THE PEN CONFRONTS THE SWORD

EXILED GERMAN SCHOLARS CHALLENGE NAZISM

AVIHU ZAKAI
The Pen Confronts the Sword:
Exiled German Scholars Challenge Nazism

_The Pen Confronts the Sword_ draws attention, for the first time, to the shared motives behind four remarkable texts, all begun in 1942 by exiled scholars confronting Nazi barbarism. The list is impressive: Thomas Mann, _Doctor Faustus_ (1947); Ernst Cassirer, _The Myth of the State_ (1946); Erich Auerbach, _Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature_ (1946); and Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, _Dialectic of Enlightenment_ (1944). Each identified a specific danger in Nazi ideology and mustered new theories, new approaches, new sources, and a new energy to combat it. While scholars have examined these authors’ individual legacies, no one has drawn them together for comparative analysis nor isolated this watershed moment in their careers. The sense of urgency in their works demands attention. They all raised their pen against Nazi barbarism, believing exactly like Sir William Blackstone, the English jurist and judge, who wrote in his _Commentaries on the Laws of England_ (1765-1769), “scribere est agere” (to write is to act).

_The Pen Confronts the Sword_ asks readers to attend far more sensitively to the shared motives running under the remarkable texts I examine. Trauma always scars the texts it leaves behind, and unprecedented political trauma scars them deeply – however skillfully their authors bury the scars beneath layers of erudition. Deeply scarred by unprecedented political trauma, they wrote a defense of western civilization that would outlast the “thousand-year Reich.”