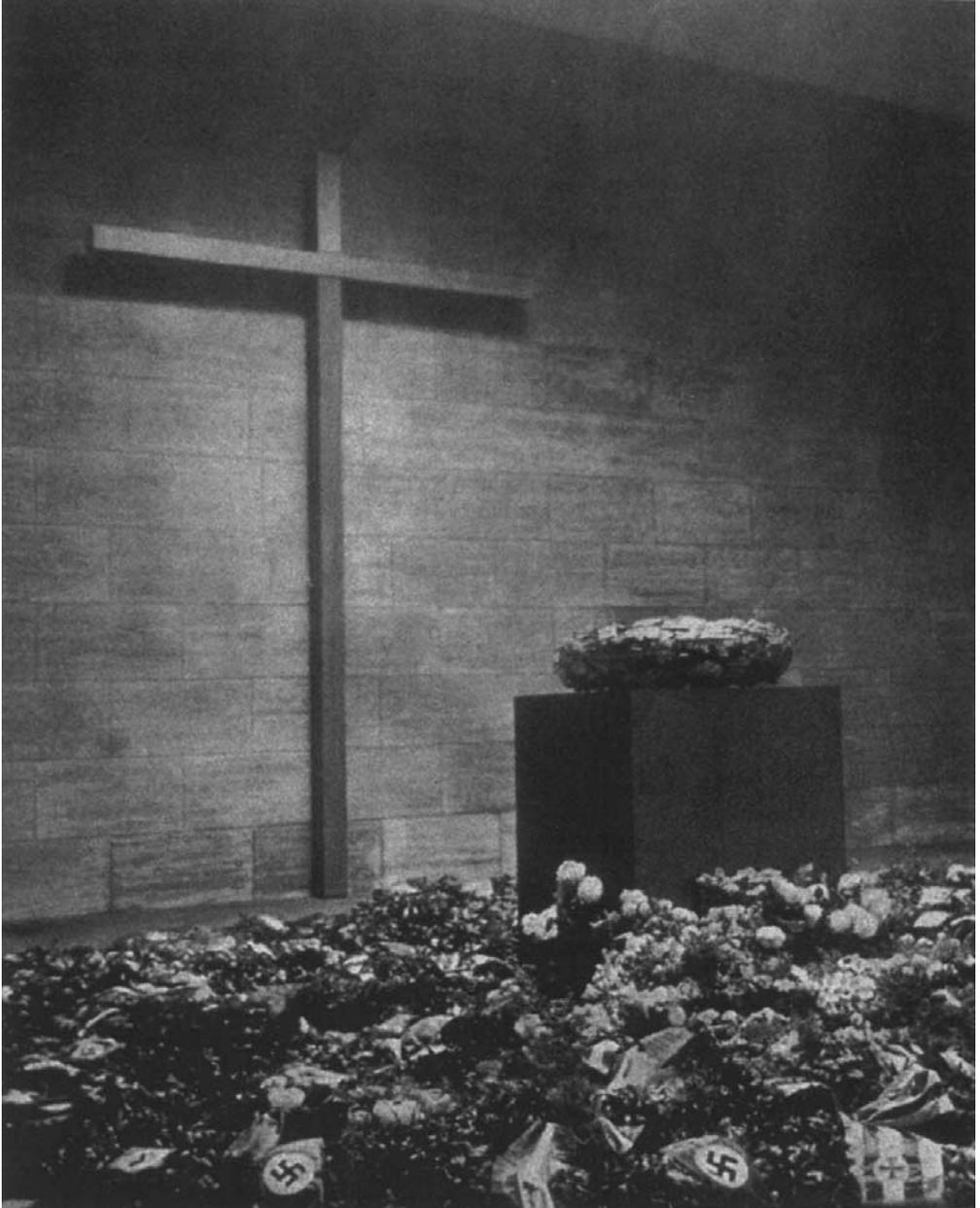
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The Neue Wache during the Third Reich. The Cross was added by the Nazis after the Seizure of Power. Source: *Die Jugend des Führers Adolf Hitler: Bildbuch über die grossdeutsche Jugend*, edited by the Reichsjugendführung der NSDAP (Leipzig, 1942).

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AEKZ	<i>Allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Kirchenzeitung</i>
BAP	Bundesarchiv Potsdam (Federal Archive Potsdam)
BAZ	Bundesarchiv Berlin-Zehlendorf (Federal Archive Berlin-Zehlendorf)
BdK	<i>Bund für deutsche Kirche</i> (League for a German Church)
BdM	<i>Bund deutscher Mädel</i> (League of German Girls)
BK	<i>Bekennende Kirche</i> (Confessing Church)
BStA	Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (Bavarian State Archive, Munich)
CEB	<i>Christliche Elternbund</i> (Christian Parents' League)
DAZ	<i>Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung</i>
DC	<i>Deutsche Christen</i> (German Christians)
DGB	<i>Deutsche Glaubensbewegung</i> (German Faith Movement)
DSP	<i>Deutschsozialistische Partei</i> (German Socialist Party)
DVFP	<i>Deutschvölkischen Freiheitspartei</i> (German Völkisch Freedom Party)
EZA	Evangelisches Zentralarchiv in Berlin (Protestant Central Archive Berlin)
GStA	Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian State Archive, Berlin-Dahlem)
HJ	<i>Hitlerjugend</i> (Hitler Youth)
IfZ	Institut für Zeitgeschichte (Institute for Contemporary History, Munich)
NSDAP	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i> (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
NSDStB	<i>Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund</i> (National Socialist Student League)
NSEB	<i>Nationalsozialistische Elternbund</i> (National Socialist Parents' League)
NSF	<i>Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft</i> (National Socialist Women's Organization)
NSFP	<i>Nationalsozialistische Freiheitspartei</i> (National Socialist Freedom Party)

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NSLB	<i>Nationalsozialistischer Lehrerbund</i> (National Socialist Teachers' League)
NSV	<i>Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt</i> (National Socialist People's Welfare)
PNB	<i>Pfarrernotbund</i> (Pastors' Emergency League)
PPK	<i>Parteiamtliche Prüfungskommission zum Schutze des NS-Schrifttums</i> (Party Examination Commission for the Protection of National Socialist Literature)
RPL	<i>Reichspropagandaleitung</i> (Reich Propaganda Office)
SA	<i>Sturmabteilung</i> (Storm Troopers)
SD	<i>Sicherheitsdienst</i> (Security Service)
SS	<i>Schutzstaffeln</i> (Protection Squads)
StAM	Staatsarchiv München (Munich State Archive)
VB	<i>Völkischer Beobachter</i>
WHW	<i>Winterhilfswerk</i> (Winter Relief Drive)

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I have translated *Konfession* as “confession,” rather than the more standard “denomination.” In Germany, where to this day religion nominally remains an obligatory state affair and not voluntaristic, there are no denominations in the strict sense of the word. Its use in the German context incorrectly suggests an American-style religious “marketplace” and attendant separation of church and state. This is especially relevant when describing certain Nazis like Hitler or Goebbels as “Catholic,” even though they expressed antagonism toward their church. Whereas both men ceased to attend Catholic services or take confession long before 1933, up until their deaths neither man actually left his church or refused to pay church taxes. In a nominal sense therefore both men can be classified as Catholic.

I have translated *evangelisch* as “Protestant,” except when “Evangelical” is used in cited secondary literature. For North American readers the more conventional translation of “Evangelical” implies a particular type of religious activity not necessarily tied to any one church. By contrast, the German *evangelisch* carries a definite theological–institutional determinacy. To maintain the distinction made between *Volk* and *Nation* in the German language, *Volk* has been translated as “people” or, more commonly, left untranslated. *Heidnisch* is frequently translated as “heathen” or “pagan” in the secondary literature. However, the proponents of a Nordicized religion within the party did not actually practice this religion, let alone devise a coherent religious system that could actually be practiced. Rather, they advocated the establishment of a faith that ultimately never came into being. Therefore, instead of referring to these Nazis as “pagans” or “neopagans,” I use the expression “paganist” in all cases.

Documents are cited as follows: “archive, holding/file/page (date: place).” For instance, the citation “BAP R5101/23135/152-153 (21 February 1938: Berlin),” means the document was found in the Bundesarchiv Potsdam (BAP), holding R5101 (Reich Ministry for Church Affairs), file 23135 (correspondence with *Forschungsheim für Weltanschauungskunde*), folios 152–153, date 21 February 1938, and origin Berlin. For files with no pagination, page numbers are omitted.

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With the alterations still taking place in the German Federal Archive system, many of the archival citations used here will have changed. During research, plans were being made to phase out the Bundesarchiv Berlin-Zehlendorf (BAZ), formally known as the Berlin Document Center, and transfer its holdings to the new Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde location. Similar plans were being made for the Bundesarchiv Potsdam (BAP). As of this writing, both these moves are still ongoing. In addition, several files that were at these locations have now moved back to the Bundesarchiv Koblenz. I have therefore chosen to retain the original citations as the exact location of the holdings currently remains in a state of flux.