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IDEAS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

A PARTIAL PARAPHRASE AND REVIEW OF *MODERN FASCISM* BY GENE

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See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

This article will reveal similarities between the philosophies prevalent in Germany that characterized fascism and those of postmodern thinkers today. I am not suggesting that because these similarities exist postmoderns would be in favor of a new Hitler. I am suggesting that ideas have consequences and that history ought to teach us how serious they can be. The key issue is the rejection of a transcendent God who has revealed moral law. The result of such a rejection will most certainly be some form of lawlessness.

Recently, radio host and friend Chris Rosebrough called me and insisted that I read *Modern Fascism* by Gene Veith. Chris suggested the book because it draws a parallel between the ideas popular in Germany between World Wars I and II and the ideas popular in America today. These ideas now are called "postmodern," a term introduced by Martin Heidegger, a popular German philosopher who became a committed fascist. Veith's *Modern Fascism* unpacks the philosophical ideas that led to fascism.

This review of Veith's book will show that the postmodern/emergent ideas that are popular today are identical to those in vogue in post WWI Germany. [Note: I also use the term paraphrase in the title, because I quote extensively from Veith's book and explain his ideas.] I do not claim that those who promote postmodern theology are guilty of promoting fascism, but I

do claim that ideas have consequences. As we examine the ideas that led to fascism, we shall see why those ideas led to horrific consequences. Once we see the parallels between those times and today we can hope that today's ideas will not lead to such consequences. But we have no guarantees that they won't.

BACK TO NATURE

Postmodernism is a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism (that reason alone will get us to truth) and the sense of alienation that came from urbanization. This sense of alienation included a desire to connect with nature. Germany after World War I was characterized by a desire to reconnect with nature that included a desire for pagan religious ideas that were linked to nature. Gene Veith explains: "Because of their Romanticism, fascists sought to overcome the alienation between the human being and nature. Again, the villain was modern civilization, with its scientific technology and polluting factories."¹ This same sensibility characterizes postmodern thinking today which, as I have claimed in another work, is a resurrected version of Romanticism.² People want to be connected to nature and to react against the Enlightenment; to do so involves making decisions on a basis other than logic and rationality. Most people would be shocked to realize that their postmodern inclinations are those of fascist ideology which led to

Hitler, but I'll develop that connection later in the paper.

Veith explains: "Whereas the traditions of the Enlightenment sought to transcend nature, fascist ideology made nature central to human life. In the words of Adolf Hitler, 'the folkish philosophy of life corresponds to the innermost will of Nature'" (Veith: 39). The draw to nature is a huge factor in our culture today as seen in everything from political ads to those of larger corporations. Everyone wants to be seen as being "green." This mindset prevailed in Germany during the periods between WWI and WWII, a mindset that resulted in the belief that humans and Western civilization are the problem.

Humans, it is thought, have undertaken an onslaught against nature and ancient pagan thinking is seen as a better approach. Paganism has always seen religion as stemming from nature. The Judeo-Christian worldview believes in a transcendent God who has spoken, has created humans in His image, and has given them dominion over the rest of the creation (Genesis 1:26). So what in our view is good and from God is, in the postmodern view (that of the fascists and Emergents), very bad; a thing to be rejected.

My maternal grandfather, Fred Saupe, lived in the same time period as the rise of fascism in Germany. Grandpa Fred served in the United States Army in WWI, and though he was a great marksman, he was assigned to be a supply truck driver so that he wouldn't have to kill Germans (he was of German descent). That assignment, incidentally, may have saved his life.

After the war, Grandpa Fred became a farmer in Iowa near where his father had homesteaded in the 19th century. On that farm, where I grew up, I learned from him that nature was likely to kill you unless you used all of your wits and available technology to prevail over it. Fred was a Christian man with a Biblical

worldview. His beliefs were the polar opposite of those that prevailed in Germany after WWI.

The farm reflected the Biblical admonition for humans to rule over nature, and the reality that the Fall meant that with great labor man could live off of the land. Grandpa Fred fought against possible destruction all of his life. He lived through the Great Depression. He lived through the dust bowl of the 1930s. He lived through drought, windstorms, insect invasions, and fought weeds. When I was old enough to understand the farm that Fred turned over to my father, we had everything we needed to survive: a brooder house to raise little chicks, a chicken house for when they matured, dairy cows, pigs, and steer. We had cherry trees, pear trees and apple trees, raspberries, strawberries and many kinds of garden vegetables.

Lack of water was the one persistent battle with nature that Fred fought every year. Nearly every August the several shallow wells on the farm would go dry and he would have to haul water from elsewhere for his animals. So turning to technology, in the 1940s he drilled a 400-foot well. We never ran out of water again. And herbicides and pesticides helped us declare war on other destroyers of the crops.

While all this was going on in America, Germany was taking the opposite approach—that technology and Western civilization are evil, that going back to nature was good, and that humans (at least certain ones) were the problem. So eugenics became important—the practice of selectively breeding humans so that only the best reproduced. Undesirable people were forcibly sterilized, and when that proved inefficient the Nazis began mass killing. It was a return to tribalism and ancient nature religions. Veith explains: “Nature and the community assume the mystical role they held in ancient mythological religions. Religious zeal is displaced from the transcendent onto the immanent: the land, the people, the blood, the will” (Veith: 17). The idea that nature was like a goddess who would care for humans replaced the

idea that nature was fallen and that humans needed to use the sweat of their brow to overcome the natural tendency for thorns to choke out the garden (Genesis 3:17). Again Veith explains: “Fascists seek an organic, neomythological unity of nature, the community, and the self. The concepts of a God who is above nature and a moral law that is above society are rejected” (Veith: 17).

The postmodern ideals prevalent in America today are identical. The primary idol in our society is nature, and many people harbor the romantic view that nature is a “mother” who will nurture us. These postmoderns consider humans with technology to be the enemies who are a threat to the nature goddess. These inclinations drive the postmodern/emergent understanding of theology.

They reject the transcendence of God, who has spoken and given moral law and will in the end be the judge of all. In His place they posit community and a return to nature. Whether these advocates know that they are teaching ideas that at one time led to fascism is uncertain. But they did. For example consider this Emergent writer:

Perhaps interest in theologies of the kingdom of God is related to the contemporary quest for holism, integration, and a sense of interconnection. My colleague, Dr. Linda Bergquist, has suggested that renewed popularity of the “kingdom” language is related to the emerging global narrative of the deep ecology movement—a consciousness and awareness that everything matters and is somehow interdependent.³

The deep ecology movement sees traditional Christianity’s understanding of man’s uniqueness (as created in God’s image and given authority over the earth) as a terrible cause of the earth’s problems. Instead it derives its thinking from pagan sources and a decidedly pagan worldview that values the “interconnectedness of all things.” In its extreme, the deep ecology movement

wants to see most of the humans on the earth eliminated and balance restored to nature. Veith points to Finnish deep ecology proponent, Pentti Linkola, as one who holds to fascist ideas: “Linkola, surveying the way humanity has ravaged nature, considers human beings to be an evolutionary mistake, a cancer of the earth” (Veith: 40).

One might ask how human beings can become anti-human. In Nazi Germany the answer is that they become only “anti-some humans”—those who are not the elite, not the right race, or not fit to reproduce. It may shock many to realize that the ultimate brutality of fascism was led, not by uneducated savages, but by the educated elite. As Veith points out, “Thus fascism attracted students, artists, intellectuals, and the avant-garde. Fascists sought first of all to demolish Western civilization, so that it could be replaced with a new, organic, holistic culture” (Veith: 40). The Judeo-Christian idea that humans were created in God’s image and given dominion over the rest of the creation was seen as an enemy to the natural, organic whole. Fascists hated Jews because they were seen as the “inventors” of a transcendent Creator God who gave moral laws like “you shall not murder” that made human life something that must be protected.

MARTIN HEIDEGGER THE FASCIST

The existential philosopher, Martin Heidegger, was a key thinker who embraced fascism, and his mortal enemy was Western civilization. Veith explains:

Heidegger’s attack on the West is repeated over and over again by his followers today, who perhaps do not realize its original Nazi context. Heidegger opposed democracy and continued to do so even after the collapse of the Third Reich. Heidegger was also an important environmental theorist, whose critique of technology—though rooted in National Socialist organicism—has been enormously influential (Veith:

41).

Neo-orthodoxy is a religious version of existential philosophy such as that of Heidegger and postmodern/Emergent theology is nearly identical to it. Its enemies are the same: the Enlightenment, Western civilization, technology, a transcendent God who has given binding moral laws, individuals as important in their own right, and humans having dominion over nature. I was amazed that ideas expressed by the postmoderns/Emergent are identical to those of the fascists. It's sobering to think about where these ideas will lead.

One of Heidegger's ideas very popular with the Emergent movement is the challenge against objective truth. Heidegger was influenced by Nietzsche who famously declared the death of God. Heidegger (who invoked Nietzsche in a famous address) realized the implications as explained by Veith: "If God is dead, there is no longer a transcendent authority of reference point for objective truth" (Veith: 85). Here is Veith's analysis of such thinking:

Heidegger's conclusion has become accepted to the point of becoming a commonplace of contemporary thought, *that knowledge is a matter of process, not content*. With the death of God, there is no longer a set of absolutes or abstract ideas by which existence must be ordered. Such "essentialism" is an illusion; knowledge in the sense of objective, absolute truth must be challenged. The scholar is not the one who knows or searches for some absolute truth, but the one who questions everything that pretends to be truth. (Veith: 85)

This is precisely the Emergent idea: we cannot know, but we can rebuke those who claim to have knowledge. Consider this Emergent statement: "We live in a post-Neitzschean world of faith and spirituality. Nietzsche's declaration that God is dead still holds true, since interest in all things spiritual does not necessarily translate to a belief in a metaphys-

ical God or the tenets and dogmas of a particular faith."⁴ The new "god" who replaced the "dead" one is only immanent and has never revealed absolute truth that can be known. To find out that Emergent ideas are those of fascists is quite shocking.

So now knowledge has been replaced by questioning as it was in the philosophy of the fascist Martin Heidegger. This comes with some horrible consequences such as the end of academic freedom. Veith explains:

In the same address in which he asserts that "questioning itself becomes the highest form of knowing," Heidegger goes on to advocate expelling academic freedom from the university: "To give oneself the law is the highest freedom. The much-lauded 'academic freedom' will be expelled from the university." (Veith 86)

This may explain something I recently experienced. In debating a professor from a Baptist university about the promotion of Zen mediation to their students, I pointed out that present at the symposium were two Zen Buddhists and one Christian who believed in Zen style meditation. There was not a single traditional Christian who defended the Biblical definition of prayer and meditation. I asked why no conservative Christian had a seat at the table (I have asked that of other Christian educators) and received no answer. But there is an answer, and it is the one Heidegger explained: academic freedom must go. Once the idea about certainty concerning the knowledge of the truth is rejected, then the freedom of those who want to express the knowledge of the truth as revealed by God must be squelched. Everyone's idea is valid except that of conservative Christians.

Heidegger's idea of giving oneself the law meant that morals derive from the human will. Veith explains the implication: "The concept that there are no absolute truths means that human beings can impose *their* truth upon an essentially meaningless world" (Veith: 86). But that would apparently

mean chaos with no guidance for deciding things collectively as in society. The answer to that problem is "the will to power" as understood by Nietzsche. The will to power can and does become a collective will. Heidegger spoke of "willing the essence" (Veith: 90). But he was speaking of a collective will. The "essence" is not some pre-existing transcendent truth revealed by God but something people will into existence themselves. Once it is willed, it becomes the guidance of "authentic" life. In other words, when a collection of people commonly wills something, and if they then live in conformity with that common will, they are living valid, authentic lives. Whatever is thus willed cannot be judged to be good or bad by any transcendent moral law revealed by God.

Veith cites Adolf Hitler repeating the theme of the collective will-power (Veith: 90, 91). According to Hitler, the "dominating preacher" could win the masses over to a new will, the collective one of his national socialism. Hitler's mass rallies were aimed at that. With the moral will of a transcendent God removed, the collective will of the German society became the new moral law. If that will meant the killing of millions of people, there was no higher law above the collective will to say that anything was wrong.

Veith cites the fascist film *The Triumph of the Will* as a significant example of this idea. The title of the film was provided by Hitler himself (Veith: 91). The collective will of the German people is portrayed as having great mythical qualities to be lived by. Morality is to be judged by the collective will of the German people that was being clearly manipulated by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party. The God of the Bible, who has spoken, had been declared dead by the earlier Nietzsche and replaced by the collective will of the people. Thus these people were unleashed to do whatever they deemed correct—with no sense of guilt.

Veith makes two points about this. One is the practice of abortion in America being justified because of a "choice" (Veith: 37). The Judeo-

Christian ethic of “you shall not kill” is set aside by the rationale that a collective culture has decided to make choice a moral value. This is fully in accord with the ideas of Nietzsche and Heidegger that contributed to fascism. Another is to point out the irony that the fascist slogan of *the triumph of the will* is the total reversal of Martin Luther’s great work *The Bondage of the Will*: “In simultaneously alluding to Luther and contradicting him, *The Triumph of the Will* invests Hitler with Luther’s mantle and replaces German Protestantism with the new fascist spirituality” (Veith: 92).

What consequences will come when the human will (viewed collectively) becomes the new source of morals for a society? The answer is that it could be just about anything, but it will be evil. Veith comments on Luther’s view and validates it:

If the human will is unleashed, with no external or internal restraints, Luther would expect not authenticity, not self-actualization or humanistic fulfillment, but an evil approaching the demonic. In this respect, at least, those who celebrated *triumph of the will* proved him right. (Veith: 93)

Whatever becomes of our current society will be revealed as history unfolds, now that the moral law revealed by the transcendent God of the Bible has been rejected. But we can expect it will be a version of evil that approaches the demonic.

THE REJECTION OF THE VALUE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

One facet of fascism was a characteristic called *volkisch* which is a German term for which no single English word has the same range of meaning. It is usually translated “folkish” but includes ideas of ethnic, folklore, populist, and romanticism. The way it functioned in fascism was a rejection of individualism. A person’s identity was found in a communal experience and communal conscious-

ness. As Veith explains: “The individual human being is ‘nothing more than the vehicle of forces generated by the community’” (Veith: 36, 37 citing Zeev Sternhell). This is a precursor to what is now called “socially constructed reality” as used by postmodern theologians such as Grenz and Franke.⁵ Individuals themselves cannot read historical documents (because of language games that are communal) and understand meaning. This cuts individuals off from meaning, which is considered socially and culturally determined. They must find their meaning from being a part of the “folkish” group.

Brian McLaren uses this postmodern approach as he rejects the importance of the individual:

How do “I” know the Bible is always right? And if “I” am sophisticated enough to realize that I know nothing of the Bible without my own involvement via interpretation, I’ll also ask how I know which school, method, or technique of biblical interpretation is right. What makes a “good” interpretation good? And if an appeal is made to a written standard (book, doctrinal statement, etc.) or to common sense or to “scholarly principles of interpretation,” the same pesky “I” who liberated us from the authority of the church will ask, “Who sets the standard? Whose common sense? Which scholars and why? Don’t all these appeals to authorities and principles outside the Bible actually undermine the claim of ultimate biblical authority? Aren’t they just the new pope?”⁶

The rejection of the individual (“I”) is a reiteration of the postmodernism of Heidegger and other fascist thinkers. Veith comments on postmodern ideas: “Postmoderns ‘deconstruct the subject’ by attempting to show that human consciousness itself is constituted by social forces and structures of power embodied in language. The self cannot escape the ‘prison-house of language,’ through

which the culture encodes itself and determines the very structure of what one is able to think” (Veith: 37). McLaren’s attack on the individual being able to understand the Bible is very much postmodern. It is also very fascist (though he would not call himself that).

The unimportance of the individual and the rejection of individual rights led to horrific consequences in Nazi Germany. Individuals who were deemed unfit to contribute to the “folkish” community were eliminated. The older understanding of “humanism” (not secular humanism) was that individuals were important and had been given rights by their creator (as articulated in the Declaration of Independence). This sort of humanism was attacked by the fascists. Veith explains: “Just as the postmoderns attack ‘humanism’ on these grounds, the fascists also attacked human-centered values, including the concept of individual rights. Since the culture determines the individual, the needs of the culture must have priority” (Veith: 37). To implement the idea of the priority of the *volkisch*, Aryan, identity in community Hitler held mass rallies: “The mass rallies, uniforms, and parades so favored by the early fascist parties were all mechanisms for creating group identity, giving people the experience of losing themselves by becoming part of a larger collective existence” (Veith: 37).

The ideals of the United States (at least as the U.S. used to be) are the polar opposite of those of fascism. Fascists hated Western civilization, the Enlightenment, and Judeo-Christian values. So do postmoderns of today. Immigrants to America have typically come to escape oppressive circumstances in their own cultures and to find a new identity. Thus identity here was not *volkisch*, but based on ideas such as expressed in our Constitution. Veith writes, “Democratic nations were based not on a cultural identity, nor on ethnicity, but upon a rational plan—such as the United States Constitution” (Veith: 38). Individuals, not certain cultures, were given rights. But fascism and National Socialism were based on

different ideas: "Hitler's racism was part of his Darwinism and his Romanticism, his desire to ground culture in what he saw as the natural order" (Veith: 38).

One consequence of fascist ideas was that once the individual had no particular rights and was important only in the context of the "folkish" culture, individuals were expendable. Genocide and euthanasia were the result. The return to paganism meant the return to tribalism. Tribalism has always meant killing in tribal warfare. Veith also comments on this:

The contemporary stress upon cultural identity is accompanied by sustained critiques of "Western Civilization" in favor of cultural and ethnic consciousness. Primitive or tribal cultures are presented as being more virtuous those "contaminated by Western civilization" and modern technology. American culture becomes guilty of "cultural imperialism," it is argued, by seeking to destroy the cultural identity of other groups by making them assimilate to democratic values. (Veith: 39)

But individual rights granted by a constitution as well as democratic values that make it possible for various immigrants to coexist without tribal warfare has been the hallmark of America. Postmodernism was the hallmark of fascism in Italy and Germany. Now that postmodernism is the prevalent thinking in our institutions of higher learning, what do we think will happen? Whatever the consequences will be, they will not be good ones. Tribalism is a bad outcome. The "noble savage" is a myth.

Veith claims that through the mass media, the creation of a mass culture can contribute to the world becoming more tribal: "Individual differences become homogenized. The world becomes 'retribalized'" (Veith: 149). He also says, "The goal of fascism was the creation of an organic, mass community" (Veith: 148). The idea was to surround the individual with masses with

the same opinion. The masses with a same opinion, charged emotionally through mass rallies, can come to assert a mass will that becomes the new morality whatever it is. Veith insightfully writes: "Mobs tend to be governed less by reason than by emotion, less by moral restrictions and more by irrational impulses. That is why Hitler loved them" (Veith: 152). By embracing the postmodern philosophy that fueled fascism in Germany, we are setting the stage for a similar horrific outcome, whatever it turns out to be.

It is ironic that most current postmodern theologians and teachers are promoting something akin to the social gospel to make the world a better place. They would be horrified to think they are promoting ideas that led to Nazi Germany. But they are. Hitler intended to make the world a better place through eugenics (the selective breeding of humans). Margaret Sanger had similar ideas in America as cited by Veith: "Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, summarized her goals accordingly: 'More children from the fit, less from the unfit—That is the chief aim of birth control' (Veith: 108). The connection with Hitler and Sanger goes beyond merely an ideological one: "Margaret Sanger invited Eugen Fischer, Hitler's advisor on race hygiene, for a speaking engagement in the United States" (Veith: 108). Ideas indeed have consequences.

THE END OF TRANSCENDENCE

A key doctrine of Christianity is that God is both transcendent and immanent (above and beyond the creation but also engaged with it). This passage asserts this truth: "*For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, 'I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite'*" (*Isaiah 57:15*). In theological terms this means that God is transcendent ontologically, but immanent relationally. God is not contingent upon anything within the creation and totally transcends as the eternal One who cre-

ated the world out of nothing. But God does providentially rule His own creation and has spoken to us through inerrant and authoritative spokespersons (the Biblical writers). God relates to us in a saving way if we are contrite (repentant) and trust in His Son, who died for sins.

Fascism is based on a complete rejection and denial of transcendence. Veith says that one of the key reasons for Nazi hatred of the Jews was that they "invented" the transcendent God of the Bible who gave moral laws. It is ironic that Hitler and his philosophical supporters understood that Western civilization sprang from the Jews, whereas nowadays most textbooks on the subject have forgotten that fact. The problem was that Hitler believed Western civilization to be an evil thing to be done away with. So do most postmoderns today.

The Bible claims that God came to Mount Sinai and audibly spoke "You shall not murder" to the Jewish nation (*Exodus 20:13*). That meant that the transcendent, Creator God spoke a moral absolute that applied to every individual. Fascism was inimical to any such thing: "A 'collective and organic' society must be based on different principles than the 'individualist and atomistic' ideals injected into Western culture by the Jews" (Veith: 49). The consequent of wanting to rid society of Western civilization was the intention of ridding society of the Jews:

For those who reject transcendent moral absolutes—such as "Thou shalt not kill"—there was nothing to prevent the gas chamber. There was no higher authority than the "collective and organic" society, which sought to rid itself both the Jewish people and of their ideas. (Veith: 49)

If Christianity held to the transcendent revealed moral truth that it inherited from the Jews, it became Hitler's enemy as well. But, sadly, many during that era joined the "German Christian" movement which gained control of the institutional church in Germany (Veith: 55).

Veith aptly comments: "Christianity could be reinvented, that is to say, repaganized; it only had to be drained of its Biblical and Hebraic content" (Veith: 55). There was a remnant, the "Confessing Christians" who were persecuted and killed by Hitler. The confessing Christians refused to give up the idea of a transcendent God who issued moral truth that was not dependent on the culture (Veith: 56).

Veith has an entire chapter about the church in fascist Germany (Chapter 4: "Two Masters") that chronicles the difference between the German Church and the Confessing Church. The issue was whether or not the church would confess the truths that had been revealed by the transcendent God of the Bible. The *German Christians* were able to take control of the state church (Veith: 57). Veith writes: "What this meant can be seen in a research institute established by the new church government: *The Institute for the Study of Jewish Influence on German Church Life*" (Veith: 58). The Jews with their transcendent, law-giving God could not be allowed to influence the German church. The counter movement, the *Confessing Church* issued a declaration affirming Reformation ideas such as Christ alone and scripture alone (Veith: 60).

To apply the issues of postmodern, fascist Germany to today, we have to see the gravity of the choices before us. Will we deny transcendence as postmodern theology does and place "truth" in the hands of the culture (socially constructed reality), or will we confess the transcendent, revealed truths of the Bible? Much of the church has fallen asleep on this matter. The denial of the transcendence of the God of the Bible who has spoken led to horrific consequences in Nazi Germany. Now that the same concept of transcendence is being denied in most "Christian" educational institutions in favor of all things postmodern, why do we think we shall escape the logical consequences? Do we really believe that contemporary people are "good" and can be trusted to do "good" even if they no longer have a transcendent source of true goodness or a reve-

lation of what good really is from the Creator God? Adopting postmodernity is naïveté at its worst. One definition of insanity sometimes offered is of doing the same thing time after time and expecting a different result.

To repeat: ideas have consequences. Veith traces a number of fascist ideas back to the earlier Nietzsche. He cites Nietzsche and then comments:

"A tablet of the good hangs over every people. Behold, it is the tablet of their overcomings; behold, it is the voice of their will to power." Moral principles are not transcendent truths (as in the Judeo-Christian tradition), but expressions of power. Change comes when new tablets are imposed upon the people, and this is done by the artists. (Veith: 119)

When I visited an Emergent convention last fall, art was emphasized. As I attended the first session, an artist was creating a drawing during the session. A video camera was trained on her so we could see the process as we listened to the speakers. There were other works of art hung in the auditorium. It all looked rather strange to me until I realized there was a theme. There was something in each picture emerging, even though what it was seemed unclear. They were using art to reinforce the postmodern idea of God's immanence in the creation causing something good to emerge from it.

But what contemporary postmodern/emergent thinkers overlook is the sin nature. To deny God's transcendence and then look for goodness to emerge from a process overseen by the collective community assumes that goodness will come from a collective of sinners willing as they see fit. There is no moral law that guides them to even give a reasonable definition of "good." The Bible has been silenced through the neo-orthodox idea that the reader determines the meaning. What is to keep this group, which is creating a socially constructed "reality," from unleashing a ruthlessly evil reality like

Nazi Germany? Nothing. For now they live off of the borrowed capital of the Judeo-Christian worldview that they have rejected. The capital will soon be exhausted.

ANTI-SEMITISM

The most well known aspect of German fascism is anti-Semitism. Veith mentions two of the key reasons the Jews were so hated: 1) their association with "banking capitalism" and 2) their worldview (Veith: 43). Yes there was racial hatred as history records. But Hitler was committed to paganism, and the Jewish (and Jewish inspired Christian) Bible is the polar opposite of paganism. The Church in Germany had already largely been stripped of an authoritative Bible by liberalism and then neo-orthodoxy, so the church could be made safe for fascism (other than the confessing Christians). But the Jews were seen as intractable. They had to be eliminated. They were never going to give up their monotheism.

The fascists viewed the Jews as cerebral and detached from nature and the rich polytheistic world of ancient paganism (Veith: 44). Veith describes a popular fascist and what he had to say: "According to poet and fascist propagandist Ezra Pound, the Jewish religion began when Moses, 'having to keep a troublesome rabble in order' scared them by inventing 'a disagreeable bogie, which he . . . [called] a god'" (Veith: 44). According to fascist thinking, the Jews ruined the world by inventing one transcendent, monotheistic God who was opposed to the immanent, polytheistic gods of the pagans. Veith explains how they saw the problem:

Jewish monotheism led to the decline of the mythological consciousness in which religion, nature, and the community were unified. Fascism sought to restore the values of primitive cultures, with their social solidarity, oneness with nature, and psychic integration. The iconoclasm, antipaganism, and moralism of the Judeo-Christian tradition

must be eradicated so that a more holistic spirituality could emerge. (Veith: 44, 45)

The similarities with many contemporary, postmodern ideas are striking.

The Jews with their monotheism and moral laws were intolerable. They were the enemies of the re-paganization of society. Veith comments: "In other words, the Jews with their absolute morality invented intolerance; therefore they shall not be tolerated" (Veith: 46). Veith astutely understands the Old Testament dynamic that kings who did evil were to be denounced by God's prophets—and they were. The sort of view revealed in Deuteronomy 17 that the king is *under* and not above God's revealed law is the foundation for ideas cherished in the West and embodied in such documents as the United States Constitution. The Nazis wanted to be rid of such ideas, so they sought to be rid of the Jews who first articulated them. I agree with this great statement by Veith: "That a prophet could come into the presence of a king and denounce him for oppression and bloodshed on the higher authority of the 'word of God' was a conceptual development of the profoundest importance for Western society" (Veith: 47).

What a sorry thing it is that today the authority of Scripture is being diminished in our churches and that our society is thereby adopting the sensibilities of fascists, if not their politics. If we do not accept the moral law of God as true and binding, by what authority can we rebuke "kings"? The new morality becomes the morality of the Biblically illiterate masses who are drawn to their pagan roots. "Good" can no longer be defined.

Veith articulately describes the results in fascist Germany:

For those who reject transcendent moral absolute—such as "Thou shalt not kill"—there was nothing to prevent the gas chambers. There was no higher authority than the "collective and organic" society, which

sought to rid itself of the Jewish people and of their ideas. (Veith: 49).

Christianity resists such things only if it retains the Bible as authoritative because it was inspired by the transcendent, Creator God. But Hitler found a cure for that problem: "If Christianity could not be eliminated, it could be changed. Cured of its 'Hebrew disease' Christianity could be repaganized" (Veith 50). Thinking about how applicable this is to what is happening today gives one chills. We think we can be repaganized by going back to the ideas and practices of a paganized version of medieval Catholicism, rejecting the *solas* of the Reformation, reconnecting to nature as if it were a goddess, satisfying fallen humanity's pagan urges, and do so in the name of God—but not get any of the results that attended fascism's return to nature religion.

THE REAL PROBLEM

I agree with Veith: "The problem is not alienation from nature, but alienation from God through the rebellion of sin" (Veith: 51). The longing for a return to nature has never been stronger in American society than I see today. The term "natural" is deemed synonymous with "good" and "unnatural" with "bad." This ignores the problems that nature is fallen, that nature is impersonal, and that nature, therefore, is not a goddess who wishes to care for us. The deification of nature common today places many contemporary Americans in a philosophical league with the Nazis. They are blinded to that fact. Our problem is not alienation from nature, but from God.

The firewall we have against postmodernism (which is a fancy name for paganism) is an inerrant, authoritative Bible. Our sin problem finds its remedy through the gospel that is revealed in the Bible. We find morals and restraint from our sinful tendencies through the law of God revealed by God through the Biblical writers. Western civilization used to be based on such ideas. That is why Hitler hated the Jews and the West.

Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. He came in fulfillment of prophecies found in the Old Testament in such places as Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. If the Christian church confesses Christ and the authority of Scripture, she shall put herself in opposition to *Modern Fascism* as Veith describes it. We will thus be seen as the enemies of society.

We need to do that. We need to stand on the *solas* of the Reformation and say "no" to postmodernity. We need to say "no" to neo-paganism and nature worship. We need to say "no" to the type of socialism that characterized Nazi Germany. The socialism of the Marxist Soviet Union was not the polar opposite to that of Germany, but a first cousin of it (Veith: 34-36). In both cases millions died. Hitler saw capitalism as a grave evil of the West, with the Jews as its bankers. We need to say "no" to every pastor in America who refuses to purely preach God's Word from the pulpit. Those who do not are complicit in contemporary postmodern ideas just as the *German Christians* of Hitler's day were complicit in the postmodern ideas that undergirded fascism. When we fail to confess what God has revealed, we fail. Period.

CONCLUSION

Gene Edward Veith's book is more needed now than when it was published in 1993. I thank God for His providence that led me to it. The world around us and much of the church is being shaped by the very ideas that led to fascism and the Nazi party. "Ideas have consequences" (Veith: 78, 79). We are fools if we think there will be no consequences this time. I do not know what they will be. But they will be bad. Here is Veith's description of the consequences in Nazi Germany:

If Judeo-Christian transcendent ethics place restrictions on individual behavior, they also liberate the individual socially and politically. The fascist's ethics of immanence did the reverse—they unleashed the animal

impulses, while enslaving the population. (Veith: 50)

We need to fight against these ideas using the Scripture.

Our young people are being indoctrinated into postmodern thinking in most of our colleges, be they secular or Christian. Their parents have no clue that the ideas they are being taught are the very ideas of the Hitler youth movement. The only difference is that there is no particular ethnicity that is claimed to be superior. That may save us from National Socialism, but it will not save us from some other version of it. But the idea that we need to be saved from alienation from nature caused by human enterprise rather than saved from our alienation from God caused by sin is spiritually fatal. It will lead only to neo-paganism and moral disaster.

END NOTES

1. Gene Edward Veith; *Modern Fascism – The Threat to the Judeo-Christian Worldview*; (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1993) 39. All future citations from this book will have bracketed references with this article.
2. Bob DeWaay, *The Emergent Church – Undefining Christianity* (Minneapolis, Bob DeWaay, 2009) 204.
3. Mark Scandrette, “Growing Pains – The Messy and Fertile Process of Becoming,” in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones editors (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 27.
4. Barry Taylor, “Converting Christianity The End and Beginning of Faith,” in *Emergent Manifesto of Hope* 164.
5. Stanley Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism – Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).
6. Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, (Youth Specialties: El Cajon, CA, 2004; published by Zondervan)

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