



Born to Win

Opposing Evil #1

by Ronald L. Dart

The German people are, in every sense of the word, *a great people*—intelligent, innovative, accomplished—but for me the question about the Germans is always colored by the dark shades of Adolf Hitler, and the question of how it happened to them and to the Jews of Europe.

Not long ago I presented a program titled *How Freedom Is Lost*. I turned back the pages to an episode in the history of Israel. (You can read it for yourself; it's in 1 Samuel, chapter eight.) It came at the end of what may have been a period of unparalleled freedom, that has never been before and has never been since; and the story of why they laid that freedom down, and of what followed after, is an object lesson we must never let ourselves forget.

Now, I'm not going to retell that story today. (I *will* tell you how to get a free CD of that program a little later.) What I want to do today is to draw another lesson from much more recent history, and to consider the implications for Christians living *right now*.

I knew that Germany was a great nation in European history. Christianity was *strong* there and the Protestant Reformation was *born* there. I've heard people puzzle over how a people like the Germans of that era could *possibly* allow a man like Adolf Hitler—such a lowbrow, corruptible little man—to come to such absolute power. Strange as it may seem, it may have been for some of the same reasons I discussed in that program, *How Freedom Is Lost*.

I knew of the great intellectual and artistic accomplishments of the Germans and their great universities. Did you know the University of Heidelberg was established in 1386? The University of Leipzig in 1409; University of Rostock in 1419; the University of Greifswald in 1456; Freiburg, 1457; Munich, 1472; and the universities at Mainz and Tübingen were established in 1477.

Are these dates registering on you? It was not until 1492 that Columbus set sail from Spain and discovered a new world no one even knew existed. It was in 1517 that Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the great cathedral. In the early 1700s, Bach was turning out some of the greatest music ever heard, including a cantata a week. In the late 1700s, Beethoven was at his peak. America? Well, we were just figuring out who she was, and it was in 1776 we published our Declaration of Independence. And the great German universities were more than *300 years old* when this nation was born.

And here is a burning question for us and the Germans to consider: How could a nation like Germany produce an Adolf Hitler? I think maybe it's fair to say that she didn't *produce* Hitler. She became vulnerable through European wars and, by the time the First World War was over, the people of Germany were dispirited, defeated, and *craving* leadership.

The years following that war were *desperate* for many Germans. The economy was *crushed*; hyperinflation made the currency worthless. Some feel this led to Hitler's rise but, in fact, Germany came out of that era before Hitler came to power. The 1920s saw the German economy in recovery. When a new currency [the Rentenmark] was brought in, it was based on land instead of paper, and we

had a chancellor that actually brought them back on the road to full recovery. What we in this country called “the Roaring Twenties”, the Europeans call “the Golden Twenties”, because they were *coming on*.

Now, it’s fair to say that the Great Depression that came on in the early 1930s played a role. I’m not the only one, by a long shot, who was puzzled by the Hitler phenomenon. I came across a *remarkable* book by Ron Rosenbaum entitled *Explaining Hitler*. Its subtitle was *The Search for the Origins of His Evil*. I bought the book because it came advertised in the flier I got as a “thumping good read”, and I was really *needing* a good read at that moment in time. The book turned out to be not merely about Hitler, but about the “Hitler-explainers”. And, boy, have they been many. One of them—Alan Bullock—said:

The more I learn about Hitler, the harder I find it to explain.

Ron Rosenbaum - Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil

Now, this is not an idle remark. This is made by a man who had spent already some 50 years studying Hitler, and he says, “the more I learn, the harder it is to explain.” Emil Fackenheim (another explainer) said:

There will never be an adequate explanation. [...] The closer one gets to explicability the more one realizes nothing can make Hitler explicable.

Ron Rosenbaum - Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil

Yehuda Bauer:

It’s not impossible to explain Hitler, but it might just be too late. Too late, because too many crucial witnesses have died without giving testimony, because too many crucial documents have been destroyed, too many memories have faded, because all too many gaps in the evidentiary record will never be filled[.]

Ron Rosenbaum - Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil

But these quotes reveal a truism: that things are inexplicable doesn’t keep us from trying. And the people who have attempted to explain Hitler are *legion* in number. And I can’t help wondering, after my reading on the subject, if they aren’t trying to explain the wrong thing. Perhaps it is the German people of that era who need explaining even more than Hitler. For murderers are never in scarce supply. *Brutal, evil* men are a dime a dozen. Have you been reading your newspapers? Do you watch television news to see what people are doing? I mean, the *evil* of some man is beyond calculation by normal people. You can probably tick off a few nasty, evil, brutal murderers—from memory—right here in North America. Charlatans are on every corner. Why are some people, at a given moment, vulnerable to them? Petty tyrants are a dime a dozen, and their ascension to power may say more about *their people* than it does about them. Another Hitler explainer—George Victor—who followed his trail observed:

Charismatic leaders are masters of an illusory type of intense sincerity. Hitler boasted he was the greatest of liars—a boast he fulfilled—yet he came across as sincere. One observer said: “Not only did he say what seemed most advantageous to say at the time; he actually believed it;

such liars are always the most convincing.” Passionate oratory, combining underlying sincerity with false words—as opposed to honesty—is what gives words “the ring of truth.”

George Victor - Hitler: The Pathology of Evil

But then, Victor quotes a well-known German philosopher named Nietzsche. He said:

In all great deceivers, a remarkable process is at work to which they owe their power. In the very act of deception with all its preparations—the dreadful voice, the expression, the gestures—they are overcome by their belief in themselves, and it is this belief which then speaks so persuasively, so miracle-like to the audience.

Friedrich Nietzsche - Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits

That’s really an incredible thing that Nietzsche said here. Alan Bullock adds to that quotation:

[N]ot only does he communicate that to the audience but the audience returns it to him and strengthens his belief.

Alan Bullock - Personality in History: Hitler and Stalin

How many times does this have to happen in history before we learn what it is and call it by its name? It’s in this last thing he said here: how he has this incredible belief in himself that *overcomes him*. He’s actually come to the place where he starts out lying and comes to believe his own lie, overcome by his belief in himself. Then the audience *returns* that to him and strengthens his belief. This, I think, is where we may come to understand not so much Hitler (as would-be Hitlers are a dime a dozen) but where we can understand *how people can put him in power*. And it was in this light I came across an interview Rosenbaum had with Daniel Goldhagen which kind of blew me away.

Rosenbaum spent some time with Daniel Goldhagen—another person who has researched Hitler. He said this:

Charisma, as we know, although it’s not often treated this way, but as Max Weber first expressed it, it is not a property of leaders, it’s a property of the *people* really. The extent to which the leader is charismatic as Weber discussed it depends on the belief of the *people* in his infallibility and the prophetlike nature of the leader. *They* grant him his charismatic quality.

Ron Rosenbaum - Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil

Maybe. Maybe Goldhagen is right. In that case, what we have is a feedback loop that *grows* in intensity until it becomes vulnerable to *great* evil. The apostle Paul said something like that. He wrote his second letter to Timothy when he was, kind of, winding up his life, and he said:

2 Timothy 3

AKJV

¹ This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

² For men shall be lovers of their own selves, [...]

In the process of time, we have found a word for this. The word is “narcissism”. Do yourself a favor; look it up. Look it up in a dictionary. Look it up on the internet. Look it up wherever you can find it —“narcissism”. Paul goes on to describe what they would be like. They would:

2 Timothy 3

AKJV

² [...] be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

³ Without natural affection, truce breakers [*their word isn't worth a dime*], false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

⁴ Traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

⁵ Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

You know, until I read this scripture in the context of what I was learning from Ron Rosenbaum, I had not considered how narcissism initiates and then develops all the evil that follows on its heels. So it becomes almost impossible to separate the Germans of that generation from Hitler—though we must separate the Germans of *today* from that. They are not the same people who did that. Just as we are not the same people who engaged in the slave trade. Fair enough?

Do you remember the fairy tale *The Emperor's New Clothes* by Hans Christian Andersen? There was an emperor of a prosperous city who cared more about clothes than he did about government, as a matter of fact—about military pursuits or even entertainment. He hires two swindlers who promise him the *finest* suit of clothes from the *most beautiful* cloth. They tell him the cloth is invisible to anyone who was either stupid or unfit for his position. The Emperor cannot see the nonexistent cloth, but he pretends he can for fear of appearing *stupid*. His ministers do the same. When the swindlers report that the suit is finished, they dress him in mime. The Emperor then goes on a procession to the capital showing off his new clothes. During the course of the procession, in which the people by and large are cheering him and admiring his new clothes and everything else involved... because the spade work has been done, the mob are going along with it.

However, a small child cried out, “But he has nothing on!” The crowd realized the child is telling the truth. The Emperor, however, holds his head high and continues the procession. When you think about it, this is what Jesus was driving at when he spoke about how we were all supposed to be like children. He told his disciples (Matthew 18):

Matthew 18

AKJV

¹ At the same time came the disciples to Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

² And Jesus called a little child to him, and set him in the middle of them,

³ And said, Truly I say to you, Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Whoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

If you want to understand what Jesus said to his disciples here, just read Hans Christian Andersen's little story. What is he talking about? He is talking about the fact that we don't let ourselves get cluttered up, led astray, led down the garden path—*confused by liars*. It may seem odd, but it is true: It is *vanity* that blinds great men to the things the least of us can see. But we become vulnerable to swindlers through our need and our ego.

For the Germans of the 1930s, they had been humiliated by the loss of World War I, and they had a need for restored self-respect. So they were willing to believe a lie to get it back. The German people were worn out; they were tired; they were dispirited. So they *grasped* at the lies Hitler was telling him and, in turn, *reinforced* his own belief in himself. They *wanted* to believe the lie.

Now, don't consider what I'm saying as a complete explanation of the horror of Hitler and the Nazis. What I'm driving at is not an explanation, but *understanding*—understanding that might be useful to us where we stand. Evil can creep up on people in ways they cannot even imagine; and the only defense against it, really, is to rely on a higher power. Christian people—believers in scripture—*should be* (but aren't always) immune to this sort of thing. Following the breadcrumbs, I came upon a statement by the Spartacus School about what happened back there in Nazi Germany.

In the original programme of the Nazi Party drawn up by Adolf Hitler, Anton Drexler and Gottfried Feder in February, 1920, promised religious freedom for all those religions except those which endangered the German race.

Spartacus Educational - Christianity in Nazi Germany

Once Hitler gained power, he was quick to express his hatred of the Jews.

Based on his readings of how blacks were denied civil rights in the southern states in America, Hitler attempted to make life so unpleasant for Jews in Germany that they would emigrate. [...] The campaign started on 1st April, 1933, when a one-day boycott of Jewish-owned shops took place. Members of the Sturm Abteilung (SA) [*the Brownshirts*] picketed the shops to ensure the boycott was successful.

Spartacus Educational - Christianity in Nazi Germany

In other words, if you wanted to go shop there—even though you weren't participating in the boycott—you'd get beat up if you try to go in there. Now, I have noticed recently, in remarks of some people, references to Brownshirts, and I wonder how many of today's listeners have any idea what they're talking about. They're talking about Hitler's SA; they're comparing, sometimes, what's going on *right now* to the Brownshirts of Hitler. Listen for it; people talk about it.

The hostility of towards Jews increased in Nazi Germany. This was reflected in the decision by many shops and restaurants not to serve the Jewish population. Placards saying "Jews not admitted" and "Jews enter this place at their own risk" began to appear all over Germany. In some parts of the country Jews were banned from public parks, swimming-pools and public transport.

Spartacus Educational - Christianity in Nazi Germany

Did you ever hear that the Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted, too—killed off in concentration camps? They were.

The Jehovah's Witnesses were also persecuted in Nazi Germany as they refused to do military service. Nazis also hated the sect because they believed in the imminent return of a Messiah.

The rejection that this [Messiah was] Adolf Hitler led to its members being sent to Germany's concentration camps.

Spartacus Educational - Christianity in Nazi Germany

You know, I knew the Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted; I did not know the second reason. It's chilling. They were looking for a messiah, and they wouldn't accept Hitler as *the one*, and so they were sent off to concentration camps and up the chimneys of crematoriums. And it's chilling, but so is what the Spartacus group said next.

Leaders of the Protestant and Catholic churches remained silent throughout this period. The main opposition to Hitler came from a group of young pastors led by Martin Niemöller, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Heinrich Grüber. Initially the main complaint was the decision by Adolf Hitler to appoint Ludwig Müller, as the country's Reich Bishop of the Protestant Church.

Spartacus Educational - Christianity in Nazi Germany

That was a new one for me. I knew Constantine did that for the Catholic Church; I did not know that Hitler had done the same thing.

With the support of Karl Barth, a professor of theology at Bonn University, in May, 1934, these rebel pastors formed what became known as the Confessional Church. Over the next few years hundreds of these pastors were sent to concentration camps and some were executed.

Spartacus Educational - Christianity in Nazi Germany

One wonders what the outcome would have been had Christians, with one voice, opposed the actions of the Nazi regime right from the start. Perhaps they would have ended up where the Jews were. Perhaps not. But, they were *divided*.

Ron Rosenbaum introduced one more idea in his book about Hitler: primitive hatred.

According to "a well-known [*but unnamed*] German physician," Oechsner [*Frederick Oechsner, UPI Berlin bureau chief at this time*] tells us, Hitler's attitude toward the Jews is "a primitive hate typical of half civilized or even uncivilized persons."

Ron Rosenbaum - Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil

What struck Rosenbaum was the concept of primitive hatred. The reason that this is important is that the source of Hitler's hatred (which nobody dismisses) focuses on what might have *caused* it. Rosenberg continued to say that:

One of the things that made the Holocaust so unique and uniquely horrifying was precisely that it arose from a society widely regarded as the most civilized, in the sense of "learned" or "cultured," and philosophically sophisticated—convinced of its own rectitude—in the world.

Ron Rosenbaum - Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil

Another author [Hugh Trevor-Roper] characterized Hitler as “convinced of his own rectitude.” He considered Hitler’s hatred as “sincere”—that is, based on rational belief and ideologically-based hatred. But Rosenberg acknowledges that there is:

[...] another kind of hatred that is not intellectual but visceral, personal; an irrational hatred that can assume the guise, the mantle, of an ideological antipathy but which is primitive in the sense of being *prior* to ideology—its source rather than its product.

Ron Rosenbaum - Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil

You know, there does come a time when the human mind, being sick, becomes open to something *far more evil* than we would ever expect of human beings—not merely sinister, but actively evil and destructive. Some people have rejected the idea of a demon-possessed Hitler because it *mitigates* his evil. In other words, some of these guys...they’re not willing to have any explanation for Hitler because they feel like it may tend to *let him off*. But it doesn’t, really. No one who believes the New Testament can deny the existence of demons or the possibility of demon possession. And Scripture tells us, categorically, that Satan himself entered Judas. In a strange sort of way, this may explain the hatred of the Jews—not merely among the Nazis, but of anti-Semitism in general. For the Jews are the oldest of all the representatives of God in the world—the chosen people. Chosen by whom? Chosen by God. And so, if you hate God, it’s a very small step to hating Jews. Why not Christians? Well, they’ve been too many of them, and oftentimes too much in power to be able to attack them successfully. Remember, we’re not talking about objective hatred here; we’re talking about *primitive* hatred. And so, there can be no hatred more primitive than one arising before the creation of man.

Now, what lessons can Christian folks take away from this? One: We cannot, *we must not*, remain silent and passive in the face of evil. It is *never* true to say there is nothing we can do. There is *always* something we can do. We can always speak out. We can always persuade. We can always vote. Too many Christians have remained silent while more than 50 million prospective citizens have been destroyed in abortion mills and sent up the chimneys of the incinerators in hospitals. No politician can be elected who loses the vote of all the Christian folks in his district.

You follow me on this? No politician can be voted into office if he loses 100% hundred percent of the Christian votes. If all of us are together and opposed to this...Now, maybe we need to draw some lines. Maybe the law *does* draw lines. Maybe we could work on the third trimester, or maybe omit the first trimester. Because law does have limits on how far it can go and what it can do. But the truth is, all the pro-abortion congressmen, senators, and presidents in this country were elected with the consent and participation of many Christians. We’re not united. Remember the German Christians? There were too many of them to kill, but they were divided and remained silent. This is not to say they didn’t all attend the same church. All Christians should recognize evil when it appears and should oppose it, *no matter* where they go to church. Why didn’t the German Christians do it? Because they would not call evil by its name. Was it fear? Could be. Was it apathy? Possibly. But you do understand, don’t you, both fear and apathy are *unworthy* of us who name the name of Jesus Christ. By coincidence, I was reading the 83rd psalm a day or so ago, which begins:

Psalm 83

AKJV

¹ Keep not your silence, O God: hold not your peace, and be not still, O God.

And it occurred to me: The voice of God in the world is his people. We cannot complain that God is silent when we will not speak up for him.

There's the bottom line. We have challenges. Like little children, if we don't see the Emperor wearing clothes, we ought to say so. The simplicity, the courage—*we must do it.*

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