

**Peter Hoffmann - *Stauffenberg: A Family History 1905-1944*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.**

Claus Shenk Graf von Stauffenberg was shot by order of court martial on July 20, 1944 for his role in the assassination attempt on Hitler's life a few days earlier. He had served in the 10th Panzer Division, and was seriously wounded in Tunisia in April 1943, for which he was later decorated. He was then detailed to the Commander in Chief of the Home Army. In that capacity he had the required security clearance which led to the bomb-laden briefcase at the Wolfschanze, Hitler's East Prussian Headquarters, in the abortive *coup* attempt of July, 1944.

Peter Hoffmann's biography of Stauffenberg and his brothers, Alexander and Berthold, tends to gloss over and downplay the role of religious and moral conviction in their resistance to Hitler. Their exceptional courage and resistance to Nazi propaganda was clearly rooted in Catholic and Classical culture. They were repelled by the nihilism of secular and modernist alternatives, especially Bolshevik Marxism. As young boys Claus and Alexander were particularly pious (p. 3). For awhile Claus even had an altar in the attic where he imitated the local priest in offering the Holy Mass (p. 15).

The boys went to Catholic schools and had Jewish friends. There was no evidence of anti-semitism in their background or upbringing (p. 27). As a young cadet in the infantry school at Dresden, Claus Stauffenberg would read the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* in Greek, attend Mass at the Catholic Church in Dresden, and gave "no evidence of ever going to the frequent dancing, drinking, or hunting parties of his infantry school classmates." Stauffenberg was respected as "different." One of his regimental comrades called him a "blazing sacred fire" (p. 50).

Like many Germans, the Stauffenberg brothers bristled under the injustice of the humiliating Treaty of Versailles. They were repelled, however, by Nazi law breaking, the outrages against Jews (Alexander's wife was Jewish), and the corruption and vulgarity of the National Socialist leaders around Hitler. They condemned the willful causing of war, but when Britain and France declared war on Germany, they gave priority to defending their country.

Alexander expressed his uncompromising opposition to National Socialist ideology as early as 1937, and surely would have been encouraged by the papal encyclical, *Mit Brennender Sorge*, promulgated that year on Palm Sunday of Holy Week. It reiterated common Catholic moral tradition to the effect that the natural law right and duty to resist unjust rule is inalienable, especially after all hope for remedy from proper authorities and regular procedures has been exhausted. Claus expressed his judgement that "the foolish and criminal Führer must be overthrown" with growing frequency from the summer of 1942 onwards, as the implementation of the "final solution of the Jewish problem" was beginning. He would cite St. Thomas Aquinas to the effect that tyrannicide was permissible and

meritorious in extreme circumstances (p. 152).

As wartime events unfolded, Claus, as a member of the German Army Command, had access to information many ordinary German citizens did not. It became increasingly clear that the war could not be won militarily. He, like many others, understood that the Soviet Union could only be defeated with the support of the rather large number of civilian peoples who had initially welcomed German forces as liberators. This support collapsed as hundreds of thousands were brutalized or starved to death. In addition, Stauffenberg was increasingly outraged at what he had learned about the mass murders of racially inferior persons, especially Jews, but also Poles and Slavs. Thus, was the stage set for the conspiracy and *coup* attempt in which he participated.

Like Peter Hoffmann, too many analysts and commentators these days ignore the considerable German Catholic resistance to Hitler's rule, which the Stauffenberg's evidently shared. In fact, Catholic resistance to Nazi philosophy and policy was serious, deep, and consistent. As materials of the *Kommission für Zeitgeschichte* of the Catholic Academy of Bavaria under the leadership of Dr. Konrad Repgen demonstrate, such resistance surfaced in election results, in newspaper and journal articles, sermons, pastoral letters, and official documents for as long as these were allowed to be published, and most especially in Nazi prison and police records.

It is common to ignore the fact that at least 8,000 priests or more than one third of the German Catholic clergy had come into open conflict with the Nazi regime. Over 500 were killed. In addition, the Nazis destroyed the religious orders and dispersed some 8,000 of their members. Hitler's animus toward the Jesuits was particularly severe. They were often associated with Jews and other *Untermenschen*. Their schools and properties were confiscated or destroyed. Thousands were imprisoned or exiled, and 259 were killed. Still, Jesuit intellectuals like Jakob Notges, Anton Koch, Erich Przywara, Gustav Grundlach, Max Pribilla, and Oswald von Neil Brüening spearheaded a formidable and consistent intellectual resistance to Nazi propaganda.

In Austria alone 120 churches and chapels, 26 large monasteries, 1,417 Catholic schools and educational institutions, and 188 Church related charitable foundations were closed. In Germany virtually all Church schools were closed by 1936. In 1932 Catholic dailies had a circulation of over 3 million, and Catholic journals of 11.5 million. By October of 1935 Catholic newspapers ceased to exist, and by 1938 virtually all Catholic publications had been suppressed. In fact, for as long as the Church was free to express herself, she condemned and resisted the racial ideology and totalitarianism of the regime. Typical of numerous pastoral pronouncements of the German Bishops was their common pastoral letter of 1941:

There are holy duties of conscience from which no one can free us, and which we must fulfill even if it costs us our own lives: never under any condition may man blaspheme God; never may he hate his fellow man; never may he kill an innocent person outside justified self defense.

In 1937 the Holy Father's encyclical, *Mit Brennender Sorge*, had to be printed outside of Germany, and secretly smuggled into the country. It was distributed clandestinely so that it might be read in all Churches on Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week. The Nazis were furious. They confiscated copies of the encyclical and arrested those who sought to distribute it. In such a context, to ask why the Church didn't protest more than she did, is a little like asking why a man whose tongue has been cut off can't speak, or why one whose eyes have been gouged out can't see. Some of the most impressive evidence for the real situation of the Church in Nazi Germany shows up in Gestapo surveillance records. SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*) reports are replete with lengthy excerpts from pastoral letters, sermons, and the Fulda Bishops conferences. Priests often asserted that National Socialism with its atheism, nihilism, brutality, and persecution of the Church was no better than Bolshevism. For almost five years Gestapo agents from all over Germany consistently reported a high incidence of clerical protest noticeably increasing in 1941. At Nuremberg one witness reckoned spies and informers among diocesan officials, in parishes and elsewhere at about 30,000. Virtually all eyewitness reports of the period witness to the unique vulnerability and persecution of the Church in the "losing battle" she was so valiantly fighting against both Stalinist and Nazi secular tyrannies. Other than its lack of attention to and respect for these and other facts, which undoubtedly had a major influence on the Stauffenberg's Catholic mental and moral vision of things, Peter Hoffmann's "family history" is rich with biographical detail and very helpful.

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**William Brennan - *Dehumanizing the Vulnerable: When Word Games Take Lives*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1995.**

*Dehumanizing the Vulnerable: When Word Games Take Lives*, by William Brennan, is a book that merits being read by the widest possible audience. It is meticulously researched and well argued, and packs quite an emotional wallop to boot. In its discussion of such hot button moral topics as abortion, euthanasia, racism, sexism, and totalitarianism, this book will validate and fortify the beliefs of some (including those of the reviewer); infuriate others; and leave still others