Letter from Hitler to Fr. Magnus Gött (“Beneficiary”: a priest who is beneficiary of an endowed parish), March 2, 1927

Source: Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte

Translation from the original German:

Highly esteemed Herr Beneficiary!

Please accept my sincere thanks for your kind recent letter. Unfortunately it has a series of points I cannot leave uncontradicted. Herr Beneficiary, you complain that our program is too “meager” as concerns religion. Along these lines, I am of a different view. I live in the apprehension that our political parties have gotten themselves too mixed up in matters of religion, that these matters thereby keep getting politicized and thus inevitably end up in a domain where they eventually come to grief. Because, if you complain about the defenselessness of today’s liberal State in the face of evil, then I must ask you not to forget that participating materially in these evils today are the very same parties that have written a religious motif on their political banners. Just as a bitter war against nationalist views has been waged for the past 8 years with the help of the Catholic Center Party, it could have been waged that bitterly against the vicious abuses of our contemporary life, if they had earnestly wanted to do so. All of that has nothing to do with the liberal State, but only with the singular fact that the political life of this era has been filled with the worst elements, who, to be sure, embellish their role with religious catch-words to claim that their program is really serving the interests of particular denominations. The result of this politicization of religion, my most esteemed Herr Beneficiary, is pernicious. The teachings of Christ have not gained any new interior adherents through this, but have actually lost millions who do not like it when religious ideals are made to serve the role of political stirrups for pathetic spirits.

Moreover, esteemed Herr Beneficiary, might I make you aware that just as in Germany in the year 1918 politically oriented Catholicism played a decisive role in the Revolution and thereby cooperated in tearing down the final supports of the antiliberal authoritarian state of that time, so also during the French Revolution, politically active Catholicism of that time cooperated in the setting aside of the monarchy. Frankly, as the Jacobins were then celebrating their final orgies, they worked together exactly as the Center Party did in early 1919 as the German Revolution, enabled by help from the Center Party, suddenly began to brandish the torch of Bolshevism. I consider it always and in all circumstances to be a misfortune, most esteemed Herr Beneficiary, whenever religion, no matter in what form, is amalgamated with political parties. Exactly as I consider it also to be a misfortune whenever it occupies a field that belongs to the hard sciences and then eventually ends up in conflict with them. I am also most deeply interiorly convinced that this was neither the wish nor the will of Christ himself, nor that any sort of blessing for our religion would arise from it. The more that realpolitik, which has to protect our early life in this world, is kept far removed from religious faith, which should prepare us for moral-ethical conduct and worthiness for a life after death, the less will the religious idea suffer harm from liberal freedom in politics, science and culture. For the more these phenomena then flee, so much the more will faith itself come into play as a stable pole. Then faith would be able to exercise one day those mild influences that would justify us in looking back upon antiquity as a barbaric era and the Christian epochs by comparison as enlightened periods of human high-mindedness. Thus you speak today, Herr Beneficiary, of gladiator combats and beast-baitings and must yet admit, however, that the centuries that came after the collapse of Rome were morally even more barbaric, that the 68 torches of Nero were followed by 100,000 burnings at the stake, the Christian martyrs by millions who were persecuted, the gladiator combats by often no less awful tortures, the beast-baitings by man-hunts of Azteks and Incas, the slavery of antiquity by those taken as slaves in the Middle Ages, planning millions of negroes on the American continent, and all that in times in which there as no liberal State, but rather the Church itself as the highest political power player in the picture. You will not want me, Herr Beneficiary, to . . .

Finally, Herr Beneficiary, you fear that our crusade will become a movement without a cross and will eventually lead to the same criminal extremity as Marxism. When Christianity once began its crusade, the purpose of that struggle was hopefully not the destruction of Rome as a political institution, because otherwise the Christian-persecutions would have immediately found an entirely unique enlightenment. Christ himself, in any case, did not intend that or will it. According to his words, the struggle was not waged under the sign of the cross for a kingdom on this earth, but rather for one beyond and really above it. Christianity waged a religious crusade against paganism in all its unhealthy outgrowths and manifestations. National Socialism wages a political crusade against the present form of the State, against the contamination of our race, the undermining of our Volk, the annihilation of the Fatherland, etc. Thus it is an eminently political struggle, and the cross under which we conduct this struggle is our swastika. And therefore just as you, Herr Beneficiary, are convinced that the German Volk can never come to success other than through Christ, so I am convinced that it can never come to health and strength other than through the swastika. And I can only long for the day when the German Volk stands on this earth strong, unshakable, and united, with the swastika on the left or sword-side as the banner of the struggle in this world, but the cross of the Lord on the right as the symbol of faith and the struggle for the eternal.

. . .

. . . I do not need to assure you that I would be glad if you, Herr Beneficiary, pursued our work further, and that I am really sorry that you are not able or allowed to take part in it more positively. The process that occasioned this prohibition by your high Church authorities after the November 1923 [putsch], I myself deplore to the utmost. The attacks that were advanced then, against the Lord Cardinal especially, occurred neither with my knowledge nor my approval. It is just that blood had been spilled, and in the terrible excitement there were words that came out that surely never would have been spoken in calmer times and with sober deliberation. It makes me unendingly sorry, because I lost thereby many co-workers who had shown by their pastoral activity, until then, that they possessed an upright warm heart for our Volk, and who had offered me the surest guarantee that in our movement no tendency would ever take hold that would make it difficult for adherents of any particular denomination to belong to our Party. For my desire was always that in the ranks of the National Socialist German Workers Party, the most faithfull Protestant can sit next to the most faithful Catholic, and vice versa, without ever experiencing the slightest conflict of conscience.