

Painting of Jesus Next to Hitler in German Church Stirs Controversy

“Halo Hitler!” screams the headline in London’s *Daily Mail* tabloid newspaper.

People in Germany and beyond are outraged at the revelation of a painting in a Bavarian church that shows someone who looks very much like Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler standing next to Jesus.

The painting was first unveiled in 1939, when Hitler arguably was at the height of his power. Germany invaded Poland that year but did not begin to suffer military setbacks until 1941 when the Allies were on the march in North Africa and Hitler foolishly invaded the much stronger Soviet Union.

But now, cleaning of the painting in the Christus Church in the northern Bavarian city of Hof clearly shows the image of a man who has an uncanny likeness to the former Fuehrer standing next to Christ.

“There is the toothbrush moustache, the hair parted on one side and the staring, maniacal eyes which made him a dark Messiah to so many Germans,” according to the *Daily Mail*’s account.

Evangelical pastor Martin Goelkel, who recently left after eight years at the church, claims the likeness is coincidental. But even if it is meant to represent Hitler, he argues that the painting shows him in a subservient relationship to Christ.

“This is no Hitler homage, in my eyes,” Goelkel told the British newspaper. “We find people asking something of Christ,

there is someone kneeling before him. God resists the proud, but the humble He gives His grace to."

Hitler is described in the newspaper account as standing "imperiously at the side, alone, wearing boots, his robe somehow militaristic. Haughty and arrogant."

Goelkel insists that in all the years that the church has been open for worship no one has objected to the Hitler painting near the altar. Now, however, some members of the church are speaking up—calling for the Hitler-like image to be erased from the painting.

"It is not right under any circumstances that the biggest mass killer in history should be featured in a painting in a house of Christian worship," one parishioner said in an interview on Radio Bavaria.

Goelkel, however, told the *Daily Mail* that he thought the painting should not be removed. "This image is a central challenge to Nazism: Christ is in the middle. The powerful can stand idle as much as they want," he argued.