

obedience they practised, but their hearts were right, and those were the hearts of your comrades. Many believed it was a matter of their homeland; they did not know it was only a matter of the Nazi party. Many others, however, did not believe this at all. They knew they were dealing with an unjust cause, and they hated him who sent them. But they thought it a soldier's duty to obey, so they obeyed.

'In the storm of battle they were so utterly alone and abandoned that for them death was a release. They accepted death as they had accepted a share in the guilt. Their graves number in the hundreds of thousands. We should bow before them, before them and their mothers, who had to let them go, knowing the while that they cursed those who sent them. Much has been suffered, on this earth, that few know about; it has been suffered because of error, of weakness, and of obedience. Lost blood, precious blood, irreplaceable blood, but which one of us will dare to be a judge over those who erred?'

We can and should think of them with genuine esteem and love, and yet we can and should keep in mind that the objective 'error'—probably in most cases without subjective guilt—was on their side, and not on the side of those who for the sake of God and of their consciences refused military service. To these latter is due the greater respect!

II

A PRIEST WHO STOOD UP TO HITLER¹

MAX PRIBILLA, S.J.

THE book *Franz Reinisch, ein Martyrer unserer Zeit*, by Heinrich Kreuzberg, published recently in Germany, contains a remarkable tale. It depicts vividly and impressively the life and suffering of the Pallottine priest Franz Reinisch, who was condemned to death on July 7th, 1942, and executed in Brandenburg on August 21st, 1942, at the age of thirty-nine. Called up for army service, he had firmly refused, for reasons of conscience, to take the oath of allegiance to Hitler. He knew, of course, that many others in the same situation thought and acted differently. That gave him reason

¹ Translated by John Doebele from *Stimmen der Zeit* (March 1953).

for reflection. But with all consideration and prayer, he remained ever more confirmed in the decision to make a visible protest against the unjust government then in power and its 'leader' by refusing to take the military oath. He was unwilling to swear fidelity. Moreover, as a native Austrian, he viewed Hitler as a usurper in that country, and denied all duty of obedience to him.

Once resolved, he kept clearly to his path. He never attempted to conceal or disguise his true conviction through pretence. He was one of the few who frankly and openly acknowledged themselves as opponents of the criminal Nazi system, the system that persecuted the Church. Indeed, he reaffirmed his antagonism even in court, at a time when he could almost certainly expect the death sentence. He accepted all the hardships of imprisonment and the sentence with manly calm, without moaning and with firm trust in God, and thus encouraged his friends to bear the great suffering in like spirit.

It is worth special mention that he courageously took the momentous resolution upon his own conscience rather than burden anyone else with it. No one must imagine that such a sacrifice, with all its consequences, is easy; it is far more difficult than the death of the soldier who falls in battle.

Alone and forsaken, the unpretentious Pallottine father, with his child-like piety, placed his head on the block for the sake of his conscience, in order not to serve a corrupt system. This priest, through the voluntary offering of his life, put to shame the all too many of us who, because of their insight and position, were able and called upon far sooner than he to resistance against the unjust power then ruling.

The objection that this was an 'unnecessary martyrdom', that the prudent, the anxious, and the overly clever might raise is in this case out of place. There were of course morally acceptable ways open to Franz Reinisch that he might have used to avoid his hard fate. He knew them himself and they were recommended to him by others. He had not sought out the conflict that was confronting him, but he was unwilling to evade it. He wished to challenge it honestly, and in that way to set the example of a firm Christian character in a world of weak compliance.

His conscience would have been erroneous only if he had said that his own action was the duty of all. But he did not say that. His case 'was exceptional'—we would like to add 'unfortunately'!

In times of tyrannic despotism, there will doubtless always be a division of minds. One group, the great majority, will decide for maximum adaptation, in order to protect themselves and their relatives from harm, or 'to prevent a worse evil'. The other group—made up of the few—will see this adaptation as the worst choice, and decide from the very beginning on the sharpest conceivable resistance, risking their lives. There must be people in each nation who, especially in the fateful hours, do not think first of their own welfare, but intervene courageously for justice in public life. And without external success, even in their failure, they establish a great example. This applies especially to the Germans, for their character training is the weakest part of their education.

A brief but important section of a review of this book is due to Fr Kreutzburg, chaplain for Fr Reinisch and also his biographer. Under the conditions of Hitler's Germany, he had to have special prudence, in order on the one hand not to endanger all spiritual ministrations in the armed services, and on the other hand, as a priest to render loving aid to the prisoner.

His concluding verdict is characteristic, and correct beyond all doubt: 'It was the great disaster of our nation that there were lacking people who, upright and unconcerned about the consequences, followed their consciences.' In this matter his book is very valuable for the education of our nation.



THE APOSTLE AS POET

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

THE true apostle must be a poet, and an apostle who is not a poet is no true apostle.

In order to understand this claim, we may start by describing the would-be apostle who is no apostle. A Christian sets out to be an apostle for Christ. He joins a Catholic Action group or enters an Order such as that of the Dominicans who specialize in preaching. He begins to prepare himself for the work by reaching down from the shelves of the library large tomes of Christian doctrine and theology. He learns all that the Church commonly