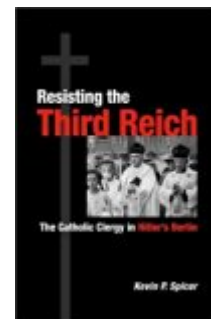


Kevin P. Spicer. *Resisting the Third Reich: The Catholic Clergy in Hitler's Berlin.*
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This carefully researched book responds to at least three persistent, interrelated questions about National Socialism. Were Christian churches--in this case, the Roman Catholic Church--primarily perpetrators, bystanders, or victims of the crimes of Nazism? Did most "ordinary Germans" support, oppose, or remain indifferent to the Nazi system during its twelve years of existence? How do we best understand "resistance" in the context of the Third Reich: as organized, active defiance of Nazi policies and practices, or as what Martin Broszat called *Resistenz*, an often invisible quality that rendered certain individuals and groups resistant--in the sense of immune--to the total claims of Nazi ideology and power?

Kevin Spicer's study of priests in Berlin allows him to pose these questions in the concrete and intimate context of individual lives. His answers, not surprisingly, are complex, as the simple binaries and triangulations of familiar debates dissolve in the ambiguities of lived history. The Catholic Church, Spicer shows us, was a complicated institution whose relationship to Nazism might best be characterized as a mixed bag.

(Spicer offers the more elegant metaphor of a "subtle duel" [p. 4].) Antisemitism, integrity, opportunism, defensiveness, heroism, and self-protective impulses intermingled with an overriding concern to preserve the Church's sacramental mission. By taking theology seriously and examining its implementation in the everyday ritual life of one diocese, Spicer is able to find patterns in an otherwise bewildering jumble of action, reaction, and silence. Convinced that the Church "made God sacramentally present" (p. 8) and held the keys to eternal life, Catholic clergy loyally worked to preserve the institution, Spicer maintains. But, as he demonstrates, a commitment to the Church and preservation of its sacramental mission could produce a wide range of actions, from selfless engagement for the victims of Nazism to solipsistic disregard for those outside the ecclesiastical circle.

In rare cases such as that of Monsignor Bernhard Lichtenberg, whom Spicer describes as "truly an exception" (p. 182), devotion to the Church's pastoral mission led to martyrdom. Lichtenberg died in 1943 while awaiting transport to Dachau

as punishment for his public prayers for persecuted and deported Jews and Christians of Jewish descent. Spicer's moving account of Lichtenberg's challenge to Nazi power (chapter 7, "The Unique Path of Bernhard Lichtenberg") constitutes the analytical highlight and the emotional/spiritual center of the book. This is a fitting tribute to a figure whom many scholars of the Holocaust first encountered in Raul Hilberg's *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945* (1992). Hilberg dedicated the German edition of this work to Lichtenberg—a reminder, as if we needed it, of the wealth of knowledge and depth of insight that Hilberg embodied.

More common than heroes like Lichtenberg were priests who insisted they were not political but still clashed with Nazi authorities. Merely performing ministerial duties brought these men into conflict with the state. Spicer provides numerous, intriguing examples, like that of Father Paul Krause, arrested in 1940 for allowing some sixty Poles—POWs and civilian workers—to attend his regular Sunday mass (p. 109). Denounced and arrested, Krause was subsequently released. Spicer's meticulous research, much of it in underutilized diocesan archives, and the interviews he conducted reveal many similar accounts of priests who found themselves unwilling targets of attack by a state they did not oppose or, for the most part, even question. It was often in their ministry to young people that priests crossed the lines of what the state accepted as religious activity, boundaries that, Spicer tells us, the Gestapo "adjusted ... regularly to its own advantage" (p. 93).

Even the "brown priests" to whom Spicer devotes chapter 6 ("For the Glory of the Führer") occupied a place on the spectrum of loyalty to the Catholic Church and its sacramental mission. For one thing, Spicer argues, they were able to throw their energies behind the Nazi cause precisely because they were aberrations, "renegades" who "often placed their own careers and welfare above their ministry" (p. 141). Nevertheless, as Spicer

shows, most of these men stayed in the Church and remained priests. Perhaps they wanted a base from which to conduct their pro-Nazi activities, as appears to have been true of Johannes Strehl, "the most prominent Nazi priest in the Potsdam vicariate" (p. 144), who, in 1934, denounced several diocesan officials for writing a statement against sterilization and requiring it to be read from the pulpit. Or maybe the "brown priests" simply feared losing their income. Spicer, however, hints that even these "outsiders" maintained some loyalty to their pastoral calling. More important, the bishops, concerned to protect the institutional church, tolerated the antisemitic words and deeds of Nazi priests and disciplined them only when they disobeyed episcopal directives.

Implied in Spicer's analysis is an argument about the dynamics of hierarchies and their influence on the behavior of individuals under pressure. For parish priests, devotion to preservation of the Church and its sacraments had a radicalizing effect as performance of pastoral duties led almost invariably to defiance of Gestapo regulations. Further up the hierarchy, however, among the episcopate, the same commitment to safeguarding the Church generated an accommodationist stance vis-à-vis the state, even for individuals like Berlin Bishop Konrad von Preysing, whom Spicer describes as "strongly anti-Nazi" (p. 140). Spicer does not enter the debate surrounding Pius XII, but the logic of the work allows readers to infer where he stands, and the conclusion makes the point explicit. When it came to dealing with Nazism, Spicer indicates, neither the pope nor the bishops offered priests much guidance. Some individuals still succeeded in living a "teaching of love," but the Church as an institution failed both to embody that quality and to support it among its people.

Spicer's focus on individual priests allows him to make an interesting contribution to debates about Nazism's domestic popularity. To the extent that Catholic priests in Germany's capital

city represented "ordinary" Germans --and Spicer considers them both inside and outside that amorphous category--they tended to accept Hitler's government as legitimate even while their adherence to the "spiritual practices and programs of the Church" pitted them against the state. In other words, their ordinary qualities--things like ambition, class background, and personality conflicts--tilted priests toward acceptance of, and sometimes active participation in, the Nazi agenda, including such actions as joining the Nazi Party. In Spicer's analysis, it was the extraordinary fact of their priesthood that moved them away from compliance and even collaboration toward *Resistenz*--and conflict with Nazism.

If Spicer is correct, then Catholic priests were an exception among professional groups. Studies of Protestant theologians, doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers, lawyers, engineers, municipal officials, businessmen and, most relevant perhaps to readers of this review, academics, all depict members of these professions as among the more "willing" participants in the Nazi system, including its extreme violence. Those individuals who did stand against the tide appear not to have been motivated by professional honor; nor were they immunized against Nazism by the particular ethos of their professions. Indeed, professional loyalties seem to have adapted all too easily to totalitarian demands. (This point is made in an abundance of relevant scholarship by, among others, Robert P. Ericksen, Manfred Gailus, Michael Kater, Henry Friedlander, Robert Lifton, Bronwyn Rebekah McFarland-Icke, Susan Benedict, Elizabeth Harvey, Ingo Müller, Konrad Jarausch, Wolf Gruner, Peter Hayes, Ingo Haar, Susanne Heim, and Götz Aly).

It is not clear whether Spicer has the evidence to clinch this case, or indeed whether he is especially interested in doing so. His suggestion that Catholic priests were uniquely resistant to National Socialism is implied, not claimed, and he did not frame his inquiry around the wider issue of

"ordinary Germans." Still, no historian of Germany working in the 1990s and since can avoid the influence of the Daniel Goldhagen-Christopher Browning debate, and Spicer's extensive bibliography includes, tucked in amongst the many titles in church history, works by Henry Friedlander, Saul Friedländer, Robert Gellately, and Michael Kater. It would be interesting to see how far he is willing to take this aspect of his argument--and stretching in that direction would be a significant step toward the ongoing project of integrating studies of religion into the master narrative of Nazism, the Holocaust, and World War II.

Judging this book by its cover might lead one to conclude that Spicer's position on resistance is less nuanced than his views on Nazism, Christianity, and "ordinary Germans." The title, *Resisting the Third Reich*, is noticeably different from that of Spicer's dissertation, which was called "Choosing between God and Satan: The German Catholic Clergy of Berlin and the Third Reich" (2000). The cover photograph, framed by an elongated cross, shows a 1942 First Communion procession in Stettin. The priest in the middle, Father Ernst Daniel, was arrested in 1943 and subsequently imprisoned on charges of listening to foreign radio broadcasts and undermining Germany's war effort. Next to him in the procession, although not visible in the cropped image that appears on the cover, was Father Herbert Simoleit, executed on related charges in 1944. (The wider view showing Fr. Simoleit appears on p. 85.) The impression of Christian/Catholic triumph over Nazi evil is accentuated by the color scheme: the white of the priests' vestments and of the words "Resisting" and "the Catholic Clergy" stands out against the black background and ominous red letters spelling "Third Reich" and "Hitler's Berlin."

But Spicer's account is indeed subtle, and his claims of clerical resistance/*Resistenz* cautious and muted. It was the anti-Church dimension of Nazism, Spicer shows, not its war-mongering or murderous antisemitism, that priests proved most

courageous in opposing. Those like Lichtenberg, who developed a more fundamental resistance to the regime, were exceptional, even unique. Indeed, Spicer's balanced treatment leaves readers with the unsettling impression that in fact, the *Resistenz* of Berlin's Catholic clergy to Nazism managed to exist quite comfortably alongside national chauvinism and antisemitism. Indeed, the combination of priests' immunity to the total claims of Nazism and their endorsement of some of its underlying prejudices may even have helped to legitimize Hitler's regime in the eyes of the Catholic faithful. Such are the depressing dynamics of totalitarian systems.

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