



NAZIS VS. JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Posted on July 1, 2018 by D. Sarantis



"We have no interest in political affairs, but are wholly devoted to God's Kingdom under Christ as King. We will do no injury or harm to anyone. We would delight to dwell in peace and do good will to all men as we have opportunity, but since your government and its officers continue in the attempt to force us to disobey the highest law of the universe, we are compelled to now give the notice that we will, by His Grace, obey Jehovah-God and fully trust Him to deliver us from all oppression and oppressors."

~Statement of Principles by the Jehovah's Witnesses to the Nazis, Oct 7th 1934

"Those sowing seed with tears will reap even with a joyful cry. How great the joy will be, when we see all of us again, although it is not easy now to overcome all this, but through belief and hope in the King and His Kingdom we conquer the worst."

~ Wolfgang Kusserow, a twenty-year old Jehovah's Witness, executed for refusing military service. The day before his death he wrote his family a last letter, translated [here](#). March 28th, 1942,

One of the strangest chapters of Holocaust history is the Nazi persecution of the Jehovah's witnesses. As the Nazi machine sets the course for world power it chances upon a humble yet resilient adversary.

Jehovah's Witnesses are a Christian sect started in the 1870's in Pittsburgh. Unlike most major churches, they are non-trinitarians. As Restorationists, they seek to restore Christianity to the lessons of the early Apostolic Church. Lastly, the Witnesses preach Millenarianism, the belief that the current rulers of society are unjust and corrupted and will be torn asunder by powerful forces.

The Witnesses take on their faith by adopting certain life practices. They emphasize distribution of literature for evangelism. Because the Witnesses recognize God's kingdom as the only real kingdom, they do not vote nor conduct military service for earthly kings.

But they are far from some violent anti-state anarchists. Citing [Romans 13](#), they believe that they are obligated to follow laws of a nation as long as they do not directly conflict with God's laws. In other words, when in Rome do as the Romans do as long as it isn't a sin.

Furthermore, Jehovah's Witnesses are the least likely to take up arms and throw a violent revolution. They abhor violence and are strict believers in the using words over brute force of any kind.

Yet, they do not consider themselves as "pacifists." Jehovah's understand themselves as soldiers in God's army. They will be called on the Last Days and are ever-vigilant against the forces of Satan.

As you might have guessed, the Jehovah's Witnesses and Nazis don't see eye to eye on a number of things. Nazis think that the German *Volk* holds the ultimate supremacy of authority, but of course the Witnesses think that it is God who is the master of all things, including the German people.

Eventually the Nazis' nationalism and militarism was set on a collision course with Jehovah's Witnesses' non-violent adherence to God's Kingdom.

The Jehovah's Witnesses were never well liked in the Weimar Republic. Believe it or not, a minority against voting and military service isn't the most popular. They were looked down upon by the state and other major churches. On the other hand, they did reasonably well under the Weimar's Liberal legal structure.

Problems began in the 1920's in Catholic Bavaria, the Nazi party's ground zero. In this time Witnesses were hassled about the "illegal peddling" of literature but were often acquitted. Nonetheless, critics considered them to be heretics and a tool of political subversion for "Communists" and "Anarchists."

In 1922, accusations arose that the Witnesses were agents of the Jew and enemies of German culture. Publications of [*The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*](#), in 1923, even mention the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Because of the increased harassment, the Witnesses felt obliged to issue a statement. In June 1933, they wrote the [*Declaration of Facts*](#), and sent it to every high-ranking government officer.

In the *Declaration*, they describe their harassment, emphasize the lawful nature of their members, and deny ties to Freemasonry, Jewry, and Communism. The document tries to appease the Nazis by condemning the League of Nations, and points to the other "parallel goals" the Witnesses shared with the Nazis.

Sadly, their appeals to neutrality backfired. The *Declaration* caused the Witnesses to stand out as "Traitors." The S.A. subjected the Witnesses to lynch-justice, leaving homes and businesses without police protection. All of this was pretty bad, but it was about to get a lot worse...

When the [elections were held in 12th November 1933](#), the Witnesses refused to vote. Of course, not voting for the Fuhrer's leadership resulted in a mass persecution of the faithful. Humiliation and physical violence followed the Witnesses. Gallows were built "as a warning" to captured prisoners. Deaths in jail were reported as "suicides" and the Witnesses, like the Jews, had lost all civil rights.

In addition, the Nazi's escalated their attempt to stop the distribution of the Witnesses' literature. The Nazi's were bothered by the Witnesses' literature, claiming that the blood covered sword often displayed on their documents was "offensive." The Nazis allowed the Witnesses' publishing house to only publish literature that did not mention the Jehovah's Witnesses or their work. Following the letter of the law, the Witnesses published anyway. They continued to push the envelope with what they could get away with.

In June 1934, the Nazis began to purge the government of any Jehovah's Witnesses. Civil servants were dismissed for their refusal to vote and give the proper Hitler salute greeting. In this way, the Nazis mobilized the population to further alienate and [persecute](#) the Witnesses.

So far, the Nazis had tactically danced around the legal system. They made a point of keeping up appearances of legality.

But none of this stopped the faithful from continuing their mission in the face of persecution. The Jehovah's Witnesses responded with new literature that dropped any sign of appeasement. The Nazis were quick to double down. In 1935, The ban on Witnesses literature was re-issued with an increase in arrests and police surveillance. But once again, the Witnesses remained undeterred.

With the war on literature proving to be a quagmire, the Nazis directed their assault on a new target held dear by every Jehovah's Witness; their families. Marriage to one of the faithful became grounds for divorce, and children were taken away because the state deemed parents unfit because of their faith. Their children were banned from school or adopted by parents who could raise them as proper National Socialists. But still, the Witnesses refused to yield.

As Germany mobilized for war, new laws for mandatory military service were passed. Three days later, the Jehovah's Witnesses responded by not only refusing to participate in military service, but all labour services that directly aided the war effort. These actions triggered more imprisonment and their exclusion from the Labour Front, ensuring almost complete unemployment and poverty. Yet once again, the faithful pressed on.

The appearance of legality began to slip from the Nazi's hands. Germans began to argue about the whether the actions against the Jehovah's Witnesses were justified.

Those in favor of the ban claimed that the freedom of the individual wasn't affected because people could still choose to be Jehovah's Witnesses (regardless of whether or not they endured persecution as a result of doing so). Accusations that the religion was nothing more than a safe harbour for Communism and Marxists shock troops stoked the fears kindled against the Witnesses. This was said regardless of the fact that a government memo released on June 11, 1934, denied that any of the evidence gathered from police raids against the Witnesses supported such accusations.

In spite of theses allegations, the judges from lower courts began to refuse upholding the ban against the Witnesses. As a consequence, in 1940, the Nazis began to siphon the Witnesses into secret courts. Double jeopardy was the norm as the faithful were shepherded from courthouses and prison halls into secret courts where they were tried en mass. The pseudo-justification for their convictions would be

published in the Tuesday Book of Reich Justice, explaining to the public why prisoners were now in the "protective custody" of the Gestapo.

Afterwards, these lambs were locked away in concentration camps like Dachau and Morigen, regardless of whether they were found guilty or innocent. But the underground network of literature distribution raged on, and the Witnesses kept faith.

The Witness's literature became more and more anti-Nazi as their oppression increased. They compared Hitler to the biblical "beast of prey," and the German nation as an evil regime which corrupted the youth. As early as 1937, they wrote about the "satanic" nature of Reich and the hope of a new kingdom that was to come. They prophesied Hitler's defeat by the hands of the Allies, hallowing the biblical "King of the North's" defeat by the "King of the South." Pamphlets mocked Hitler and foretold the dawn of a new age that would strike down the corrupted.

"Stand Fast!" was a popular tune of resistance sung by the Jehovah's Witness at the time their persecution. It called for the faithful to endure the tribulations found in the "land of the enemy."

The Nazi government was unable to stop the spread of these documents. The teachings were spread to military officials, bureaucrats, and the citizenry within the German nation as well as to others abroad. In addition, the Witnesses found innovative ways to spread their ideology. For example, some opened medical practices as chiropodists and osteopaths in order to pass on their teachings in the guise of medical care.

At times, the literature of the witnesses would reach thousands. In December 12th, 1937, 300,000 pamphlets were distributed in a very coordinated underground campaign. Producing literature was so important to the Witnesses, that even within the concentration camps, it was a top priority.

In the concentration camps, the Witnesses endured "initiation rituals," daily violence, and abuse from guards. Many of Witnesses were fellow Germans, so all they had to do was sign a declaration against their beliefs to be liberated. Almost all refused.

Signified by a [violet triangle](#), they began to make the adjustments to their new lives in the camps. The Witnesses were reported to be model prisoners. They wouldn't make attempts to escape and refused to use violence with their oppressors. Ironically, as a result, they were often employed by S.S. as servants. One officer mentions how they could be trusted to shave guards with razors. This of course led many of them to be despised by fellow prisoners.

Life carried on for the Witnesses. They kept on with the old routine, meeting together, praying together, producing literature, and of course making converts from fellow prisoners (even some of the guards). Also, in Buchenwald, they set up an entire underground printing press. After the war, they went on to convert fellow survivors and did so in great number.

But why didn't the Witnesses crack? One expects a psychological breakdown when analyzing the conditions of the camps. The answer is that the Witnesses could make sense of the camps and the suffering around them. Not being able to make order out of chaos is reported to be one of the greatest reasons for the psychological breakdown of Holocaust victims.

But to the faithful, this great tragedy was just God's greatest test. The end was nigh! And the Witnesses always believed that it wouldn't be pretty, but at the same time not an ounce of suffering would be forgotten by the Lord. The day of judgement was at hand, for them and their oppressors.

About one out of every two Jehovah's Witness was imprisoned. About one out of four lost their lives as a result of the Nazi terror, each of them with their own [stories](#).

But who won? Some 20,000 Jehovah's Witnesses (their total number) or the Nazi state?

If we judge the Witnesses and the Nazis by the goals they set themselves. The Witnesses won hands down.

Not only did the Nazis fail to stop half of the Witnesses, they failed to stop the spread of their ideas. Not to mention they failed to do this at the expense of a great deal of time, energy, and resources.

Meanwhile, the Jehovah's Witnesses understood themselves as lambs who would be shepherded by God. Both the Nazis and the Witnesses preached of a thousand-year Reich to come, it's just that one believed it to be God's instead of Hitler's. The Witnesses believed that any tyrannical kingdom of hate and despotism would face collapse when the great day of judgement came. Great and apocalyptic forces would come, and truth would have its reckoning. All they had to do was hold firm in the faith in order to not lose themselves in the process.

Were they wrong?

