

## LUTHERANS, PLEASE REFUTE!

**S**YMPTOMATIC cures are rarely effective. Satisfactory treatment, medical or political, demands a knowledge of causes, as well as symptoms. So long as the cause is unknown, remedies are futile. Yet the Western Allies are striving to impose just such a symptomatic cure for Nazism, without ever investigating its causes; that, perhaps, is all political action can do. But to dismiss Nazism, in theory and practice, as a policy of anti-Semitism, concentration camps, imperialism, militarism and compulsory sterilisation, is not enough; all those abuses may be eradicated by A.M.G., but they are merely the symptoms, just as unemployment and degradation were merely the occasions, of Hitler's revolution. The inherent disposition to Nazism will remain until its *causes* are diagnosed and treated. The writer believes this inherent disposition to come from tendencies engendered or encouraged by Luther, when he denied Natural Morality, and rejected the claims of the Church; without that rebellion, Nazism might never have occurred.

I do not enjoy making such bold assertions; I should be glad to see them disproved; but there is no virtue in concealing the truth. Let me not be misunderstood, however. No one would make Luther a champion of Dachau and Buchenwald; one might as readily accuse George Washington of defending the atomic bomb; but Luther suffered from having disciples. In fact, only a chemist can detect the affinity between coal and diamonds, but none the less it is there; so with Luther and the disposition to Nazism.

Lord Acton remarked that 'Luther at Worms is the beginning of modern history'. And Luther's defiance is epoch-making not only because it destroyed the Papal supremacy and disrupted Europe, but also because it radically altered the Catholic view men held of themselves and their environment. We believe that man is naturally moral; original sin has dislocated his will and reason, but not destroyed them; grace presupposes and completes nature; redemption is wrought by faith *and* works. For Luther, on the other hand, there was no such thing as natural morality; original sin had utterly destroyed man's nature; regarded apart from God, he was fundamentally immoral. Therefore there could be no co-operation between God and man, between grace and nature. Redemption was by faith alone, and only the elect were saved; if a man were predestined to damnation no effort of his would save his soul from Hell!

Since we believe man is naturally moral, the entry of a christian into the world is like a stone falling into a pond; it sets up ripples that stretch, in ever-widening circles, to the farthest bank; these

ripples denote all the varied institutions, family, church, state, christendom, which promote our temporal and eternal welfare, and, just as the ripples stretch to the farthest bank, so Catholicism embraces the whole of life. Temporal life is lifted on to the spiritual plane; only Catholics can have a consistent sociology; for them 'there is nothing secular but sin'. For Luther, on the other hand, everything must be secular but worship, and worship must be confined to church on Sundays. For, since natural man was fundamentally immoral, men's everyday relationships could no longer be governed by any moral law; life split up into two independent halves, religious and secular, and the secular half, all men's dealings with each other, was governed, not by morality, but by force.

The change can be seen in Luther's attitude to the state, which became a purely secular complex, characterised not by justice, but by force. Divine ordinance gave the ruler absolute and total power over his subjects; as Luther said: 'The hand that bears (the sword of government) is as such no longer man's hand, but God's; and not man it is, but God, who hangs, breaks on the wheel, beheads, strangles and wages war', and so his subjects became mere instruments of the divine will, and free of all responsibility in serving the state; 'It is not I that smite, thrust and kill, but God and my Prince, whose servants my hand and life must be'; *raison d'état* will justify anything. Christians no longer had any concern with politics, with the things of this world; their function was simply to obey the ruler. In fact, once the rift had come, both Lutheranism and Catholicism were anyway too weak to do without armed support from the Princes, who in turn demanded that the church should license their own excesses. In the Peasants' War of 1525 it was Luther who incited the Princes to the utmost violence 'against the pillaging and murdering troops of peasants', who were defying their authority. Ever since then, German thought has displayed, for the most part, the same dualism between religious and secular, the same submissiveness, and even servility, to an absolute state; that is one of the reasons why Hitlerism took so firm and swift a hold. Perhaps Stendhal was partly right when he said of Germany: 'Cette nation est née à genoux'.

In fact Luther did more than condone immorality in serving the state; logically interpreted, his teaching on salvation sanctioned it. For, if salvation was for the elect only, if no goodness could ever save a man predestined to Hell, then it followed that no sin would ever damn one predestined to Heaven: hence antinomianism triumphed, and man received a licence to sin with impunity. As Luther said to Philip of Hesse: *Pecca fortiter, sed fortius fide et*

*gaude in Christo*. (Sin boldly, but trust and rejoice more boldly in Christ.) Afterwards, of course, he tried to avert the consequences by saying that good works, though powerless to save a man, should still be performed as the fruit of salvation. But it was too late. Here again Luther's antinomianism, his denial of natural morality, provided a congenial atmosphere for Hitler. Luther denied natural morality and natural law, and so produced the absolute secular state. But to do so he first rejected all authority, for rejected authority is the basis of Protestantism. Once authority and certainty are overthrown, men lose every fixed, objective principle, all eternal law; each department of their lives is invaded by an overwhelming individualism, until they begin to doubt even the transcendence of God—that is just what happened with Lutheranism: man, not God, became the measure of all things.

When Luther repudiated the authority of the Church, and set up the Bible, interpreted by the individual conscience, in its place, then the naked human soul was left face to face with God. Naturally man soon lost his sense of proportion, and began to assert, not his misery, but his greatness, who thus could parley, *solus cum solo*, with the Deity. Luther had asserted man's utter depravity, but the very violence with which he did so, rapidly provoked a 'pendulum-reaction'; men remembered they were 'a little lower than the angels', but forgot they were also formed of the dust of the earth; sin lost its horror, human power alone was admired and worshipped. The Church was no longer there to recall her erring children, infatuated and crazed with their own strength, to their right position in the universe. We can follow the same belief in human autonomy throughout German literature. From Luther's rejection of authority sprang the liberal humanism, in which the Popes have seen and denounced the forerunner of modern dictatorship, above all in Germany.

But Nazism is not simply totalitarianism and dictatorship; its essence is blood and race mysticism, belief in the mission of the German people, and in the teachings of the German Faith movement. Here, too, Lutheranism provided a congenial soil for such seeds. In the first place, Luther's revolt against Rome, supported by the German princes, was the signal for violent outbursts of Nationalism, which Luther himself supported: Germany repudiated the common Græco-Roman heritage of Western Europe. But his influence reached deeper still. As we have seen, Luther rejected every external authority, urging his followers to consult their own heart and conscience, and find there the sanctions of their religion. But once men have repudiated the infallible, objective authority which the Church exercises on earth, they begin sooner or later to doubt the objec-

tivity and transcendence of God in Heaven. God leaves the heavens empty, and takes up his abode in their own hearts; the image they make of him, not the image he revealed of himself, is alone valid. He is then created after the image of man: immanent within the human breast, not transcendent, above space and time, Creator and Ruler of the Universe.

This notion of an immanent God has always fascinated German thinkers, from Meister Eckhart, the medieval mystic whom the Nazis claim as their forerunner, to Wilhelm Hauer, of the German Faith movement. Religion was always regarded in the Third Reich as a personal, subjective concern; 'the religious destiny of individuals is as varied as their personal yearning', wrote Hauer. Christianity was denounced as 'a religion which claimed to possess the one and only way to God and repudiated other people as unbelievers'. The idea of the immanence of God combines with German nationalism and racialism; 'We want the German people to regard its history and territory with religious devotion'. Hauer claims for the Germans: 'an experience that the religious life of the believer has its source in the eternal deeps of his own personality. And we who hold the German Faith are convinced that men, and especially the Germans, have the capacity for religious independence, since it is true that everyone has an immediate relation to God, is, in fact, in the depths of his own heart one with the eternal ground of the world'. Beliefs such as these enabled Nazi teaching, with its blood and race mysticism, to spread so fast.

But the worst of this bogus mysticism is that it undermines the distinction between right and wrong. Christian European morality is based on the transcendence of God and the authority of the Church; once these are denied, and religion becomes a matter of 'the German religious genius', then the foundations of our moral system collapse. Then standards of judgment come, not from God, but from men, and there are as many moralities as there are individuals; everything has what one German thinker called its 'inner law'. Hauer acknowledges: 'the goal of a Teutonic, a German morality that will rank higher than Christianity. This morality is grounded in the nature of men and in their very blood'. Virtue is, not obedience to the will of God, but conformity to the 'ideal will of the nation'. The old maxim of 'Recht ist, was dem deutschen Volke nutzt' ('Whatever serves the German people is right'), acquires a sinister significance; expediency is the only principle of action: the end always justifies the means: the name 'sin' may remain, but the content has disappeared. The moral disintegration that began at Wittenberg ends up in Buchenwald.

Luther unleashed a monster which soon exceeded his control. When he denied the moral nature of man, he never thought of the godless absolute state; when he repudiated the authority of the Church, he did not foresee the moral collapse that produced the German Faith movement; but both were implicit in his teaching.

I have tried to show one of the reasons—and it was only one among many—why Nazism gained so firm a hold. The remedy lies clearly, in the Catholic faith. But there are two questions, unanswered here, which readers should ponder: the first, how far is Lutherianism itself the outcome of even earlier national characteristics, and the second, how is the remedy to be applied, and the cure effected?

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### ERIC GILL: A REPLY

FATHER RALPH VELARDE, attacking Eric Gill in *BLACK-FRIARS* (June, pp. 283-7), makes his first point by misquoting me, proceeds on p. 284 by a string of material and formal fallacies, and asserts on p. 286 that sex is 'part of the virtue of chastity'. With such a writer one does not argue; in the small space allotted me I shall try to write constructively, but must leave much unsaid or undeveloped. What I say may be reinforced from *Letters*, pp. 9-11, 94-6, 203, 253-4, 334-5, 404, 439-40; and *Necessity of Belief*, 346-7.

One need not have read far in Eric Gill to observe his constant return to fundamentals (from sculpture or education to 'What is man?'); his constant making of distinctions (means and ends, intellect and will, tools and machines, poverty and destitution); his constant use of scholastic terms (*form, matter, recta ratio factibilium, operatio sequitur esse*). Such procedure—surely philosophical—marks him off not only from such non-Catholic predecessors as Ruskin, Morris and Lethaby but from most Catholic 'men of letters' today, e.g., French and English novelists and essayists—men who often think in theological terms but seldom in philosophical.

I speak therefore of his 'philosophy', though I leave the name 'philosopher' for professionals of more systematic training. In Thomism he saw the general lie of the land, knew one stretch well and had made one plot his own. Some distinguished Thomists were his friends; he discussed things with them and invited correction of work in progress. He learned much from them; they learned something from him. Some of them may remember producing a quotation—from St