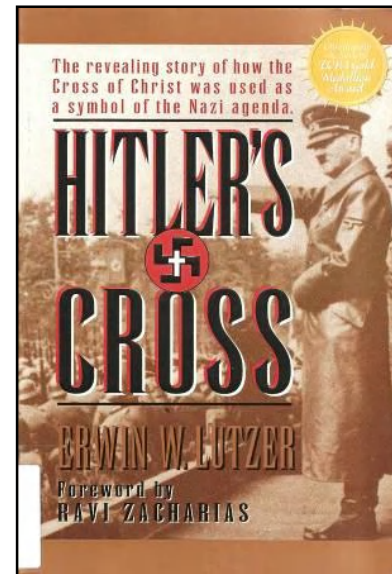


## Hitler's Cross - Introduction

Written by Erwin Lutzer in 1995, "Hitler's Cross" probes into the division of the Christian cross and the Nazi cross and symbolic of struggle of the church – and the souls of man – between God and other representations or substitutes of God. There is the obvious and real history of the rise of Third Reich, but there is the value of history that compels man to post-analyze the events and circumstances that lead-up to and propagated this horrific institution.

Mr. Lutzer is a theologian and, on the matter and material of the Christian church, considers what happened in the spirituality of a nation that exchanged a base steeped in the reformation of Martin Luther for the iron cross and spiritual fervor of Nazism. Was it economic desperation and oppression or something much deeper? How can our God – whom we trust by faith as omniscient – allow such powers to rise and to commit such oppression and atrocities against humans?

These are just a few questions that I recall from an early read of the text; but now, as a first in the series of "My Book of the Month", I return to the book for a more thorough and accurate account.



In his introduction, Lutzer writes of Hitler:

That Hitler was a god no one can doubt. He was worshipped by millions and thought himself to be both infallible and invincible. He seduced the masses and believed he would rule the world. In the end, he was found to be a lesser god whose fate is shared by all those who stand in opposition to the Almighty.

As I write this introduction, there is yet another movie on the leader of Adolph Hitler; this time on one of many failed attempts to assassinate him, the account of the courageous resistance of a relatively small population of the German citizenry.

What is it about this organization and time period that so compels us to study it, write about it, and re-examine it? Is it the raw presence of evil in man that paradoxically attempts to exalt one (race) while systematically destroying others? Is it the duping of a nation into a sense of victimization as the impetus for invasion and annihilation of this "oppressive nations"? Whatever the reason are reasons, the interest cannot be understated and, with that, **the lessons learned** for any republic – even our own.

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## Hitler's Cross – “Waiting for Hitler”

To begin, consider the “marriage” of church (the Christian church) and state (or man's government). In Chapter 1, a brief account of the crowning Charlemagne (Charles the Great) was the continuation of this “marriage” instituted by Constantine, emperor of the Roman Empire (274-337). A result of the joining of the two was the religious-based persecution of any deviations to the Roman Catholic - or the Reformation (see Martin Luther among others).

What also resulted from this described marriage was some degree of corruption – the product of power. The author makes a related comment, “...the marriage of church and state is always detrimental to the mission of the church. Either the church will change its message to accommodate the state's political agenda, or the political rulers will use the church their own ends.”

Even today, the closeness of the church to government and political parties is a problem; the church's mission is evangelism and education – not politics, properties and related power. When the church “goes to bed” with the state, the mission or purpose of the church is compromised by conflicting interests and intentions; one is to serve God and the other is to serve man.

I have used the phrase “**The end justifies the means**” a number of times in my writings. Humans make many rationalizations and, so often, will do so with an implicit distinction between the morality of the Bible and the ethics of secular society. The commandments given to Moses clearly identify lying (or bearing false witness) as wrong; yet, our tendency is to dilute such practices under the rationalization (and, in turn, justification) that a lie is necessary or unavoidable. What's also true is that we lose or interest in or desire for the truth and, whether actual truth or not, we accept something as true because it pleases us or is convenient, etc. During the rise of the Third Reich (in Germany), such rationalizations include the systematic genocide of races and classes of citizens – in view of a self-proclaimed “superior race”.

Well-educated were among those who embraced and promoted this rationalization. *Georg Hegel*, *Friedrich Nietzsche* are sited as those who inspired the Third Reich – although not without the distinctions of their writings from the “final solution” to include genocide.

The complex conditions that led to the rise of Third Reich and Nazism are broadly categorized as theological, economic, and political. “Liberal” theology led to deification of man (and minimization of God); the economics of the post-WWI Germany created massive inflation and oppression; and a post-treaty Republic that was unable to over the economic crisis. With the economy in shambles and the state in such bitterness came the rise of fascism and totalitarianism; out was the Republic and individual civil rights; and in was the Nazi party and...

## Hitler's Cross – “God and Hitler: Who was in Charge?”

A key word in this chapter is “Providence”; and what it means is Divine cooperation with and guidance of creation. In the realm of Providence is the question of why things are allowed to happen “to us” or “to me”; yes, good things may not be pondered in Providence, but apparent “bad things” may very well be. Stemming from this Providence is such fundamental questions: “Is God real?” Another question is sometimes “Why does God allow bad things to happen?”

The author points out that the Christian church of Germany was actually prospering during the rise of the Third Reich; not necessarily what is measured or estimated to be prosperity, but the essence or faith of the church was growing in the face of persecution, or oppression. Like the early Christian church – that suffered immeasurably under the Roman rule – the reformed church of this region was growing in unity and faith. As in the individual pilgrims life, faith and trust will “rise to occasion” of such stress, or persecution.

His growing interest in and involvement with socialism led Hitler to an eventual attempt to overthrow the established democratic government (1923). Even with the failure, his treason and imprisonment, Hitler remained resolute that “fate” was with him. While in prison, he co-authored the Nazi bible, *Mein Kampf*. This same sense of invincibility and destiny occurred through over 40 attempts to assassinate him during the period to follow. Hitler exalted himself to political and spiritual leader yet, in truth of course, he was not invincible or incorruptible.

As featured in a current movie, the most famous assassination attempt was led by Colonel Stauffenberg. With a transition plan and provisional government already set-up, the attempt was carefully planned and carried-out. Even so, Hitler survived of course – and attributed his survival to Fate, once again.

The questions presented above – and the existence of God in the realm of world history – is described by author in this way: “even though evil is contrary to God’s nature – and contrary to his revealed word – God permits it nevertheless.” Still, we must ponder “Why does God allow bad things to happen?” We should be reminded “the bad things” that we do live in a fallen world; that is, a world where humans are allowed to sin or disobey God – and suffer greatly as a consequence. We should also remember **God permits the rain to fall on the just and the unjust; or even the innocent, God-fearing humans suffer much as the unjust or disobedient.**

In truth, none of us are righteous or perfect before God and, consequently, we are given the savior, Jesus Christ. We make choices in our life (or lives); and sometimes those choices are not good – for us or for others who depend on us or care for us. God is merciful – even to those who did such atrocities as can be learned about the Third Reich or other dictatorships. When we come to the truth of our individual unrighteousness, we exalt God’s righteousness.

## Hitler's Cross – “The Religion of the Third Reich...”

In 1834 (a 100 years before Hitler's rise), a German poet named Heinrich Heine wrote, on the mood of the country, that only the Christian cross was holding the country back from “the lust of war”.

The cross was literally broken; as the *hakenkreuz* or swastika was adopted as for the Nazi party. Moreover, Hitler is described as having dealt into the occult with the practice guided by spiritual mentors steeped in such religions. Erwin Lutzer writes: “Hitler did become a god for millions” as indicated by the address, “Heil Hitler”, and the title, “the Fuhrer”.

These practices, beliefs and experiences in occultism were not limited to Hitler; but several of his closest colleagues such as Himmler and Goebbels also subscribed to the lifestyle. The author comments: “The inner Nazi circle drew power directly from these hidden forces. But in a nation that was already steeped in occult doctrines, millions of others came under Hitler's magic spell.

There is the material world and there is the spiritual world. Christians believe that the true battle of good and evil resides in the later (“...spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”). With very understanding of the evil, spiritual world – and how it applied to the Nazi party – the basic belief of a spiritual world is reason enough to embrace the proposition that evil and wickedness is present in humans; that is, that some people are indeed wicked and evil.

Was Hitler an evil, wicked man? I think most would agree that he was that kind; but whether they would embrace or accept the spiritual forces of evil – or spiritual warfare – is another thing. To believe such conditions is to force ourselves to seriously consider that which is not material or manifested so literally, but is hidden and not easily detected or determined by ourselves alone.

God's offers his believers discernment to recognize such spiritual forces and warfare and, as Paul instructs in the New Testament, to gird on the armor of God against such things or forces. Beyond history and what can be observed as evil and wickedness is the reality that such still remains on earth and among humans. When a person or people rejects God and rebuffs salvation, they open themselves to such things; and even the believer must confront evil and wickedness in his or her life. **The truth is that we cannot confront these forces alone; as in our flesh, we are no match for such power.**

If God is the source of good – and the opponent of evil and wickedness – than we must embrace and accept his call to believe. Only then are we able to fight and defeat the forces that took down such nations as Germany and, still today, can destroy souls...and even nations of souls.

## Hitler's Cross – “The Anti-Semitism of the Third Reich”

The question may arise: “why the Nazis were Anti-Semitic – or why they wanted to destroy the Jewish peoples?” Legend has it that a young Hitler was so deeply hurt by his failed attempt at heart, that he blamed this race or culture of people. Whether this was the impetus of his drive to cleanse the race, I do not know; but what is certain is that his conviction was a driver to destroy what was deemed an inferior race – under a program entitled “the final solution”.

The persecution of the Jews goes back much further in history: the Bible accounts for the enslavement of the Hebrews by Egypt and the exile of the nations by the Assyrians and Babylonians. In the 20th century, the dispersed Jews were mistreated in Russia and well as Germany – and were cast as lesser peoples in other parts of the world. While they were a “chosen” people by God through Abraham; they have been a persecuted people as described above.

Of particular emphasis (in this chapter) is the de-sensitizing of the citizens in preparation for and during this series of barbarous actions; to denigration of the Jews (and other classes), the relocation programs, the concentration camps and assorted other actions. In this effort, the author writes: “The Nazis proved that ordinary people, if controlled with rigid discipline and the power of mass psychology, can be induced to carry out the most brutal and destructive crime the human mind can devise.” **Perhaps some of the more passive were forced by fear into such compliance; they either resisted with likely arrest (and execution) or they were compliant and collaborative.**

Besides many references to the aforementioned occult, the forces behind these programs included the effective de-humanizing of humans – as though the oppressed people were not people at all, but something lower than animals. It was in this de-valuing of human life that such actions were justified and carried-out among the citizenry and military ranks.

When a government or party is able to de-humanize life – or to subordinate one class from another – than a similar risk occurs; that is, the prejudice and persecution is encouraged and supported by the power of rule. Thus, the events and conditions of Germany should be a lesson to any society; that with such devices, the otherwise considered deplorably and inhumane can be presented and recorded as the right thing to do...even a good thing!

I have learned that some citizen did not support the extermination of the Jews; if fact, the organized Resistance was adamantly opposed to such conduct and conditions. As for the church, the opinion or consensus seems to be the few *stood in the gap* for the Jews. Even in the church (and sometimes only in the church) can such behavior reside on the pride that, by some revelation or ordination, humans have the insight to God's Providence – even when it conflicts with New Testament teaching and understanding.

## Hitler's Cross – The Church is Deceived

How was the Christian church deceived? Nazism invoked the conflicting relationship between spiritualism and nationalism; that to be a good Christian was to be a good German.

Erwin Lutzer writes: “Germany was unified in its anger toward its enemies” – and anger can be a power force! Fueled by anger, Nationalism spread to the church in the manifestation of Anti-Semitism, anti-democracy, pro-fascism, and pro-Nazism. As much as we may understand who (or what) Nazism was about, the church (and much of the population) was duped or deceived; Lutzer writes:

Christians of all kinds were deceived by Hitler, at least initially. The liberals however, who were tossed to and fro by “every wind of doctrine”, found themselves particularly vulnerable...they were more interested in the miracles of the revived Germany than in the miracles on the pages of the New Testament.

Even with this acceptance, the church was still considered as a hindrance to Hitler; thus, he had a plan to eventually obliterate the Christian church – but first he had to woo her through deception.

“Hitler believed in lies” – Erwin writes; as Hitler clarified: “the magnitude of a lie always contains a certain degree of credibility since the great masses of people...more easily fall victim to a big lie than to a little one.” According to the writer, Hitler eventually convinced the public that the Christian church was not needed; and he did this by falsely accusing members of the church of unbecoming and unacceptable conduct. In effect, he smeared salvation by Christ – while offering salvation from the ashes of the post-war economic depression. Yes, he gave people hope; but not on a peaceful platform – but rather on the collective anger of the many.

New laws were drafted for the purpose of serving the state of Nazism – which gave way to the treatment of the Jews among others. Erwin comments: **“Hitler began with *lies*; they were reflected in his *laws*; and finally he emerged as a *lord*.** The Fuhrer became the lord and master of the land...

As a representation of lies, propaganda was essential as a first-step toward the state's or people's transformation. If the people could be convinced of their victim status, than their anger would fully blossom – and lead to the intended engagement in aggression. The ruling government must not only support the laws, but must be solely able to change them; hence, the state or central government acquired such abilities. Thirdly, the Christian church had to be superceded by a National church; Lutzer writes: “The Bible could not be laid along side the *Mein Kampf*, but the Nazi bible had to be on the alter by itself.

## Hitler's Cross – The Church is Divided

Hitler believed that to conquer his enemies (of the state), he would have to *pit them* against each other. The deception described in the last chapter was part of that effort or scheme.

There were those – however few – that did openly or publicly oppose Nazism or the growing nationalism. One of those in open opposition was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who, among things, distributed statements with content: “We will not cease to combat everything that is destructive to the very nature of the Church.” In the years to come, he would be arrested and eventually executed...

This nationalism took on the name of “German Christians”; and among things, began the process of repudiating the Bible under an effort deemed the second German Reformation. Unlike the first involving Martin Luther, this second guise of reform was aimed at dismantling the Bible, Christ, and the teachings of Paul of the Epistles.

Appointees, installments and eventual ultimatums were the tools used to convert the church of God into a church of the state; some Christians would reject this conversion, some withdraw, and some accept the terms of transformation. The *end-game* was to replace God and the Word – the truth with something less.

In 1934, the Confessing Church issued a document called the Barman Confession; described as drawing a line in the sand, the confession delineated the church as that of Christ – and not the state. Some key content was:

We reject the false doctrine that there are realms of our life in which we belong not to Jesus Christ, but to other masters, realms where we do not need to be justified and sanctified by Him.

Erwin Lutzer reminds the reader (and the church) that: “Many of our Christian heroes were lawbreakers...**Christians have always insisted that there is a law that is higher than that of the state.**”

He concludes this chapter by writing:

A choice had to be made: Those who chose the cross would have to walk a lonely road in one direction; those who chose the swastika would walk in step with the exuberant crowd. Those who chose the swastika participated in the fate of its leader. Those who chose the cross of Christ discovered that “it is the power of God for salvation” (Romans 1:16)

## Hitler's Cross – The Church is Dismembered

What is introduced as a time for *separating the wheat from the chaff*, the true church or “Confessing Church” was being pulled from the “German Christians”; hence, there would be little if any margin for *straddling the fence* or being ambivalent on the matter of the true faith.

In 1936, this ‘separating’ was spurred by a memo sent to Hitler – and his eventually response with the arrest of more than 800 pastors by his SS. One leading member of this movement (not mentioned yet), was Martin Niemoller. In 1938, following his arrest, he was tried by the People’s Court, for “malicious and provocative criticism”; in that his commentary from the pulpit was considered disloyal to the politic. Niemoller records in his memoirs that while being led to court, his escort or guard kept repeating Proverbs 18:10 – “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe.” This action or recitation was much uplifting to a bleak and certain conclusion. Unlike his colleague Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Niemoller would survive his imprisonment.

As the Third Reich expanded (into Austria and Czechoslovakia), so too did the power of this false doctrine. Churches voluntary embraced this ideology by an oath of loyalty to Fuhrer and the Reich. This oath extended to many in the Confessing Church and, by 1938, the dismantling of the remaining church enabled the Nazis to go forth with the “final solution” eradicating their society of the Jewish and other classes. **According to one account, the church basically ignored this tragedy...**

A highly recognized reference, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, by William Schirer, described the reaction of the German citizenry this way:

...What really aroused the Germans in the Thirties were the glittering successes of Hitler in providing jobs, creating prosperity, restoring Germany’s military might, and moving from one triumph to another in his foreign policy...

As far as the “final solution” and the dismantling of the Protestant and Catholic faiths, not many *lost sleep* according to Schirer.

A post-war commentary by one German-theologian, Helmut Thielicke, described the country as neglecting the cross, and being blinded by Germany’s militarism. Overlooking its greatest danger (whether for one or many) is gaining the whole world while forfeiting your soul. Among the more extensive list of mistakes or wrongs was: “...We violated God’s commandments and got tangled in our own unpredictable and brutal instincts.”

Only two of the many have been named; yet, the two were among the exception; had more (pastors and parishioners) taken a stand, history could have been changed and the mistakes mitigated...

## Hitler's Cross – Heroism in the Third Reich

With the limited description (and knowledge) of the church, heroism did emerge during this “rise”. Albert Einstein was said to be impressed by the struggle among the Confessing Church. He wrote:

Only the church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing the truth. I never had any special interest in the Church before, but now I feel a great affection and admiration for it...

In keeping with the effect of *separating the wheat from the chaff*, the pressures placed on the church as a whole have (through time and history) produced some good – by purifying the church or separating the faithful from the balance.

**Before I continue with the chapter summary, allow me to draw distinction between ethnic cleansing (e.g. “the final solution”) and this described “purifying of the church”.** The one (type) is man's valuation or worth of humanity – based largely on ethnic and religious criteria; the “purifying...” is based on God's Providence and the *free-will* of each human – regardless of race or nationality – to accept/receive God as Lord.

Suffering has marked the New Testament church from its formation in Palestine to its continued expansion throughout the world. The suffering of God's people has a way of not only separating them – but further, refining them into stronger, more-faithful followers. Suffering obviously is not pleasant and, to the extreme, has caused untold death and destruction; yet, God's Providence enables the reward of eternal life to anyone that – like Christ – endures suffering for righteousness...was supernaturally personifying gratitude and love.

Heroes existed among the martyrs that endured arrest, torture and even death for righteousness. Some of these may not have been strictly pastors – or even claimed some direct religious or church basis – but they exemplified the compassion of Christ by aiding local and fugitive Jews or resisted the regime by other means or methods. Trying to draw some distinction between the one claiming Christ and the other doing what Christ would do is too much for me to judge; but accepting such conviction and courage as Christ-like, I rest on God to be a fair-judge in recognizing the human-heart and Common Grace of God.

It is dangerous for any of us to judge each motive or action on the confession of Christ alone; but the actions of the believer are what sometimes prove his faith and real beliefs. Without trying to contradict the Gospel and admission/acceptance of Christ as savior, I'll repeat that Christ is the final judge of each and all – and thus will be the only true source of a person's heart and soul. I believe that Christ is the savior and, through the Holy Spirit, enables man to become more like Christ; but I also accept that God endows Common Grace to all his created man – thus enabling all to see that the evidence of God since the creation of man, himself...

## Hitler's Cross – The Cost of Discipleship in the Third Reich

Continuing on the subject of suffering Bonhoeffer drew distinction between *cheap grace* and the notion that the believer's life (here on earth) was (or is) going to be easy. This "easy road" is nothing new to the church and arguably exists today in Western culture as the "prosperity gospel" or the belief that *health, wealth and happiness* are the present entitlements of the so-called faithful. In his own words, Bonhoeffer described it as: "...grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, and grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."

As early as 1931, he warned his students of the growing nationalism – which was derailing the true message of the church. He believed that the responsibility of the church went beyond the church body, and extended to all who were treated unjustly; thus, the harboring and helping of the Jews would have been well-within the responsibility and ministry of the church.

To describe Bonhoeffer's conviction and commitment would be to consider Matthew 10:37 – where Jesus tells his disciples, "He who loves his father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me..." Bearing in mind that some pastors did not share his level of commitment, the sacrifice and suffering of leaving family was more than they could endure or accept. It was one thing to suffer for Christ, but another to expose you children to some level of suffering. **Bonhoeffer embraced this scripture to mean that no one (or all others) is more important than our faith and relationship with Christ. He spoke of it...but he also lived it.**

Participation for Bonhoeffer was carried into the Resistance movement – where he joined a movement to assassinate Hitler. It may seem out-of-character or unexpected – considering his role and responsibility among believers – but he described his decision as like Christ who risked his life to defend the poor and the outcasts. His primary mission within the movement was to contact Allied forces for terms of surrender – predicated on the successful assassination.

While involved in this movement, he continued to write – both while free and later, while imprisoned. In his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, he wrote: "the church can only be the church if it acts courageously in a time of need." Having witnessed his final minutes (or execution), a doctor wrote: "The devotion and evident conviction of this man moved me to the depths...In almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God."

Much has been overlooked in this summary regarding his life – his devoted life; but in a few of his own words, Bonhoeffer said: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die."

## **Hitler's Cross – America's Own Hidden Cross**

Having covered on a brief of the events and time of the Third Reich and the German church, I come to the last chapter of the book on America. What on earth does this history have to do with America?

In the subtitle "Our Two Dangers", the following on America:

- The retreat of the church from cultural and spiritual battles
- The church becoming overburdened with social/political agendas such that it loses its central message and mission

What about our culture...and "spiritual battles"? Lutzer warns: "Powerful forces are seeking to uproot every vestige of Christian influence, rewrite our history, and banish God from the public sector." As I write these words, Rick Warren (a Christian pastor) was able to give an invocation at the inauguration – but not without controversy and attempts to cancel his participation. Yes, it may seem small, but the truth is that Christianity has been under pressure from political movements.

Is one party the right party, the Christian party? Indeed not, as no political party can represent itself (or be represented) as the Christian (or Godly) party. In an effort to reform the public, the church must be careful about siding with one party or the other. Have we not learned the danger and destruction caused by intimately joining Christianity with government? It is tempting to construct or join a majority – since we are a democracy – and attempt change (or reform) by such channels; but where do stop in terms of the political forum and spiritual freedom?

In the same forum, should we isolate ourselves or withdraw from our responsibility as citizens? I do not think so as New Testament teaching instructs the church body on being good citizens. Where the dilemma occurs is when the two (social/political and spiritual) are in conflict – as was the case in Germany. Erwin reminds us (or the reader) that God did not put us on earth to save America – but to save Americans...and others, still.

In his closing words, Lutzer writes (on America):

America is an angry nation – angry because of the emotional distress caused by the breakup of the home; angry because of crime...

We need to heal rather than hurt; we need to unite rather than divide...

No retaliation, no threats, no self-pity. Just endurance, patience and love.

Our culture and society is a reflection of the church (its health and status) – which is a reflection of the human hearts. He writes: "The cross reminds us that the battle is not so much between the church and the state as it is within our own human hearts."

## Hitler's Cross – My Conclusion

First let me say that my choice of such a “dark” subject was no so much about the history or events – as much as about the opportunity to learn from this period presented with partiality to the Christian faith. The Third Reich was based much more on eastern religion and the occult than on the political and economic conditions of the time. This “dark” side was developed in the minds and hearts of Nazism and the notion that man (or a certain race) is superior of all other – including God. Yes, the manifestations of human suffering are apparent; but the underlying motives or mindset that drove this party to political power was spiritual and supernatural.

The broken cross or swastika is symbolic of this spiritual – and is a conjuring-up of ancient religions and occults of the Middle East or of tribal Norseman. How else could a modern human culture have justified the genocide except to dress it in *spiritual clothing*? Yes, there were the economic woes of post-WWI – the gross deterioration of the Mark that culminated in 1923; but the economics alone did not drive or justify the deception that genocide was justified. Something in the way of Providence had to be exploited – such that the community of Jewish citizens could be ostracized, segregated, exploited and exterminated.

What can be learned from this understanding; or what have I learned from my brief summary of the book, each chapter? Here are some possibilities:

- As long as man exalts himself to the level of the creator (or superior to God), he will ultimately destroy himself.
- As Francis Schaeffer describes in his book “How then Shall We Live”, the possibilities for a political supremacy (and loss of a free society) includes economic collapse or similar. Could such political powers gain popularity in our own republic? If the conditions were dire than, yes, we could allow such “a rise” to occur on the promise of recovery, prosperity, etc.
- When the Christian faith (the church) fails in its place as the protector of the defenseless and innocent, such atrocities as mass murder and genocide can and will occur. The church is (or should be) should represent the moral and ethical absolutes of the Bible – even against a society or culture established on relativistic thinking and arbitrary laws.
- The *vile of a victim* (or victim status) is when the status is abused to the degree that the victim is in fact the villain. For Germany, the stigma of being a victim (of the Treaty of Versailles/post-war disposition) was leveraged by Nazism to spur or rationalize the attack of bordering nations – and not as a defender or protector of its peoples. In the early phases of the war, such aggression was posed or presented as an action of defense – and not conquest – and the people or citizens *bought-it*, of course.