

Correspondence

Islam and Iran

In the May *Worldview* ("What the U.S. Needs to Know About Iran") Yahya Armajani speaks much of the prominent role Islam plays in the Iranian revolution. "Among the three great missionary religions of the World, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, Islam has not had a history of persecution." True, yet the reason for this is that it has been the predator, and not the prey. What of the Arab, Jewish, and Christian ethnic and religious minorities within the heart and outskirts of Lady Persia? A Jewish businessman was recently executed for having "links with Zionist Israel." The non-Arab military personnel are fighting a three-front war against Arab tribesmen on the fringes of Iranian territory. No Christian has yet been shot by "revolutionary tribunals" or Islamic "courts," probably because of the fact that even though 98 per cent of the Iranian populace is Muslim, the repercussions in the Christian world would be devastating, and Mr. Khomeini doesn't need more troubles—especially during his current "rest." But were the massacres of Bahai religionists justified? Were they also sentenced because of "spreading corruption of Earth?" And, although Communists are known for devilish troublemaking in hotspots and are not beyond fomenting riots and stirring up "causes" for their own chauvinist ends, they are human beings made in the image of an Islam and Christian God alike. Mr. Armajani quotes one ayatollah as commenting that "Islam means freedom of the individual limited only by the freedom of the others." Well, the "others" now have the upper hand in Iran, and the outspoken "individual" is truly limited in his action, and in his life as well.

Ray E. Johnson

Boulder, Colo.

Victims of the Hitler Youth

To the Editors: We were stunned and saddened to see Alfons Heck's article ("The Hitler Youth: We Too Were Victims," May, 1979) appear in *Worldview*. Heck's self-pitying tone and repugnant message deserve no place in

your journal. Heck's article is a thinly veiled apology for the Nazi Holocaust. Although he condemns the Holocaust in a pro forma manner, he is most careful to shun any personal or collective responsibility. ("Not by the bloodiest thirst for revenge can we, the children of that age, be blamed for what happened.") Heck reveals his true feelings when he describes the foes of Nazism as being filled with "the bloodiest thirst for revenge." Who, we wonder, are those unnamed bloody avengers?

But there is more. One can almost hear the jackboot heels clicking when Heck remembers his "exciting" years in the Hitlerjugend. He was a "dedicated" member, who belonged to a "coveted elite unit." No wonder Heck "enjoyed" his career in the Nazi Youth Movement. For Alfons Heck the "betrayal" of the Fuhrer's youthful soldiers was Adolf Hitler's greatest sin. Heck recounts that Hitler's "betrayal" and Nazi Germany's defeat in the Second World War cost the German people "Innumerable futures....And a third our territory." But Heck does not tell us that nearly 11,000,000 non-German civilians lost much more than territory or shattered futures at the hands of the Nazis; they lost their very lives. Heck, despite thirty-five years of solid historical research, still plays an obscene numbers game with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust (the "slaughter of four to six million people...whose only crime [sic!] it was to have been born Jewish...").

But there is more. Heck reverts to the "some of my best friends are/were Jews" game when he sadly remembers Heinz, his childhood Jewish acquaintance. Heinz, one of the Six Million, was gassed at Auschwitz in 1944 "perhaps cursing the stupendous caprice of fate that had made him a Jew in an era when it was again open season on Jews." For Heck, being a Jew is either a "crime" or a "stupendous fate." It never occurs to the former Hitlerjugend member that millions proudly lived and died as members of the Jewish People, men and women who thanked God every day for being Jewish, even in the face of death. For them and for us it is no "crime," no "stupendous fate," only a God-given obligation to attempt to fulfill the Jewish Covenant.

But there is more. Heck concludes his whimpering letter as if we were
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WORLDVIEW

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of *Worldview* is to place public policies, particularly in international affairs, under close ethical scrutiny. The Council on Religion and International Affairs (CRIA), which sponsors the journal, was founded in 1914 by religious and civic leaders brought together by Andrew Carnegie. It was mandated to work toward ending the barbarity of war, to encourage international cooperation, and to promote justice. CRIA is independent and non-sectarian. *Worldview* is an important part of CRIA's wide-ranging program in pursuit of these goals.

Worldview is open to diverse viewpoints and encourages dialogue and debate on issues of public significance. It is edited in the belief that large political questions cannot be considered adequately apart from ethical and religious reflection. The opinions expressed in *Worldview* do not necessarily reflect the positions of CRIA. Through *Worldview* CRIA aims to advance the national and international exchange without which our understanding will be dangerously limited.

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Correspondence

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watching a bad movie. The murders of innocent people like Heinz, the Nazi call for genocide, the deadly disease of anti-Semitism—all of this never “highlighted the complete idiocy of war” for Alfons Heck. It took the death of his beloved dog, Prinze, to make war absurd. His dog was “cooked to the bone” by an American air raid on Christmas Eve, 1944. We suspect that we are dealing with an unconscious case of victim substitution; for more than dogs were having their “flesh cooked to the bone” in those terrible years.

But there is more. Heck, today a naturalized American citizen who lives in San Diego (his innocent victims have forever been denied such a pleasant status), tells of seeing some of today’s neo-Nazis parading around “under the swastika.” “I’m tempted to walk up to them and say, ‘Do you really know what in the hell you are doing?’” But, of course, Alfons, why can’t you, of all people, walk over in the warm California sunshine and tell those young Nazis the awful and monstrous truth about Nazism? You complain that no one did it for you in the 1930’s, but, Alfons, this is 1979, this is the United States. Speak out against Nazism, against the terror and murder and evil that is Nazism. Do it, Alfons, in memory of your dear friend Heinz, no, better, do it in memory of poor old Prinze!

Rabbi A. James Rudin
Inge Lederer Gibel

Interreligious Affairs
American Jewish Committee
New York, N.Y.

Alfons Heck Responds:

When I wrote the article, “The Hitler Youth: We Too Were Victims,” I knew I was in a no-win situation, but I’m usually taken to task by right-wing radicals.

Although it’s obvious by the tone of your letter that I’ll never be able to influence your opinion, I would like to answer to some of your charges. You accuse me of enjoying my “exciting” years as a “dedicated” member of a “coveted elite unit” in the Hitler Youth. True. What do you want me to do? Lie? I did enjoy my life as a Hitler Youth leader and member of the “master race.” Why is that so heinous? Did you forget that I, and my peers, were all of five years old when Hitler came to power? Did you expect mature judgment from mere children constantly bombarded by Nazi ideology, when most of the adults, and not in Germany alone, were taken in by Hitler?

That should also answer your accusation that, to me, the “betrayal” of the Hitler Youth was, as you put it, Hitler’s greatest “sin.” Of course it was, since it directly made us a part of the Holocaust, at least in the eyes of people who think like you.

What I really take exception to, however, is your contention that it wasn’t the murder in Auschwitz of my Jewish boyhood friend Heinz that highlighted the complete idiocy of war to me, but the death of my “beloved” dog Prinze. You must know that the Nazis took great pains to hide the extermination of the Jews from the rest of the German people, although rumors of it certainly filtered through. I didn’t really believe that I had served a mass murderer until I visited and talked to survivors of Dachau, Treblinka, and Auschwitz after the war. When my dog was killed on Christmas Eve, 1944, I can assure you that I knew nothing of genocide, let alone that Heinz was one of its victims.

Now, let me identify the foes of Nazism who, as you say, are filled with “the bloodiest thirst for revenge.” You two obviously belong to this classification. You simply will not or perhaps cannot accept the fact that there were many thousands of children who, though blindly believing in Hitler and his racial doctrines, were nevertheless totally blameless for the Holocaust. Can you, in all seriousness, advocate that we were guilty of mass murder of which we knew nothing? Your hatred really shows through in the statement that I enjoy being a naturalized citizen while my victims have “forever been denied such pleasant status.” Come now, that’s really getting carried away. What do you want me to do? Commit suicide?

Finally, I would like to assure you that I do speak out against the evils of Nazism. I didn’t, after all, have to expose myself as a former leader of the Hitler Youth. But I, like you, believe the infamous past should not be forgotten. So far, since last December, my life has been threatened three times, after I had written articles critical of the Nazis. On May 17 I was interviewed on the Phoenix radio station KTAR as a counterbalance to airtime demanded by the American Nazis. The Nazis never showed up to debate me. On July 2 I spoke about my experience in Nazi Germany on San Diego radio KSDO, following the publication of my article “Nazis Here and There” in the *Baltimore Sun* on Sunday, July 1. Would you believe that this time I was accused by members of the German-American community of throwing a bad light on the respectable Germany of today? I got only one anonymous letter from an irate Nazi, while three Jews complimented me for exposing the danger....

I don’t blame you for your views, and defend your right to utter them, no matter what you think of me. Silence is more dangerous than any form of verbal extremism.

Although I am deeply sorry for the atrocities committed by the Nazis, partly because I’m ashamed that such things happened in my “civilized” native land, you are certainly correct in stating that I assume no “personal or collective guilt.” That would really be hypocrisy.

If you, as you write, interpret my article as a “thinly veiled apology” for the Nazi Holocaust, you are simply mistaken.

Who’s Who

To the Editors: For the information of your readers, the Ira V. Birdwhistell referred to in James A. Nuechterlein’s “Reflections on American Religion” in the April issue is currently serving as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Drakesboro, Kentucky. “Jack,” as Ira is known to his friends, hails from Anderson County, Kentucky. He graduated from Georgetown College, Georgetown, Kentucky, and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

Frank Thomas
Evansville, Ind.