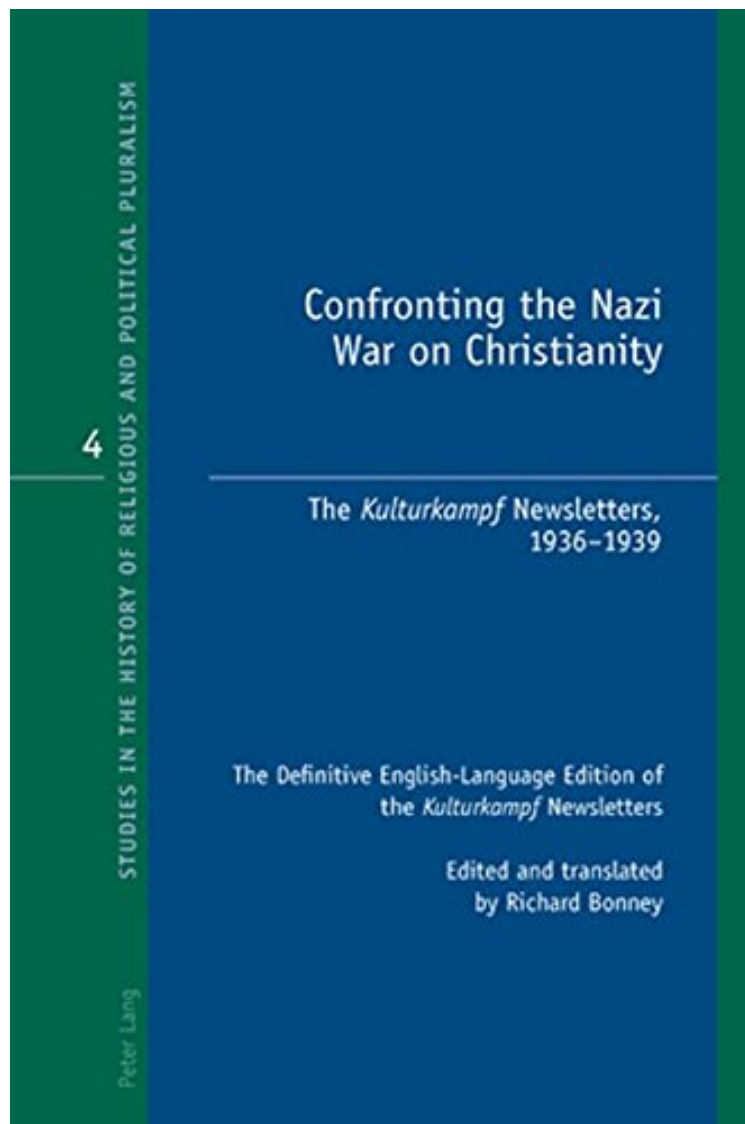


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## Confronting the Nazi War on Christianity: The "Kulturkampf Newsletters, 1936-1939- The Definitive English-Language Edition of the "Kulturkampf ... History of Religious and Political Pluralism)

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From Peter Lang AG, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften : Confronting the Nazi War on Christianity: The "Kulturkampf Newsletters, 1936-1939- The Definitive English-Language Edition of the "Kulturkampf ... History of Religious and Political Pluralism)

before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Confronting the Nazi War on Christianity: The "Kulturkampf" Newsletters, 1936-1939- The Definitive English-Language Edition of the "Kulturkampf ... History of Religious and Political Pluralism)*:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Eye-opening diary of the Nazi war on Christianity. By Peter S. Bradley "Confronting the Nazi War on Christianity" is a compilation of the "Kulturkampf Newsletter" from 1936 - 1939. The Kulturkampf newsletter was a newsletter put together anonymously by Germans who were monitoring developments in the Nazis religious policies. The newsletters were written anonymously and published in German and French. They had a limited circulation, apparently about 400 subscribers, but one of the subscribers was Osservatore Romano, so the information in the newsletters got a broader circulation than one might think. These newsletters are in fact a kind of "blog," covering an area of topical interest for the authors, written for a general audience and written by individuals who have a great deal of knowledge and insight. The newsletters have three virtues for those interested in the issue of Nazi religious policy. First, the newsletters are written contemporaneously with events so that the reader can see the evolution of Nazi policy and the development of the internal logic of Nazi ideology as one policy led to another policy. Second, the newsletter pays attention to the sources where the Culture war was fought, such as the newspapers that were fronting for Goebbels, Rosenberg and Goring. In this area, the articles of the Schwarz Korps and Der Sturmer are as important as speeches by Hitler. Similarly, Rosenberg and Baldur von Schirach are important players for all that they get relegated to the "B list" in the typical narrative. Third, the reader experiences the qualia - the feel - of what it was like for Catholics and orthodox Protestants in a culture that was going religiously and culturally insane, where the madmen were running the asylum. The text covers four years of the Kulturkampf - 1936, 1937, 1938 and 1939. Like modern bloggers, the authors wrote more newsletters in the early years, than the later, perhaps because of losing interest, perhaps because everything had already been said, perhaps because of life interfering, or perhaps because of the Gestapo. What I got from the newsletters was several things. First, was the undoubted feeling of oppression that Catholics and Confessional Church Protestants experienced. The newsletters constantly report arrests of priests, attacks on bishops, and closing of Catholic schools and demands that Protestant pastors take a loyalty oath to Hitler. On top of that, the official "semi-official" press was constantly ginning up anti-Christian and anti-Catholic hatred. Catholics and Protestants must have felt like they were under a constant state of siege, which they were. Second, the newsletter develops some interesting insights about the religious sociology of National Socialism. The newsletter authors discerned three "tendencies" or "wings" in National Socialism, which may provide a useful way of keeping track of the many strands of religiosity found in National Socialism: "Amidst the complexity of National Socialist policy, the extreme wing, on the edge of, or outside the Party, embracing the organized 'German Believers,' all the way to the Ludendorff adherents; and openly hostile to Christianity. Second, the 'neo-pagans': Rosenberg, the Schwarze Korps review, practically the whole of the SS men and the Hitler Youth - the most influential grouping in the Party. This describes itself as anti-denominational rather than anti-Christian. And third, the "German Christians": not the small sect of that name, but those who hold the conception of a peculiarly National Socialistic Christianity, subserving the dictatorship, as expressed in article 24 of the Party programme and represented by Hitler, Frick and others. All three tendencies are in fact equally wide divorced from Christianity. We are not discussing their standing from this angle, however, but their relative political weight and their position in relation to the Kulturkampf." (2 Nov. 1937, p.267.) And: "In a recent issue of Kulturkampf, we sought to describe the various currents in National Socialist circles with regard to religion; and we assigned to the Schwarze Korps and to the Black Guards' organization generally a considerable position between the self-declared pagans to their left and the small group to their right, generally described as "German Christians." We also stated that this right wing - which includes Hitler himself, Frick and now, Reich Church Affairs Minister Kerrl - was taking over direction of the war on the Churches and intends either liquidating or "co-ordinating" the Left." (23 Dec. 1937, p. 292.) And: "As concerns the campaign against the Churches, the Sturmer would appear to belong to the Right, the German Christian wing of the Nazi Party. The name of Jesus Christ is frequently invoked in the paper, but only as the father of anti-semitism. The Sturmer stands by the thesis that Christ was an "Aryan" and leader of anti-Semitism who suffered crucifixion because of his anti-Semitism, that the New Testament has as little connection with Old as Hitler has with Rathenau or Brüning. A pensioned municipal official from Leipzig - an "Aryan" - recently laid charges of blasphemy against the Sturmer before the prosecuting attorney of the Nuremberg district court. In an article on a modern statue in the Lubeck Cathedral, the Sturmer had written that the "God Jehovah, to whom the Jews pray, is the greatest of all criminals." "Such a statement", wrote the official in his letter to the prosecutor, "offends my deepest feelings as a Christian. Jehovah is the name of the holy, almighty and beneficent God according to the original text of the Old Testament, which, as generally recognized, forms an essential part of the Bible, the foundation of the Christian religion. The national courts have already rendered judgement that blasphemy of God under the name of Jehovah is a punishable offense. But the Sturmer is quite certain of winning its case. "The Herr Official," it write, "is acting in accordance with the wishes of the Sturmer. The Sturmer is desirous that this question of the Jewish God Jehovah shall finally be judged in the courts of the Third Reich. This has long been necessary. It is true that hitherto the God Jehovah has also been

comprehended in the blasphemy statutes. It will, however, be easy to prove that those statutes have been protecting a "God" who has always been a criminal and who continues to teach crimes. Thus, our accuser has rendered Jehovah a poor service. His charges have created the necessary conditions for finally unmasking the face of this "holy," "almighty" and "all-good" God." There is no need to be excited about the outcome for this case. The Nazi judges have always been ready to kiss the boots of the Nuremberg despot." (12 Jan. 1938, p. 308.) Interesting how thoroughly modern the Nazis appear when that kind of writing is compared to Richard Dawkins' popular applause line about the God of the Old Testament. And: "It is quite true that there are two wings within the National Socialist Party, with regard to the question of religion. However, these two wings do not disagree as to whether National Socialism should be the state religion. They disagree only as to whether Christianity should be entirely excluded from the state religion or only subordinated to it. The more moderate wing envisages a solution such as that adopted in Japan: the state religion is set up as a state service, above all other religions, which are only tolerated inasmuch as they show respect for the state religion and limit their own religious activities to the churches themselves and the private life of their members." (6 July 1939, p. 525.) [Sidenote: Karl Barth observed that "one cannot understand National Socialism except by seeing it as a new Islam, with its myth of a new Allah, and with Hitler as its prophet." (10 August 1939, p. 532 - 522.)] Third, the newsletter puts Hitler in the third group, that of the small "right-wing" of so-called German Christian (who, as noted, hold a view of the God of the Old Testament that is indiscernible from that of Richard Dawkins): "Until now, it has been the second tendency which has led the attack upon religion. But now the third is pushing forward - the Fuhrer advances to the lead. Adolf Hitler never really desired the fight with the Church. He wanted a pliable Church, a Church which would pay him homage. The "positive Christianity" in his programme, the government's statements which were friendly to the Church - these were sincerely intended. But sincere only when measured by the sole standard which applies to all his acts - his inordinate lust for power. At the state ceremony in the Potsdam Barracks on 21 March 1933, the generals bowed before the former corporal. Prussia surrendered to the Austrian. In order to complete the symbolic act, the Church should also assist at the enthronement. The Concordat was one more attempt to secure this recognition by bartering peace with the Church. How could he have overlooked the Church - he who with such incomparable acuteness perceived every means which would bring him more power, which would consolidate his power in the minds of his subjects? Both Mein Kampf and his later speeches have shown that he coveted power over the Church more than any other institutions. He, whose method it is to possess himself of the existing mechanisms of power and influence, can never have despised that of the Church. Only the superficial will deny this. He has expressed himself drastically against the Church, you will say? His speeches against Hindenburg were a hundred-fold more hostile. Those words were afterwards buried as, with full honours, was later the old man himself; and, in his place, now sits his erstwhile reviler, a thousand times more powerful. That the Kulturkampf ever came about was not through Hitler's design, but his mistake. He forgot that in Germany and the Church belong to Christ. He looked first upon the dispute with the Churches as a struggle for political power. It was not that, however; it was a spiritual conflict. Then he withdrew, to wait, and left the field almost entirely to the second tendency we have described. He was not satisfied as, bit by bit, the standing of the Church in public life was destroyed. Nor was he satisfied with the increasing sei-divine magnification of his own personality. He wished to be honoured by the existing, established Church. He wanted to possess the Church and therefore did not wish to see destroyed that which he hoped to make his." (p. 267 - 268.) The Kulturkampf newsletter suggests that the second tendency was subjected to "co-ordination" in the interests of the Party. (p. 269.) Fourth, by 1939, the newsletter authors had concluded that the objective of the Nazis was the establishment of an "Anti-Christian Theistic State" (6 July 1939, p. 522.) and that Nazism was already a religion. Interestingly, the pro-Nazi writings of Bishop Hudal are offered as proof in that they were rejected by the Nazis as intruding into their spiritual space. (Cf. 10 Aug. 1939, p. 532 with 15 April 1938, p. 362: "After the publication of the Papal Encyclical, *Mit brennender Sorge*, and after the case of Bishop Hudal - it can no longer be said that National Socialism is a purely political creed. Hudal wrote a book which was friendly to Hitler and his aims. Yet it was later prohibited in Germany - precisely because the writer had restricted national Socialism to the political field only. And on 30 March, in an address to some Austrian artists in Vienna, Dr. Goebbels said: 'there can be no greater error than to believe that National Socialism is only a political doctrine. National Socialism is a new, all-inclusive conception of human life, and therefore it embraces every aspect of human thought, sentiment and activity in its sphere of action. National Socialism is not concerned solely with the state, or with economics, with military or foreign policy, with social policies or with culture.'" (Id.) Fifth, the 20 March 1939 newsletter documents the "National Socialist fury" at the election of Cardinal Pacelli to the Papacy; Expectation that Pius XII will share the "Burning Anxiety" of his predecessor with regard to Christianity in Germany." The editor of the book notes that "none of this is noted in John Cornwell's "Hitler's Pope"...the evidence of this newsletter vitiates the title of Cornwell's book." The newsletter observes: "Officialdom in Germany has not sought to conceal its opinion of the election of Cardinal Pacelli to the Papacy. And it would indeed have been difficult for it to assume gratification or even indifference. both before and after the death of Pius XI - and also now, after the election of the new Pope - the National Socialist press advertises and recommends an official Nazi Party pamphlet entitled, *The Men Around the Pope: Who Decides the Vatican's Policy?* This pamphlet was published last year and has already sold 340,000 copies. In this pamphlet - the sale of

which is vigorously pushed by the various Nazi Party organizations - the heaviest attack is made upon Cardinal Pacelli, State Secretary at the Vatican at the time of its writing." (p. 493.) So much for Hitler's Pope. Sixth, the newsletter addresses the issue of a "peace agreement" with the Nazis and the accusation that such a hypothetical agreement would "sanction" the Nazis: "There is one error, in which credence is readily placed in circles, which should be corrected at once. If the Catholic Church were to enter into an agreement with the National Socialist government - even an agreement which were completely favourable - she would not thereby be "sanctioning Hitler," as some say, but would be legally establishing the oppression of the Church by the dictatorship. Through this "peace treaty" she would be definitely assuming the role of persecuted - a role of which she need not be ashamed. For example, in order that she may continue with her mission, the Catholic Church is compelled to accept the governmental regulation of religious life imposed by the Japanese government. But by so doing, she does not "sanction" the heathen Japanese Government and still less Shintoism but secures the necessary preconditions for the continuation of her missionary work and to render possible the exercise of their faith by Japanese Catholics. As we shall later see, this example, apparently too exotic to be applicable to the West, is by no means irrelevant, but highly pertinent in the existing case. But when she signs a treaty with the National Socialist government, does not the Church recognize as right all the injustices that has been done to her and does she not therewith abandon all claim to a reparation of this injustice? No, the Church merely accepts the situation which has been imposed upon her by the rulers as the pre-supposition of her legal attitude and her religious activities, and thereby establishes nothing more, morally and legally, than that this situation arises from the forcefully imposed laws of the dictator, but not that it is just. The Catholic Church ought not to refrain from any efforts to secure an agreement which, while not rendering any lighter the burden which German Catholics must wear, might protect them from a yet heavier burden. She would be prepared to adopt a *modus vivendi* arising out of necessity. She has not the earthly weapons with which to avert this; and it is not disgraceful for those who accept it but only for those who impose it. The Church's struggles in an unequal conflict with power have never harmed her." (6 July 1939, p. 525.) The bottom line is that for anyone who has been infected by the virus of disinformation - who thinks that the German Catholic Church supported the Nazis or that Pius XII was "Hitler's Pope" - this book is going to open your eyes, if you can open your mind.

Contemporaries and historians have found it difficult to interpret the ambiguous relationship between National Socialism and Christianity. Both the Catholic and Protestant Churches tended to agree with National Socialists in their authoritarianism, their attacks on socialism and communism, and their campaign against the Versailles Treaty; but the doctrinal position of the Churches could not be reconciled with the principle of racism, a foreign policy of unlimited aggressive warfare, or a domestic agenda involving the complete subservience of Church to State. Important sections of the Nazi Party sought the complete extirpation of Christianity and its substitution by a purely racial religion, but considerations of expediency made it impossible for the National Socialist leadership to adopt this radical anti-Christian stance as official policy. The *Kulturkampf* Newsletters, which have not appeared in English since the 1930s, were produced by German Catholic exiles in France. They scrupulously document the tensions between various strands of Nazi policy, and the nature of the policy eventually adopted: this was to reduce the Churches influence in all areas of public life through the use of every available means, yet without provoking the difficulties diplomatic as well as domestic which an openly declared war of extermination might have caused.

About the Author  
The Editor: Richard Bonney was Professor of Modern History at the University of Leicester from 1984 to 2006 and is now Emeritus Professor. He is also Professorial Research Fellow in South Asian Security at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Whitehall. His recent publications include *Jihad: from Quran to Bin Laden* and *False Prophets: the Clash of Civilizations and the Global War on Terror* (Peter Lang, 2008).