

## Iconic Ironic Iron

...the Third Reich reinterpreted the cross of Christ to advance a pagan agenda  
- Erwin Lutzer, *Hitler's Cross*

On a local, now-closed military post stands this Iron Cross. Not the sort of monument that one would expect in *these parts*; but having some fetish to peruse old cemeteries, I stop my walking or bike riding to give due to the fallen enemies of past wars - of organizations and ideologies that I have understandably accepted as wrong, even wicked. Still, the habit and curiosity of touring the tombstones is not deterred, and I venture-on with casual glances from one stone to the next.

Some of the names and ranks are quite different from what my notions accept as "American" - but this is before I am reminded of the obvious relationship between Europe and this once-colony; and to the immigrants and the inextricable ties to the "Old Country".

Perhaps my mind is simply playing on the experience to somehow add drama and intrigue to the moment; to take a foreign name, add a face, and try to establish some story of life in the Nazi party, the Third Reich or by any similar description and descent. But my mind quickly runs dry as far as story content - thus leaving me with little more than the name, rank and lifespan of these few who found themselves serving their last days in America, in Alabama, in an Army POW installation. Cause of death unknown, these soldiers most likely died of disease or possibly deprivation from actual battle or a combination of prison life and natural causes. Whatever the cause of death, the obvious fact is that they never saw their fatherland again; they would never return in honor...or at all.



I have never served actively in the military; and therefore, have no real understanding of a soldier's life, of war, and of such destruction and death. Not knowing of this experience greatly limits my ability to capture the idea and the beliefs of these - of few of the many - who fought in the Axis and believed in the rise of a race, a country and heritage above all else. Whether the reasons for their enlistment and service, this side of that war is far from my understanding in the sense of what drives one to fight, to believe in and die for these ideologies of a superior race; that preys on the weak and otherwise inferior while systematically using or destroying them.

*...of what drive one to fight, to believe in and die for these...*

A recent read, *Hitler's Cross*, offers some insight into the rise of this Nazi party, the suppression (and capitulation) of the Christian church, and the emerging eastern religions and occults that either replaced the spiritual void or rose in power within the politic. Certainly the Holocaust stands-out as most poignant in the bizarre and wicked nature of this party and its platform, but what remains as the least understood is why the citizenry did not cast greater opposition or resistance. Here, where I have probably exceeded the *danger zone* of my ability is where I will continue this story; this impression of the Iron Cross in the context of what little I've read...and think I understand.

It is a cross; the "Iron Cross", but still a cross. Does it represent Christianity; or does it have some origin or even facsimile to some variant of the Christian cross? Could it offer any true, spiritual meaning - beyond the ideologies, politics and power of a state, government or military? There is perhaps an answer to these questions; but instead of seeking it out, I think I'll go elsewhere on the inspiration of another read (other than *Hitler's Cross*, by Erwin Lutzer).

Published in 1983, *The Stealing of America* by John Whitehead offers more commentary on this time period in relation to today...to our culture and to our

changing society. In chapter 3, he writes of the "Ominous Parallels" - the similarity between the growing nationalism of the Nazi party and some aspects of our own society. Of particular interest (for me), was how much of the clergy accepted - and even promoted - this growing nationalism; that would foster such unforgettable destruction of people and property, and furthermore, generate a systematic "final solution" .

As I walked through this small but eccentric burial ground, the notion occurred to me that these men died for their cause - for this nationalism with all that we understand it to be. Irrespective of what they knew - or what the church or the clergy

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knew - the understanding is that the Nazi party was wicked and, by association, so might be all who served ,supported...and died for it. From the lowly privates to the high-ranking general, should I believe these men were wicked; or from the many parishioners to the regional and national leaders, should I believe the church that supported this state to be wicked as well? Well, I don't know; after all, the nation was in an economic crisis and, while the cause(s) could be attributed in part to the treaty - or international interests - did it justify the church to jettison its moral base? Questions on more questions; and no real answers, it seems.

I believe in the soldier's confession that, in the final assessment, the soldier fights for the other soldiers...for his brothers-in-arms and not necessarily for the lofty cause(s) of freedom, conquest or other national agenda. Regardless of what I or anyone else thinks of the Nazi party, one has to be impressed with the rise to power and the efficiency of its war machine; out of the ashes of double digit inflation to regional conquest and dominance. What fury must have driven these peoples, this nation and all its resources, to such a radical but ruthless change?

Were many of the citizenry just afraid - to include the church; and, if so, than who did they fear? Did they fear the state or government (such as the SS,

Hitler Youth, and other policing groups) and/or did they fear those said to oppress them through the treaty? What is certain amid all these questions is that these people were afraid of something; so much so, that they were willing to abdicate God, to support (or at least ignore) the racial and ethnic cleansing, and to embrace the nationalism of the Third Reich. Their fear was manifested in this fury, and their fury was driven by faith in the *Der Fuehrer*, and their *Der Fuehrer* was only a man.

*...these people were afraid of something...that they were willing to...*

This man became a god; he became the icon or idol of hope - for the reign of the Third Reich was thought to be foreordained or *manifest destiny*. In his personal power - his own fury and developed philosophy - a man became a god, and the people became his flock, and the flock left the true church in view of the present crisis and the prevailing and painful sense that they were victimized by others. Yes, they fought with a fury because they were so deeply afraid; they died for a cross but not the true cross; and they substituted or replaced a human for Hosanna - a false source (or sense) of hope for the true source.

With this artificial or counterfeit source of hope, nationalism flourished; the once understood, accepted and practiced norms of morality and ethics were marginalized; and the growing police-state and authoritarianism were rationalized as the "final solution". The small enclave of the church that did not stand-down paid dearly: the deity became dissidents subject to prosecution, punishment, and other forms of persecution; those like Dietrich Boenhiffer (Evangelist) or Sophie Scholl (White Rose resistance) would find themselves without a church, behind bars or barbwire, and eventually executed; while the nation known for the early reformation of Lutheranism spurned all such influences in view of the powerful and prevailing politic.

I look again at this iron cross - this "Iconic, Ironic, Iron" representation of a cross - and the final question in mind is not why they fought and died for such

Picture & a 1000

Ironic Iron

baseless hope in the past, but is there a lesson or warning for our nation, the present and future, our hope - our source of hope?