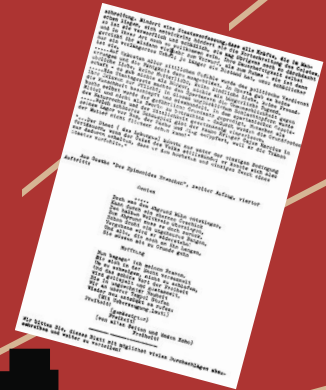


# RESISTANCE TO NAZI GERMANY

## THE WHITE ROSE AND CATHOLICISM



CAILYN PEDDLE, 2023, SNHU UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH DAY



# INTRODUCTION

*Il faut avoir l'esprit d'ur et le coeur tendre.  
You must have a strong spirit and a tender heart.*



- This quote by Jacques Maritain inspired many readers all over the world, but perhaps most notably, Sophie Scholl.
- Sophie was a German university student deeply interested in religion and philosophy, but she also was actively involved in resistance against Nazism.
- Sophie, her brother Hans, along with some of their school friends formed the White Rose, a movement that opposed fascism and encouraged nonviolence and peace. They produced leaflets that were spread around the University of Munich campus but also to various towns across Germany.
- As a result of their initiative, Sophie, Hans, and their friends were beheaded.
- The White Rose was one of the very few vocal resistance groups within Germany, and with their ties to religion, it proved to be a unique situation.
- The Nazis had a complicated relationship with religion and the Catholic Church in particular, which the White Rose aligned itself with, but had no clear plan to eradicate the Catholic ideology.

# HISTORICAL CONTEXT

## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND NAZISM

- In Germany, activities of the Catholic Church were almost completely banned.
- The Nazis wanted to get rid of religion in Germany and replace it with nationalism.
- Church leaders were put on immorality trials, some were killed. Hitler wanted to "imprison the Catholics in their own churches."
- Pope Pius XI was a fierce advocate against Nazism, but his successor, Pope Pius XII was more reserved in his criticisms.



# START OF THE WHITE ROSE



"My soul is hungry... My sole sustenance is Nature, the sky, and the stars from the silent earth...If I love people in all sincerity, I love them for God's sake. What better thing can I do than take that love to God?" -Sophie

-Hans Scholl, Willi Graf, Alexander Schmorell, Christoph Probst, and Sophie Scholl were the core members of the group.

-Hans and Sophie grew up with fairly liberal and progressive parents. When Hans, Sophie, and their siblings joined the Hitler Youth with their friends, their dad said, "Don't believe [the Nazis], they are wolves and deceivers, and they are misusing the German people shamefully."

-Eventually the kids found their way back to their parents' views, but they were forced into mandatory labor service for the Third Reich.

-During this time, the Scholls grew deeper in their faith and in their resolve, mainly through Catholic literature.

"There are things that one can never fathom with rational thought, things that are outwardly incomprehensible but inwardly comprehended. I want to travel far along the road of reason; but I realize I'm a creature born of nature and grace, though a grace that presupposes nature." -Hans



# START OF THE WHITE ROSE



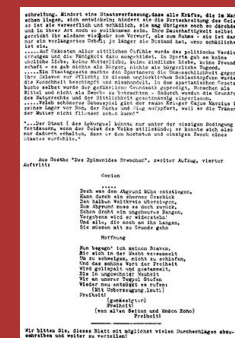
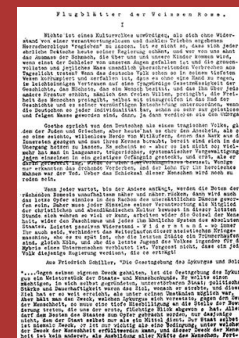
-Willi never joined the Hitler Youth and was a strong Catholic.

-They all met at university in Munich and befriended the Scholls.

-They held weekly meetings together to discuss religion, politics, art, and literature. This



"In this last hour every individual must arm himself as best he can, aware of his responsibility as a member of the Christian and western civilization. He must work against the hostage of humanity, against fascism and all similar systems of an absolute State. Offer resistance to prevent the continuation of this atheistic war machine before it is too late." -First Leaflet



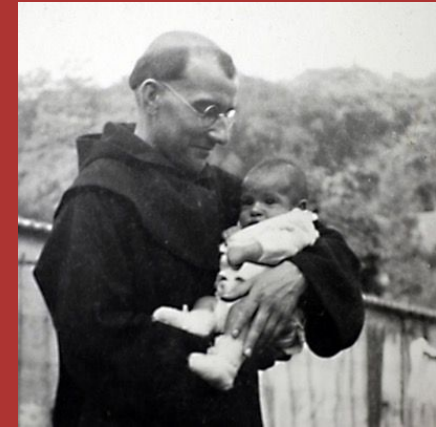
# START OF THE WHITE ROSE



- After publishing the first four leaflets, the boys of the group were forced to go to Poland and Russia to work as medics on the front.
- Because Alex was fluent in Russian, they were able to talk to peasants and locals to understand the full scope of the situation and realize what the Germans were actually doing.
- They witnessed Jews being beaten and starved in the Warsaw Ghetto among other atrocities.
- This led the group to the conclusion that Germany needed to lose the war, and upon their return to Germany they reignited the White Rose with more fervor and passion than before.

# OTHER FORMS OF CATHOLIC RESISTANCE

- All over Europe, churches and priests and ordinary people were taking in Jewish children and their families to save them from Nazi persecution.
- They would teach them Latin prayers, falsify identification documents, and hid them in countries all over the continent.
- Protestant resistance was less common because most either supported Nazism or were apolitical.
- Denouncing Nazism and Hitler in any form carried the same sentence. This included hiding Jews and speaking poorly about the Reich; any offenders were typically killed on the spot. If they weren't killed, they could taken to prison and tortured for information or sent to a concentration camp.





## THE FINAL LEAFLETS AND EXECUTION

[illegible]



# THE FINAL LEAFLETS AND EXECUTION

- On February 18, 1943, Hans and Sophie brought copies of the last leaflet to campus to distribute while class was in session. They assumed no one would be around.
- They set piles of the leaflet in front of classroom doors and on staircases, but as they were about to leave Sophie realized they had some left. They ran upstairs and pushed the rest off of a balcony.
- As the leaflets fluttered down, a janitor noticed and called the Gestapo.
- The school was locked and Sophie and Hans were arrested.



# THE FINAL LEAFLETS AND EXECUTION

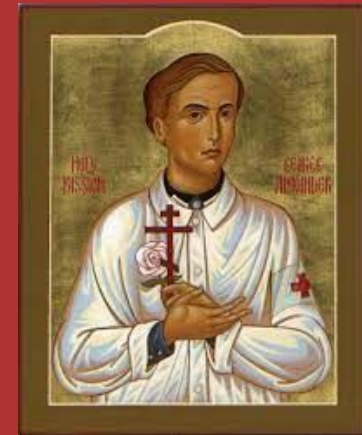
- They were taken in to be interrogated and were questioned for four days.
- After a search of their apartment, evidence against Christoph came to light and he was arrested as well.
- On February 22, they were brought to a closed trial with no defense or witnesses. All three were to be executed that day.
- The guards were sympathetic to their age and bravery and allowed them to see their families again before being brought to the guillotine (which was not allowed).
- Hans's final words as the guillotine fell were "Long live freedom!"

# THE LEGACY OF THE WHITE ROSE

-In total, seven White Rose members were executed. Others were given prison sentences or released.

-In July of 1943, copies of the sixth leaflet were dropped by Allied planes over Germany retitled "The Manifesto of the Students of Munich." They had been smuggled out by a friend of the cause to England.

-Many schools, plazas, and parks have been named for the Scholls and other White Rose members. Alex was canonized by the Eastern Orthodox Church as a passion bearer and saint.



# CONCLUSION

-Organized resistance in Nazi Germany was not an easy feat. Although the White Rose did not go out and hide Jewish people like some did, words are powerful.

-Hans wanted to be "a beacon to many a lonely traveler"; through their leaflets, those that could not speak out could know that they were not alone.

-Hans and Sophie were incredibly wise for their age. They were deeply religious and philosophical and found purpose through resistance work.

- If they had to lose their lives for a cause that would help those who were alone, lost, or in pain, they would, and they did. Hans, Sophie, all of the members of the White Rose, and anyone who risked everything to save the lives of others during the war will forever be remembered as champions of compassion and freedom. They are eternal reminders that there will always be good in the world.

*That which has arisen bravely from the abyss—  
By some harsh quirk of fate,  
Can conquer half the globe  
But it must then return to the abyss.  
Monstrous fears are threatening now,  
In vain will he resist!  
And all those who have clung to him  
Must perish too.*

*Hope.*

*Now I meet my good men  
Who have gathered in the night  
To keep silence, not to sleep.  
The lovely word of freedom  
Is spoken lisping and stammering  
Until in unaccustomed newness  
We stand upon our temple steps  
And cry anew enraptured:*

*(Loudly and with conviction)  
Freedom!*

*(Moderately)  
Freedom!*

*(Echoing from every side and corner)  
Freedom!<sup>102</sup>*

# SOURCES



Bard, Mitchell. "Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust." *Jewish Virtual Library*.

Calloway, Donald. *Consecration to St. Joseph*. Stockbridge: Marian Press, 2020.

Chadwick, Owen. *A History of Christianity*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

Chand, Neelam. "Parallels of the White Rose Resistance." University of Utah, 2018.

Conway, John S. *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933–1945*. Regent College Publishing, 1997.

Ehrenfried, Matthias. "NAZI ACTS DECRIED BY REICH BISHOPS; Text of Their Pastoral Letter of March 22 Shows Sharp Protest at Oppressions." *The New York Times*, 1942.

Fest, Joachim. *Plotting Hitler's Death: The German Resistance to Hitler 1933–1945*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997.

Forest, Jim. "Alexander Schmorell, freed from the tyranny of fear." U.S. Catholic, 2016.

Frey, Reed. "Conscience before Conformity: Hans and Sophie Scholl and the White Rose Resistance in Nazi Germany." *Newman Studies Journal* 16, 2019.

*Gestapo Interrogation Transcripts: Willi Graf, Alexander Schmorrel, Hans Scholl, and Sophie Scholl*. Translated by Ruth Hanna Sachs. Las Vegas: Exclamation Publishers, 2003.

Gill, Anton. *An Honourable Defeat: A History of the German Resistance to Hitler*. London: Heinemann, 1998.

*Holy Silence*. Directed by Steven Pressman. PBS, 2020.

Hornberger, Jacob G. "The White Rose - A Lesson in Dissent." *Jewish Virtual Library*.

*Irena Sendler: In the Name of Their Mothers*. Directed by Mary Skinner. PBS, 2010.

"Jardin Hans et Sophie Scholl." paris.fr, 2022.

Kent, Peter C. "A Tale of Two Popes: Pius XI, Pius XII and the Rome-Berlin Axis." *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1988.

Kertzer, David. "The Pope at War." New York: Penguin Random House, 2022.

Lapomarda, Vincent A. *The Jesuits and the Third Reich*. E. Mellen Press, 2005.

LaFarge, John. *Humani Generis Unitas*. 1938.

*Leaflets of the White Rose*. Translated by libcom.org. 2006.

Mohr, Robert. *Robert Mohr: Written Memorandum*. Translated by Ruth Hanna Sachs. Las Vegas: Exclamation Publishers, 2007.

Perekrestov, Elena. "Alexander Schmorell: Saint of the German Resistance." New York: Holy Trinity Publications, 2017.

Peterson, Larry. "Christoph Probst: He was a Husband and Father, and at the age of 23 the Nazis made him a Martyr." *Cradling Catholic*, 2018.

Pope Pius XI, *Mit Brennender Sorge*, 1937.

Radcliffe, Mike. "Resistance and Accommodation: Protestant Responses to Nazism." All Volumes (2001-2008), 2008.

Richards-Wilson, Stephani. *Willi Graf of the White Rose: the role of Bildung in his decision to resist National Socialism*. Madison: University of Madison, 2013.

Rychlak, Ronald J. "Review of A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair." *The Catholic Historical Review*, 2003.

Salluci, Mary. "Biography." perejacques.org.

Scholder, Klaus. *The Churches and the Third Reich*. Fortress Press, 1988.

Scholl, Inge. *The White Rose*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1970.

Scholl, Hans and Sophie Scholl. *At the Heart of the White Rose*. Edited by Inge Jens. Harper and Row Publishers, 1984.

*Secret Lives: Hidden Children and Their Rescuers During World War II*. Directed by Aviva Slesin. Vimeo, 2003.

Shirer, William L. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1960.

Silberberg, Paul. "Five Last Days." San Francisco International Film Festival, 1983.

Spitzer, Tanja B. "Sophie Scholl and the White Rose." The National World War II Museum, 2020.

Sweet, William. "Jacques Maritain." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2019.

"The Assisi Network." Yad Vashem.

"The July 20, 1944, Plot to Assassinate Adolf Hitler." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

*The White Rose*. Bayerische Landeszentrale für Politische Bildungsarbeit, 2006.

"We Will Not Be Silent." gablestage.org, 2022.

"White Rose: The Musical." whitereosethemusical.com, 2022.

Wittenstein, George. "Memories of the White Rose." *The History Place*, 1997.

# **Resistance to Nazi Germany: The White Rose and Catholicism**

Cailyn Peddle

HIS-401 Making History: Capstone

December 16, 2022



## Introduction

“Il faut avoir l’esprit d’être et le cœur tendre” [You must have a strong spirit and a tender heart]. This quote is from French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain. Throughout his storied career, he helped draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, became the French ambassador to the Holy See, and founded a university in the United States for academic refugees escaping Nazism during World War II. Maritain also was an advocate for Integral Christian Humanism, which valued the whole person, including their soul.<sup>1</sup> This inspired many readers all over the world, but perhaps most notably, Sophie Scholl. Sophie was a German university student deeply interested in religion and philosophy, but she also was actively involved in resistance against Nazism. Sophie, her brother Hans, along with some of their school friends formed the White Rose, a movement that opposed fascism and encouraged nonviolence and peace. They produced leaflets that were spread around the University of Munich campus but also to various towns across Germany.

To most, the Scholls appeared to be perfect examples of what Adolf Hitler imagined of German teenagers and young adults: they were part of Hitler Youth groups, mandatory service programs, and did well in school. When they realized how Nazism contradicted their faith and morality, though, they felt compelled to act and formed what is now one of the most well-known and revered German resistance movements. As a result of their initiative, Sophie, Hans, and their friends were beheaded. The White Rose was one of the very few vocal resistance groups within Germany, and with their ties to religion, it proved to be a unique situation. The Nazis had a complicated relationship with religion and the Catholic Church in particular, which the White Rose aligned itself with, but had no clear plan to eradicate the Catholic ideology. By examining the Nazis’ treatment of the White Rose resistance movement, it becomes clear that the regime

---

<sup>1</sup> William Sweet, “Jacques Maritain” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

did not develop, much less enforce, a clear policy for handling rebels involved with Christianity of any variety, Catholic or Protestant. They used this lack of organization as an opportunity to make an example of these students, but ultimately failed in quelling the brewing antipathy among certain Church members and in tarnishing the legacy of the White Rose. While resistance itself did not end Nazism, the efforts of all involved saved countless lives and inspired generations of people who have a story to tell and a message they want to share with the world.

### **Historical Context: The Catholic Church and Nazism**

In Germany, the activities of the Catholic Church were almost entirely banned. The Nazis wanted to completely eradicate Catholicism and replace it with a religion based on race and nationalism: “Nazis disliked universities (which, curiously, supported the Party on the whole), intellectuals, the Church - both Evangelical and Roman Catholic; indeed the long-term plan was to de-Christianise Germany after the 'final victory'.”<sup>2</sup> If they had won the war, Alfred Rosenberg, cultural and educational leader of the Third Reich, planned to end the publication and circulation of the Bible, the Christian cross was to be replaced by the swastika, *Mein Kampf* was to be “the most sacred book” in churches, and no religious statues or figures would be allowed.<sup>3</sup> While this never happened, during the war there were attempts to achieve this. During the Night of the Long Knives, a purge of Germans whom Hitler considered enemies, various Church members who had influence, mostly in the press, were murdered. They were careful not to kill too many Catholics, though, because they did not want to create martyrs and hoped to avoid large-scale protests.<sup>4</sup> Immorality trials against members of various churches began in 1936; 276 churchmen were

---

<sup>2</sup> Anton Gill, *An Honourable Defeat: A History of the German Resistance to Hitler* (London: Heinemann, 1998), 14-15.

<sup>3</sup> William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1960), 240.

<sup>4</sup> A number of martyrs did come from World War II, including the 108 Blessed Polish Martyrs, Bishop Galen, and around seventy others.

convicted of homosexuality.<sup>5</sup> Thousands of religious leaders across Nazi-occupied territory were sent to Dachau where there were designated barracks for clergy members, the majority of whom were Catholic.<sup>6</sup> Many prominent religious writers and philosophers had their works burned and banned as part of the attempt to eliminate their practices and thoughts from society; Hitler wanted to “imprison the Catholics in their own churches.”<sup>7</sup>

While all of this was going on in Germany, Pope Pius XII’s response in Italy is disputed. The Pope’s actions, or lack thereof, have been controversial ever since he was elected in 1939. Pius XII never publicly denounced Nazism, but when he was a cardinal, he participated in the drafting of numerous encyclicals that condemned the violence against the Jewish people, writing, “Whoever exalts race, or the people, or the State...above their standard value and divinizes them to an idolatrous level, distorts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God; he is far from the true faith in God and from the concept of life which that faith upholds.”<sup>8</sup> Pius XI, the predecessor to Pius XII, published three encyclicals after the Nazis came to power, all of which challenged their ideas and views. The aforementioned was the most popular as it was the only one written in German, and it was copied and spread all throughout Germany.<sup>9</sup> The Church was growing increasingly frustrated at the treatment they were being shown at the hands of Hitler, but while this encyclical ignited a spark amongst its readers, it made matters worse for Catholics in Nazi-occupied territory. Hitler had signed treaties with the Vatican to establish terms in which they would be allowed to operate, and it generally protected their rights, but it was

---

<sup>5</sup> Joachim Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death: The German Resistance to Hitler 1933–1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 373.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Calloway, *Consecration to St. Joseph*. (Stockbridge: Marian Press, 2020), 168.

<sup>7</sup> Anton Gill, *An Honourable Defeat: A History of the German Resistance to Hitler*, 57. For additional context, the quote continues: “They could celebrate mass and retain their ritual as much as they liked, but they could have nothing at all to do with German society otherwise. Catholic schools and newspapers were closed, and a propaganda campaign against the Catholics was launched.”

<sup>8</sup> Pius XI, *Mit Brennender Sorge*, 1937.

<sup>9</sup> Owen Chadwick, *A History of Christianity* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 254.

never truly honored. All Catholic newspapers, youth organizations, and schools were closed, and they were told to stay out of politics.<sup>10</sup>

Catholics in Germany began to consider this persecution a war of its own. After the negative Nazi response to the encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge*, the condition for those in all organized religions, but especially Catholics, worsened (besides Jewish people, of course, who had always been a primary target of the Nazis and whose situation was undoubtedly more dire). Some bishops tried to comply, telling their congregations, "We appeal to the faithful to join in ardent prayer that God's providence may lead this war to blessed success for Fatherland and people."<sup>11</sup> This did not stop Reinhard Heydrich, a high-ranking Nazi official, from continuing to intensify his eradication of Church activity in Germany. He believed that due to the globalization of religion and the content of its teachings, church leaders and followers could not be expected to comply with Nazi doctrine and so it would be in the regime's best interests to eliminate it.<sup>12</sup> In 1942, the disillusioned bishops worked together to draft a letter about their issues and worries,

For years a war has raged in our Fatherland against Christianity and the Church. Repeatedly the German bishops have asked the Reich Government to discontinue this fatal struggle; but unfortunately our appeals and our endeavors were without success... We the German bishops shall not cease to protest against the killing of innocent persons. Nobody's life is safe unless the Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" is observed.<sup>13</sup>

Unsurprisingly, these efforts were to no avail, but this letter was widely circulated and brought light to the fears that Catholics were confronted with in the country.

Pius XI died of a heart attack in early 1939. He firmly believed that antisemitism was one of the most un-Christianlike perspectives that a Catholic could hold: he presided over the

---

<sup>10</sup> Anton Gill, *An Honourable Defeat: A History of the German Resistance to Hitler*, 57.

<sup>11</sup> John S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933–1945* (Regent College Publishing, 1997), 234.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>13</sup> Matthias Ehrenfried, "NAZI ACTS DECRIED BY REICH BISHOPS; Text of Their Pastoral Letter of March 22 Shows Sharp Protest at Oppressions," *The New York Times* (1942).

German bishops' excommunication of Nazi Party members, banned Catholics from joining the Party until it was required by law, and called all Christians Semites in spirit.<sup>14</sup> While he was not perfect and did not always try to stop fascism from spreading, particularly in the early years of Hitler and Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, he was more vocal about his anti-Nazi beliefs than most other prominent leaders of the 1930s, and according to historian Peter Kent,

By the time of his death ... Pius XI had managed to orchestrate a swelling chorus of Church protests against the racial legislation and the ties that bound Italy to Germany. He had single-mindedly continued to denounce the evils of the Nazi regime at every possible opportunity and feared above all else the re-opening of the rift between Church and State in his beloved Italy. He had, however, few tangible successes.<sup>15</sup>

Although he did not get a chance to implement the change he so fiercely advocated for, his legacy would live on in Pope Pius XII, albeit in a very different way, for better or for worse.

The now Pope Pius XII had been involved in some of Pius XI's anti-Nazi activities, but this more candid nature waned as the war progressed and especially after he was elected to the papacy. Because he believed that the Axis Powers would win the war and because he had seen how *Mit Brennender Sorge* damaged the Church under Hitler, he did not want to create any additional problems for Catholicism as a whole. In his first meeting with Hitler, he said, "I am certain that if peace between Church and state is restored, everyone will be pleased. The German people are united in their love for the Fatherland. Once we have peace, the Catholics will be loyal, more than anyone else."<sup>16</sup> While he wanted to protect the Church within Germany and without, his nonpolitical stance potentially did more harm than good.

---

<sup>14</sup> Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich* (Fortress Press, 1988), 150–162; Ronald J. Rychlak, "The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust," *The Catholic Historical Review* (2003): 327–333. On the choice to use the spelling of "antisemitism" versus "anti-Semitism": "The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) concern is that the hyphenated spelling allows for the possibility of something called 'Semitism', which not only legitimizes a form of pseudo-scientific racial classification that was thoroughly discredited by association with Nazi ideology, but also divides the term, stripping it from its meaning of opposition and hatred toward Jews".

<sup>15</sup> Peter C. Kent, "A Tale of Two Popes: Pius XI, Pius XII and the Rome-Berlin Axis," *Journal of Contemporary History* (1988): 589–608.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

### **The Beginnings of the White Rose Resistance**

Hans Scholl, Willi Graf, Alexander Schmorell, Christoph Probst, and Sophie Scholl: these five students were the core members of the White Rose and were largely the ones responsible for the writing and distribution of the leaflets. Hans and Sophie grew up with fairly liberal parents; their father, Robert Scholl, was the mayor of a town called Forchtenberg but was voted out due to his progressive beliefs.<sup>17</sup> They were born into a Lutheran family and from a young age understood the depth and complexity of religion; the Scholl parents felt that their religion coincided with, rather than contradicted, their political views.<sup>18</sup> When Hitler rose to the chancellorship in 1933, however, the siblings were initially very receptive to his views because they too loved their country and wanted to see it prosper. Hans joined the Hitler Youth and Sophie joined the League of German Girls. They, along with their other siblings Inge, Elisabeth, and Werner, were confused as to why their parents were unhappy with their patriotism. Robert told the kids, “Don’t believe [the Nazis], they are wolves and deceivers, and they are misusing the German people shamefully.”<sup>19</sup>

Although they all had intense enthusiasm for the cause at first, it did not take long for them to become a bit disillusioned by Nazism. Sophie was upset that her Jewish friends could no longer go to school and Hans got in a physical altercation with a Hitler Youth official over the fact that they had to fly a Nazi flag rather than one their group had designed. They were both young teens at this point and slowly began to find their way back to their father’s liberal belief system rather than that of the Party. In 1935, Hans joined an illegal underground youth organization that championed the ways of the Weimar Republic and was for kids and teens that no longer cared for the deep-seated nationalism that had spread across Germany. He was

---

<sup>17</sup> Inge Scholl, *The White Rose* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1970), 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

reintroduced to authors that had been banned years prior, and Hans shared what he was experiencing with Sophie as she was not allowed to join on account of being a girl.<sup>20</sup>

In late 1937, Hans was in prison for his involvement with the group and due to charges of homosexuality; he actually ended up admitting to two relationships with male students after being interrogated. The judge let Hans go free, but sentenced Ernst Reden, a close family friend of the Scholls and one of the boys involved in the alleged relationship with Hans, to time in prison and a concentration camp.<sup>21</sup> Ernst was a few years older than Hans and Sophie and influenced their love of poetry and literature. He is frequently mentioned in correspondence and diary entries from the two.<sup>22</sup> A few weeks following Hans's arrest, two Gestapo officers were at the door of the Scholls' apartment looking to arrest the remaining teens. Their search of the home did not bring forth any incriminating evidence, but Werner, Inge, and Sophie were taken away. Sophie was released immediately, but Werner and Inge were held for a week and Hans was in prison for a total of five weeks.<sup>23</sup> They were now on the radar of the Gestapo, and would be watched with a suspicious eye going forward. The following years for the Scholls consisted of studying and carrying out their mandatory service time, called *Arbeitsdienst*. Hans was involved in the Reich Labor Service before going to medical school, and Sophie worked as a kindergarten teacher initially to try to avoid the service, but eventually was forced to join. She struggled immensely at first, quoting Maritain for the first time in her letters. Sophie needed the philosopher's encouragement to adjust to this new life with fewer freedoms and poor living conditions.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Anton Gill, *An Honourable Defeat: A History of the German Resistance to Hitler*, 186.

<sup>21</sup> Reed Frey, "Conscience before Conformity: Hans and Sophie Scholl and the White Rose Resistance in Nazi Germany," *Newman Studies Journal* 16 (2019): 124–125.

<sup>22</sup> Hans Scholl and Sophie Scholl, *At the Heart of the White Rose*, ed. Inge Jens. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984), 262.

<sup>23</sup> Inge Scholl, *The White Rose*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Scholl and Scholl, *At the Heart of the White Rose*, 194.



During this time of manual labor and hardship, Sophie turned inward and to her faith. From a young age, all of the Scholl children had been avid readers, and Sophie particularly loved Catholic-leaning authors as she got older. While she was not Catholic and did not convert before her untimely death, she expressed great interest in the branch of Christianity, as did her brother: “Young people... had begun to turn to theological and philosophical writings in their quest for means to cope with the ever-growing barbarism.”<sup>25</sup> Munich during World War II was “a deeply Catholic city” which also contributed to the Scholl siblings’ departure from their Lutheran upbringing.<sup>26</sup> Sophie mentioned reading a book about St. Augustine by Étienne Gilson, which she would try to consume during her limited free time. This was a period of great personal and spiritual growth for Sophie, and it solidified her blossoming views on religion, politics, and the world itself. In a diary entry from 1941, she said, “My soul is hungry... My sole sustenance is Nature, the sky, and the stars from the silent earth... If I love people in all sincerity, I love them for God’s sake. What better thing can I do than take that love to God?”<sup>27</sup>

Hans also experienced an intense spiritual awakening that same year, saying in a letter to his girlfriend Rose, “There are things that one can never fathom with rational thought, things that are outwardly incomprehensible but inwardly comprehended. I want to travel far along the road of reason; but I realize I’m a creature born of nature and grace, though a grace that presupposes nature... Christ has been born for me anew.”<sup>28</sup> His unofficial conversion to Catholicism was also led by books, although he took a more intellectual approach to religion than Sophie did. For Hans and Sophie both, their friendship with Carl Muth, a devout Catholic, heavily influenced their faith after they met in 1941.<sup>29</sup> Other authors that inspired the siblings include Léon Bloy,

---

<sup>25</sup> Annette Dumbach, *Sophie Scholl and the White Rose* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2006), 68.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>27</sup> Scholl and Scholl, *At the Heart of the White Rose*, 194.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

Paul Claudel, Georges Bernanos, and especially Theodor Haecker. After Sophie's work service was extended for six additional months, she was finally discharged in April of 1942. Hans had now spent many months abroad and returned home to occasionally resume his studies, but now they would be able to attend university together. In May, Sophie could finally begin her education in biology and philosophy and Hans continued his medical work.<sup>30</sup> He introduced Sophie to his school friends, among them Willi, Christoph, and Alexander. Hans and Sophie moved in together.

Unlike many of his fellow White Rose members, Willi Graf never joined the Hitler Youth. In fact, he crossed out the names of his friends in his address book who did.<sup>31</sup> At age eleven he became a member of a Catholic youth movement that was later banned by the Nazis, and subsequently joined the anti-Nazi Grey Order which led him to a three-week stay in prison. He was a devout Catholic for the entirety of his life and clung to religious texts as a lifeline throughout the adversity in which he had been brought up.<sup>32</sup> Christoph Probst's upbringing was slightly different; his father was a scholar and his step-mother was Jewish, but shortly after their marriage his father committed suicide.<sup>33</sup> Christoph was never fully on board with Nazi ideology, but ended up attending a boarding school that was centered around propaganda, and it is here that he met Alexander Schmorell. Alex was born in Russia and remained fluent in Russian even after his move to Germany when he was four. He was raised in the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>34</sup> His mother died in the Russian Civil War when he was two, and his father remarried a German

---

<sup>30</sup> Tanja B. Spitzer, "Sophie Scholl and the White Rose" The National World War II Museum (2020).

<sup>31</sup> Stephani Richards-Wilson, *Willi Graf of the White Rose: the role of Bildung in his decision to resist National Socialism* (Madison: University of Madison, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Larry Peterson, "Christoph Probst: He was a Husband and Father, and at the age of 23 the Nazis made him a Martyr" *Cradling Catholic* (2018).

<sup>34</sup> Elena Perekrestov, *Alexander Schmorell: Saint of the German Resistance* (New York: Holy Trinity Publications, 2017), 10.

woman which prompted their relocation. Eventually he went to study medicine after many years of schooling with Christoph, and this is how he came to know Hans.<sup>35</sup>

In the summer of 1942, Hans and Alex wrote the first four leaflets. They were inspired by *leseabende*, or weekly meetings they held with friends to discuss politics, philosophy, and other intellectual pursuits.<sup>36</sup> They saw the increasingly brutal ways in which the Jewish people were treated, heard stories of what the Germans were doing to the Russians and Poles, and frequently read the Catholic Bishop Clemens August Graf von Galen's sermons condemning the Nazis' actions against the Church and their violence.<sup>37</sup> As they were both students and avid readers of philosophy and religious texts, they decided to write a call to action for fellow Christians and German intellectuals because they believed that those people in particular could be persuaded, as they had been just a few years earlier. In the first leaflet they conveyed,

In this last hour every individual must arm himself as best he can, aware of his responsibility as a member of the Christian and western civilization. He must work against the hostage of humanity, against fascism and all similar systems of an absolute State. Offer... resistance to prevent the continuation of this atheistic war machine before it is too late.<sup>38</sup>

They wrote the first four leaflets on a typewriter and managed to make around a hundred copies in total and hid them in telephone boxes and mailed the remaining copies to students and professors. They first sent leaflets to themselves, though, to see if they would be intercepted. Only thirty-five copies were reported to the Gestapo.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Elena Perekrestov, *Alexander Schmorell: Saint of the German Resistance*. 16.

<sup>36</sup> George Wittenstein, "Memories of the White Rose" *The History Place* (1997).

George, or Jürgen, was a friend of Hans and Alex. He actually introduced the two. He wrote four articles detailing his relationship to the White Rose as well as the inner workings and thoughts of group members. As a surviving member who was close to Hans, Alex, and Willi (they served together in the same student company) and also knew Christoph well, he provides a unique perspective.

<sup>37</sup> Anton Gill, *An Honourable Defeat: A History of the German Resistance to Hitler*, 59. In 1941, Bishop Galen gave three sermons that condemned the arrest of Jesuits, the treatment of the Church, and the euthanization of disabled people. These were illegally circulated in printed form, which is how the Scholls and their friends came to read them.

<sup>38</sup> *Leaflets of the White Rose*. Translated by libcom.org (2006).

<sup>39</sup> George Wittenstein, "Memories of the White Rose."

As one member of the White Rose explains,

Producing and distributing such leaflets sounds simple from today's perspective, but, in reality, it was not only very difficult but even dangerous. Paper was scarce, as were envelopes. And if one bought them in large quantities, or for that matter, more than just a few postage stamps, one would become instantly suspect. Taking leaflets to other cities carried great risk, because trains were constantly patrolled by military police, who demanded identification papers of any male of military service age... We left the briefcases which contained the leaflets in a different compartment, for luggage was routinely searched. Mostly, however, leaflets were taken by female students who were not subject to such scrutiny.<sup>40</sup>

This is where Sophie came in. She initially was never supposed to have known about the resistance, but when she read a leaflet and discovered her brother was involved, they let her take part and eventually realized her value as women were less likely to be suspected of illegal activities.<sup>41</sup> A few other female students joined over time as well, usually girlfriends or sisters of other members.<sup>42</sup> This initial wave of activism did not last long, though, as the men of the group were being sent to Russia for three months. They were to work as medics on the front, and these experiences had a lasting impact on them all. They first stopped in Poland, where the group witnessed Jews being beaten in the Warsaw Ghetto.<sup>43</sup> Alex became a temporary leader among them due to his Russian language skills, and this allowed them to directly communicate with peasants with whom they lived adjacent. Alex was nearly court-martialed for protesting a Russian worker being beaten, Hans secretly gave away some of his rations to Jewish people they passed, and they all came to understand the horrors of what Germany was actually doing.<sup>44</sup> The students realized that the only way to put an end to these atrocities would be for Germany to lose the war; this was a painful thought, but it only provided more passion and encouragement for

---

<sup>40</sup> George Wittenstein, "Memories of the White Rose."

<sup>41</sup> Scholl and Scholl, *At the Heart of the White Rose*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Inge Scholl, *The White Rose*, 66.

<sup>43</sup> George Wittenstein, "Memories of the White Rose".

<sup>44</sup> Anton Gill, *An Honourable Defeat: A History of the German Resistance to Hitler*, 190.

their resistance activities. When they returned from Russia, the White Rose would increase its influence and become greater than anyone could initially comprehend.

### **Other Forms of Catholic Resistance Against Nazism and the White Rose**

Harold Gottschall was five years old when he was taken in by a Catholic family in Holland to hide with for the duration of the war. The day the war ended, he remembered, “I grabbed a Dutch flag and ran all over the street yelling, ‘I’m a Jew! I’m a Jew! I’m a Jew!’”<sup>45</sup> All over Europe, churches and priests and ordinary people were taking in and hiding Jewish children and sometimes their entire families. It is estimated that 10,000 to 700,000 Jews were saved this way, but it is impossible to know the true number.<sup>46</sup> There was no large organized effort, it was small, typically isolated groups like the White Rose who made the decision to fight back against Nazism in whatever way that they could. The White Rose and Bishop Galen used words and intellect to combat fascism, while other Catholics helped Jews falsify documents to escape, hid them all over Europe, and taught Jews Latin prayers so they could more easily blend in amongst other churchgoers.<sup>47</sup>

Irena Sendler, a Polish Catholic, led an initiative that saved 2,500 Jewish children, namely hiding them in convents. She and her team snuck them out of the Warsaw Ghetto, provided them with Catholic names and documents, and made sure they memorized prayers and religious songs in Polish in case they were ever questioned. All of the people she helped save survived the war.<sup>48</sup> The Assisi network of Catholics in Italy saved around 300 Jews from persecution by doing all of the above, and even helped them celebrate Jewish holidays and provided kosher meals.<sup>49</sup> Claus von Stauffenberg, a practicing Catholic, was one of the

---

<sup>45</sup> *Secret Lives: Hidden Children and Their Rescuers During World War II*, directed by Aviva Slesin, Vimeo, 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Vincent A. Lapomarda, *The Jesuits and the Third Reich* (E. Mellen Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> *Irena Sendler: In the Name of Their Mothers*, directed by Mary Skinner, PBS, 2010.

<sup>49</sup> “The Assisi Network,” Yad Vashem.

organizers of the July 20 plot to assassinate Hitler. He placed a bomb under a conference table where Hitler was sitting but the table ultimately shielded him from the blast. The attempt was a failure and all involved were executed, but it remains potentially the closest anyone had come to success.<sup>50</sup>

Conversely, in the Protestant Church, there is not much evidence of resistance other than the Confessing Church. The Confessing Church was a German Protestant movement against Nazism that rejected Hitler's initial attempts to combine all Protestant churches into one pro-Nazi religion: the German Evangelical Church.<sup>51</sup> Protestants on the whole were enthusiastic about Nazism; most Protestants voted for Hitler in 1932 and 1933 while the votes of supportive Catholics fell below the national average, although there were definitely Catholics who were sympathetic to Hitler as well.<sup>52</sup> As the apostle Paul said, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God."<sup>53</sup> As many Protestants believed in this line of thought, they generally accepted Hitler and his ideas. Some did not subscribe to this, though, and so the Confessing Church was born and the Nazis loosened their ties to religion in Germany. Because Protestants made up sixty-two percent of the German population at the time and were either in favor of the Nazis or apolitical, the resistance efforts fell to those in the minority.<sup>54</sup>

As one member of the White Rose described the complexities of trying to fight against Nazism and connect with like-minded groups,

Organized resistance was practically impossible. One could not speak openly, even with close friends, never knowing whether they might not be Nazi spies or collaborators...Even the privacy of one's home was not assured: a tea cozy or pillows

---

<sup>50</sup> "The July 20, 1944, Plot to Assassinate Adolf Hitler," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<sup>51</sup> Mike Radcliffe, "Resistance and Accommodation: Protestant Responses to Nazism" *All Volumes (2001-2008)*, (2008): 40.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Romans 13:1 (Berean Standard Bible).

<sup>54</sup> Mike Radcliffe, "Resistance and Accommodation: Protestant Responses to Nazism."

placed over the telephone were popular precautions against eavesdropping by bugging. Nor did one ever know what mail had been secretly opened... There were individuals, and small, local groups who were opposed to the regime... We now know that there were over 300 of them; but it was nearly impossible to establish contacts, let alone to maintain communications. Thus the existing groups were small, isolated, and did not know of each other.<sup>55</sup>

The Nazis were skilled at instilling fear among resisters which discouraged vocal resentment. If they themselves were willing to die in the fight against fascism, the concern for family members and friends who could be killed as well was enough for many to take extreme caution and secrecy in their efforts. The White Rose attempted to expand their group and work with other movements around Germany, but it proved to be a difficult feat. The mailing of leaflets and painting graffiti were the ways in which they could get their message to reach people, even if it wasn't as sweeping as they would have liked. A similar group in name, spirit, and methodology published the *White Pages* "to keep the human spirit of the Resistance going, to remind people that there was another Germany - the Germany of Goethe and Schiller, of Hegel and Schopenhauer, of Bach and Beethoven."<sup>56</sup> This was a literary magazine, run by Catholics, that were not as blunt in their criticisms as the White Rose, but veiled their hatred in history lessons, poetry, and the simple yet effective omission of 'Heil Hitler' anywhere in the publication. It ran for nine years. Almost everyone involved was executed as part of the July 20 purges.<sup>57</sup> The difference between this group and the White Rose, though, was that the White Rose wanted to provoke the downfall of Nazism while the team behind the *White Pages* only wanted a place to vent their frustrations to others.

Resistance in all forms was dangerous, even if it was covert. Hiding and helping Jewish people was maybe the most obviously perilous as Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, a member of the

---

<sup>55</sup> George Wittenstein, "Memories of the White Rose".

<sup>56</sup> Anton Gill, *An Honourable Defeat: A History of the German Resistance to Hitler*, 158.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



Polish resistance, explains, “You can hide a box of ammunition. You don’t have to feed it everyday. You don’t have to care for it if it gets ill. And the neighbors don’t have to know about it! But when you are hiding a human being... You have to realize you have a ticking time-bomb in your home.”<sup>58</sup> Denouncing Nazism in any form carried the same sentence, however. A small turn-of-phrase to a friend discussing a dislike for anything German or the Reich could lead to arrest, torture, or death. Robert Scholl was arrested after being overheard calling Hitler the “scourge of God” and then again for listening to alleged enemy broadcasts.<sup>59</sup> Many Jewish children who were being hidden were passed from household to household, one child was kept in eighteen different homes throughout the war, as a lot of families and rescuers were scared of harboring one for too long.<sup>60</sup> Those who were caught in this act were shot or sent to a concentration camp, and this included the children.<sup>61</sup> Jacques de Jésus, a Roman Catholic priest at a boys’ school, hid multiple Jewish kids who posed as Catholics but when they were caught, he and the children were sent to camps and died there.<sup>62</sup> The White Rose was aware of all of this, not on a case-by-case basis, but they knew what would happen to them if their identities were revealed. Christoph was less eager to directly participate in the group because he had a wife and children, and while the others did not overtly try to get arrested, they understood what their fates could be, but it did not deter them.

### **The Relationship Between Resistance and Spirituality**

“People shouldn’t be ambivalent themselves just because everything else is... this thoroughly un-Christian attitude is especially common among self-styled Christians. If it were so, how could one expect fate to make a just cause prevail when so few people unwaveringly

---

<sup>58</sup> Irena Sendler: *In the Name of Their Mothers*.

<sup>59</sup> Scholl and Scholl, *At the Heart of the White Rose*, ix.

<sup>60</sup> *Secret Lives: Hidden Children and Their Rescuers During World War II*.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Mary Salluci, “Biography,” [perejacques.org](http://perejacques.org). His story is famously depicted in the French film *Au Revoir Les Enfants*, directed by and from the perspective of one of his students that had befriended one of the Jewish boys.

sacrifice themselves for a just cause?”<sup>63</sup> Sophie wrote this in a letter to her boyfriend, Fritz Hartnagel, in 1940, two years before the first White Rose pamphlets were written. As the war progressed, both Hans and Sophie experienced an intense deepening of their faith alongside a desire to help others and promote change. In that same letter, Sophie continues, “I’m reminded of an Old Testament story that tells how Moses raised his arms in prayer every hour of the day and night, asking God for victory. As soon as he let them drop, his people forfeited divine favor in battle.”<sup>64</sup> This allusion continues and becomes a kind of inspiration for Sophie and Hans as they gradually begin to commit themselves to resistance activity and the risks associated. They found solace in nature and literature that only confirmed their beliefs and provided them with a greater spirituality. While neither of the two formally converted to Catholicism, as previously discussed, they fell more in line with the Catholic belief system as the war progressed. Most of their friends were Catholic and they were almost solely consuming literature by Catholics, so this change makes sense. Sophie never really had a major crisis of faith as Hans did in the midst of the war (as did many others, because it became difficult to rationalize the evils they were witnessing), but she expressed a lot of self-doubt and felt completely humbled by the very notion of a God: “I cannot achieve anything by myself.”<sup>65</sup>

After the first four leaflets were distributed, the boys of the group were sent off to Russia to work as medics. During this three month period, Hans came to find a new perspective on life. In one of his first letters from the front, he talks about the importance of suffering and how greatness can only come from it, “Isn’t Christ being crucified a thousand times every hour, and aren’t beggars and cripples being turned away from every door? To see that human beings fail to

---

<sup>63</sup> Scholl and Scholl, *At the Heart of the White Rose*, 83.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. Exodus 17:11-12: “And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses’ hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.”

<sup>65</sup> Scholl and Scholl, *At the Heart of the White Rose*, xii.

see precisely what makes them human: helplessness, misery, poverty.”<sup>66</sup> He begins to find comfort in discomfort, the unknown, and in the mysteries of God. At the end of July in 1942, he began writing long and intense essays that dealt with all things philosophical and religious, contemplating eternalism, nihilism, and existentialism, among other theories about life’s meaning and his place in the world. This is also the time where he grapples with the reality of a God, saying, “I see the Creation, your handiwork, which is good. But I also see man’s handiwork, which is cruel, and also called destruction and despair... Spare your children! How much longer must they suffer?”<sup>67</sup> As his time in Russia neared its conclusion, Hans found his way back to his work with the White Rose. He started to see the connections between his meditations, his strong feelings against the war, and the conflict within himself. His writings reflect an intensifying disillusionment with war, include detailed descriptions of the beauty and heartbreak of Russia, and pose the question, “what is death?”<sup>68</sup> He expresses the desire to live in Asia as a beggar with nothing in order to grow closer to God; he feels guilt over what he has when so many people are being starved, tortured, and killed. Hans ultimately comes to the conclusion that “all values can never be destroyed among all men,” and this is what inspires him when he returns home to write more leaflets with more fervor and passion than they had before.<sup>69</sup>

Hans was intellectual in his spirituality while Sophie was introspective. She always had a deep affinity for the natural world which enveloped her spiritual life and thoughts. She writes, “Who could have thought it possible that a tiny flower could preoccupy a person so completely that there simply wasn’t room for any other thought?”, and, “The sight of the mountains’ quiet majesty and beauty makes the reasons people advance for their disastrous doings seem ludicrous

---

<sup>66</sup> Scholl and Scholl, *At the Heart of the White Rose*, 239.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

and insane.”<sup>70</sup> Her spirituality was intrinsically connected to nature, as she believed that just admiring the forest and even the tiniest of insects brought her closer to God. It also gave her a sense of humanism and a feeling that she owed a debt to the world, in a way, because humans had wronged it. These ideas contributed to her brewing anti-Nazi sentiments as Sophie felt an obligation to protect who and what she loved but also as a duty to God. Although she felt as if she were being kept in a “straitjacket” under Hitler’s conformist laws, she found ways to “enjoy freedom in secret.”<sup>71</sup> She and Hans often talked about the idea of inner freedom. In her diary she repeatedly meditates on attempts to prove herself to God, feeling small versus strength within herself, and the sanctity of prayer. Like Hans, she began to delve into philosophical questions, like what is nothingness, and is there such a thing? Who is God? This, along with the Christian principles of charity, allowed resentment against Nazism to fester until she discovered her brother’s involvement with the White Rose, which gave her purpose and the knowledge that she was truly doing good, rather than just thinking and praying about it. Sophie found within herself a strong spirit, tender heart, and a spiritual hunger that propelled her into a unification with resistance work.

### **The Final Leaflets and the Execution**

In January of 1943, Paul Giesler, the Nazi district leader of Munich, visited the University of Munich to give a speech about why women should not receive an education. He said that if they were studying because they thought they were too unattractive to find a partner, he would offer some of his lower-ranking officials to do the job, as having children was a woman’s most important responsibility.<sup>72</sup> Many of the female students in attendance tried to leave the room in protest, but were apprehended by Nazi officers. The male students then

---

<sup>70</sup> Scholl and Scholl, *At the Heart of the White Rose*, ix.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>72</sup> Anton Gill, *An Honourable Defeat: A History of the German Resistance to Hitler*, 191.

stormed the podium where Giesler was speaking, took a Nazi student leader hostage, and demanded that the women be released. This event marked the first public student protest against Nazism in Munich, but it also incited a greater urgency to put a stop to the White Rose; Giesler is ultimately credited with the capture and destruction of the White Rose.<sup>73</sup>

Prior to this, though, once everyone had returned from their service in Russia, the writing of leaflets resumed. While in Russia, Hans, Alex, and Willi were in correspondence with their philosophy professor, Kurt Huber. Upon their return, they decided to enlist him to help with the movement, and he was very enthusiastic about the idea,

We must try to kindle the spark of resistance in the hearts of millions of honest Germans, so that it burns bright and bold. The isolated individuals who have stood up one by one against Hitler must be made aware that a large body of like-minded people stands with them. This knowledge will give them courage and the strength to persist. Beyond this, we must try to enlighten those Germans who are still unaware of the evil intentions of our government and awaken in them the will to resistance and forthright opposition. Perhaps we will succeed at the eleventh hour in shaking off the tyrannical oppressor and using that great moment for building, in concert with the other nations of Europe, a new and more humane world.<sup>74</sup>

The students quickly got to work on the fifth leaflet, which had fewer references to literature and was more of a direct call to action and an imagining of a Europe without Hitler. Hans had learned through a friend, Manfred Eickemeyer, about the reality of the persecution of the Jews, and this further fueled their writings.<sup>75</sup> The sixth leaflet was to be their last, and it was written by Huber. It is even more straightforward than the previous, concluding with, “Our nation is awakening against the enslavement of Europe by National Socialism, in a new pious revival of freedom and honor!”<sup>76</sup> In addition to their leaflets, the White Rose also began a graffiti campaign. They

---

<sup>73</sup> Anton Gill, *An Honourable Defeat: A History of the German Resistance to Hitler*, 191.

<sup>74</sup> Inge Scholl, *The White Rose*, 36.

<sup>75</sup> Scholl and Scholl, *At the Heart of the White Rose*, 294.

<sup>76</sup> *Leaflets of the White Rose*, translated by libcom.org.

painted the words ‘Freedom!’ and ‘Down with Hitler!’ on various buildings around the campus over the course of a few nights in early February of 1943.<sup>77</sup>

On February 18, 1943, Hans and Sophie brought a suitcase filled with copies of the sixth leaflet to distribute around the university. It was before classes were let out, so they believed that they were alone. They set piles of the leaflets in front of classroom doors and on the floor for students to find once they were released, but as they were leaving Sophie noticed they had a few copies left, and so they ran upstairs to get rid of them. Sophie hurriedly pushed the papers over a ledge where they fluttered down, catching the eye of a janitor who then called the Gestapo. The doors of the school were locked and Hans and Sophie were arrested. When their personal belongings were being taken off of them, Hans had a copy of a draft for a seventh leaflet written by Christoph which he quickly tore up and tried to swallow, but the officers were able to recover most of the pieces, leading them to the arrest of Christoph two days later.<sup>78</sup> Four days of interrogations ensued, and initially neither of the siblings confessed to anything. Hans and Sophie both said that the reason they were carrying an empty suitcase was because they intended to catch a train to their hometown, Ulm, that day to get clean laundry. Eventually, once the Gestapo had connected the leaflet draft with letters from Christoph that were seized from the Scholls’ apartment, Hans confessed to everything, but he said that he acted alone. When Sophie learned of Hans’s confession, she said that only she and Hans were involved and that no one else should be blamed, and she tried to exonerate her brother when she could.<sup>79</sup> To conclude the lengthy questioning, she said, “I believe I have done the best that I could do for my nation. I

---

<sup>77</sup> *Gestapo Interrogation Transcripts: Willi Graf, Alexander Schmorrel, Hans Scholl, and Sophie Scholl*, translated by Ruth Hanna Sachs (Las Vegas: Exclamation Publishers, 2003).

<sup>78</sup> Inge Scholl, *The White Rose*, 29.

<sup>79</sup> *Gestapo Interrogation Transcripts: Willi Graf, Alexander Schmorrel, Hans Scholl, and Sophie Scholl*.

therefore do not regret my conduct. I wish to take upon myself the consequences for my actions,” and that “the Christian person was more accountable to God than to the State.”<sup>80</sup>

The day of their trial came, February 22, and all three were sentenced to death. It was a closed trial that lasted from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon presided over by Roland Freisler. The Nazis were famous for show trials, and this was no different. During the trial, Sophie is reported to have said, “Somebody, after all, had to make a start. What we wrote and said is also believed by many others. They just don't dare express themselves as we did.”<sup>81</sup> There were no witnesses and no defense; their fate had been sealed from the moment they had been arrested. They were each allowed to make a final statement: Sophie said nothing, Christoph asked for his life to be spared for his children, and Hans also requested that Christoph be released.<sup>82</sup> They then were taken to the prison to write farewell letters. The guards were sympathetic to the Scholls and Christoph, admired their bravery, and allowed them to see their families and share a cigarette before being led to the guillotine one by one. Christoph remarked, “I didn’t know dying can be so easy.”<sup>83</sup> Sophie was first, then Hans, and finally Christoph. Sophie’s true final words are unknown, but her cellmate, Else Gebel, stated that the last time she saw Sophie she said, “Such a glorious sunny day and I must go. But how many must die on the battlefields these days, how many young hopeful men. What does my death matter if our actions will shake and awaken thousands of people?” and she had written ‘Freedom’ on the back of her indictment.<sup>84</sup> Hans’s final words as the guillotine was falling were “Long live freedom!”<sup>85</sup>

In total, seven members of the White Rose were executed. The second trial took place on April 19, 1943 and involved seventeen suspected members including Willi Graf, Kurt Huber, and

---

<sup>80</sup> *Gestapo Interrogation Transcripts: Willi Graf, Alexander Schmorrel, Hans Scholl, and Sophie Scholl.*

<sup>81</sup> Jacob G. Hornberger, “The White Rose - A Lesson in Dissent,” *Jewish Virtual Library*.

<sup>82</sup> Inge Scholl, *The White Rose*, 60.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>85</sup> *Gestapo Interrogation Transcripts: Willi Graf, Alexander Schmorrel, Hans Scholl, and Sophie Scholl.*



Alex Schmorell; they were to be killed while eleven were given prison sentences and three were released. The latter two were executed in July while Willi was locked away in solitary confinement and tortured for seven months before his ultimate beheading in October of the same year.<sup>86</sup> The third trial was scheduled for Hitler's birthday on April 20, but had to be postponed due to lost evidence and finally took place in July where four members were expected to be sentenced to death. Because a new judge was presiding over this trial and was not as familiar with the situation as Freisler, he acquitted all but one who was given a prison sentence.<sup>87</sup> Hans Konrad Leipelt, a Jewish student at the University of Munich, was executed in 1945 because of his connection to the group. While his name is not associated with the core members, after the deaths of the Scholls he continued printing and distributing the leaflets with a friend, and when Professor Huber was killed he began to raise money to send to his wife. He added "and their spirit lives on anyway!" to the end of the leaflets he reproduced.<sup>88</sup>

### **The Legacy of the White Rose**

In July of 1943, copies of the sixth leaflet were dropped over Germany by Allied planes. They had been smuggled out by a friend of the resistance, Helmuth James Graf von Moltke, and reached the Allies by way of Scandinavia to England. The leaflets were retitled "Manifesto of the Students of Munich."<sup>89</sup> This made the activities of the White Rose known all across the nation, and although no uprising or revolution followed, it let sympathizers know that they were not alone. The White Rose has become a symbol of resistance and strength in the face of adversity all over the world. There have been countless books, documentaries, and films created as a way to educate but also to memorialize the group. Geschwister-Scholl-Platz is the name of a plaza in

---

<sup>86</sup> Anton Gill, *An Honourable Defeat: A History of the German Resistance to Hitler*, 195.

<sup>87</sup> Annette Dumbach, *Sophie Scholl and the White Rose*, 201.

<sup>88</sup> Hans-Michael Körner and Wolfgang Smolka, *Hans Leipelt und Marie-Luise Jahn. Studentischer Widerstand in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus am Chemischen Staatslabor der Universität München* (Munich: LM Universum, 2003).

<sup>89</sup> *The White Rose* (Bayerische Landeszentrale für Politische Bildungsarbeit, 2006), 51.

the University of Munich dedicated to the Scholls, and they also have a park in Paris named after them.<sup>90</sup> Professor-Huber-Platz is across the street from the Scholl's square. Numerous other schools, streets, and buildings are named after the White Rose and its members throughout Germany. In 2012, Alex Schmorell was canonized by the Eastern Orthodox Church as a passion bearer and saint, reflecting his last words: "I'm convinced that my life has to end now, early as it may seem, for I have fulfilled my life's mission. I wouldn't know what else I have to do on this earth."<sup>91</sup>

Until the 1990s, the only available information regarding the activities of the White Rose had been first-person accounts and information from surviving family members and friends. Letters, diary entries, and the leaflets were among the only insights accessible until the end of the Soviet Union when the interrogation transcripts and other similar government documents were made public. Two films released in 1982 about the White Rose relied primarily on Inge Scholl's 1952 book as source material which includes a letter from Else Gebel detailing her time with Sophie; *The White Rose* directed by Michael Verhoeven is about the founding of the White Rose until the first executions, and *Five Last Days* by Percy Adlon is solely about Sophie's time in prison from the perspective of her cellmate.<sup>92</sup> The 2005 film *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* was able to use the transcripts to guide the filmmaking process and so it mostly concerns itself with what is in the Nazi documentation. More recent adaptations of the White Rose story include a play by David Meyers called *We Will Not Be Silent* that fictionalizes Sophie's time in confinement and a musical about the resistance movement is in development.<sup>93</sup> Their memory goes beyond reenactments and storytelling, though; their efforts and legacy have had a real, profound effect on many. Germans voted Hans and Sophie into the top-ten most important

---

<sup>90</sup> "Jardin Hans et Sophie Scholl," paris.fr. (2022).

<sup>91</sup> Jim Forest, "Alexander Schmorell, freed from the tyranny of fear" *U.S. Catholic* (2016).

<sup>92</sup> Paul Silberberg, "Five Last Days," San Francisco International Film Festival (1983).

<sup>93</sup> "We Will Not Be Silent" gablestage.org (2022); "White Rose: The Musical," whitereosethemusical.com (2022).

Germans in history, and their method of protest has inspired other movements since.<sup>94</sup> Historian Julie Ault explains,

The tactics that the White Rose utilized are still relevant around the world. Protest through art and language continues to be a means of pointing out hypocrisy, corruption, and cruelty... The White Rose is a reminder of how vital young people are in challenging the status quo—whether under dictatorship or in a democracy—as they seek to correct injustice.<sup>95</sup>

The leaflets of the White Rose are quoted today in response to threats to democracy, its members provide encouragement for those fighting against an oppressor, and their memory heartens all who have a story and a message they want to share with the world.

### **Conclusion**

Organized resistance against the Nazi regime was not an easy feat, especially in Germany. While Catholic movements across Europe that risked their lives to save Jewish people had plans more overt and actionable compared to the White Rose, words are powerful. The thousands of sheets of paper they printed with messages of hope and freedom found their way into the hands of people from all walks of life who, regardless of their views on Nazism, were connected through those words. The analogies to literature and scripture woven between instructions on ways that the average person could aid in bringing an end to fascism in Germany resonated with readers. Although the leaflets did not have their intended impact, a widespread vocal opposition against Hitler and his ideas and an end to Nazism, they did not fail, either. As Sophie said, their supporters, who she believed were large in number, were too afraid to speak out. She hoped the efforts of the White Rose would comfort Germans even if nothing changed.<sup>96</sup> Hans agreed, he understood the power of loneliness: “Individuals are lonely in many respects, but when was this ever not so?... I try to see [people] as they are and make an equable impression

---

<sup>94</sup> Neelam Chand, “Parallels of the White Rose Resistance” (University of Utah, 2018).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Jacob G. Hornberger, “The White Rose - A Lesson in Dissent,” *Jewish Virtual Library*.

on them, and I don't shrink from the vilest stench or the muddiest color. They exist. Shadows exist for the sake of light, but light takes precedence."<sup>97</sup> He wanted to be "a beacon to many a lonely traveler," and through his initiative and writings he succeeded.<sup>98</sup>

Sophie and Hans were deeply religious, philosophical, and wise, especially for being so young. Sophie in particular saw an immense change in her beliefs during the war, and as 1943 arrived, she said, "I occasionally used to wish I was just a tree, or better still, just a fragment of bark from a tree. I entertained such whims very early on, but nowadays I take care to stifle them and resist the kind of fatigue that seeks fulfillment in nonexistence."<sup>99</sup> Sophie had begun to find purpose in her resistance work and strength through her inner turmoil. She and Hans both were of the mind that suffering made a person stronger and purer and they both would rather suffer immensely than sit idly by as injustices occurred.<sup>100</sup> They could not in good faith do nothing when confronted with the horrors of the Nazis, of which they did not even know the full extent. In times of hardship and also in times of joy, Hans and Sophie delved further into their Biblical and academic pursuits which they felt bettered them as people but also allowed them to discover ways to better the world, as Hans said,

Man in the midst of this world resembles a fire that flickers relentlessly, inflames us with apparent unpredictability, burns, and dies. Should we blind ourselves to these dangers? Isn't it preferable to die of ever-gnawing pain than to roam the world freely and easily, but falsely? Love is the only consolation, because love requires no proof... it is unconstrained and exempt from human jurisdiction.<sup>101</sup>

He, along with Sophie, lived by this. They understood that love, either from themselves, from God, or both, was enough of a force to take any risks and endure any challenges in the name of liberty and life. If they had to lose their lives for a cause that would help those who were alone,

---

<sup>97</sup> Scholl and Scholl, *At the Heart of the White Rose*, 169.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 239, 293, 306.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

lost, or in pain, they would, and they did. Hans, Sophie, all of the members of the White Rose, and anyone who risked everything to save the lives of others during the war will forever be remembered as champions of compassion and freedom. They are eternal reminders that there will always be good in the world.

*That which has arisen bravely from the abyss—  
By some harsh quirk of fate,  
Can conquer half the globe  
But it must then return to the abyss.  
Monstrous fears are threatening now,  
In vain will he resist!  
And all those who have clung to him  
Must perish too.*

*Hope.*

*Now I meet my good men  
Who have gathered in the night  
To keep silence, not to sleep.  
The lovely word of freedom  
Is spoken lisping and stammering  
Until in unaccustomed newness  
We stand upon our temple steps  
And cry anew enraptured:*

*(Loudly and with conviction)  
Freedom!*

*(Moderately)  
Freedom!*

*(Echoing from every side and corner)  
Freedom!<sup>102</sup>*

---

<sup>102</sup> *Leaflets of the White Rose*, translated by libcom.org. This poem is from Goethe's *The Awakening of Epimenides*, act two, scene four. It concludes the White Rose's first leaflet and is featured in a letter from Hans to his parents in 1942.

### Bibliography

- Bard, Mitchell. "Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust." *Jewish Virtual Library*.
- Calloway, Donald. *Consecration to St. Joseph*. Stockbridge: Marian Press, 2020.
- Chadwick, Owen. *A History of Christianity*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.
- Chand, Neelam. "Parallels of the White Rose Resistance." University of Utah, 2018.
- Conway, John S. *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933–1945*. Regent College Publishing, 1997.
- Ehrenfried, Matthias. "NAZI ACTS DECRIED BY REICH BISHOPS; Text of Their Pastoral Letter of March 22 Shows Sharp Protest at Oppressions." *The New York Times*, 1942.
- Fest, Joachim. *Plotting Hitler's Death: The German Resistance to Hitler 1933–1945*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997.
- Forest, Jim. "Alexander Schmorell, freed from the tyranny of fear." U.S. Catholic, 2016.
- Frey, Reed. "Conscience before Conformity: Hans and Sophie Scholl and the White Rose Resistance in Nazi Germany." *Newman Studies Journal* 16, 2019.
- Gestapo Interrogation Transcripts: Willi Graf, Alexander Schmorrel, Hans Scholl, and Sophie Scholl*. Translated by Ruth Hanna Sachs. Las Vegas: Exclamation Publishers, 2003.
- Gill, Anton. *An Honourable Defeat: A History of the German Resistance to Hitler*. London: Heinemann, 1998.
- Holy Silence*. Directed by Steven Pressman. PBS, 2020.
- Hornberger, Jacob G. "The White Rose - A Lesson in Dissent." *Jewish Virtual Library*.
- Irena Sendler: In the Name of Their Mothers*. Directed by Mary Skinner. PBS, 2010.
- "Jardin Hans et Sophie Scholl." paris.fr, 2022.
- Kent, Peter C. "A Tale of Two Popes: Pius XI, Pius XII and the Rome-Berlin Axis." *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1988.

- Kertzer, David. "The Pope at War." New York: Penguin Random House, 2022.
- Lapomarda, Vincent A. *The Jesuits and the Third Reich*. E. Mellen Press, 2005.
- LaFarge, John. *Humani Generis Unitas*. 1938.
- Leaflets of the White Rose*. Translated by libcom.org. 2006.
- Mohr, Robert. *Robert Mohr: Written Memorandum*. Translated by Ruth Hanna Sachs. Las Vegas: Exclamation Publishers, 2007.
- Perekrestov, Elena. "Alexander Schmorell: Saint of the German Resistance." New York: Holy Trinity Publications, 2017.
- Peterson, Larry. "Christoph Probst: He was a Husband and Father, and at the age of 23 the Nazis made him a Martyr." *Cradling Catholic*, 2018.
- Pope Pius XI, *Mit Brennender Sorge*, 1937.
- Radcliffe, Mike. "Resistance and Accommodation: Protestant Responses to Nazism." All Volumes (2001-2008), 2008.
- Richards-Wilson, Stephani. *Willi Graf of the White Rose: the role of Bildung in his decision to resist National Socialism*. Madison: University of Madison, 2013.
- Rychlak, Ronald J. "Review of A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair." *The Catholic Historical Review*, 2003.
- Salluci, Mary. "Biography." p rejacques.org.
- Scholder, Klaus. *The Churches and the Third Reich*. Fortress Press, 1988.
- Scholl, Inge. *The White Rose*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1970.
- Scholl, Hans and Sophie Scholl. *At the Heart of the White Rose*. Edited by Inge Jens. Harper and Row Publishers, 1984.
- Secret Lives: Hidden Children and Their Rescuers During World War II*. Directed by Aviva Slesin. Vimeo, 2003.

- Shirer, William L. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1960.
- Silberberg, Paul. "Five Last Days." San Francisco International Film Festival, 1983.
- Spitzer, Tanja B. "Sophie Scholl and the White Rose." The National World War II Museum, 2020.
- Sweet, William. "Jacques Maritain." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2019.
- "The Assisi Network." Yad Vashem.
- "The July 20, 1944, Plot to Assassinate Adolf Hitler." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.
- The White Rose*. Bayerische Landeszentrale für Politische Bildungsarbeit, 2006.
- "We Will Not Be Silent." [gablestage.org](http://gablestage.org), 2022.
- "White Rose: The Musical." [whitereosethemusical.com](http://whitereosethemusical.com), 2022.
- Wittenstein, George. "Memories of the White Rose." *The History Place*, 1997.