

The White Rose



Passive resistance
in the face of tyranny

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Introduction

Philosophies regarding the accumulation of wealth, power, and security - although sometimes forgotten or dressed in new rhetoric - have tempted individuals and governments since the beginning of recorded history. Such was Germany after World War I, as governmental instability, cultural change, civil unrest, and economic concerns contributed to the rise of National Socialism in Germany. When Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany in 1933, the Nazi Party was given "free reign" in order to restructure the government. Promising solutions to the crisis which faced the German people, the National Socialists would institute new economic policies, and enact a variety of State-sponsored social programs.

This culminated in 1939 - six years later - with Germany invading Poland. In just a few short years, the Nazi Government's effective use of Nationalistic fervor, propaganda and force of arms had effectively spread Hitler's empire throughout most of Europe, and Northern Africa. It wasn't until 1942, after tremendous blood-shed amongst civilians and soldiers (and more yet to come), that the Nazi government's imperial conquests began to slow.

While much of German Society enthusiastically, or complicitly advocated the policies of National Socialism during this era of the 1930's and 40's, there were a few who chose to respond differently. But don't be fooled. These weren't people who were merely grasping at a nebulous concept of right and wrong. Rather, they were resolute intellectuals who believed in a higher authority than any individual or government could claim, and possessed a keen understanding of truth and liberty. Risking everything, and ultimately paying for such risk with their lives - their resistance wasn't through a force of arms, but through the belief in the education and encouragement of others in the discovery of objective truth.

Key figures of The White Rose



Sophie Scholl

Sophie Scholl, born May 9, 1921, enjoyed painting and drawing, wrote frequent letters to friends (including her boyfriend, Fritz Hartnagel), and maintained a journal. She later worked as a kindergarten teacher, but was required to work six months for the National Labor Service in order to be admitted to the University. Upon completing her Government service, Sophie studied biology and philosophy at the University of Munich.



Hans Scholl

Born September 22, 1918, **Hans Scholl** joined the Hitler Youth in 1933, rose to command a squad, and then resigned two years later. He was arrested in 1937 for participating in a banned German youth movement, but received an amnesty indictment on April 25, 1938.

He was drafted in 1940, and served in France for a time, and then later in Russia as the war progressed. Throughout the later years of his life, he kept a journal, corresponded with his girlfriend, Rose Nagele, and studied to be a doctor.



Christoph Probst

Christoph Probst was 23 in 1942, married to Herta Dohrn, and was the father of three children. His parents had divorced when he was a child, and his father committed suicide when Christoph was 17. He was baptized as a Catholic before his execution.



Alexander Schmorell

Torn between two worlds, Russian and German, **Alexander Schmorell** was born in 1917. His mother died two years later from a typhus epidemic, and his father was forced to evacuate from Russia in 1921. Raised in the Russian Orthodox Church, Alexander detested the Nazi order, and refused to take an oath swearing loyalty to Hitler.



Willi Graf

Willi Graf - 24 years old in 1942, Willi is described as an intensely devout Catholic, known for his silence and brooding manner. In light of the rapid erosion of German society, he constantly found his faith put to the test, and struggled with the ethics of illegal and possibly unchristian acts committed towards the destruction of the tyranny and evil he witnessed.



Prof. Kurt Huber

Prof. Kurt Huber - Born in Switzerland, and 49 years old in 1942, Prof. Huber taught philosophy, psychology, and musicology at the university since 1926. Described as possessing a "dry wit", he was writing a definitive work on Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz. Huber was a conservative that supported German philosophical and historical nationalism, but didn't believe in the revolutionary, war mongering ideals the Nazi's possessed. He married in his mid-thirties, and had two children. While he doubtless could have had a successful career under the Nazi regime, he refused to utilize his gifts towards propaganda.

The Necessity of Resistance

As Hitler and his administration consolidated the government, Nazi party officials understood that for party ideals to perpetuate into the future, the hearts and minds of the populace would need to be “pruned” and “nurtured” through a specific Government sanctioned curriculum. But this couldn’t work if competing views were allowed to perpetuate. Operating through the tidal-swell of public support, quick action was implemented towards banning and censoring what the State deemed as inappropriate. Of particular focus was the Academic realm, in which many professors were removed for words or actions that didn’t fall in line with Nazi rhetoric. But it didn’t stop there.

The new State-advocated German church, lead by individuals who had surrendered God’s law in favor of a politically correct anti-Jew ideology, worked to de-Christianize the traditions surrounding birth and death, the vows of marriage, and the shift of Christmas into a celebration of the winter solstice. Hitler was regarded as a church reformer, Jews were dismissed from Congregations, and in some cases even the Old Testament was excluded from scripture.

However, men like Martin Niemöller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer believed this Governmental interference wasn’t a sign of hope or progress towards the future, but a poisonous infiltration of humanist ideals which eroded the bedrock truths of Society. Through forming the Confessing Church as an alternative to the State church, Niemöller and Bonhoeffer hoped that people would understand that answers to societal ills wouldn’t be found by man’s efforts, but only through adherence to God’s law. By public statement, the Confessing Church made their beliefs known by expressing that, “the new religion demands belief in an eternal Germany in place of the belief in the eternal kingdom of our Master and Savior, Jesus Christ... This insane belief creates a god from man’s image and being... It is anti-Christian... In the face of temptation and the danger of this religion... we must bear witness to our country and people.”¹ However, after reading these words from their pulpit, five hundred Protestant ministers were arrested, Niemöller was soon imprisoned, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer was eventually executed in April 1945.

Bishop Galen, the pastor of the church the Scholl family attended, was another stubborn and outspoken leader in the community who couldn’t accept the spread of National Socialist ideals. Upon learning that a Euthanasia policy was being implemented towards those no longer defined as people (elderly, handicapped, Jews, etc.), and thus a burden on the Government, he stood before his congregation in 1941 and stated the program was, “against God’s commandments, against the law of nature, and against the system of jurisprudence in Germany.” Galen then asked his congregation how they expected to live if their lives were measured by economic productivity? Who could even have confidence in his doctor?¹

While information on the deporting of people to concentration camps, and mass executions was available to the public, many chose to ignore, rationalize, or pretend that it wasn’t their problem. But for those individuals who would form The White Rose, this apathy towards their fellow man was simply unthinkable. “Perhaps in ordinary times these young people would have remained unaffected by religious beliefs – with the exception of Willi Graf. But the times were extraordinary; the world was going straight to hell; no one, inside or outside of Germany, seemed able or willing to stop it, and they strained with every fiber of their beings to find a meaning to life. Without a religious structure it was difficult; without God it was becoming impossible.”¹

Hans Scholl studied medicine at the University of Munich, and soon introduced Sophie (his sister) to a group of like-minded individuals who regularly gathered to discuss art, music, philosophy and theology. But the pressing issue that weighed heavily on the minds of these young people, was how to react to the increasing failures and atrocities of the Government they found themselves living under.

From Hans’ Journal of 1940

“The fate and thus the task of the German Christian is without an example which he might follow... he is alone! Everything that he feels, thinks and does has a question mark to it, questioning whether it is right. The leadership of Germany today, and of this there is not the slightest doubt and it cannot be evaded, is consciously anti-Christian – it hates Christ whom it does not name... From the very beginning, the successful trick of these people sent to plague Europe has been to combine the special interests of their basely impulsive and greedy natures, intellectually speaking, soulless and half-educated, with the true and genuine wishes and claims of the German people... The German people will be beaten, but not struck down and wiped out. The one ray of light in my mind is this: it is better for a people to be defeated and to suffer, than to sin and apostatize.”¹

Governmental Retaliation

In 1942, Hans and Sophie's father, who was known for being strong-willed, was imprisoned for a short time for making a critical remark about Hitler. It was about this time that Hans and Sophie Scholl, Willi Graf, and Christopher Probst began writing and distributing resistance leaflets (see pages 4 and 5). Calling their group The White Rose, they were arrested after distributing the sixth leaflet at the University of Munich on Feb. 18, 1943.

With Nazi officials fearing the by-product of martyrdom, the trial and execution of the White Rose members happened quickly. So quickly in fact, that friends and family members barely had enough time to process what was happening. But even as Sophie was being faced with an interrogator who accused her of false beliefs, she still had the presence of mind to reply with, "You're wrong. I would do it all over again – because I'm not wrong. You have the wrong worldview."¹ Later at the trial, Sophie and Hans' father attempted to speak on his children's behalf, but was instead hauled from the courtroom. Before being removed, he shouted "There is a higher justice – they will go down in history!"

Kurt Huber, who had been discovered for his role in the White Rose, was quickly apprehended too. In his defense speech, he stated "I am staking my life to make this warning, to plead for a return [to German values]. I demand the revival of freedom for the German people. We don't want to spend our brief lives in the chains of slavery, no matter if the chains are made from the gold of material abundance."¹

After Hans and Sophie had been sentenced for "preparations to commit treason and their aid to the enemy", they awaited execution. On the day it was to happen, February 22, 1943, Sophie's mother implored her daughter to remember Jesus. "Yes, but you too." Sophie replied, before being lead away. As for Hans, his last words shouted throughout the courtyard where his execution would soon take place, were "Long live freedom!"¹

Alexander Schmorell, also arrested and sentenced to death for his "crime", wrote to his parents as he sat alone in his cell. "This difficult misfortune was necessary to put me on the right road, and therefore was no misfortune at all... What did I know until now about belief, about a true and deep belief, about the truth, the last and only truth, about God?" Later, when his lawyer visited Alex, the young man stated, "I'm convinced that my life has to end now, early as it seems, because I have fulfilled my life's mission. I wouldn't know what else I'd have to do on this earth."¹

On July 13, 1943 Kurt Huber and Alexander Schmorell were beheaded at Stadelheim prison.

As for Willi Graff, he endured seven months of solitary confinement, and was executed on October 12, 1943. In the last letter written to his family, he expressed that, "On this day I'm leaving this life and entering eternity. What hurts me most of all is that I am causing such pain to those of you who go on living. But strength and comfort you'll find with God and that is what I am praying for till the last moment. I know that it will be harder for you than for me."¹

Although the government had attempted to put a stop to the activities of the White Rose, the sixth leaflet was smuggled out of Germany and obtained by the Allied Forces. In 1943, millions of copies of the leaflet, now entitled *The Manifesto of the Students of Munich*, were dropped over Germany.

Conclusion

In our world today, the decisions and sacrifices made by the members of The White Rose may seem far removed from the choices we make towards raising our children, or working at the job. But when faced with the enormity of the millions of lives lost - whether in bombed cities, extermination camps, or on the battlefield - the following questions must be asked. Did truth and liberty matter when people were being persecuted and exterminated for who they were or what they believed? And seventy years later, when persecutions and exterminations of people from all classes, beliefs, and races continue to happen in our world, does truth and liberty continue to be of importance?

Apathy, rationalization, the reinterpretation of law, humanism, and relativistic truth weren't just contributors to the rise of Governmental tyranny in Germany of the 30's and 40's, but in all places and periods of history - even into the present day. Although it seems we've learned a few valuable lessons from the rise and fall of National Socialism in Nazi Germany, we've quickly forgotten others - such as the importance the White Rose placed towards the education and safe-guarding of liberty and objective truth.

Excerpts from the White Rose Leaflets

■ The First Leaflet

Written by Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell

Distributed in, or around, June of 1942

“Nothing is so unworthy of a civilized nation as to allow itself to be ‘governed’ without any opposition by an irresponsible clique that has yielded to basest instincts. It is certainly the case today that every honest German is ashamed of his government. Who among us has any conception of the enormous shame that we and our children will feel when eventually the veil drops from our eyes and the most horrible of crimes - crimes that eclipse all atrocities throughout history - are exposed to the full light of day? If the German people are already so corrupted and spiritually crushed that they do not raise a hand, unquestioningly trusting in the dubious legitimacy of historical order; if they surrender man’s highest principle, that which raises him above all of God’s creatures: his free will; if they abandon the will to take decisive action and turn the wheel of history and thus subject it to their own rational decision; if they are so devoid of all individuality, have already gone so far along the road toward becoming a spiritless and cowardly mass - then, yes, they deserve their downfall..... Therefore every individual has to consciously accept his responsibility as a member of Western and Christian civilization in this last hour; to arm himself as best he can to work against the scourges of humanity, against fascism and every other form of the absolute state. Adopt passive resistance - *resistance* - wherever you are, and block the functioning of this atheistic war machine before it is too late...”

■ The Second Leaflet

Written by Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell

Distributed in, or around, June of 1942

“Why are the German people so apathetic in the face of all these abominable crimes, crimes so unworthy of the human race? Hardly anyone thinks about that. It is accepted as fact and put out of mind. The German people slumber on in their dull, stupid sleep and thereby encourage these fascist criminals; they give them opportunity to carry on their depredations; and of course they do so. Is this a sign that the German people have become brutalized in their most basic human feelings, that the sight of such deeds does not strike a chord within them, that they have sunk into a terminal sleep from which there is no awakening, ever, ever again? It seems that way, and will certainly be so, if the German does not arouse himself from this lethargy at last, if he does not protest whenever he can against this gang of criminals, if he doesn’t feel compassion for the hundreds of thousands of victims - not only compassion, no, much more: *guilt*. For his apathy allows these evil men to act as they do; he tolerates this ‘government’ that has taken upon itself such an enormous burden of guilt; indeed, he himself is to blame for the fact that it came about at all!”

■ The Third Leaflet

Written by Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell

(with advice from Christoph Probst and editorial assistance from Jurgen Wittenstein)

Distributed later in 1942

“The family is as old as man himself, and out of this initial bond man, endowed with reason, created for himself a state founded on justice, whose highest law was the common good. The state should reflect the divine order, and the highest of all utopias, the *civitas dei* [*City of God*], is the model it should ultimately resemble. We will not compare the many possible forms of the state here - democracy, constitutional monarchy, monarchy, and so on, but one issue needs to be made clear and unambiguous: every human being has the right to a just state, a state that safeguards the freedom of the individual as well as the good of the whole. For according to God’s will, man should be free and independent, while fulfilling his natural duty of living and working together with his fellow citizens, and strive to achieve earthly happiness through self-reliance and self-motivation.”

Excerpts from the White Rose Leaflets (*continued*)

■ The Fourth Leaflet

Written by Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell

(with advice from Christoph Probst and editorial assistance from Jurgen Wittenstein)

Distributed later in 1942

“Everywhere and at all times demons have been lurking in the dark, waiting for the moment when man is weak; when of his own volition he leaves his place in the order of Creation as founded for him by God in freedom; when he yields to the forces of evil, separates himself from the powers of a higher order and, after voluntarily taking the first step, is driven on the next and the next at a furiously accelerating pace. Everywhere and at all times of greatest trial men have appeared, prophets and saints who cherished their freedom, who preached the One God and who with His help enabled people to reverse their downward course. Of course man is free, but without God he is defenseless against evil. He is like a rudderless ship, at the mercy of the storm, an infant without his mother, a cloud dissolving into thin air.....Only religion can reawaken Europe, establish the rights of the peoples, and install Christianity in new splendor visibly on earth in its offices as guarantor of peace. (Novalis)”

■ The Fifth Leaflet

Written by Willi Graf and Kurt Huber

Appeared January 1943

“All centralized power, like that exercised by the Prussian State in Germany and Europe, must be eliminated. The coming Germany must be federalistic. At this juncture only a sound federal system can imbue a weakened Europe with new life.”

■ The Sixth Leaflet

Written by Kurt Huber

“We grew up in a state where all free expression of opinion has been suppressed. The Hitler Youth, the SA, and the SS have tried to drug us, to revolutionize us, and to regiment us in the most promising years of our lives. ‘Philosophical training’ is the name given to the despicable method by which our budding intellectual development is smothered in a fog of empty phrases. A system of selection leadership, at once unimaginably devilish and narrow-minded, trains up its future party bigwigs in the ‘Castles of Knightly Order’ to become Godless, arrogant, and conscienceless exploiters and executioners - blind, stupid hangers-on of the Fuhrer.”

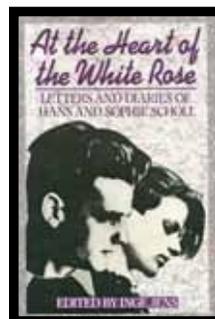
Works Cited

For greater insight into the White Rose movement, the following books are highly recommended.



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2. Inge Jens. *At the Heart of the White Rose: Letters and Diaries of Hans and Sophie Scholl*.

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Note: This essay is designed for informational purposes. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided.

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