

Gentile Resistance to the National Socialist Regime: A Selection of Cases

Compiled and Edited by Robert F. Hogg

Introductory Note

The National Socialists came to power in Germany essentially by democratic and legal means in 1933, even though the republic and the rule of law had become deeply flawed in Germany by 1930. The Nazi regime and Adolf Hitler were highly popular with the German people, except among those relatively few people who had political, religious, or philosophical reasons for rejecting Nazism. Hitler himself remained popular even when the tide of war began to turn against Germany—when ordinary Germans began to suffer from privation and extensive bombing, even while ever larger numbers of Germans were dying on far-flung battlefields.

There were some Germans who resisted the Nazis, either passively or actively—by refusing to serve in the armed forces during the war, by helping Jews and other persecuted groups, as well as by attempting to assassinate Hitler and overthrow the regime. Many of these German resisters were imprisoned and executed for resisting the regime. However, it must be pointed out that all the conspiracies failed, and that very few of these resistance efforts had a significant impact on the Nazi regime or the crimes it was perpetrating across Europe, including the "Final Solution." Ultimately, the Nazis were only destroyed and the Holocaust was only stopped by military force when the Allies (Britain, the US, the Soviet Union, the Free French, and others) liberated Europe from Nazi occupation and conquered Germany itself in 1945.

Note: See questions after each document

A. The Barmen Declaration

The National Socialist regime attempted to take over and "Nazify" every major institution in German society, including the churches. Pro-Nazi church leaders calling themselves "German Christians" ("Deutsche Christen") set up a national administrative structure for Protestant churches throughout Germany in 1933. Many other church leaders rejected these attempts to introduce Nazi ideology into religion and to spread totalitarian control throughout society. A group of church leaders calling itself the "Confessing Church" ("Bekennende Kirche") met in the town of Barmen in 1934 and produced a protest against Nazi policies. This statement is called the Barmen Declaration. The protest focuses on the Nazi takeover of the churches but also offers clear and forceful criticism of Nazi ideology and the Führer principle of a charismatic dictator whom people must obey unquestioningly.

The primary author of the Barmen Declaration was the Reformed pastor and theologian Karl Barth. Other significant members of the Confessing Church movement included the Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller and the Lutheran pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

I. An Appeal to the Protestant [Protestant] Congregations and Christians in Germany

8.01 The Confessional Synod of the German Protestant Church met in Barmen on 29 to 31 May 1934. Here representatives from all the German Confessional Churches met with one accord in a confession of the one Lord of the one, holy, apostolic Church. In fidelity to their Confession of Faith, members of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches sought a common message for the need and temptation of the Church in our day.... Their intention was to withstand in faith and unanimity the destruction of the Confession of Faith, and thus of the Protestant Church in Germany. In opposition to attempts to establish the unity of the German Protestant Church by means of false doctrine, by the use of force and insincere practices [by the Nazi regime and the so-called "German Christians" who have taken over many Protestant churches]....

8.04 Test the spirits whether they are of God!If you find that we are speaking contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to us! But if you find that we are taking our stand upon Scripture, then let no fear or temptation keep you from treading with us the path of faith and obedience to the Word of God....

II. Theological Declaration Concerning the Present Situation of the German Protestant Church

8.07 We publicly declare before all Protestant Churches in Germany that what they hold in common in this Confession is grievously imperiled.... It is threatened by the teaching methods and actions of the ruling Church party of the [pro-Nazi] "German Christians" and of the Church administration carried on by them. These have become more and more apparent.... This threat consists in the fact that the theological basis, in which the German Protestant Church is united, has been continually and systematically thwarted and rendered ineffective by alien principles [Nazi ideology]....

8.08 As members of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches we may and must speak with one voice in this matter today. ...[W]e may not keep silent, since we believe that we have been given a common message to utter in a time of common need and temptation....

8.09 In view of the errors of the [pro-Nazi] "German Christians" of the present Reich Church government which are devastating the Church...we confess the following truths from Scripture....

8.11 Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

8.12 We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation [such as Adolf Hitler as Führer and the ideology of the Nazi Party].

8.14 As Jesus Christ is God's assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so, in the same way and with the same seriousness He is also God's mighty claim upon our whole life. Through Him befalls us a joyful deliverance from the godless shackles of this world for a free, grateful service to His creatures.

8.15 We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords [such as Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party]....

8.18 We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions [such as Nazism].

8.19 "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant." (Matthew 20:25-26.)

8.21 We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church, apart from this ministry, could and were permitted to give itself, or allow to be given to it, special leaders vested with ruling powers [such as Adolf Hitler and the so-called "German Christians" who have taken over many Protestant churches].

8.22 "Fear God. Honor the emperor." (1 Peter 2:17.) Scripture tells us that, in the as-yet-unredeemed world in which the Church also exists, the State has by divine appointment the task of providing for justice and peace. [It fulfills this task] by means of the threat and exercise of force, according to the measure of human judgment and human ability....

8.23 [But] we reject the false doctrine, as though the State, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life [as the Nazi regime now wants to do]....

8.24 We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church...should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the status of the State, thus becoming an apparatus of the State [as is happening under the Nazi regime].

8.27 We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church in human arrogance could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans [such as Nazi ideology].

From: *The Church's Confession under Hitler* by Arthur C. Cochrane. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962, pp. 237-242.

Questions

1. What was the purpose of the meeting (Confessional Synod) according to the declaration?

2. What threats do the authors of the declaration see in Germany?

3. What false doctrines do they reject?

B. Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer against the National Socialist Regime

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was born in Breslau into a highly-educated and talented middle-class family. Against his family's wishes, he chose to become a Lutheran pastor and theologian. He studied in Germany and the US. He was a prominent member of the Confessing Church movement that opposed the Nazi takeover of the Protestant churches. He spent part of the early Nazi period in Sweden and the US but became convinced that he should return to Germany to serve as a pastor, teacher, and resister. He wrote against the Nazi regime and worked in illegal underground anti-Nazi churches. He joined the German intelligence service known as the Abwehr in order to become a "double agent" supplying information to the Allies. He eventually rejected his earlier pacifist beliefs and became connected to a conspiracy attempting to overthrow the Nazi regime (the July 20th Plot). Bonhoeffer was arrested by the Gestapo (Secret State Police) in 1944 and spent the last years of the war in prisons and concentration camps. He was executed at the Flossenbürg concentration camp on 9 April 1945, a few weeks before the end of the war.

Bonhoeffer is often regarded today as one of the most significant opponents of the Nazi regime and, in the view of many people, a martyr. His ideas and his example have become very influential.

At the moment when the terrible persecution of the Jewish population in Germany and in other Central European countries has come to a violent climax, it is our duty to remind ourselves of the stand which we have taken...against anti-Semitism in all its forms.

We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds: we have been drenched by many storms; we have learnt the arts of equivocation and pretence; experience has made us suspicious of others and kept us from being truthful and open; intolerable conflicts have worn us down and even made us cynical. Are we still of any use? What we shall need is not geniuses, or cynics, or misanthropes, or clever tacticians, but plain, honest, straightforward men. Will our inward power of resistance be strong enough, and our honesty with ourselves remorseless enough, for us to find our way back to simplicity and straightforwardness?

I have come to the conclusion that I made a mistake in coming to America. . . I shall have no right to take part in the restoration of Christian life in Germany after the war unless I share the trials of this time with my people.

Civil courage, in fact, can grow only out of the free responsibility of free men. Only now are the Germans beginning to discover the meaning of free responsibility. It depends on a God who demands responsible action in a bold venture of faith....

Questions

4. How does Bonhoeffer critique the German people (including himself)?

5. What is Bonhoeffer's advice for himself and for the German people in this time of crisis?

C. Archbishop Clemens Graf von Galen Protests against Nazi Forced Euthanasia Programs

Clemens Graf von Galen (1878-1946) was the Roman Catholic archbishop of Münster in northwestern Germany during the National Socialist period. He came from an old aristocratic family. In contrast to most of his fellow Catholic bishops in Germany, he protested and resisted in various ways from the beginning of the Nazi regime. In 1941, he gave three sermons explicitly denouncing Nazi policies. The following sermon,

the most famous and influential of the three, protests against the ongoing Nazi "euthanasia" programs in which the mentally and physically disabled, the mentally ill, and other German Gentiles were secretly being killed at hospitals throughout the country because the regime and its medical establishment deemed them "life unworthy of life" ("lebensunwertes Leben"). The text of the sermon was later smuggled out of Germany and printed on leaflets dropped over the country by British aircraft.

Along with other protests from both Catholics and Protestants, von Galen's actions were instrumental in causing the Nazis to cancel the largest of their killing programs, Action T-4. They did continue euthanizing people but on a smaller scale and with greater attempts at secrecy. High-ranking Nazis considered arresting and executing von Galen but decided to wait until after Nazi Germany had won the war. Archbishop von Galen was named a cardinal before his death and has now been made a saint of the Roman Catholic Church.

...[F]or some months we have been hearing reports that, on the orders of Berlin, patients from mental asylums...are being compulsorily removed. Then, after a short time, the relatives are...informed that the corpse has been cremated and the ashes can be delivered. There is a general suspicion verging on certainty, that these numerous unexpected deaths of mentally ill people do not occur of themselves but are deliberately brought about, that the doctrine is being followed, according to which one may destroy so-called "worthless life," that is, kill innocent people if one considers that their lives are of no further value for the nation and the state.

I am reliably informed that lists are also being drawn up in the asylums of the province of Westphalia as well of those patients who are to be taken away as so-called "unproductive national comrades" and shortly to be killed....

German men and women, section 211 of the Reich Penal Code is still valid. It states: "He who deliberately kills another person will be punished by death for murder if the killing is premeditated." However, I have been assured that the Reich Interior Ministry and the office of the Reich Doctors' Leader, Dr. Conti,¹ make no bones about the fact that in reality a large number of mentally ill people in Germany have been deliberately killed and more will be killed in the future.

The Penal Code states in section 139: "He who receives credible information concerning the intention to commit a crime against life and neglects to alert the authorities or the person who is threatened in time...will be punished."

When I learned of the intention to transport patients from Marienthal [an institution in the local area] in order to kill them, I brought a formal charge at the State Court in Münster and with the Police President in Münster by means of a registered letter.... I have received no news concerning intervention by the Prosecutor's Office or by the police...Thus we must assume that the poor helpless patients will soon be killed.

For what reason? Not because they have committed a crime worthy of death....but rather because, in the opinion of some department, on the testimony of some commission, they have become "worthless life"....

....We are not dealing with machines, horses and cows whose only function is to serve mankind, to produce goods for man. One may smash them, one may slaughter them as soon as they no longer fulfill this function. No, we are dealing with human beings, our fellow human beings, our brothers and sisters. With poor people, sick people, if you like, unproductive people.

But have they for that reason forfeited the right to life? Have you, have I the right to live only so long as we are productive, so long as we are recognized by others as productive?

If you establish and apply the principle that you can kill "unproductive" fellow human beings then woe betide us all when we become old and frail!If it is once accepted that people have the right to kill "unproductive" fellow humans—and even if initially it only affects the poor defenseless mentally ill—then as a matter of principle murder is permitted for all unproductive people, in other words for the incurably sick, the people who have become invalids through labor and war, for us all when we become old, frail and therefore unproductive.

Then, it is only necessary for some secret edict to order that the method developed for the mentally ill should be extended to other "unproductive" people.... Then none of our lives will be safe anymore. Some commission can put us on the list of the "unproductive," who in their opinion have become worthless life. And no police force will protect us and no court will investigate our murder....

Who will be able to trust his doctor anymore? He may report his patient as "unproductive" and receive instructions to kill him. It is impossible to imagine the degree of moral depravity, of general mistrust that would then spread even through families if this dreadful doctrine is tolerated, accepted and followed.

¹Leonardo Conti (1900-1945) was a medical doctor who joined the Nazi movement early on and later held important posts related to health policy in the Nazi regime. He was intimately involved in the Nazi "euthanasia" programs. After the war, he was arrested by the Allies but killed himself before he could be put on trial for his crimes.

Woe to mankind, woe to our German nation if God's Holy Commandment "Thou shalt not kill," which God proclaimed on Mount Sinai amidst thunder and lightning, which God our Creator inscribed in the conscience of mankind from the very beginning, is not only broken, but if this transgression is actually tolerated and permitted to go unpunished.

Questions

6. What did von Galen do after he heard of government plans to kill mental patients in his own area? What do you think of his action?

7. What arguments does von Galen use against these killings?

D. SOPADE: Resistance by the German Social Democratic Party

From the 1890s to 1933, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) was one of the largest political organizations in Germany. Although its ideology was officially Marxist, it rejected violent revolution and sought instead to work within parliamentary government to promote socialism. After the National Socialists came to power in early 1933, Social Democratic leaders began setting up a party organization outside the country. This came to be known as SOPADE (an acronym that translates as Social Democratic Party of Germany in Exile). The organization was first based in the Czech capital, Prague. Just before the Nazis took over Czechoslovakia, SOPADE moved to Paris. Just before the Nazis took over France, the organization moved to Britain and later the US. Among the key figures in the SOPADE organization were the theoretician and politician Rudolf Hilferding and the politician Otto Wels.

In 1934, SOPADE issued a declaration called the Prague Manifesto in which it outlined the principles of its struggle against Nazism; the tone is very revolutionary because SOPADE leaders felt that this was the only way to confront the Nazi regime (given that parliamentary democracy was now dead in Germany). The revolutionary goals in the Prague Manifesto were never accomplished, although social democrats continued to work against the regime. SOPADE maintained extensive contacts within Nazi Germany who reported on conditions there. The organization used this information to publish regular reports in Allied countries.

Excerpt from the Prague Manifesto of the Social Democratic Party of Germany in Exile, 1934

For a year now, the National Socialist dictatorship has been weighing down Germany and the world. The victory of the German counter-revolution has changed the character and the tasks of the German workers' movement. Servitude and lawlessness have been inflicted upon the German people in the completely fascist state. In revolutionary struggle, servitude is to be overcome by the right to freedom and lawlessness is to be overcome by socialist order—those are the tasks of the German workers movement.

We struggle against fascist barbarism and for the great and undying ideas of mankind. We are the bearers of the great historical developments since the overcoming of medieval subservience. We are the heirs of the undying inheritance of the Renaissance and of humanism, of the English Revolution [English Civil War] and the French Revolution. We do not want to live without freedom, and we will gain it: freedom without class dominance, freedom [that extends] to the removal of all exploitation and all domination of men over others. The victims' blood will not flow in vain. German workers, you have only the chains of your oppression to lose but the world of freedom and of socialism to win! German workers, unite in the revolutionary struggle to destroy the National Socialist dictatorship! Through freedom to socialism, through socialism to freedom! Long live revolutionary German Social Democracy! Long live the Internationale!²

² "The Internationale" can refer both to the most famous anthem of leftwing movements such as Social Democrats, Communists, and Anarchists. It can also refer to an international organization also known as the Comintern (Communist International or Third International), which sought to struggle "by all available means, including armed force, for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie and for the creation of an international Soviet republic as a transition stage to the complete abolition of the State." Dominated by Soviet Communists, the organization existed officially from 1919 to 1943.

Questions

8. In what ways does the manifesto put the fight against Nazism into a larger historical context?

9. What future ideal society does the document envision?

E. The White Rose Movement: Non-Violent Resistance in the University

The White Rose Movement was formed by students at the University of Munich to oppose the National Socialist regime through non-violent means. The organization produced anti-Nazi flyers that the members distributed around South Germany and Austria in 1942 and 1943. The core of the group consisted of students and one of their professors: Hans and Sophie Scholl, Alexander Schmorell, Christoph Probst, Willi Graf, and Prof. Kurt Huber. The members came from a variety of backgrounds: The Scholls were among the devout Protestants in the group, while others were devout Catholics; another member embraced Buddhist teachings and another adhered to the teachings of anthroposophy; others were secular. What they all shared was a moral commitment to oppose tyranny in general and Nazism in particular.

Hans and Sophie Scholl were caught distributing flyers at their university in February of 1943. They and others were arrested by the Gestapo (Secret State Police) and put on trial in the special court known as the Volksgerichtshof ("People's Court") under the infamous Judge Roland Freisler. The Scholls, Probst, Schmorell, Huber, and Graf were sentenced to death, and all were guillotined in 1943. Others associated with the group received prison sentences.

Many Germans, including students at the University of Munich had a negative view of the White Rose. Some students even celebrated the executions. Today, however, the White Rose has come to be widely regarded in Germany and beyond as an outstanding example of resistance to the Nazi regime. The movement has become the subject of many scholarly works as well as plays and films.

Excerpt from the Second Flyer Distributed by the White Rose Movement, 1942

....[A]s an example, we would like to briefly note that since the conquest of Poland, three hundred thousand Jews in that country have been murdered in the most bestial ways [by the Nazis]. Here we see the most terrible crime against human dignity, a crime incomparable to any in the whole of human history. The Jews are human too—whatever one's opinion of them—and this has been done to humans. Perhaps a person would say that the Jews warrant such a fate, a monstrous presumption. Even so, if someone were to say that, then what would that person think of the fact that the young people of the entire Polish nobility have been wiped out (may God grant that this were not yet the case!). How has this been done, one might ask? All boys between the ages of fifteen and twenty have been brought to Germany to work as slave laborers, all girls of the same age have been brought to [Nazi-occupied] Norway to SS brothels....

....[H]ere we are touching on a question that concerns us all very deeply and that everyone must reflect on: Why is the German people so apathetic in the face of these most terrible crimes unworthy of humans? Hardly anyone thinks about it. The fact is just accepted and set aside. And the German people once again falls into its dull, dim-witted sleep, giving these fascist criminals encouragement and opportunity to continue rampaging—and they do....

Questions

10. What news has been reported about the fate of Jews in Poland? About the fate of the Gentile Polish nobility?

11. What does the flyer say about the attitudes of the German people toward these kinds of reports?

Excerpts from the Sixth Flyer Distributed by the White Rose Movement, 1943

Fellow students! Fellow students!

Our people, shaken, face the loss of the men of Stalingrad.³ Three hundred and thirty thousand German men have been senselessly and irresponsibly driven to death and destruction by the inspired strategy of our First World War Private First Class.⁴ Führer, we thank you. There is unrest among the German people. Will we continue to entrust the fate of our armies to a dilettante? Do we want to sacrifice the rest of German youth...just for power of a [Nazi] Party clique? No, never!

The day of reckoning has come—the reckoning of our German youth with the most abominable tyrant our people have ever been forced to endure. In the name of all German youth, we demand that Adolf Hitler's state return to us our personal freedom, the most precious treasure that we have, out of which he has swindled us....

We grew up in a state in which all free expression of opinion was unscrupulously suppressed. The Hitler Youth, the SS, have tried to drug us, to revolutionize us, to regiment us in the most promising young years of our lives.An unimaginably diabolical and narrow-minded selection process trains its chosen future party bigwigs in the "Castles of the Knightly Order" to become brazen, godless, unscrupulous exploiters and assassins—blind, moronic hangers-on of the Führer.⁵ We "workers of the intellect" are the very ones who should put obstacles in the path of this new caste of overlords....

For us there is but one slogan: Fight against the Party! Get out of Party organizations, which are used to keep our mouths sealed and hold us in political bondage! Get out of the lecture rooms of the SS corporals and sergeants and the Party bootlickers! We want genuine learning and real freedom of opinion. No threat can terrorize us, not even the shutting down of institutions of higher learning. This is the struggle of each and every one of us for our future, our freedom, and our honor under a [future post-Nazi] regime conscious of its moral responsibility.

Freedom and honor! For ten long years Hitler and his comrades have manhandled, squeezed, twisted, and debased these two splendid German words to the point of nausea.... They have sufficiently demonstrated what they understand by freedom and honor in ten years of destruction of all material and intellectual freedom, of all moral substance among the German people. The frightful bloodbath has opened the eyes of even the stupidest German.... The name of Germany is dishonored for all time if German youth does not finally rise, take revenge, and atone, smash its tormentors, and set up a new intellectual Europe.

Students! The German people look to us! As in 1813, the people expected us to shake off the Napoleonic yoke,⁶ so in 1943 they look to us to break the National Socialist state terror through the power of the spirit.

"Courage, my people, our beacons are burning!" Our people stand ready to rebel against the National Socialist enslavement of Europe in a fervent new breakthrough of freedom and honor!

Questions

12. What does the flyer have to say about the Battle of Stalingrad and its impact?

13. What does the flyer report about education under the Nazi regime?

³Stalingrad (today called Volgograd) was a large city on the River Volga in the Soviet Union (Russia). The Germans and Soviets fought a bitter battle street-to-street, house-to-house, and room-to-room for control of Stalingrad in late 1942 and early 1943. By the time the White Rose wrote this flyer, the Germans had lost the battle. This is regarded as one of the major turning points of the Second World War in Europe.

⁴An ironic and contemptuous allusion to Hitler, who had only risen to the rank of corporal during the First World War.

⁵This is a reference to the intense ideological training given to those young people who were to become future leaders of the Nazi Party and thus elites in Nazi Germany. Numerous types of schools were established for these purposes, including the so-called "Adolf Hitler Schools" (Adolf-Hitler-Schulen) and "Knightly Order Castles" (Ordensburgen).

⁶The German people rose up in 1813 to rebel against the French domination of Germany by Napoleon Bonaparte.

14. According to the flyer, what has the Nazi regime done to concepts such as "freedom" and "honor"?

F. Armed Resistance to the National Socialist Regime: The July 20th Plot

There were numerous conspiracies by Germans to overthrow the National Socialist regime or specifically to assassinate Adolf Hitler. None of these plots succeeded, and the regime was only destroyed by the Allied liberation of Nazi-occupied Europe and the conquest of Germany in 1945.

The most famous of the conspiracies against Nazism has come to be known as the July 20th Plot, carried out in 1944. Below is a brief explanation of the conspiracy. The text is taken verbatim from the website of the German Resistance Memorial Center, a museum in Berlin located in the building known as the Bendler Block, the headquarters of the conspirators on 20 July 1944.

Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg

From autumn 1943 on, Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg became a decisive factor in the struggle against Hitler. In 1933, he initially felt that National Socialist policy offered Germany favorable opportunities but was soon alienated by the regime's racial ideology. Yet Stauffenberg only assumed an active role in opposing the regime once he realized the consequences of German policy in eastern Europe and was able to estimate the full extent of the damage that Hitler's war had brought upon Germany and Europe.

Under the influence of Henning von Tresckow, General Friedrich Olbricht, and First Lieutenant Fritz-Dietlof Graf von der Schulenburg of the army reserve, Stauffenberg became a focal point of the military conspiracy. He established important links to civilian resistance groups and coordinated his assassination plans with Carl Friedrich Goerdeler and Ludwig Beck, and with the conspirators waiting in readiness in Paris, Vienna, Berlin, and at Army Group Center.

The Planning for Operation "Valkyrie"

The conspirators...concentrated their efforts on eliminating Hitler, gaining control of the military chain of command, and assuming the responsibilities of government in Germany. They made use of plans developed [by the Nazi regime] for putting down civil disturbances and insurrections by the foreign slave laborers. These plans provided for entrusting executive power and military authority to the commander of the Reserve Army in such cases.

The conspirators altered these plans, code-named "Valkyrie," several times, adapting them.... With the aid of the "Valkyrie" orders, they intended to gain control of key government, Party, and Wehrmacht⁷ offices in Berlin so they could pave the way for the coup throughout Germany and at the front.

Hitler's Headquarters "Wolf's Lair" near Rastenburg in East Prussia

In the winter of 1940-41 immediately before the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Hitler established his new headquarters near Rastenburg. During the following years, extensive bunker systems were built, which were sealed off from the rest of the world by restricted areas. The extensive forests of East Prussia, the moors of the surrounding countryside, and the location of the headquarters beyond the range of Allied bombers appeared to offer the greatest possible measure of protection.

....The importance of the "Wolf's Lair" in Prussia increased as the Wehrmacht retreated, and the site became Hitler's preferred location. When several attempts to eliminate Hitler by assassination failed in 1943, the conspirators decided to kill him here in the central bastion of his power.

Assassination Attempt of July 20, 1944

Despite great difficulties, Colonel Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg succeeded in arming a bomb and planting it under a map table in Hitler's vicinity a few minutes before a briefing in the "Wolf's Lair." Stauffenberg was able to leave the room without being noticed and observed the detonation from a safe distance. Unfortunate coincidences prevented the attempt from succeeding, and Hitler survived. The heavy oak table he was leaning over when the bomb exploded shielded his body.

⁷"Wehrmacht" was the name for the armed forces of Nazi Germany.

Yet Stauffenberg was convinced that his assassination attempt had been successful. Together with his adjutant and fellow conspirator Werner von Haeften, he succeeded in leaving the headquarters for Berlin within minutes of the explosion, immediately before the area was sealed off.

July 20, 1944, in the Bendler Block

After the assassination attempt, valuable hours were lost in Berlin before the "Valkyrie" orders could be issued. Executive power was to be transferred to the commander of the Reserve Army. Key command centers and communication facilities had to be occupied, and the SS units stationed in Berlin had to be kept away from the center of the conspiracy on Bendlerstrasse [the Bendler Street headquarters of the conspirators].

The conspirators relied on Berlin's city commandant, a few friends in important positions, and Berlin's chief of police. A few members of civilian resistance groups came to the Bendler Block. Even a few younger officers stationed in Potsdam assumed functions here. They were joined by some other officers who had purposely not been informed about the coup during its initial phases but who followed the orders of the conspirators.

The Failure of the Coup

The conspirators hoped to be able to mobilize formations in Berlin and throughout Germany against the National Socialist leaders through normal command channels. To do so, they required intact lines of communication.

Since Hitler had survived the bombing, the conspirators' helpers at Hitler's headquarters were not able to interrupt telephone and radio communications with the outside world for long. This put Hitler, Himmler, Bormann, and Keitel⁸ in a position to issue countermanding orders late in the afternoon that frustrated all the conspirators' efforts. Many officers in key positions on Bendlerstrasse and in the military districts now cited their oath of allegiance and remained loyal to Hitler.

Friedrich Fromm, commander of the Reserve Army, refused to join the conspirators. Late that evening he ordered the execution of the four main conspirators by a firing squad.

After the Assassination Attempt

After the unsuccessful assassination attempt, Hitler addressed the German public in a radio speech. He depicted himself as an instrument of "providence," accusing "a small clique" of ambitious officers of having committed treason in their hunger for power.

The following days brought with them a profusion of speeches avowing loyalty. Appeals, newspaper articles, and speeches were staged to stir up public sentiment throughout Germany. The aim was to irreversibly transform the Wehrmacht into a mainstay of National Socialist ideology while neutralizing the influence of the officer corps.

The propaganda soon began to take effect. Accounts of public morale gave the impression that Hitler was again able to kindle renewed enthusiasm among the German people. While many bulletins were exaggerated, many Germans undoubtedly disapproved of the assassination attempt.

The Last Words of Plot Leader Colonel Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg

Long live sacred Germany! (Es lebe das heilige Deutschland!)

Questions

15. What was the role of Colonel Klaus Schenk von Stauffenberg in the plot against the Nazi regime?

⁸ Martin Bormann was a high-ranking Nazi official very close to Hitler. Wilhelm Keitel was one of the highest-ranking military officials in the Nazi regime.

16. What was the plan for toppling the Nazi regime?

17. Why did the plot ultimately fail?

Rescue of Jews: The People of the French Village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon

Among many examples of rescue of French Jews, the case of the village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon stands out as particularly impressive. At great risk to themselves, the villagers worked to hide Jews and help them in other ways until the end of the Second World War, saving between 3,000 and 5,000 people.

Nazi Germany had conquered France in 1940 and occupied large parts of the country. The Nazis permitted the establishment of a new French government subservient to them. This new quasi-fascist dictatorship replaced the French Third Republic and is commonly known as Vichy, after the city that was its capital. The Vichy government carried out extensive persecution of Jews, including deportations to death camps in Nazi-occupied Poland. Some Jews escaped that fate owing to the actions of the villagers of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon.

The following account is taken verbatim from the website of a Danish organization commemorating the Holocaust (<http://www.auschwitz.dk/Trocme.htm>).

During the horrors of The Holocaust a small French mountain village *Le Chambon-sur-Lignon* was the safest place in Europe for Jews. Not one Jew was taken by the Nazis. A story of a 'conspiracy of goodness': an entire town which at great risk sheltered 5,000 Jews. Committed to deception of the enemy and preservation of life....

In occupied France collaborators [with the Nazis] delivered 83,000 Jews, including 10,000 children, to the Nazi death camps - only 3,000 ever returned. But the residents of the area of Le Chambon, quietly took in and saved as many Jews as their entire population, who came to them for shelter and refuge.

Ordinary people, often poverty-stricken themselves, protected the Jews at the peril of their own lives. They took the Jews into their homes, fed and protected them, right under the noses of the Gestapo. Defying the Nazi régime and the French government that was collaborating with the Nazis, the villagers of the area of Le Chambon provided a safe haven throughout the war for the Jews. Every home hid strangers, not for days, but for years. So deep was their humanity that no resident of Le Chambon ever turned away, denounced, or betrayed a single Jewish refugee.

It all started one cold, dark evening during the winter of 1940-41 with a knock at the door of Andre Trocmé, the Protestant pastor of *Le Chambon-sur-Lignon*. He answered the door and there stood a hungry, cold woman. She was a Jewish refugee fleeing the Nazis, could she come in ?

The simple act of kindness became a beacon of hope for thousands of people fleeing the Vichy government and the Nazis during World War II. It is credited with inspiring a rescue effort that saved some 5,000 refugees - four years began when the citizens of Chambon welcomed Jewish refugees, sheltering them, educating their children, arranging for hundreds to escape to safety in Switzerland or Spain via a well-organized underground network.

Pastor Andre Trocmé served as a moral compass for the village. He was born in 1901 and came from a long line of Huguenots⁹ and Germans. As a teenager in the First World War he had been deeply impressed by a German soldier who was a conscientious objector. He came to Le Chambon, seeking a remote parish where his pacifism would not be conspicuous. In 1938 he helped to found an international pacifist school in Le Chambon. A year or two later when a national leader of the Reformed Church called on Trocmé to ask him to stop aiding Jews because it could damage French Protestantism, Trocmé refused.

Andre Trocmé showed the Chambonnais [residents of Le Chambon] the most practical and effective way to resist Vichy and the Nazis. Le Chambon got away with various symbolic demonstrations of resistance. The staff of the school refused to pledge unconditional obedience to the *Head of State*, and the church bell was not rung, as ordered, for the Vichy leader Pétain's anniversary. And pastor Trocmé always responded to calls for help to hide Jews in danger of detection, even if this jeopardized not only his own life but those of his wife and children and members of his community.

The refugees were welcomed without hesitation. They were housed in private homes, on farms as well as in public institutions and were hidden in the countryside whenever the Nazis came through. One of the villagers later recalled: *'As soon as the soldiers left, we would go into the forest and sing a song. When they heard that song, the Jews knew it was safe to come home.'*

The Vichy authorities knew what was taking place, since it was impossible to hide such wide-scale rescue activities over time. They demanded that the pastor cease his activities. His response was clear-cut: *'These people came here for help and for shelter. I am their shepherd. A shepherd does not forsake his flock. I do not know what a Jew is. I know only human beings.'*

In the summer of 1942, two Vichy French police busses arrived at the village. The police captain went to Andre Trocmé and demanded a list of the Jews being sheltered in the village. The demand was accompanied by the threat of arrest, but the pastor refused to give the police the names. The next day, the busses left without prisoners....

Eventually, Trocmé was arrested along with a number of his friends, but he was released after a few weeks, without having signed a commitment to follow government orders regarding the Jews. The Nazis arrested his cousin, Daniel Trocmé, and sent him to the death camp Majdanek, where he was murdered. Andre Trocmé himself was forced to hide from the Nazis. His wife continued his legacy and many Jews resided in relative calm until the end of the war, with the aid and encouragement of the local residents in this hilly region of Southeastern France.

In 1990 *Le Chambon-sur-Lignon* became the first community to be honoured as Righteous Gentiles by the Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem. There are two trees dedicated to them at Yad Vashem. Mordecai Paldi of Yad Vashem said *'the village was unique in that almost all the people of the plateau were involved in saving these Jews, and no one said a word.'*

Questions

18. How did French collaborators with the Nazis participate in carrying out the Holocaust?
19. Describe the efforts of the people of the village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon to help Jews.
20. Why do you think that so few other communities in France or any other part of Nazi-occupied Europe worked to help Jews in the way that the people of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon did?

⁹Huguenots were French Calvinist Protestants who had faced persecution from the French monarchy during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many of them fled France, settling in other places such as Germany, England, and the British colonies in North America (parts of which later became the United States).

My Thoughts They Are Free (Die Gedanken sind frei) Traditional German Folksong

The lyrics of this folksong, written anonymously, first appeared around 1780, and there are several versions of them. The tune dates from the early 19th century. The central theme of the song—that our thoughts are free no matter what our external circumstances might be—is an ancient one in Western Civilization. In German culture, it can be traced directly back at least as far as the 13th-century poet Walther von der Vogelweide. During periods of political repression in Germany, such as the revolutionary years 1848-49 and the National Socialist era, the song was banned because government authorities regarded it as subversive. Germans who resisted the Nazis, such as the White Rose Movement, made use of it despite the danger.

The following translation seeks to render the song into idiomatic English that is also faithful to the meaning of the German original.

Die Gedanken sind frei, wer kann sie erraten,
sie fliegen vorbei wie nächtliche Schatten.
Kein Mensch kann sie wissen, kein Jäger erschließen
Es bleibt dabei, Die Gedanken sind frei!

Ich denke was ich will und was mich beglückt,
doch alles in der Stille, und wie es sich schicket.
Mein Wunsch und Begehren kann niemand mir wehren,
es bleibt dabei: Die Gedanken sind frei!

Und sperrt man mich ein im finsternen Kerker,
das alles sind rein vergebliche Werke.
Denn meine Gedanken zerreißen die Schranken
und Mauern entzwei, die Gedanken sind frei!

Drum will ich auf immer den Sorgen absagen
und will mich auch nimmer mit Grillen mehr plagen.
Man kann ja im Herzen stets lachen und scherzen
und denken dabei: Die Gedanken sind frei!

My thoughts they are free—who can guess at them?
They fly past like shadows by night.
No one can know them, no hunter can shoot them,
So it always will be: My thoughts they are free!

I think whatever I like and whatever delights me,
But take everything quietly and just as it comes.
My wish and desire can no one deny me.
So it always will be: My thoughts they are free!

And if I am thrown into a dark dungeon,
All that would be but a futile gesture,
Because my thoughts tear down all gates
And walls. My thoughts they are free!

So I will renounce sorrows forever,
And never again torment myself with foolish fancies.
In one's heart can one always laugh and jest
And think at the same time: My thoughts they are free!