
Adolf Hitler's Attitudes About Religion in the Book "My Struggle" („Mein Kampf“)

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Abstract

The aim of this work is, through the analysis of the book „My struggle“, especially its parts connected with religion and devotion and the most important facts about this complex topic, present to the modern readers Adolf Hitler's main ideas in the process of decrease, and even often destroying of a religious factor in the everyday life of average Germans in the period between his entering into politics and the start of WWII and his project of solving the Jewish problem in the areas conquered by the German army. The complexity of this topic is also visible in the fact that there was a conflict in whole social life in Germany after losing WWI. The society in Germany after WWI had been searching for comfort and escape from poverty that happened after 1919, political instability and other destabilizing factors in religion, no matter is it Roman Catholicism, Protestantism or Judaism. For National socialists who were constantly getting more and more power, thanks to mistakes of other political movements, excellent organisation and endurance of its leaders, before all, Adolf Hitler, every kind of devotion that was not agreeing with the ideas of national socialism was declared as a political enemy. From today's perspective, we can say that Germany between the two World Wars was a very interesting area for researching the relationship between religion and politics, especially if we keep in mind that Hitler in his book defined the relationship between religion and its destroying, in the case when religion does not use to the political goals.

Keywords: Germany, national socialism, Adolf Hitler, religion, politics

Adolf Hitler's Attitudes About Religion in Book "My Struggle" („Mein Kampf“)

Since the second half of 1917, people in Germany had realised that they are definitely going to lose the war. According to the saved testimonials a few months before the end of the war, some Germans become much more devotional, because of definite defeat and unpredictable future. German people had also been hoping that some miracle will stop their defeat and that God's blessing will help them to overcome incoming turbulent times. Germany, as the country that was dominantly Protestant (Drummond, 1944, p. 212) and Roman Catholic, faced a huge shock on November 9th 1918. The founding of the republic meant not only the end of the German Empire but also the elimination of the influence of religion among the widest social classes. Following the ideas that have been existing in the USSR, that is to say, the ideas of Bolshevism and militant atheism, had deeply divided German society, much more than the catastrophic poverty and political instability.

For some German residents, religion still had a huge part in their lives, even after the war. Like in similar cases, this is visible in rural areas, where traditionalistic lifestyles kept strong despite revolutionary movements that affected German cities and industrial suburban areas the most. The situation in the cities and industrial centres was such opposition that we can talk about the atheisation of urban areas. From today's perspective, researches about this topic during the Weimar Republic are very easy, thanks to a load of sources.¹ At this moment, changes in the educational system in the Weimar Republic that happened during the first half of 1919, especially changes in religious education (Retter, 2018, p. 69), are very important for this topic. Nothing less important segment for this research is the segment

¹ For example, look at the list of literature listed in the paper: Klapp, T. (1974). The Catholic Labor Movement in Germany 1850–1933: A Survey and a Commentary. *Newsletter: European Labor and Working-Class History* 6, 14–19. For research in Serbian, look Gej, P. (1998). *Vajmarska kultura* [Weimar Culture]. Плато; Јањетовић, З. (1998). *Vajmarska republika i nemačka manjina u Jugoslaviji* [Weimar Republic and German minority in Yugoslavia]. Tokovi, 1–4, 140–155...

of depreciation of German people, primarily by Frenchs, which is very good presented by a less-known medal "Schwarze Schande" that presents the reaction of german artists and many other social levels on torture of winner to the loser. So, the winner's distancing from Christian ethic values in the after-war period put themselves in a position where their morale and level of respecting Christian values were not sufficient, which was important in the society period between the end of the second and the beginning of the third decade of the 20th century, had it's the reaction.

German society in the years immediately after the war, the society where the influence of religion (Protestantism and Roman Catholicism) was dropping, thanks to the inactivity of priests from higher hierarchy and unreadiness to do any single step in the area of helping other people, normally created a lot of space for a lot of political organisation that wanted to get a leading position. Among those political organisations, there used to be „Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei“ (NSDAP), today much more known as the "Nazi Party" („Die Nazi-Partei“).

Adolf Hitler - "My struggle"

Karl Harrer (1890–1926) and Anton Drexler (1884–1942), persons who are usually mentioned as founders of NSDAP, are actually founders of „Deutsche Arbeitpartei“ (DAP). But, the most famous person in this political organisation is definitely Adolf Hitler (1889–1945). My opinion is that is not necessary to give some more details from his biography, because there is a huge literature about it in many different world languages. In this work, I am focused on Hitler's relation to religion according to the book "My struggle" („Mein Kampf“).

Primarily because of younger people, I will first give some details about the process of writing this book. Before all, Adolf Hitler with his adherents tried to attempt a coup d' état on November 8th/9th 1923 and take governance in Germany. After an unsuccessful coup d' état, he was arrested and he and his adherents had to go to a court trial. On April 1st 1924 Adolf Hitler got the five years-long prison sentence, which had to be served in the Landsberg Prison.

Hitler used his time in prison, together with Emil Maurice (1897–1972)

and Rudolf Hess (1894-1987) who were writing his opinions and attitudes, to create a book that was originally named "Four years of struggle against lie, stupidity and cowardice". The idea for this totally ugly name for the book was rejected and instead of it, a much better and more usable name was accepted - "My struggle". A very important detail is that the book was dedicated to one very interesting person - Dietrich Eckart (1868-1923) - a Hitler militant who died so only after an unsuccessful coup d' état and a member of Thule society, which was ideologically tightly connected with NSDAP, mostly because of occultism, which is important to say (Gudrik-Klark, 2004, 204).

"My struggle" can be seen as the chronique of thoughts of the person who extremely hardly accepted the fact that Germany lost the war and that Germany is collapsed. The collapse of Germany during and, especially, after the war between Hitler and many other Germans created a feeling of anger and the necessity of finding a guilty person who brought them into such a bad situation. With a strong feeling of national pride, a necessity for revanchism and the necessity for fighting with the ones who are guilty the most for loose and living in Germany, Hitler and his adherents opinion, make supported making a book like "My struggle". In the text of this book, it is very visible that the author thinks that the reorganisation of German society must be done and that people should be transformed into tools that will make necessary changes, even via war, if it is required. It is also visible that, for the author, pacifism is a deadly sin and that presents something inadmissible for him and part of the German people who are ready to follow the path of national socialistic ideology. Destroying of unlike-minded persons and those who are marked as defects that are going to interrupt the country into its progress to become one thousand-year-old Third Reich and to enter the Golden age is clearly written in the book.

The first tome of this book from Adolf Hitler is published on July 18th 1925 and the second is published in 1926. The publisher of the book was Franz Eher Nachfolger GmbH, under the leadership of Max Amann (1891-1957), presented the central publisher of NSDAP and that company knew that publishing Adolf Hitler's book would result in the promotion of his

ideas from his early phase of political work and that it would present a huge income for the political organisation and author.²

Relation With the Religion in Book “My Struggle”

Hitler's constatement: “By defending from Jews, I am struggling for the act of the Lord” (Hitler, 2001, p. 48) is often used when it is discussed about the early phase of his hate for Jews as the people and believers of “Marxistic religion”, as he was thinking. Mentioning of struggling for the Lord's act does not show Hitler as some huge Christian with extremistic attitudes and behaviour who help a lot to the Christian religion and some Christian Churches (for example, Roman Catholics or Protestants, that were dominant in Germany in the period of writing this book), of course. In fact, during all his life, except for his early childhood when he wanted to become a priest when he grew up, as he says³, he used to use Christianity as a way of achieving political goals and one segment of his political happenings. One thing that should be mentioned, and analysed deeper, is that Hitler wanted to copy the way of organizing the early Christian Church to the organization that he is going to found during the 1920s, that is to say, in NSDAP, from his engaging in a political scene of Germany to the time when he got the ultimate leading position. So, Adolf Hitler used to use several millenniums old messiah ideas very skillfully. In fact, he did not use this idea in terms of religion, but in the term that is used in Judaism, that is to say, in terms of waiting for the Messiah that will win Romans and found the Empire that will last for thousand years. Millennialism often presents a strong political base, as history shows. It was

² This very controversial book is also one of the most sold books in the world. The only edition in the German language of “My struggle” that is published after December 31, 2015, that is to say, after it had become royalty-free, is sold in 85,000 copies. One part of people support attitudes of unecessity of publishing this book, but, if we keep in mind the economical benefits for publishers, it should not be wondering why publishers still print this book in many languages. According to some documents, Adolf Hitler had earned more than 150 million US dollars only from publishing his book.

³ I must mention that young Adolf Hitler, who was baptized in the Roman Catholic Church, used to participate in worshippings in his local church in the town where he used to live with his parents, but, he was suspended from it because of smoking, according to some researchers.

accepted by Germans after losing WWI because of the wish to set them free from the embarrassing position of war-losers and to fulfil their dream of the Third Reich.

The organisation of NSDAP, as I have already mentioned, is plagiarized, because it had fully copied the organization of the early Christian church. In the centre, there is a person who is presented as the Savior, the Messiah. His closest cooperators have got to spread the ideas, like apostles. Also, there are a lot of things with some symbols and deeper meaning– for this work, I have to mention that there is a book that can be compared with the Holy Bible. In Germany, Hitler's "My struggle" in one moment became more dominant than Bible (Bald, 2014, pp. 335–336)

"My struggle", if we analyse it as a political pamphlet and as a 'religic', or better worded 'holly' book at the same time, is a book of one pseudo-religion that had been developing which showed a tendency to switch on new instead of old. But, compared with a Christian idea of switching from an old men's life full of sins into a new life full of belief in God and Savior, in national socialism, we have got one different concept. Hitler many times tried to connect the current geopolitical situation and weakness of the German state after and before WWI with fights between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Sometimes, even some random happenings in a past, like during the governance of the Habsburg monarchy connects with a slovenisation of Austria through a negative influence of Czech Roman catholic priest and similar. This happening, he concludes that it happened because of the weakness of the German people. But, this recognition of German weakness and German escaping from problems is not entirely his original thought. Hitler accepts ideas from persons like Georg von Schoenerer (1842–1921) about the realisation of goals presented in the slogan „Los von Rom Bewegung!“ ("Away from Rome!"). Influenced by this and similar ideas, Hitler said: "In the ethnic clean German municipalities, Czechs priests are brought and they put Czechs interests above interests of the Catholic church and presents the tool for degermanification process!" (Hitler, 2001, p. 77). A little bit later, more precise in 1938, by the annexation of the Sudetes area, Hitler 'solved' the problem of Czechoslovakia on his way, as he had previously

described in “My struggle”.

According to the attitudes exposed in the book “My struggle”, Adolf Hitler equally attacks Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in Germany. As we know, he puts nationality as a dominant question. The difference with Christianity, which rejects the importance of nationality because of problems that had appeared even in the period of the apostles,⁴ Hitler in his ideas wanted to use priests, especially priests in the upper hierarchy, as a tool for increasing German national feelings, as it mentions Radomir Smiljanić in his translation of “My struggle”.

If we analyse chronologically Hitler’s attitude towards religion, we can see that, at the beginning of his political campaign, he declares himself a Christian, and then he uses some of the elements from religion in his political engagement, for example, celibacy of Roman Catholic priests. As he says, celibacy is “a source of incredible huge strength, which lies in this old institution (church – A/N). Because this huge army of priests is constantly increasing by people from the lowest social levels, Church does not only keep the instinctive relation with people but also provides itself huge enough sum of energy and labour force, that will exist only in the wide range of people” (Hitler, 2001, p. 281). But, we should not exclude the fact that “My struggle” was written in the early phase of Hitler’s political engagement. In the upcoming period, some elements will have been changed. Also, some segments of this pamphlet became the reason for the attack on some groups of German society with the aim of their conversion into ideas of national socialism or making them extinct. Because of this, Hitler’s relationship with Christianity has also got some kind of “development”. For example, at one meeting in 1928 in Passau, Hitler gave a speech where he said: “We won’t tolerate any person in our organisation who attacks ideas of Christianity... In fact, our movement is Christian.”⁵ The reason for saying something like this was that 95% of Germans in the 1930s were

⁴ See: Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 15.

⁵ See: Vasilik, V. (2015, May 15). *Zver iz bezdny* [Beast from the abyss]. Pravoslavie. <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/79018.html> (05.08.2021).

Christians. In that surrounding, supporting the idea of atheism would lead directly to political failure. But, at the time, while Hitler's movement was becoming more and more popular, the relationship between protestants and Catholics was changed. Well, the relation was often determined by the attitude of religic organisations towards a political ideology that was promoted by Adolf Hitler and his party. As a classical example, we can use Johann Heinrich Ludwig Müller (1883–1945) who will get closer to Hitler and become the first man in the movement „German Christians“, and then, on September 27th 1933, the “episcope” of German evangelistic church (Baranovski, 1980, pp. 299–300; Brovko, 2012, pp. 86–95). He will work in this position for only two years because he will give fire under the pressure of the Roman Catholic church and other protestant religic communities. After that, he enrolled himself in Gestapo. He committed suicide on July 31st 1945 in Berlin.

On the other hand, Hitler's relation with other confessions in “My struggle” is generally in the range between disrespect and total hate on one side (on this level is Judaism) up to weak liking and accepting (on this level were cults and pagan beliefs of German people before accepting the Christianity). In fact, the idea of domination, the idea of the Aryan race above other people, the idea that will have become the leading thought for Hitler is also mentioned in “My struggle”. “We, the Aryans, can imagine the state as an organism of one nation that does not only insecure keeping alive this nation, but also the further development of its moral and other possibilities that lead to the ultimate freedom” (Hitler, 2001, p. 257). Those attitudes were ideal for developing the idea of destroying or transforming the Christianity into some new shape, or into “Christian-Identity-Bewegung”, as it was promoted by Alfred Ernst Rosenberg (1893–1946) making, even from today's perspective, some incredible mixture of different messiah ideas, then attitudes shown in Upanishads, ideas of Zoroastrianism and ideas of John Eckhart, widely known as Meister Eckhart (1260–1328). Nothing less important person in creating a “nazi Christianity” initiated by Hitler's attitudes from “My struggle” and about race dominance, which presented the basis of national socialism during the 1930s, is Karl Maria Wiligut (1866–1946), who had the freedom of creating and publicly exposing the most

fabulous religic ideas specific for short time lasting Third Reich, thanks to the influence he had on Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945), which still waits for some further research.

“The Jew had achieved his goal – Catholics and Protestants are having a religious war, while the deadly enemy of the Aryan men and whole Christianity is laughing to us” (Hitler, 2001, p. 358). In this sentence, we can probably find the whole answer to the “religic question”, not only in “My struggle”, but also in his pathological hate for Jews. Many interesting pieces of research about this the general political situation in Germany after the Great War. It is unnecessary to talk about s are published.⁶ An interesting thing about this topic is that Hitler often used Judaism consider equal to marxism, which is to say, one pseudoreligion that was not only spread in the USSR but also all around Germany and was one of the most important political elements in this state when “My struggle” was being written. It is obvious that Hitler was afraid of the bolshevisation of Germany. This bolshevisation, as he was thinking, is the direct consequence of the joining of Jewish money in the process of destroying everything german, and before all, german identity (Hitler, 2001, p. 398). Those and similar constatations were easy to understand and popular among a wide range of people. As the time will show, Hitler included in his political programme one sentence that Jewish were yelling to Pontius Pilate: „His blood on us and our children!” (Mt. 27: 25). Hitler easily manipulated the feelings of people that were not taught enough with the learnings of Christianity, thanks to characterizing the Jews as guilty of the internal crisis of the German people. For many Germans, especially after the Great War, the idea of revanchism and fighting with someone who is guilty of their problems was very interesting. In his political programme, Hitler provided that possibility and people, together with other promises, accepted it very easily.

⁶ I am going to recommend some of the recent papers on the Russian language about the evolution of Hitler's relation towards Jews and creating something which is today named as “Final Solution”: Palamarčuk, E. A. (2014). Антиеврейская политика в нацистской Германии в освещении „Нью-Йорк Таймс” за 1933 год. [Anti-Jewish Politics in Nazi Germany in New York

Conclusion

The book "My struggle" should be considered a political pamphlet that was written with the aim to popularise the national socialistic movement in Germany during the hard years after the Great War. When the ideas of this book are deeply analysed, in the content of this pamphlet, the tendency for getting governance is easily noticed. The ideas that Hitler writes down in "My struggle" are not original, of course. In the end, Hitler is actually a plagiarist that easily promises things that a wide range of people in Germany wish during the huge catastrophe that had occurred after WWI, as we can see from his book. The fact that „My struggle“ was published during the period of Hitler's early political engagement, and at that time, German society was still carrying some Christian ethical elements, so Hitler had to present himself as a Christian.⁷ Later, as Hitler's governance was becoming stronger, the change of relation to the traditional religions occurred and the idea of creating some new religion where the central god would be Germania, according to Max Domarus (Domarus, 2007, 21), was intensively being realised. But, when we talk about Hitler, we cannot be completely sure whether he was an atheist or not. His religiosity is actually the only religiosity of a politician, which is determined by a bigotry and increasing the reputation. Also, his religiosity and compilation of different religions and beliefs, usually pagan, also exist because of fulfilling his political ambition (Bullock, 1991, 298). „My struggle“, despite modern attitudes about publishing this book, presents a very interesting book for that one who wants to analyse some events about Hitler's rise on

Times Coverage, 1933], *Vestnik Surgutskog gosudarstvenhogo pedagogičeskogo universiteta*, 176–187; Hderu K. J. (2017). *Evrei v Germanii: zaroždenie i razvitie idej antisemitizma* [Jews in Germany: the origin and development of the ideas of anti-Semitism]. *Vestnik Rossijskogo universiteta družby narodov*, 4, pp. 331–340; Korotkij G. A. (2017). *Gitler, intellektualy i massy* [Hitler, intellectuals and the masses]. *Filosofija i kul'tura*, 6, 56–68...

⁷ Let's mention that Hitler after he got the governance, organised some religious sections among the Nazi Party that had a duty to fight against atheism and the fact that soldiers on their waist belts had a sign „Gott mit uns“, so those facts are proof that religion and personal life of the soldiers had some importance in that society, probably because of the influence of the priest PhD Bernard Stempfle (1882–1934), close Hitler's cooperant from the beginning of his political career.

the German political scene from today's perspective. Compared with German communists who were rising up against religion, as their idols from USSR were doing, Hitler actually balanced his attitude towards religion and skillfully used it as an element for getting and keeping governance. Analysing the relationship of higher church hierarchy with a wide range of German people and their detachment from the poorest part of German society is very important during some deeper research about Hitler's attitude towards religion in his early political life. Hitler's noticing of this and similar problems in "My struggle", combined with good rhetorical skills, once again presents that he knew what people in that time want to hear (Vermisev, 2014, p. 232). In that way, the opinion on religion in "My struggle" and on mass events was changed according to public rating. A delicate personal opinion on religion and generally on beliefs during the 1920s in Germany influenced the final version of "My struggle".⁸ The work of PhD Bernhard Stempfle and Elsa Bruckmann (1865–1946) on creating Hitler's book was focused on political skilful determining the author's opinion on Christianity and Judaism.

⁸ The papers of Konrad Heiden (1901–1966) can help a lot about this topic, but they still have not been published in Serbian.

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Stavovi Adolfa Hitlera prema religiji u delu „Moja borba” („Mein Kampf“)

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Sažetak

„Moja borba” („Mein Kampf”), delo čiji je autor Adolf Hitler, kada je reč o odnosu religije i politike, predstavlja nedovoljno proučen izvor za detaljnije razumevanje odnosa nacionalsocijalizma prema različitim religijama koje su egzistirale unutar nemačkog naroda u vremenu nastanka i nestanka jednog od najzloglasnijih političkih pokreta u istoriji čovečanstva. Cilj ovog rada je da kroz analizu teksta knjige „Moja borba”, to jest onih njenih delova koji se konkretno dotiču religije i religioznosti, kroz zaista najosnovnije napomene ove inače kompleksne teme, približim savremenom čitaocu ideje kojima se Adolf Hitler rukovodio u procesu umanjavanja, a neretko i odstranjenja, religioznog faktora u svakodnevici života Nemaca u periodu njegovih početaka angažovanja na političkoj sceni, pa sve do početka Drugog svetskog rata i započinjanja projekta rešavanja jevrejskog pitanja na prostorima koji su bili osvojeni od strane nemačke armade. Kompleksnost ove teme, između ostalog, projavljuje se i kroz činjenicu sukoba ne samo na političkoj, nego i na čitavoj društvenoj sceni Nemačke u vremenu neposredno nakon poraza 1918. godine. Društvo u onom obliku kakvo je bilo društvo u Nemačkoj nakon Prvog svetskog rata, prevashodno njegov materijalni položaj u koji je dovedeno posle 1919. godine, politička nestabilnost i čitav niz drugih destabilizujućih komponenti, pronalazilo je određenu utehu i osećaj

sigurnosti u religiji, bilo rimokatolicizmu, protestantizmu ili judaizmu. Za nacionalsocijaliste, koji su jačali zahvaljujući greškama drugih političkih organizacija, ali i nesumnjivo dobrom organizovanošću i istrajnošću svojih lidera, a pre svih Adolfa Hitlera, svaki oblik religioznosti koji se nije slagao sa idejama nacionalsocijalizma, pre svega se posmatrao kao politički neprijatelj. Iz današnje perspektive mi slobodno možemo reći da je Nemačka u periodu između dva svetska rata bila i te kako interesantan prostor za proučavanje pitanja odnosa religije i politike, pogotovo imajući u vidu okolnost da je upravo kroz delo „Moja borba“, sam Adolf Hitler postavio osnovne postulate odnosa prema religiji i potrebi njenog uništavanja ukoliko ne koristi političkim ciljevima.

Ključne reči: Nemačka, nacionalsocijalizam, Adolf Hitler, religija, politika