Introduction

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Our understanding of the types and meaningful levels of resistance to Hitler's rule has broadened as more complex and reflective studies have unremittingly exposed the political, social, and cultural dynamics supporting the Holocaust and its significance for our culture. Analyses of how and why the Holocaust erupted in Nazi-controlled Europe have elicited studies on the tools and methods of terror in the Third Reich. The works of both Eric Johnson and Robert Gellately, for example, have helped crystallize our understanding of the phenomenon that individual Germans living out their hopes, fears, and, frequently, petty jealousies made operant the ideological and physical terror that empowered the Nazi oppression. The Gestapo and courts, of course, formally carried out the brutalization of society, but they were assisted by countless Germans in fulfilling the Nazi agenda.

The Gestapo itself was relatively small in comparison to the size of the population that had to be shaped ideologically and controlled. To concretize the power of the regime, therefore, citizens in their everyday lives, and frequently for their own personal advantages, monitored their fellow citizens. Scholars of the terror have found that Nazi oppression was certainly initiated by the state. Normal citizens, however, were dynamically involved in oppressing one another. Their petty fears and jealousies as well as the government's desire for ideological consonance with the regime's anti-Semitic and national renewal policies breathed life into bureaucratic oppression. The local


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actors involved in the terror have refocused our attention on the importance of everyday life in Germany.

The extent of the German population's anti-Semitism, as Kershaw's analysis has shown, has also helped us in understanding local opinion formation in the Third Reich and has suggested that scholars will find it fruitful to look carefully at issues of daily compliance and nonconformity in order to understand how the regime as a whole functioned. Understanding everyday life has clearly become important, if we hope to understand how the Third Reich controlled the German population. This movement toward Alltagsgeschichte was rooted decades ago in the work of Martin Broszat, who suggested that it would not suffice only to understand the leaders of Germany; we also have to understand how people tried to live out their "normal" lives under this oppressive regime. Recently, in their own argumentative works, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen and Christopher Browning have continued to focus attention on persons like us in their mutually controversial analyses of Germans involved in implementing genocidal public policy.

Studies on resistance, not surprisingly, have also moved from the courage of the Scholls, the 20 July plot, and the Kreisau Circle to the more intimate lives of individuals facing the oppressive Nazi dictatorship that was rooted in the unique features of this malignant regime responsible for perpetrating the Shoah. Social welfare, medicine, and ordinary neighborly relations were enacted within the community that was dominated by a leadership cadre devoted to murder as a solution to biopolitical, social, and economic issues. In such communities living in terror, even normal activities had to present moral dilemmas concerned with the usefulness of adaptation and with the exploration of the opportunities to resist, as well as to foil the

types of control that the regime was trying to establish. What were the motivations of those who engaged in outright resistance or non-conformity or dissent? Under the pervasive terror generated in the Third Reich, dissent and even nonconformity came to be as dangerous as the more courageous acts of resistance described by earlier scholars, since even a minimal refusal to adhere to the regime’s ideological impetus and even idiosyncratic personal or professional activities could have serious repercussions, given the fact that even one’s fellow citizens seemed to be serving the Gestapo’s agenda.

The scholars who have contributed essays to this thematic volume of Church History, have explored the motivations, the intentions, and the patterns of behavior of individuals who adapted to or resisted Nazism. Several of those studied could accept portions of Hitler’s Weltanschauung, at least as it dealt with the national renewal of the Volk. Some, we will see, preferred adaptation. A significant sample of men and women rigorously opposed, however, particular aspects of the Nazi regime’s exclusionary or biopolitical projects, when such extensions of state power directly affected their lives and beliefs. In these cases, ordinary people opposed the intrusion of the state into their own decisions and convictions, which they felt were rooted in a private and/or religious realm.

Ideological or spiritual resistance was important, since it could oppose Hitler’s aim of transforming traditional, Christian spiritual values into secular or pagan ideals. In essence, the Germans studied by these scholars partially broke the legitimacy of the Reich’s rule by creating an alternate personal and/or religious space for themselves and their contemporaries. In this dictatorial milieu, nonconformity or even single-issue dissent helped corrode oppression, ultimately led to the empowerment of those involved in living in German society, and delayed the full control sought by the Nazi leadership.

The essays included in this issue explore some examples of adaptations, but mostly focus on varied levels of resistance. The authors are really delving into moral history. These essays primarily seek to

10. For an introduction to the study of resistance as moral history, see Michael Geyer, “Resistance as Ongoing Project: Visions of Order, Obligations to Strangers, and Strug-
unpack the resisters’ vision of humanity and, by also reflecting on those who adapted, go to the very heart of the insidious corruption that powered the Third Reich. The men and women portrayed in these contributions, who opposed at least some aspects of the regime, developed a very concrete sense of justice and liberty, which was rooted in the transformative values that they felt could support human dignity. The Germans studied here courageously stepped away from the relatively harmless realm of abstract reflection into the world of marching soldiers. Their visions of moral order and responsibilities (even if only focused on their private lives), their understanding of the meaning of community, and their reflections on human dignity controlled their questioning and critical reactions to the Nazi leviathan. Their personal acts of resistance or dissent or nonconformity required choices in their everyday lives through overt actions or in learned treatises, where they subtly opposed the exclusion of persons and collectivities from their community. Both explicitly and implicitly the resisters and those who adapted had to ask what it concretely means to be human. Their diverse answers are significant for us today.

Resistance against the Third Reich offers to us an intimate look into what Dietrich Bonhoeffer has labeled a “world come of age.” How, these experiences ask, can we wrest civil society from the reins of totalizing institutional power? How can we sculpt relations that leave space for the humanity of others? How can we rejoice in the identity of the other? Churches themselves offered very little heroic sustenance to their members, but instead seemed to be satisfied with a very unfortunate, self-centered resistance bent on their survival as institutions. Fortunately for Christianity as a religious tradition, individuals seemed to do better in safeguarding the meaning of “person” against Hitler’s world of diabolical ideas.

Nazi ideology was itself a secularized doctrine of salvation and insisted that it possessed a divine warrant that legitimated its manipulation of public opinion by means of lies. In fact, it thrived by offering a sweeping simplification of complex realities. Behind the mystic feeling generated by the vision of a Gemeinschaft that supported national renewal, there was a tyranny that imposed political and spiritual oppression. Nazi ideology targeted both the political

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self-restraint that has supported democracy as a source for the renewal of the human spirit in modern times and assaulted the religious Kingdom, which ideally was meant to shape the unfolding of the potential possessed by men and women as God’s images.13 The ideological, pseudoreligious qualities of Nazism made it attractive during the Weimar years and dangerous until the Third Reich could be defeated in war, as the lives and deaths of those depicted in these essays will show.

The sustained existence of humanistic and Christian values (reason, culture, humanity, dignity of the person) during this period helped clear the way for the emergence of our current focus on the dignity of the person as the necessary foundation for our discourse on human rights. This return to the scriptural insight that humans are the images of God, which can be found in Genesis and reiterated at the founding of the Christian faith, has proved to be important for the continued mending of the fractured humanity that was left as the residue of Nazi oppression.14 This ethical recentering has been crucial in post-1945 attempts to deal with the incidents of sanctioned murder that have continued up to our time. The resistance during the Third Reich has helped us develop a significant nexus between democracy and Christianity as systems of value-limiting power. Both Christianity and democracy, significantly, urge restraint in the quest for perfection on this earth.15 Finally, the religious and human experiences found in acts of resistance during the Third Reich have shown that both passion and compassion are necessary for healthy political systems and for the growth of the human spirit.

Those engaged in resistance to Nazi incursions were Protestant and Catholic men and women in an array of vocations. The resisters portrayed in the following essays can be viewed from the perspective of a “theology of crisis,” in which religion was no longer felt to be tangential but, rather, became a deeply felt necessity for sustaining human dignity in a world seemingly bereft of spiritual values. These resisters risked their lives to plant the seeds for a future renewal of the Christian faith that has successfully been nurturing humane values in the postwar world. At least from hindsight, these essays seem to indicate that Christians should unceasingly question the traditional modes of adaptation that their churches have historically practiced.

What seemed to have moved people in Hitler’s Reich to deeds of courage, refusal to accept state intrusion, and compassion was a realization of their connection to each other. John Donne has written that no man is an island, entire unto himself. His words may sound simple, but Donne was describing a complex ecology, in which each person’s actions and beliefs significantly and directly affect all those whom each encounters. Our daily actions necessarily have ramifications even for the future. From such studies of the Third Reich as those in this issue, we can learn that life in any society should never be perceived as disposable but, rather, always perceived as precious. The creation of any ideologically controlled “brave new world” is what even the most mundane acts of resistance, dissent, and nonconformity opposed. The essays in this issue reveal that the consciences and acts of these individuals can still speak to all of us and have the power to reach far beyond the private struggles that each resister endured. Those who rejected the Nazi Weltanschauung helped create a new web of relationships, a renewed human identity, that has resonated into our own era and has helped us move beyond the oppressive Third Reich into an ongoing discernment of the meaning of human dignity.