

# Avowal of a Man Given Up for Dead



*(Pater Gebhard Maria Heyder OCD -- † 18.5.1994 in Regensburg)*

Documentary report by a man  
sentenced to death  
by the Nazi People's Court

von Peter Gebhard  
peröversetzt  
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Julijane Ebert

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## Foreword

In January 1984, I was asked by the head of the "Academic Adult Education" department, Professor Dr. Hess, to give a lecture about my experiences with the Gestapo in the Third Reich.

After much hesitation, I yielded to the compelling notion that I was one of the very few priests who had escaped death row and were still alive today.

So I gathered my memories and documents from those years and gave the requested lecture on February 13, 1984, at the "The House of Encounter" in Regensburg, Hinter der Grieb.

Afterwards, I was repeatedly asked by various people to put the lecture into a booklet, as it represented a rare document from that time.

I express the hope that such a human aberration may never occur again and would also like to warn against even worse surprises in the lives of peoples today who seem to have learned little from recent history.

Regensburg-Kumpfmühl, May 31, 1984

The author

## Literary Introduction

Dear Professor!

Distinguished guests! Today's lecture is entitled:

"Totalitarian Rule." The main points listed are: 1. Arrest. 2. Interrogation. 3. Death sentence. 4. Prison or concentration camp. 5. Death march. 6. Unexpected rescue.

Three weeks ago, when I went to the photographer with some pictures and briefly explained the content of my lecture, for which the photos were intended, the young man said:

"Well, this matter should really be left alone.

We know nothing about it, and our generation no longer bears any guilt for it." "Yes," I said, "I agree with you. That's why I remained silent for 40 years and accused no one."

But at the urgent request of a serious academic circle concerned with truth and objective reality, I agreed to give a lecture. "I want to show from my own experience that not all Nazis were truly Nazis, and that for a long time, the true nature of Hitler's system remained hidden."

Then the dear young man seemed satisfied. That we are touching on a very topical issue here is evident from a report by Wolfgang Wiedemeyer on Südwestfunk (Southwest German Radio) regarding the Chancellor's recent visit to the Israelis, where it states: "If the concept of collective guilt was not accepted even by democratic post-war politicians, then Kohl presents himself—as Knesset President Menachem Savidor put it—as an authentic representative of a new, different Germany."

Südwestfunk correspondent Wolfgang Wiedemeyer continues: "He accepted the risk of getting on the Israelis' nerves with the repeatedly stated declaration that he represents a people whose majority did not experience the Nazi crimes firsthand."

I think that with this, I have already somewhat alleviated the concerns of some of my particularly young listeners today.

In keeping with the theme, the main part of the lecture will be a personal account from the days of the Nazi dictatorship, from one of the few who survived their death sentence—and who is now entering his 80th year. To maintain an academic framework, I will briefly refer to relevant literature. One of the first anthologies, albeit still incomplete, is the book "Cross and Swastika," Munich 1946, by the Most Reverend Auxiliary Bishop Neuhäusler, who himself was imprisoned for an extended period in the Dachau concentration camp. An article by me can also be found in the book on pages 56–59, which, admittedly, was included without my knowledge at the time. To maintain an academic framework, I will briefly refer to relevant literature. Hans Buchheim addresses the topic of dictatorship in principle in his work "Totalitarian Rule: Nature and Characteristics," Kösel-Verlag Munich, 1962 and 1967. With historical-philosophical meticulousness, which admittedly can be tedious at times, the degenerations of the Hitler dictatorship are aptly described. The Süddeutsche Zeitung, Munich, commented: "A brief history of the fateful twelve years could not be presented better." Here is just a sample from the book. On page 62, it states: "The totalitarian regime turns the moral appeal into political coercion." This is how what was colloquially known as "voluntary coercion" in the Third Reich arises, but which is even more significant in the communist sphere of influence. For example: A few days before August 13, 1961, a People's Police officer stopped a man who wanted to go to West Berlin and asked him if he didn't know that crossing the border was forbidden. 'When asked in return which law this prohibition was stated, the People's Police officer replied that the law had not yet been enacted, but, he added, don't play dumb, you know perfectly well what it's about.' According to the law, joining the Waffen-SS was always voluntary. However, the recruitment commissions made their victims by arguing that anyone who loved the "Führer" and was prepared to do everything in their power for the final victory could not refuse to join the Waffen-SS.

For no formation loves the "Führer" as much as the "Waffen-SS." We will return to this point later.

Here is a parallel story from our eastern neighbor, the Czech Republic. A teacher, Jana Micianova, is being forced out of her job because she registered her children for Catholic religious instruction. In her letter of complaint to the authorities, she emphasizes that she comes from an atheist family.

Both her parents are lawyers, and her father received numerous state awards as a member of the Communist Party. She only came to faith after becoming a teacher. "Since then," she says, "I have faced countless problems and difficulties.

No one could have convinced me before that in our country pressure is exerted on believers, that they are shadowed during religious services, and that consequences are drawn from this in their daily lives." "Various psychological methods" are used to force believers to abandon their religion.

Anyone who hasn't experienced this firsthand would hardly believe it. The woman demanded to see the law or decree that forbade a teacher from registering his own children for religious instruction. The headmaster had to admit that no such thing existed, but that this was "actually self-evident."

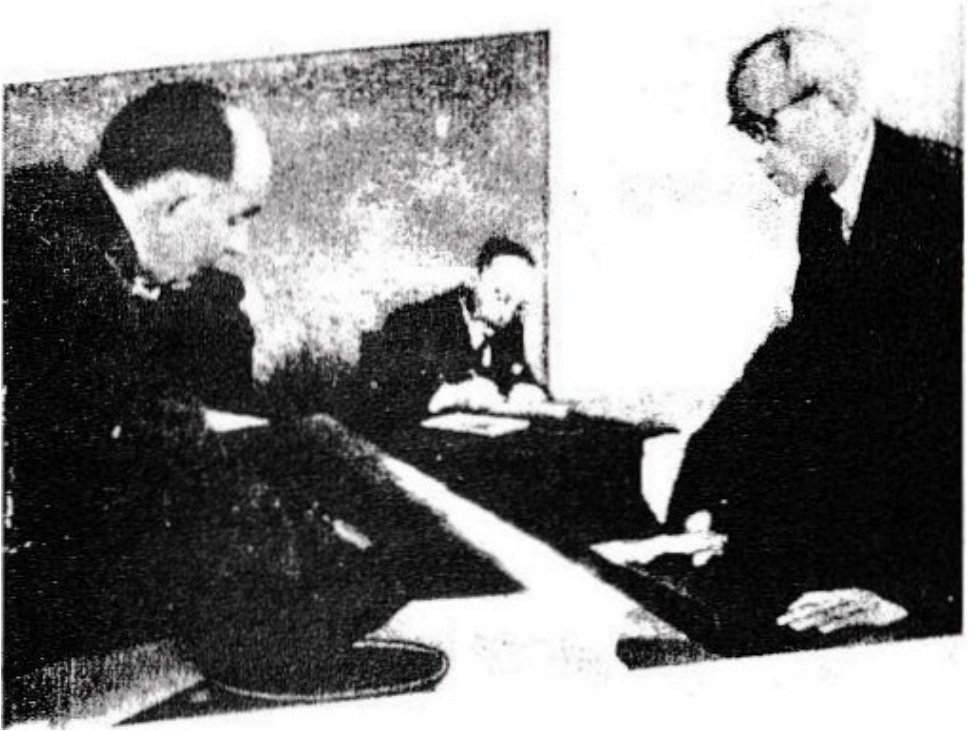
(Bayernkurier, February 4, 1984, column 1b, "Persecuted Christians")

Another modest but richly sourced pamphlet is Walter Adolf's, in the "Morus Small Papers" series, No. 35: "The Martial Witnesses Warn," Berlin 1958.

The cover illustration shows a scene from the People's Court with the notorious judge Roland Freisler (front left), who was also my judge, and the defendant Dr. Bolz (see image p. 8).



# Morus-Kleinschriften



*Scene from the People's Court: in the foreground on the left is his long-serving "blood-judge" Freisler.*

The booklet also features heroic female figures from those tragic days, with further bibliographic references.

One of the best known is Dr. Edith Stein, philosopher and later Sister Benedicta Maria a Cruce of the Carmelite Order.

She was gassed in Auschwitz on August 9, 1942.

Her beatification process has been underway for some time.

Unfortunately, I cannot provide a picture of her; however, one is already available on a postage stamp, which anyone can easily obtain. On pages 30/31, the booklet describes the death of Franciscan Father Maximilian Kolbe, who was taken by the Gestapo in Warsaw on February 17, 1941, and received a lethal injection in the Auschwitz starvation bunker on August 14, 1941, after offering his life for a condemned family man. He was canonized by Pope John Paul II. Even his executioners confessed: "We have never seen such a man."

Among the most valuable sources on the "brown totalitarian regime" are the two books by Benedicta Maria Kempner: "Priests Before Hitler's Tribunals," Bertelsmann, Gütersloh 1966, 1967, 1970.

The second is titled "Nuns Under the Swastika," published by Naumann in 1979. The author sent me this book shortly before her death (1980). — Image p. 11 Through her husband, Dr. Robert Kempner, a member of the panel of judges at the so-called "Nuremberg Trials," she had access to the relevant files of the People's Court, among which my files were also found during a construction project near the People's Court in Berlin in 1962. — With their authentic source citations,

Ms. Kempner's two books will retain their scholarly significance for a long time to come. Allow me to briefly recount how I also came into personal contact with the author. She was a German-American, a Swabian by birth, and lived with her husband in America. I was stationed again at my old monastery, Mariahilfberg, in Neumarkt/Opf., at the end of September 1962.

Then one day the postman delivered a letter addressed to:  
"To the Most Reverend Abbot of the Carmelite Monastery  
Mariahilfberg, Neumarkt/Opf., Bavaria."

Well, I never became an abbot.

But I was the superior of the house and had the right to open  
the letter.

The sender was: "**Benedicta Maria Kempner Lansdowne,  
Pa. USA.**" I thought to myself: What kind of exotic bird from  
America could this be? —

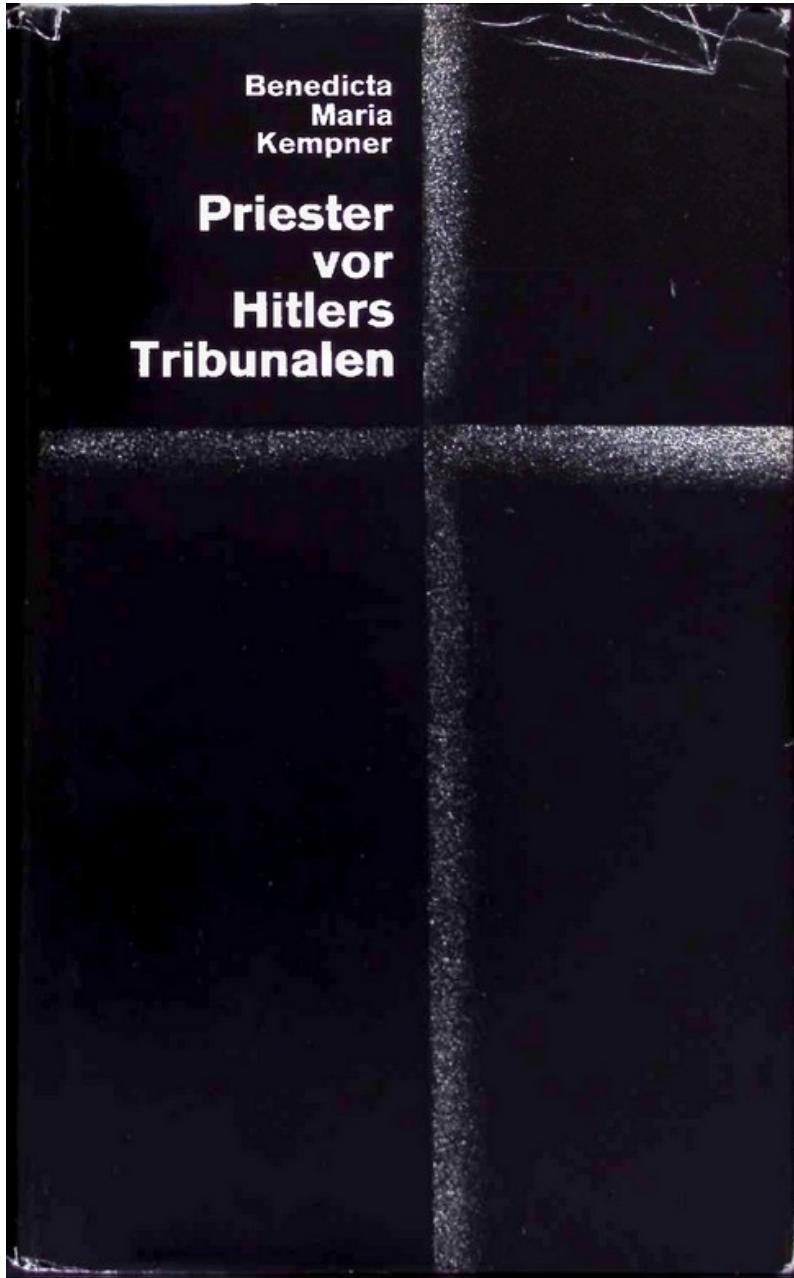
Then I read: Lansdowne, Pa. USA, September 17. 1962 "  
To the Most Reverend Abbot of the Carmelite Monastery  
Mariahillberg, Neumarkt/Upper Palatinate, Bavaria Most  
Reverend Abbot!

You may be interested to know that I am currently working on a  
book about the murder of Catholic priests during the Nazi era.  
I found the death sentence issued by the People's Court  
against the Carmelite priest "Franz Heyder", born on  
November 30, 1904, in Lorenzen.

I would be grateful if you could provide me with more  
information about the person and the proceedings against the  
executed priest. Benedicta M. Kempner" So there it was.

A woman across the large moat was interested in a monk from  
the Hintere Steinpfalz region who had long since passed away.  
Even the English radio station had already reported me as  
dead. — As surprising as the letter was, I felt no joy about it. I  
didn't want to reply and let the letter sit for about two weeks.  
Finally, a good spirit gave me a gentle rebuke; I mustn't offend  
this distant aunt from America who still cares so touchingly for  
the "dead" Father Gebhard.

So, on October 3, 1962, I wrote to her:



*The book by Benedikta Maria Kempner, in which the German-American describes the fate of 130 clergymen under the Nazi regime*

Father Gebhard Franz X. Heyder, Neumarkt/Opf.  
Carmelite Monastery Mariahilfsberg  
October 3, 1962

"To Mrs. B. M. Kempner  
Lansdowne, PA, USA

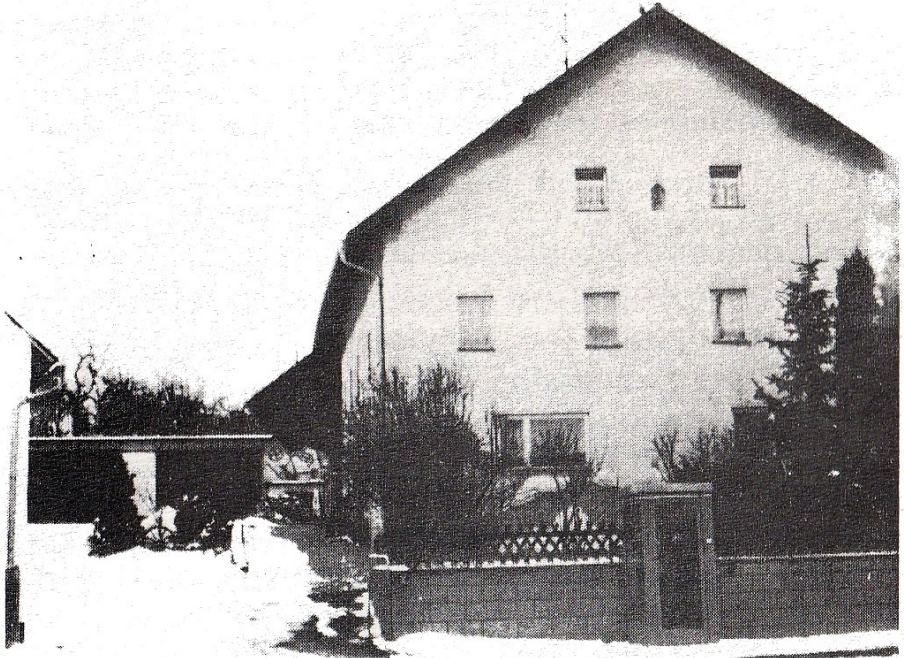
Dear Mrs. B. M. Kempner,  
Today, on the feast day of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, who belonged to our Carmelite Order, I wish to answer your letter of inquiry dated September 17, 1962.

You will be surprised that the condemned man is still answering you himself. I am the aforementioned Carmelite Father Franz Heyder, born on November 30, 1904, in Lorenzen, religious name Father Gebhard. Everything you have read about me is true, except for the final point. I was liberated at the very last moment, on the death march to Dachau for gassing, on May 1, 1945, in the front line by American troops of the 3rd Army near Geisenhausen, southeast of the Bavarian city of Landshut. However, I was already reduced to a skeleton." Starved.

We were just waiting for the bullet that would release us. It goes against my grain to talk or write about that time. I deliberately haven't published anything more about it except for a short report. But I think it's already too much; I've already burned some things... I was of a very tough nature, from a family of 10 children (the seventh), raised in a peasant and simply spartan way; otherwise, I wouldn't have survived the concentration camp at all and would never have recovered afterward... I am currently once again the superior (vicar) of this Carmelite monastery, as I was in 1944.

With regards, Father Gebhard"

Mrs. Kempner also visited me personally later. Her husband had an office in Frankfurt, and so she often came to Europe.



*The author's childhood home in the upper Regen valley,  
where he spent his youth.*

I showed her the place where I worked and where I was arrested: then also my dear home village in the Regen Valley, where she told me that she had a country house in America in a similarly beautiful river valley.

### **The Working Methods of the Nazi People's Court**

In her first book, on pages 160/61, Ms. Kempner provides an excellent characterization of the institution and working methods of the so-called People's Court, by which I was convicted. She states: "If one analyzes the complete files of the Nazi priest murders, one must come to the following conclusion:"

## **Murder of Priests as a Target of the Nazi Regime**

The most severe and brutal act of terror perpetrated by the Nazi regime against the Catholic Church and its population was the murder of over 4,000 priests between 1939 and 1945 in the "Old Reich" and the annexed and occupied territories. The killing of priests deemed undesirable occurred (1) through their deportation to concentration camps, such as Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and especially Dachau, where death was brought about through mistreatment, malnutrition, medical experiments, and other means; (2) through shootings in the occupied territories; and (3) in a particularly insidious and cruel manner, especially in the "Old Reich" and Austria, through death sentences handed down by the so-called People's Court. The most notorious president of this institution was the legally trained but fanatical, cruel, and treacherous Roland Freisler. He and his accomplices carried out their murderous activities not only at the headquarters of the authority in Berlin, but also at other "court" sites, traveling from place to place, for example, as in the Heyder case in Nuremberg. A frequent legal advisor to Freisler was the former judge of the Berlin Court of Appeals, Hans-Joachim Rehse, who was also involved in several trials against Catholic priests. The prosecutor in the present case was the then-judge of the local court, Otto Rathmayer. It should be noted that both of these judges, Rehse and Rathmayer, fled to Bavaria when the Nazi regime collapsed, claiming to be completely "untouched by the Nazi spirit" and possibly "expellees," and very soon received high judicial positions there again, one in Landshut. The other later complained that he received a lower pension than he was entitled to because of me. — I will say nothing more about this. "Only this much: I did not accuse any of my opponents or judges; but I also could not affirm— as they demanded— that they had not harmed a single hair on any priest's head. True, they 'didn't bend a hair'— but they removed the head along with the hair."

Some time ago, I received an article from the "Nürnberger-Neumarkter Nachrichten," dated March 6/7, 1982, which vividly transports us back to the atmosphere of the "brown totalitarian dictatorship."

The headline reads:

"The institution, established in 1934 on Hitler's orders, handed down death sentences to 5,200 opponents of the regime.

The 'People's Court' was a killing machine.

Two hundred participants and accomplices in the July 20, 1944 plot alone were handed over to the executioners.

To this day, none of the 574 judges and prosecutors has been convicted in a legally binding judgment.

This poses significant difficulties for the investigations currently underway in Berlin." The text continues: "The vast majority of these terror sentences for undermining the war effort, aiding the enemy, high treason, and other political offenses were handed down between August 1942 and February 1945, when the notorious Roland Freisler was president of the People's Court." Of the courageous men of July 20, 1944, alone, over 200 were put to death on the infamous meat hooks in the death shed in Berlin-Plötzensee (picture on p. 16).

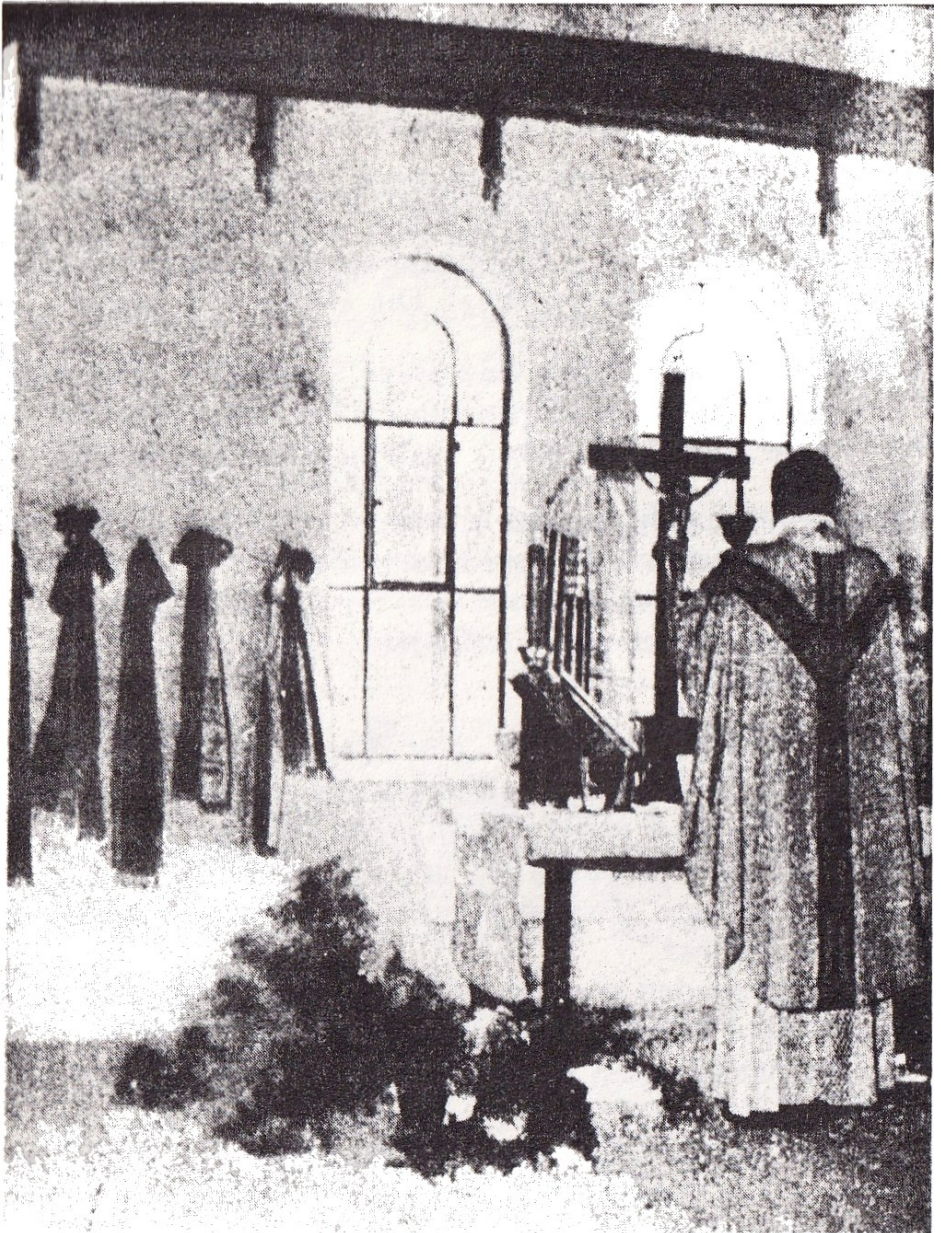
We were a little afraid of the meat hook. The shooting was quick. But here it took 5–10 minutes to lose consciousness.

My schoolmate and fellow countryman from the Regen Valley, Count Max Drexel von Schloß Karlstein, a flight officer, was also a victim of that July 20th (pictures on pp. 17 and 18).

The career of the blood judge Freisler was more than peculiar.

In 1917, while a prisoner of war in Russia, he joined the Bosnians during the October Revolution and returned to Germany in 1920. After joining the Nazi Party in 1925, he attempted to compensate for his communist past through particularly cruel behavior.



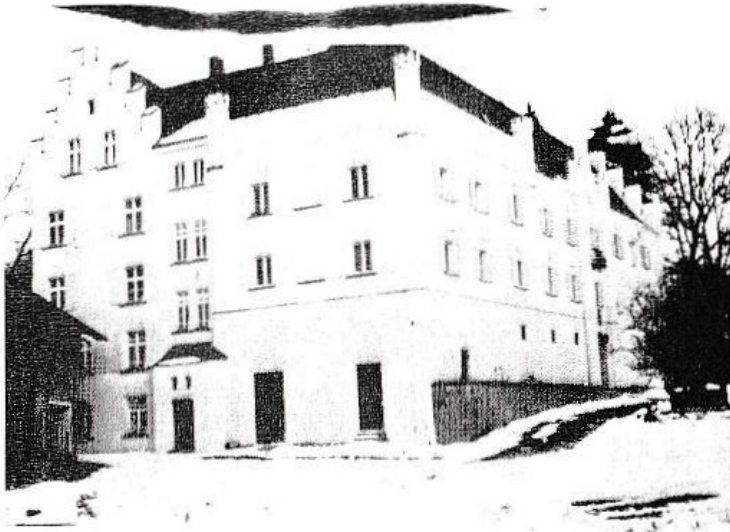


*The death shed in Berlin-Plötzensee with its gruesome meat hooks.  
A memorial service is being held there after the war.  
(Taken from "The Blood Witnesses", p. 4, by Walter Adolf.)*



*Max Ulrich Graf von Drechsel, an officer in the German Luftwaffe. Arrested on July 20, 1944, for his courageous efforts to overthrow the Nazi regime, sentenced to death, and executed on September 3, 1944, in Berlin-Plötzensee by the inhumane machinery of execution.*

*Memorial stone in the Karlstein Castle Chapel.*



*Castle of Count Max Drexel von Karlstein, who was arrested and executed on July 20, 1944.*



*The forest chapel of Karlstein, where Count Max offered his last farewell prayer. On the right, the author's youngest brother, see p. 28.*

The "People's Court" was established in 1934 on Hitler's orders. To this day, none of the judges of the People's Court have been convicted by a court in Germany. In a single case, the assessor Rehse, who had participated in over 200 death sentences, was initially sentenced in Berlin in 1967 to five years in prison for aiding and abetting murder. The prosecution had demanded a life sentence. However, in 1968, the Federal Court of Justice in Karlsruhe overturned this verdict with a controversial justification: The People's Court had ruled according to the law then in force and was equivalent to an ordinary court. The judges of the Nazi tribunal could only be punished if they had acted intentionally, for base motives, and against their better judgment, thereby bending the law.

They were protected by the so-called "judicial privilege." Rehse was subsequently acquitted in a retrial. Thus, our current highest court in the Federal Republic equates Hitler's Nazi court of blood—and therefore his totalitarian rule—with today's much-vaunted rule of law. Presumably, these judges of today and formerly sit together in a secret association, and no one dares to harm another. It should therefore come as no surprise that I cannot feel a particularly fervent affinity for such a judiciary and democracy. I may refer you to a very instructive article in the "Private Dispatch," No. 4; January 27, 1984, p. 3: "Bonn: Impossible Justice in the Federal Republic The development of the German justice system is a cause for concern for many political observers, both domestic and international.

In many areas of the judiciary in the Federal Republic, bias, politicization, and a weakening of the law prevail, bordering on perversion of justice or favoritism. This is particularly true among those public prosecutors and judges who, following the "long march through the institutions"—as propagated by the APO generation—have climbed the benches of the judiciary and now believe they can get away with anything in their secure civil service status."

They come from Marxist and left-wing radical degenerate training grounds, to which some universities have now sunk, and often take it upon themselves to make their legal decisions ideologically.

In the *Mittelbayerische Zeitung* of February 11/12, 1984, we read on page 6 a headline: "Rule of Law Trampled Underfoot." Then it says: "The actions of the Ministry of Justice are branded as reminiscent of the witch hunts of the Middle Ages... While I don't share the writer's sentiment, this is quite distressing.

First news of the new movement directly from the mouth of the false prophet of salvation

After this general, somewhat abstract, but necessary introduction for understanding the situation at the time, we now come to my more personal experiences during those days. Even before the Nazi era, some preliminary skirmishes took place during my time in Regensburg. (I can now speak a little more freely.) From 1916 to 1925, I attended the Old Gymnasium at Ägidienplatz (now the government building) here in Regensburg. It was in the 8th grade, in 1923, when five or six classmates were absent one day without a proper excuse. It was the day the so-called March on the Feldherrnhalle began in Munich.

But he failed to achieve his goal due to the resistance of the Bavarian security forces.

Munich was wrongly called "the city of the movement." Hitler did not rise to power in Munich or Bavaria.

Therefore, he went to northern Germany.

There, I believe in Braunschweig, he was given the title of Senior Government Councillor, which automatically conferred German citizenship.

Hitler was, after all, a native Austrian.

Back then, a delightful historical joke was circulating: "For having disgraced the old, hereditary Austro-German Empire by establishing a Prussian-German Empire (1871), Austria took its revenge by sending us Hitler." May I share two more white-and-blue episodes from those dark days, which I experienced myself? From 1936 to 1939, I was stationed at our monastery in Reisach near Oberaudorf on the Inn River and had pastoral duties in Nußdorf, near Wendelstein-Brannenburg, where the mountain infantry barracks were, and now are again. Field exercises were underway, and the soldiers were maneuvering through the Inn Valley, towards Nußdorf and the Inn River. A Bavarian mountain infantryman had to climb over a garden fence. As he reached the top and was about to jump down, his hunting cap clipped a branch and fell backward, leaving him standing in the garden with the cap lying on the path. At that moment, the brave mountain infantryman poured all his brown-shirted enthusiasm into a resounding cry: "*Heil Hitler!*"

The other amusing story took place in public on the street in Bavaria's capital. It was November 1939, and the war had already begun. I had business in Munich and was walking towards the train station. Ahead of me, a postman was pushing his two-wheeled cart, piled high with boxes of field post, along the bumpy cobblestones. Suddenly, the cord holding the heavy load together snapped, and all the boxes tumbled down onto the street to the left and right. The horrified postman clenched both fists and exclaimed in high spirits: "*Heil Hitler!*" Only his benevolent guardian angel knows what pious thoughts he was having at that moment. The other amusing story unfolded in public on the street in Bavaria's capital. But back to my high school. After a few days, my aforementioned schoolmates reappeared in the classroom, not exactly puffed out with victory pride, but at least convinced that they had attempted a patriotic act. They had, in fact, participated in the attempted march to the Feldherrnhalle in Munich.

They certainly did this with good personal intentions. For only a few saw through the totalitarian ideology and the political and ideological aims of the "Brown Movement" from the very beginning. At that time, I was at our seminary here in Kumpfmühl, and our director was Father Heribert Altendorfer. He had already been a flying officer in the First World War and wore many decorations at festivities (picture on page 23). He was patriotic in the best sense of the word, but very quickly recognized the falseness and danger of Hitler's propaganda and instructed us accordingly. He had our trust, so I was suspicious of the new movement from the start. Incidentally, at the beginning of the war, Hitler requisitioned our seminary as a military hospital—and there was quite a fuss. These days, our own people have dissolved the seminary and given it away (to the postal service). So one wonders whether "totalitarian forces" aren't also at work within our own ranks today, only now not brown, but of a different hue. Am I touching on something here of what Pope Paul VI already described as "Autodestructio Ecclesiae = the self-destruction of the Church"? A second minor skirmish occurred about a year later when, more out of curiosity to meet the man personally, I wanted to attend a Hitler speech at the local city park hall. As I approached the entrance, two secret police officers rushed at me and grabbed me for weapons. In doing so, they pulled my beautiful stiletto, decorated with a leg grip, from my back trouser pocket. I carried the knife because I had to work hard during the holidays: in the fields, in the forest, with the cart, and a farm boy needed such a knife as a sort of tool. So I went to this gathering without any intention of fighting. All my protests were in vain. The knife was confiscated from me as a "dangerous weapon." — I listened to the speech anyway, but even as a young person I got the impression: This is a fanatical demagogue who pulls out all the stops, without serious justification and without regard for the most dangerous consequences, and these were:



*Carmelite priest Heribert Altendorfer, air force officer in the First World War, educator and role model of the author in the years 1921-25 and 1936-45.*



Dissolution of the existing legal order, the harshest dictatorship, war, and the annihilation of Christianity. I still remember one sentence vividly: "There was once someone (Christ) to whom Lucifer offered world domination, but he refused. I would accept." Well, that evening I only regretted my beautiful knife—and still regret it today. I soon got a new one, albeit a less beautiful one. — But the matter was to have repercussions. A few days later, I was summoned to the principal's office at the high school. "You have been reported to the police for unauthorized carrying of a weapon. Here is the penalty order: 20,000 marks fine." — It was a time of hyperinflation, as the currency was rising almost 100 percent every week. By the time I paid my fine, I could have at least bought a liter of beer. As far as I know, the case was also noted in my secret censorship file (picture p. 25). My knife story had yet another long-term effect. After more than a year, I completed my final exams at the Gymnasium (high school) and, after the Easter holidays, on April 27, 1925, travelled by train via Munich, Rosenheim, and Oberaudorf to the Carmelite monastery in Reisach am Inn. There, I knocked on the gate and asked to be admitted to the order.

According to regulations, Father Magister asked me if I had ever had any dealings with the police. When I answered with a firm "Yes," the pious man almost fainted. What kind of criminal did he have before him? — But when I then told him the whole story of my knife-related escapade, he calmed down and added me to the admissions list.

Thus, the brown element almost proved my undoing when entering the monastic life, even though I also desired a brown uniform, like the one I still wear today—only this is not Nazi brown, but a God-fearing monastic brown, without any "totalitarian claims to power."



*The author as a graduate in 1925, as a soldier in 1940-41 and as a concentration camp inmate at the liberation on May 1st, 1945.*

## **The Fundamental Anti-Christian Stance of National Socialism**

To clarify the actual attitude of the Nazi dictatorship toward Christianity, the following should be briefly noted. Hitler's accusations against the Christian religion were not merely accidental slips of the tongue in the heat of a speech. Even before his political career, he held a fundamentally anti-Christian stance. In Walter's book, "The Blood Witnesses," quoted above, we read on pages 5-6 how Hitler, even as a secondary school student, uttered unspeakable blasphemies against Holy Communion, and continued to do so and similar things later as a politician.

For example, in a dinner speech, he expressed his abhorrence of Christianity: "The heaviest blow humanity has ever received was that of Christianity.

Bolshevism is the illegitimate child of Christianity. Both are inventions of the Jews. Deliberate lies in the realm of religion were introduced into the world by Christianity." "Our religious level is already the most shameful there is."

For Hitler, the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, was a kind of prototype of a Bolshevik. "The religion fabricated by Paul of Tarsus, which was later called Christianity, is nothing other than the Communism of our time." "Christianity is an invention of a sick mind." How far Hitler had strayed from sound thought and feeling is demonstrated by another remark: "Providence has predestined me to be the greatest liberator of mankind. I liberate man from the compulsion of a mind that has become an end in itself; from the filthy and degrading self-tortures of a chimera called conscience and morality; and from the demands of a freedom and personal independence that only very few can ever live up to." In making these statements, Hitler was well aware of the irreconcilable contradiction with Christian doctrine. He even went so far as to provoke the blasphemy that, instead of the suffering and death of the divine Redeemer, there now stands "the vicarious life and actions of a Führer-legislator, who absolves the masses of believers from the burden of free choice" (loc. cit.). In his Hofburg Palace on the Obersalzberg, Hitler remarked to Cardinal Faulhaber: "The man from Galilee has played his part; now it is our turn." That was clear enough.

Let this suffice on this subject. My First Encounter with the Enemy More than 15 years had passed in my young life. I had been ordained a priest and soon became Master for the candidates for religious orders, again at Reisach Abbey, where I had entered the order. On the order's feast day, July 16, 1938, I delivered the sermon there in the morning and also referred to the dangers to the faith, as I considered my priestly duty to do.

In response, 4-5 sharp shots were fired against my cell window that afternoon — intended as a warning, at least —

In May 1939 I came to our local monastery in Kumpfmühl as superior and rector of the church, at that time still connected with a seminary.

War broke out on September 1, 1939. In May/June 1942, I would find myself in a somewhat more serious skirmish with the 'Brown totalitarian dictatorship' here.



During the war, the two monastery churches of St. Theresia, Regensburg-Kumpfmühl, with pulpit on the right, where the author held services, were also destroyed in Bavaria, for which he was punished.

The holidays of Ascension Day and Corpus Christi were abolished. My transgression was that I held a church service on the mornings of these two days, even though I had informed the congregation that these were not obligatory services, but rather that attendance was desirable but voluntary. I was spied on by the Gestapo, denounced, and summoned to court in the courthouse on Augustenstrasse here, colloquially known as "Augustenburg," with which I would later become even more closely acquainted. — The charge was "damaging the armaments industry and thus the war effort." In my defense, I pointed out the voluntary nature of the service and that the wives and mothers had been invited to pray for their brothers and sons in the field. — I was accused of "unpatriotism." To this I replied: "I forbid myself from making such an accusation! I don't need to learn patriotism from you. I was raised by my monastic superiors to love my homeland. I come from a family where military service was always held in high esteem. My father was a soldier; my older brother served in the First World War, and my two younger brothers have been at the front since the first day of the war. The youngest was the first in his regiment (the 20th here) to receive the Iron Cross. And I myself was also a soldier; I was the best shot in the company, so much so that after only eight weeks they wanted to make me a drill instructor." As I said this, bright tears rolled down the gray beard of the old sergeant who was standing nearby. — If I may say so: We had target practice in Bad Kissingen. It was winter, and a Monday to boot! No one could hit the target. We all had to shoot with the same rifle, an old but not bad rifle in itself. I took a look at it. The sights were barely visible. I lit a match and blackened the two aiming points. My first shot was an eight; then 10, 12, 12, 12. There was a loud cheer. The major came over, a veteran from the 14th War. "Yes, Private Heyder, you must be a hunter by profession!" "Way off target, Major!"

"Yes, what then?" - "I'm a theologian." "Yes, what, where did you learn to shoot?"

"Oh, Major, I shot with a parlor rifle and a Flobert rifle even as a boy."

"And you can do it then." "Apparently," I replied.

I was the shooting champion for the day, with an evening celebration.

Of course, I couldn't tell the soldier that an old poacher was one of my childhood friends. I even used his name as a nickname. His "hunting ground" was the upper Regen Valley between Regenstauf and Mariental.

I'd like to share a little anecdote about my old hunting friend.

One day, a hare was found in his possession.

He had to answer to the then "Royal Bavarian" District Court in Stadtamhof. The presiding judge asked him (he was a familiar face): "Now, Gux (that was his common name), with which rifle did you shoot the hare?" "I didn't shoot a hare.

Nobody can prove that." Judge: "But the hare was found at your place." He: "Sure. But I didn't shoot a hare." Judge: "Then you caught it with a snare." He: "But, Your Honor, who would catch and skin such a poor little hare with a snare?

Gux wouldn't do that." Judge: "Yes, did you shoot it with a revolver?" He: "Oh, Your Honor, who would go hunting with a revolver!" Judge: "Now Gux, tell me then: How did you catch the hare?" He: "Your Honor, I ran into it."

A general, loud, boisterous laughter erupted in the courtroom, and even the stern judge could not conceal his emotion and delivered the verdict: "Gux, if you ran into it, then it's yours." With that, the acquittal was pronounced.

Those were the days of the Royal Bavarian District Court in Stadtamhof on the Danube. But now back to my "High Court." Nevertheless, I was sentenced to "30 days in prison or a 300-mark fine."

I filed an appeal. After a few weeks, the case went to a second hearing before the next higher court. I soon realized that the new judge wasn't entirely averse to me. The verdict was now: "12 days in prison or a fine of 120 marks." I argued that as a member of a religious order, I owned no property and didn't receive a priest's salary. I had to accept the pennies that people put in the collection plate, which weren't my personal income either. — It was no use; the verdict stood.

Then I asked for permission to pay the fine in installments of 10 marks each. This was granted. In a few days, I brought a whole sack full of pennies to the fines office.

The treasurer made a fuss and shouted: "I can't possibly count all this stuff, etc." But in the end, he had to accept it. — May I include here a funny prank that my fellow pastor and comrade, Pastor Bartholomäus Reuther, played on the Nazi comrades in a similar situation? As pastor of Weismain/Upper Franconia, he preached and said: "Half the town councilors of Weismain are scoundrels."

This was followed by charges brought by the Nazis and a sentence ordering him to retract his statement, using the same words and in the same place as when and where he had uttered this "blasphemy" against the Nazi regime. — The following Sunday, the church was full of Nazi listeners. Pastor Reuther retracted: "Half the town councilors of Weismain are not scoundrels."

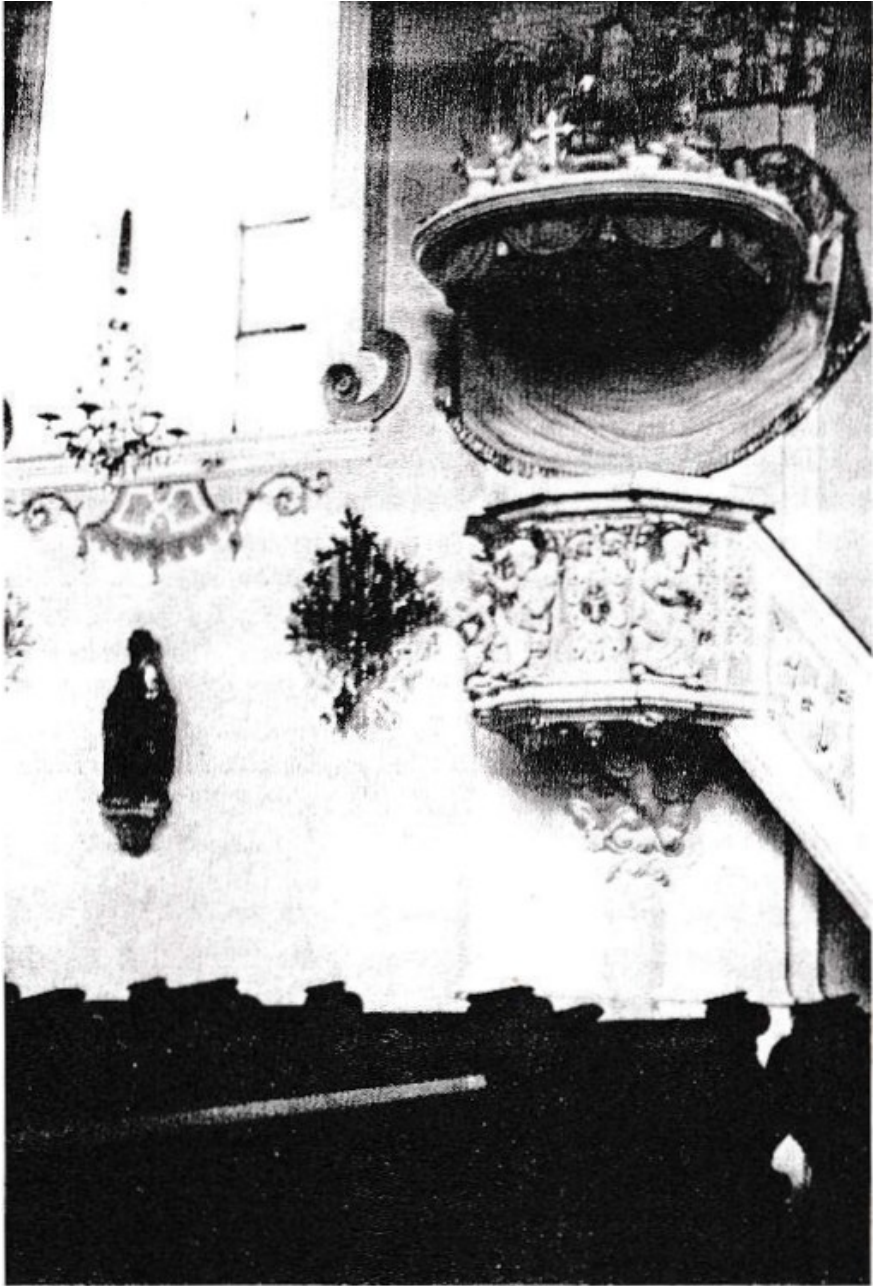
A new trial ensued. He defended himself by claiming that he had followed the order to retract his statement verbatim. Then, a bit of healthy folk humor finally broke through, even among the Nazi comrades.

The pastor received only a stern reprimand, warning him never to utter similar insults again.

## **A Serious Deployment on the Front Lines: Arrest on July 20, 1944, Day of the Revolt**

Now I come to my actual, serious deployment on the front lines in the fight against the totalitarian Nazi dictatorship: My arrest by the Gestapo on the infamous July 20, 1944. Since September 1942, I had been stationed at Mariahilfberg in Neumarkt/Opf. Since our monastery had been seized by the Nazis and converted into a Hitler School, we were living makeshift in a small cabin in the woods next door and conducted services from there in the pilgrimage church. On July 13 and 16, 1944, I preached and was spied on by a Nazi in uniform. I later learned his name; professionally, he was a teacher. He was in the Catholic nuns' infirmary at the foot of the mountain, perhaps as a paymaster; I don't know for sure. He was in cahoots with the district leader of Neumarkt, who had recently arrived from northern Germany and lived in a villa at the foot of the mountain. The man had been sent by him specifically to monitor me. The district leader seems to have been looking for some time for a pretext to arrest me, because he stopped people who came to our church and asked them what they were doing up there. Similarly, he had remarked shortly before in a speech that "now even processions and pilgrimages are of no use, only the armored fist of the German soldier." I had, in fact, just before, on June 13, 1944, introduced the veneration of Our Lady of Fatima, with a sermon, devotion, and procession (picture on page 32). This apparently didn't suit the Nazi authorities, just as it doesn't suit the communist rulers in Russia today, where possession of a statue of Our Lady of Fatima is punishable by death. As is well known, the Virgin Mary, in her apparitions in 1917, already pointed to the communist threat in Russia, even though at that time the country had already been defeated and, as many believed, was on its knees after the bloody October Revolution of 1917. But the Virgin Mary warned:





*Pulpit in the pilgrimage church of Mariahilfberg, Neumarkt/Opr.,  
from which the author delivered his decisive sermon.*

"Russia will spread its communist heresy throughout the world and incite wars and revolutions." On July 20th, a Thursday, I was, as usual, providing pastoral care at the convent of nuns at the foot of the mountain. Around noon, the gatekeeper came to me in the church, agitated: "You must answer the phone immediately; the Gestapo is calling." — I went to the phone and announced: "This is Father Gebhard Heyder." "Are you the man who preached such anti-state rhetoric up on the mountain?" — Me: "I preached, yes, but not as an anti-state rhetoric, as far as I know." "Come down to the police station immediately!" "I'm providing pastoral care here at the hospital today and can't leave right now." — He ranted and raved into the phone: "When will you be finished? I have work to do here until about 3 o'clock, and I won't be able to come before then." — He growled something else into the wire: "So come as soon as possible!" — At 3 o'clock I went to the police station, a fifteen-minute walk. I went as I was: in my religious habit, barefoot in sandals, as required by the monastery regulations for the summer months, and with my breviary under my arm—that was all I had. They were reluctant to arrest me from the hospital and lead me through the streets: "For they were afraid of the people" (Luke 22:2). The outer guard led me into the office, where the Gestapo officer N.N. was waiting for me. I know his name; he might still be alive, perhaps even among my listeners. He had come all the way from Regensburg with his secretary. I greeted him, as a decent person in Bavaria would, with "**Grüß Gott.**" He shouted, "Don't I know the Hitler salute?" I did nothing of the sort. — I was then interrogated for about three hours. He wanted the script of my sermon. I replied, "I haven't written down a sermon in years. As all my churchgoers can attest, I prefer to preach biblically, and I know a thing or two about it; I don't need a written template for a sermon." Then he quoted some sentences that the spy had scribbled down: "You said:

“The sins of mankind have piled up to heaven, and God has remembered their transgressions.” With that, you have insulted the government of our Führer.” To which I replied: “This sentence is in the Bible, Revelation 18:5, and is universally valid for all time. I haven’t mentioned the current regime at all.” Then I was asked if I listened to enemy radio. Me: “I don’t listen to the radio at all.” That was a common trap in Gestapo interrogations; listening to enemy radio was a serious crime. (I didn’t actually need to listen to the radio; I heard more than enough about the overall situation in the world from a good friend.) At the end of the interrogation, the Gestapo man looked at me mockingly and said cynically: “So, now you’re being arrested on the spot. What do you say to that?” I simply said: “I hadn’t thought it was so urgent.” He was waiting for me to start trembling and shaking. Then I was taken to the Neumarkt prison by two security guards. We had to wait a while at the gate. One of them said to me: “So, that’s what you get for your slander.” I replied: “Our Lord will one day tell you the truth even more clearly than I have.” This sentence was also included in my indictment. The prison warden in Neumarkt was a former officer of bravery from the First World War and treated me humanely and courteously in every respect. He allowed a visit from a retired sergeant major who was a friend of mine, with whom I could speak privately. I was given free rein in the courtyard, from which I could attend the Sunday service in the adjacent church through a window he had opened especially for me. The prison warden, whose name was Schmidt, assured me: “As long as you are with me, nothing will happen to you.”

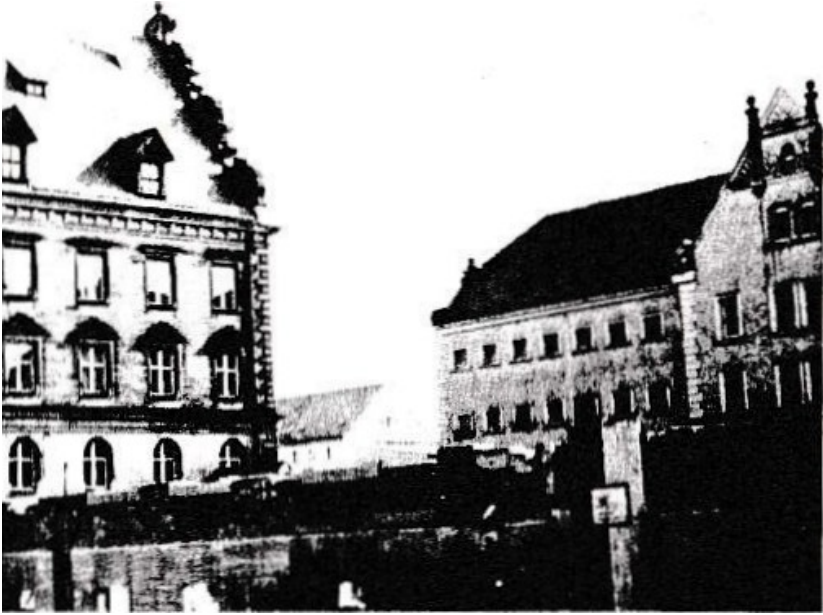
But there were not many good days to come.



*Neumarkt/Opf. District Court, formerly a castle, where the author was brought on July 20, 1944. Prison cells would have been located to the right, but were later demolished.*

After eight days, I was driven by the police chief of Neumarkt, a well-known Nazi, to Regensburg. There, I was photographed in the police station, my fingerprints and handprints were taken, and the usual police procedures were carried out on me, as is customary for serious criminals. Afterward, an auxiliary policeman led me from the examination room to the basement to be locked up. But when we were out of sight of the staff, my post addressed me: "Father, I am not a Nazi. I am a beer barrel maker by trade from Straubing and have been assigned to this auxiliary police unit. I am reluctant to lock you up." It was the harmless Langer Xaverl, whom I met several times after the war. He also got me a postcard to send to my family so they would know where I was. — Towards evening,

I was transferred with several others to the court prison on Augustenstrasse, which was not entirely unfamiliar to me—so far, only the vestibules, but now also the "inner chambers" (picture p. 37). Here, after a few days, my religious habit was taken from me. After about two weeks, I was interrogated by an older official from the ordinary court. After I had given him my statement, the official said that he could and would like to release me. "But," he said, "even if I were to release you, it would be of no use, because the Gestapo won't let you go. I am merely a tool of the Gestapo." Thereupon, I remained in pretrial detention in Regensburg until the end of November. The treatment in the Regensburg prison was no different, for better or for worse, from that of an ordinary penitentiary. Some guards were even somewhat friendly and accommodating. One, however, was quite terrible; he beat the prisoners so severely that their cries of pain could be heard throughout the entire penitentiary. After the collapse in 1945, he took his own life with a rope. — However, initially we all had regular Sunday services for prisoners, conducted by the then rector and later auxiliary bishop, Hiltl.



*Regensburg District Court, where the author was interrogated twice in June 1942 and sentenced to fines, later imprisoned from July 25 to November 28.*

From October onward, all church services were cancelled. As I only learned after the liberation, this was the time when the Americans were advancing rapidly in France. For a time, Prince Karl August von Thurn und Taxis, the father of the current Prince Johannes, was also an honored guest at our Augustenburg. I saw him myself at a roll call—or whatever it was—wearing a wide, gold brooch chain around his neck. As far as I heard, it involved listening to enemy radio.

The "unwary" man, in his conscientiousness and love of truth, probably let himself be caught up in it. He spoke fluent French, and they suspected he was listening to foreign-language broadcasts. I also experienced several air raids, during which my small cell window was smashed. It was probably the nearby train station or even my own monastery in Kumpfmühl that was bombed. At the end of November 1944, the sergeant came to my cell one day and ordered me to get dressed.

He led me down to the gatehouse, where a sergeant took charge and escorted me outside, towards the train station. I didn't know where we were going. He boarded the train with me, into a closed compartment. I realized it was heading north. Once the train had left the city behind, the sergeant suddenly stood up, removed his cap and belt, looked at me, and said, "Father, I'm an old soldier from the first World War, not a Nazi. It goes against my grain to have to transport you. I come from a Catholic family and have always upheld my faith, even in the trenches of Verdun. I never imagined such a time would come..."

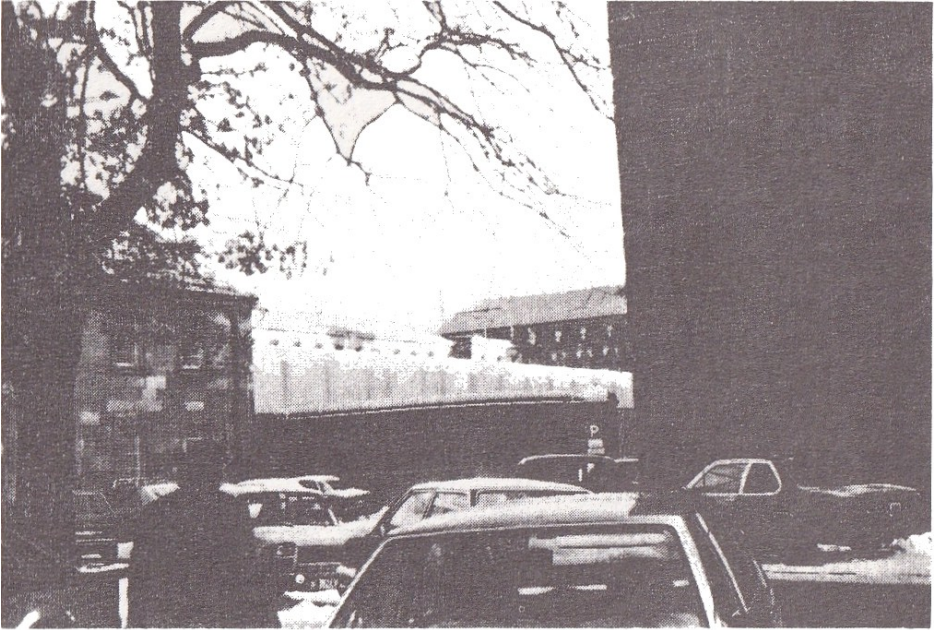
Father, I replied gratefully that I understood and that I didn't blame him personally. He was from Ingolstadt. We then chatted for the entire journey. He told me we were going to Nuremberg, where he was to deliver me to the prison. When we got out in Nuremberg, he didn't handcuff me; instead, he walked ahead, deliberately through the throng of people. He wanted to give me a chance to escape.

He repeatedly looked back. And when he still saw me trailing behind him, he shook his head, went back into the crowd, and tried to make me run away.

I noticed this clearly. But I thought: If I escape, I'll be discovered; then the good man will be held accountable and shot himself. So we made our way out to Fürther Straße and the fortress-like prison.

I took my leave with a silent, grateful look at my sergeant, who had become such a strange kind of "good comrade" to me. In Nuremberg, I was—I don't know why—put among the 400 Czech concentration camp prisoners.

Realistically speaking, the prison was a kind of concentration camp. When I protested that I was not Czech, I was snapped at: "Be quiet, you Sow-priest! Get in there." (Picture p. 39).



*Nuremberg Prison, Fürther Straße; at the very back behind the high perimeter wall, the small cell windows where the author was housed after the death sentence handed down to him by Freisler's court in the adjoining courthouse.*

### **Main Interrogation before the People's Court — Charge of Undermining the War Effort — Death Sentence**

My trial was scheduled for December 21st, but was actually held on December 20th without my prior notification.

As a result, neither defense witnesses nor friends could attend. My tribunal was the First Senate of the People's Court, presided over by President Freisler. He had come to Nuremberg specifically from Berlin, during the days when our soldiers were engaged in the bloodiest defensive battles against the advancing Russian tank spearheads. During the trial, the presiding judge accused me of being a fanatic for the truth. I replied: "I am not a fanatic for the truth, but I will be a champion of the truth."



Another assessor of the People's Court, sitting in a captain's uniform—it was, as I later learned, Vice Admiral Heimbürg—said mockingly, "You want to convert us all to Catholicism?" I replied, "If only I could!" Another member of the court, in party uniform, called out to me, "Your God must be a bloodthirsty God." I retorted, "God doesn't always have to punish with blood. He has other means!" Well, my judge Freisler didn't bleed to death. It was later officially reported that he had been killed by a falling iron girder during an air raid in Berlin. I learned more precisely that he had fled into the subway during an air raid. There, he was recognized by wounded soldiers returning from the nearby Eastern Front and hanged from a subway girder on February 6, 1945, the very day my execution was scheduled.

So he didn't bleed to death, he wasn't "punished with blood." Yet another judge remarked: "It won't make any impression on him if we sentence him to death." My defense attorney, who was assigned to me by the court, only came to see me 10 minutes before the trial to get a quick update on my situation. I defended myself. — To the accusation that my sermon was a political diatribe, I replied: "The overall impression on the people was probably that of a religious sermon and not a political diatribe.

Proof of this is that a great many people, including numerous soldiers, went to the sacristy after the sermon to be initiated into the religious brotherhood (Scapular Brotherhood) and did not, as would have been expected after a political diatribe, go down to the district leader's house to smash his windows." The two sentences from my sermon that were specifically held against me as a crime were: "1. The war is God's punishment for the nations, and this is not yet over. 2. Germany must return to Christ."

The last sentence in particular was interpreted as my main offense, as if I were saying: "Away from Hitler and back to Christ!" — I replied: "My sermon was a general call to take Christianity seriously again. I didn't mention the name 'Hitler' once in my entire sermon." — They realized that I had essentially refuted the political charge and now posed the crucial question to me—they did so in a particularly insidious way with the clergy: "What do you say about National Socialism?" I, of course, saw the trap and said: "Insofar as National Socialism is politics, it is not for me to judge. Insofar as it claims to be a worldview." At that, Freisler shouted out: "And that's what it claims to be!" "Well," I said, "insofar as it claims to be a worldview, it is the greatest misguided path the German people have ever taken." A loud outcry arose in the judges' gallery: "Listen, listen! A man who still makes such pronouncements today must not be allowed to live. Away with him! He is guilty of death!" — Thereupon, the panel of judges withdrew to deliberate. After a short time, they reappeared to solemnly pronounce my verdict. I was sentenced to death by the highest court of the time without any witnesses.

The aforementioned Nazi man who had spied on me also failed to appear. He had, as I later learned, become uncertain in his testimony and had transferred from Neumarkt to Donaustauf near Regensburg. The police chief of Neumarkt went to see him specifically to turn him against me again. Mrs. B. M. Kempner discusses this in her first book, p. 154 the note, "that judicial documents were found during excavation work near the former People's Court in Berlin, Bellevuestraße. There were a total of 629 judgments, including 500 death sentences... In approximately 300 cases, the judgments are co-signed by the judicial assessor, retired Chamber Court Judge Rehse, some of them together with the presiding judge Freisler."

The names of the representatives of the Attorney General also became known through the discovery of these judgments. Among the death sentences is, among others, that of the clergyman Heyder.

The file number is in the upper left corner of the document: "1 L 453/44 5 J 1468/44 In the name of the German people! In the criminal case against the Carmelite priest Franz Heyder of the Carmelite Monastery Mariahilfsberg (Bavaria), born on November 30, 1904, in Lorenzen, currently in custody in this matter, for undermining the war effort, the People's Court, 1st Senate, on the indictment received on November 15, 1944, from the Chief Public Prosecutor, in the main hearing of December 20, 1944, in which the following judges participated: People's Court Judge Dr. Illner, Presiding Judge, High Court Judge Rehse, SA Brigade Leader Höhm, Vice Admiral (Retired) von Heimburg, Presiding Judge of the Gau Court of East Prussia of the NSDAP Koelling, as representative of the Chief Public Prosecutor: Judge Rathmayer, rendered the following judgment: In the summer of 1944, Franz Heyder, as a Catholic priest, leveled the most serious accusations against our National Socialist leadership from the pulpit and described the enemy's terror attacks on German cities as just punishment from God. As a propagandist of subversion for our enemies, he is forever dishonored. "He is sentenced to death." This is the wording of my conviction by the Supreme Court of "the totalitarian brown regime." The judge shouted down at me from his tribunal: "You are extremely dangerous. Your execution can be carried out after 72 hours."

Then my court-appointed lawyer stood up and told me that I could submit a petition for clemency. He would arrange this. I replied briefly: "It goes against my grain to ask this society for clemency at the very hour when I am standing up for my convictions." I can say openly: I was not driven by political motives at the time. The real reason, the deeper basis of my stance against the Nazi dictatorship, was indeed my secular, Catholic conviction. — And I could not act any differently today. After the hearing, which had lasted barely three-quarters of an hour—eight death sentences were handed down that morning, I was the first—a police officer led me back to the prison. We had to wait at the gate for some time. Then my guard looked around to see if anyone was watching him and said to me: "Respect for you! You stood up for your convictions. We need more people like you." I replied: "Thank you for the compliment." In the concentration camp section for imprisoned Czechs, left to starve to death, air raids I was locked in a cell with two other condemned prisoners, a cell that otherwise only housed one other man. One was the factory owner Fritz Werthmann, around 45 or 50 years old, the other a Czech student who spoke fluent German. We soon became good cellmates. I tried to comfort them both however and wherever I could. They were both tall, constantly ravenous, and would talk for hours about nothing but the food they conjured up in their imaginations. -- What made the imprisonment even more difficult was the lack of light and water. The rations became starvation rations. — During the heavy air raids, we weren't allowed into any air-raid shelters but had to remain in our cells on the top floor. Through the small skylights, we could see the city at night brightly lit by the so-called "Christmas trees," which were the enemy's flares attached to parachutes that hung in the air for a long time.

We were able to follow the approach of the planes and distinguish the individual attack waves. They came closer and closer until they roared overhead and dropped their cargo. Soon there were fires here and there. A bomb fell on our cell, knocking the plaster off the ceiling—and bounced off into the courtyard. How this happened remains a mystery to me even today. A heavy bomb fell opposite us in a wing of the prison, penetrating to the second floor and killing two fellow prisoners in a direct hit without exploding. It was a dud. The walls of our cell were partially torn open. We would have only needed to push them, and they would have gone down with us. Smoke and flames poured in through the broken windows. My cellmate Fritz, although Protestant, kept calling out to me: "Gerhard, bless, bless!" That was true ecumenism, without falsehood or suspicion. `` Good Friday 1945, Transport by Rail to Straubing Prison Once the American troops had crossed the Rhine, Nuremberg was declared a fortress and prepared for defense. All those deemed unsuitable for defense were evacuated, including, finally, the prison inmates. I, along with my fellow sufferers, was transported on March 30, 1945 (Good Friday), two by two, chained together, to Straubing Prison. On the journey there, we experienced an air raid at the train station in Regensburg, which, thank God, we survived unscathed. Prisoners were herded to Straubing from various other prisons and concentration camps, so the prison was severely overcrowded. They also came from the Upper Palatinate (Flossenbürg). Many died on the march, as evidenced, among other things, by a memorial on the road to Roding.



*Memorial to the concentration camp prisoners who died on the march from Flossenbürg—Roding—Wetterfeld. Left: Memorial plaque for Jewish victims, right: Orthodox victims, Center: other Christians.*

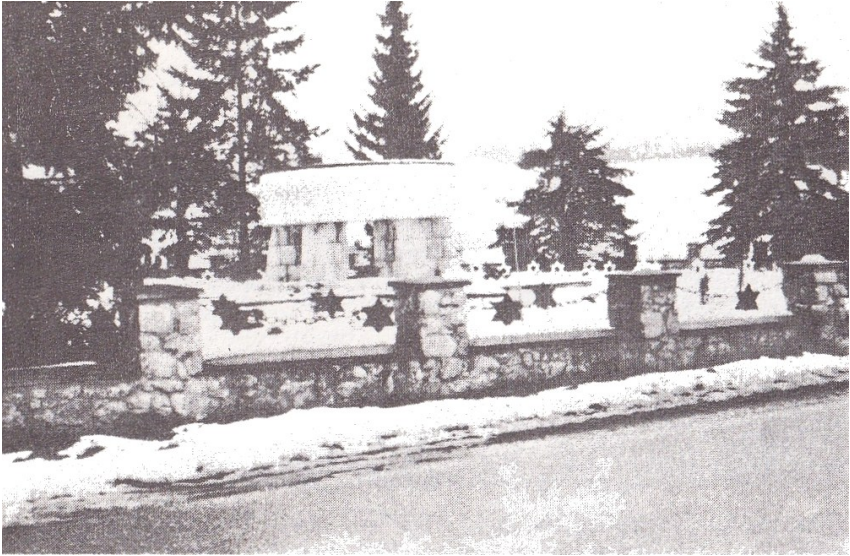
In Straubing, I was locked in a small cell with a Czech vocational school teacher. Heavy air raids also swept over Straubing. After one such raid, an Austrian Cistercian priest from Wielering near Linz, who had been sentenced to five years for preaching and was soon to be released, whispered to me through the cracks in the door: "The guillotine was hit last night." It had been brought from Stadelheim Prison near Munich to Straubing to receive our heads. But it was not to be. Death March Towards Dachau Easter, April 1st, passed, and then came April 25th, 1945, a Wednesday. On this day, on which the so-called "St. Mark's Day processions" have traditionally taken place in the church, our "death procession" to Dachau was also to begin. It became our most difficult walk. That morning, we were woken at 5:00 a.m. with the order: "Take your sleeping blanket and mess kit." We didn't know where we were going; we only had a vague idea that we were being moved out of the city because of the enemy's proximity. Around 7:00 a.m., we marched from Straubing Prison toward Landshut. During the march, we learned that we were headed to Dachau, where we were to be executed together. A few brief accounts of what happened along the way: After about 6 km, we witnessed an aerial battle and an American plane being shot down right before our eyes. The pilot was rescued by parachute and captured by German soldiers. A German ammunition truck exploded, its debris flying toward us. American planes flew low over our column to see who we were. We greeted them with our concentration camp badges. Our sentries are crowding into our ranks so they won't be shot down by the planes.



*Straubing prison, in the middle central watchtower, on the right building with prison cells where we were housed.*

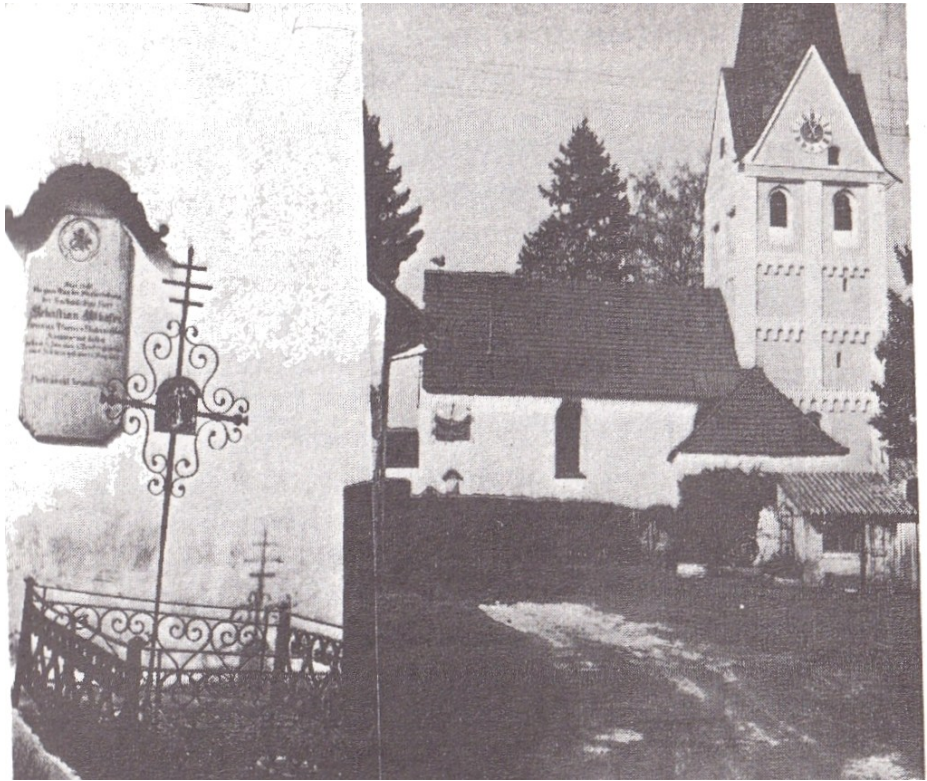
The sheer amount of deprivation, hunger, misery, mistreatment, and exhaustion unto death that this march, which lasted until the evening of April 30th, encompassed can scarcely be described. Only a brief summary can be given: We had to make the march in wooden clogs. For months, we had been on a death-famine die-off and had become walking skeletons. In the last few days, all provisions were gone. We chewed the first green grass that sprouted from the ground. We searched for the remains of dog food; but even there, we were driven away with sticks and rifle butts. We had to spend the nights outdoors in heavy downpours. As a result, numerous fellow prisoners collapsed from exhaustion by the roadside and died. Long after the war, in 1971, the gravedigger's wife in Mengkofen told me that several concentration camp prisoners were also buried in her cemetery, whose remains they later had to exhume because they were being repatriated (picture on page 48). Many of our fellow prisoners were shot in a forest between Moosburg and Freising; there were said to be over 1,200. A bridge over the Isar River was also blown up nearby.





*Memorial to the Jewish fellow prisoners who were killed, located at the intersection of Landshuter Straße and Mallersdorf.*

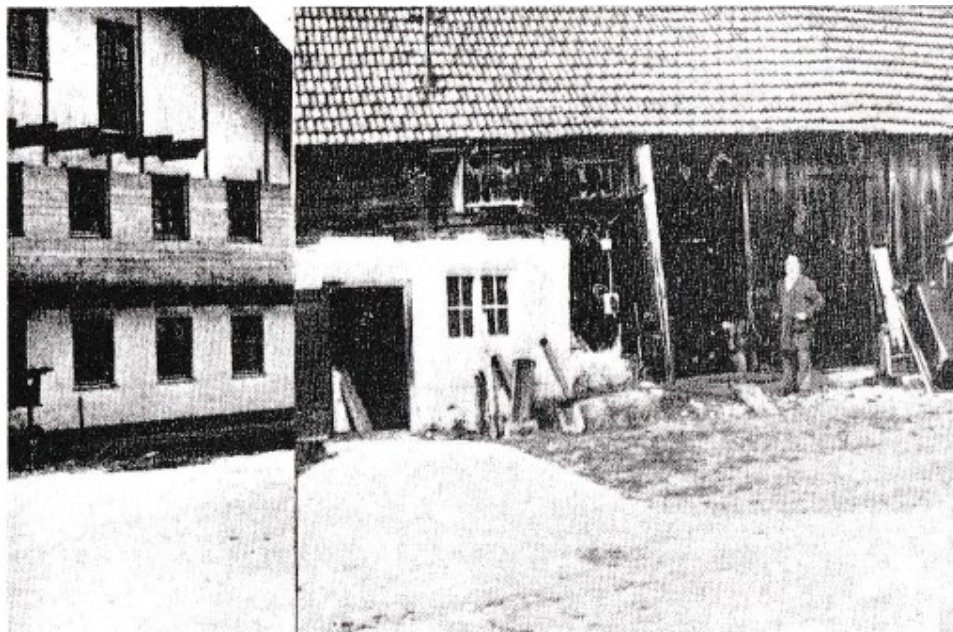
My unit and I had already passed, but we saw the debris behind us—and probably also body parts of our comrades—flying into the air. Later, in 1948/49, Americans came to see me in Neumarkt/Mariahilfberg and questioned me specifically about this experience. A completely different episode should not go unmentioned. It was perhaps the fourth day of the march. Heavy rain was falling, and utter exhaustion threatened. We trudged along. Then a man turned around in front of me and said: “My respects, Your Reverence. We are communists from Vienna, have been imprisoned for four years, and have never said the Lord’s Prayer. But today we did.” This was the answer to the silent question I had asked myself shortly before: “Dear God, must you let it come to this extreme...? This seems necessary so that the misguided little man finally comes to his senses. Of course, there were more sad scenes. A comrade couldn’t go on and kept falling over. I helped him. Then a real Nazi guard rushed up with a blunt club. I said: “You see, the man can’t go on.”



*The small church in Münchenerau near Landshut, with the grave of my great-uncle, Reverend Sebastian Alkofer, attached to the left (the actual spot is under the sundial on the church wall). I repeatedly spent my holidays here. Our hike took me very close by.*

Then he raised his club and shouted at me: "You Sow-priest, shut up!" I stood in front of him and shouted back: "Hit me!" He looked at me, both shocked and furious, and lowered his club. But I want to bear witness to the whole truth. There were also sentries with different views. It was probably the second day of the march. One of the sentries approached me and handed me a piece of bread, saying: "I'm not a Nazi, I was drafted. I have my civilian clothes with me and get out of here as soon as I can." Another episode took place soon after the aforementioned bridge blown up near Moosburg.

We were driven through a thicket of trees, and our column spread out somewhat. Then I saw a young SS lieutenant with his orderly. I approached him and said, "Excuse me for speaking to you." He: "Why, why, are you under arrest?" I: "I am a priest, and because I spoke the truth, I was sentenced to death." The officer turned around and looked to see if any of his men were watching. Then he said to his orderly, "Give me, give me!" The orderly slipped me a small packet of rusks from his so-called "iron rations." Perhaps, humanly speaking, this saved my life. — Much later, around 1965, people from German television came to visit me in Neumarkt and wanted a report about my concentration camp experience. I also told them about this scene with the young SS lieutenant and insisted that it be shown on television. I later saw this film at a relative's house. But the scene with this report didn't appear on the screen; it had been cut. Why? Did this factual report fail the "censorship" not of the Nazi regime, but of a different kind of dictatorship? If you mix brown, red, and green, you get a blackish product. I remembered this from art class, but I tried it again on my old paint set just to be sure. It's not a real, beautiful black, but a rather ignoble pseudo-black. Apparently, you can buy it these days. But I haven't gotten any yet. "Qui capere potest, capiat" (Matthew 19:12)! If you can capture, capture! On Saturday, April 28, 1945, as our wretched convoy had already passed Freising on its way to Munich-Dachau, we were suddenly ordered to turn around in the evening. Dachau had already been captured by American troops, so we could no longer enter. We were turned back, and the goal was now to drive us around behind and between the front lines until we were all exhausted and lying dead, at which point we would receive the final blow. One small incident should be mentioned here:

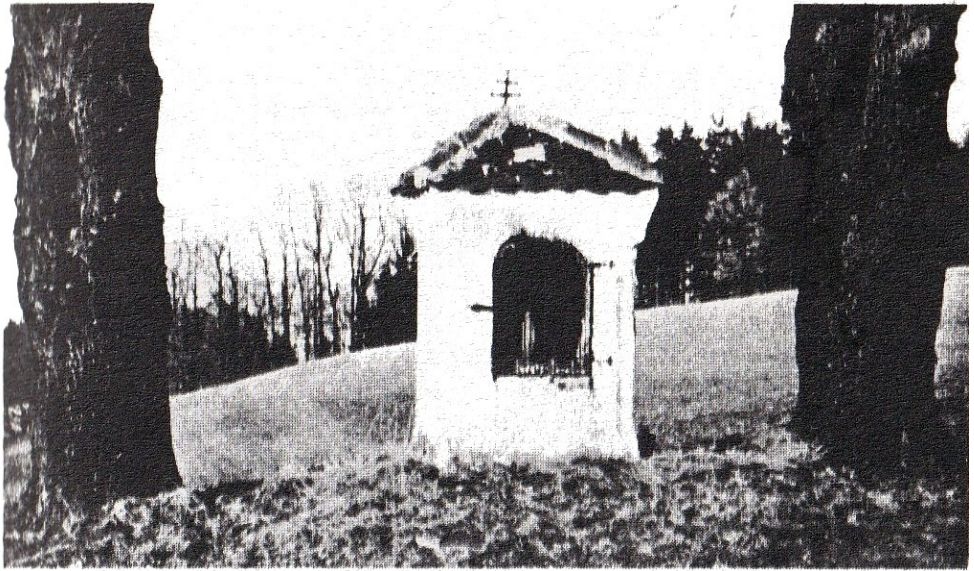


*The old barn of farmer Joseph Weindl in Unterheldenberg, standing by the gate, where we spent the night of May 1, 1945, and were liberated by American tanks. A large field kettle remains in the attic as a memento of those days. To the left is the now-renovated farmhouse where I was housed and where the kind old farmer's wife revived me with baby food.*

During the march through Landshut, a fellow prisoner accidentally grazed the motorcycle of a passing SS man and was badly injured in the head. Although the motorcyclist and his passenger were unharmed, he pulled out his revolver and shouted at the poor injured prisoner: "You Jewish pig (but he was German), open your chest!" and wanted to shoot him dead on the spot. I intervened on the man's behalf. Then the passenger shouted to the trigger-happy comrade: "Leave it alone, he's not worth a bullet!" On April 30th, we arrived in the village of Unterheldenberg (about 15 km southeast of Landshut) towards evening. We stayed overnight in a barn (picture above).

## **Liberation by American Tank Units**

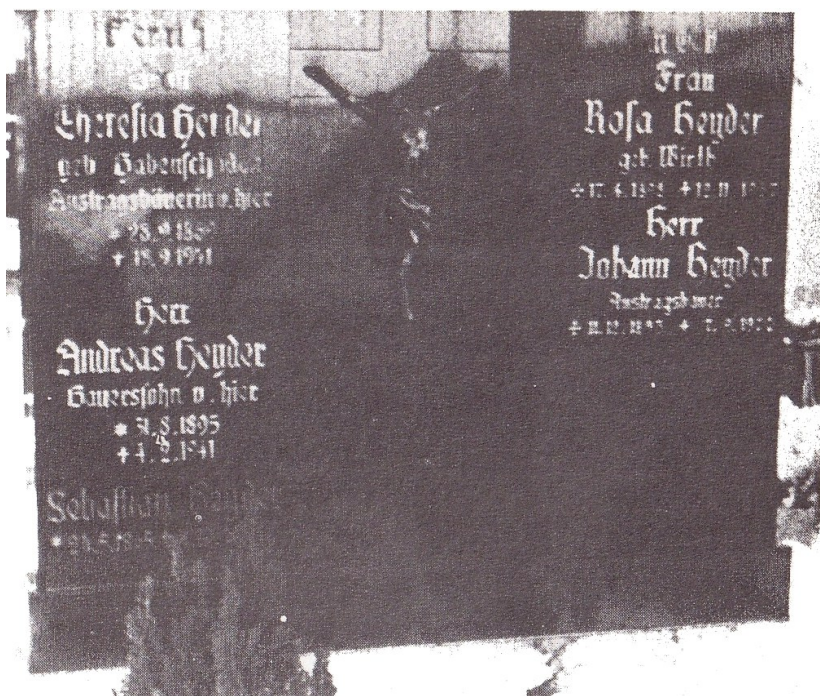
Towards morning, we heard a dull, distant rumble and gunfire. It was the approaching American tanks. There were still skirmishes with groups of defenders lying in wait. The fire drew nearer. Shots from tank cannons were already ripping through the roof of our barn. We lay still. We thought to ourselves, "Now the bullet will hit you, then you'll be free." When day broke, everything was covered with a layer of snow up to a leg. Nevertheless, the Nazi leaders wanted to drive us on again so that the last of the prisoners would also perish. Only at the urgent pleas of the kind farmers in whose barn we spent the night did they abandon their plan. As the people later told us, the leading Nazi men had held a war council during the night and decided: "We still have enough ammunition. We'll kill them all." — But they would not get the chance. They were already gripped by fear of the American bullets and hid in the farmyards. Then some of our fellow prisoners, Czech officers who were still in better physical condition, took a white horse blanket, tied it to a pitchfork handle, and walked toward the approaching American tanks. When the Americans saw the white flag, they immediately ceased firing. After our interpreter explained that political prisoners were being held in the village, American tanks immediately drove into the village, disarmed our Nazi guards, and took them prisoner. The hour of liberation had struck...after we had stood on the brink of death until the very end. We greeted the American soldiers with great joy and heartfelt thanks. They threw us rusks and chocolate from their cars, whose windshields were riddled with bullet holes. I was also able to briefly greet an American military chaplain. Of course, most of my fellow prisoners had already succumbed to their misfortune. Of the 4200 prisoners we marched away from Straubing, only 800-900 remained, and these were in such a state that they aroused the pity and horror of the people.



*A wayside shrine with a small statue of the Virgin Mary, on the road near Unterheldenberg, where I held my thanksgiving service at 3 pm on May 1, 1945*

When we finally received rations again, our completely weakened organs were no longer able to process the food; severe symptoms of dysentery set in. The American Red Cross and the military administration provided assistance as best they could. Until our final discharge, we were housed and fed. I was initially taken in by a farmer, whose room reminded me very much of my father's house. I was at the very end of my strength. I could no longer walk or eat anything. Then the kind farmer's wife, whose son was also at war, made me a baby food, the kind given to infants. I was able to eat and keep this down, and it was my sustenance for the first 8-10 days. An American military doctor also came to see me. When he saw me, he simply said, "I don't need to examine you any further." He meant that I would soon die anyway. Als ich ihm sagte, daß ich von Regensburg sei, erzählte er mir, daß sie von Regensburg her kämen.

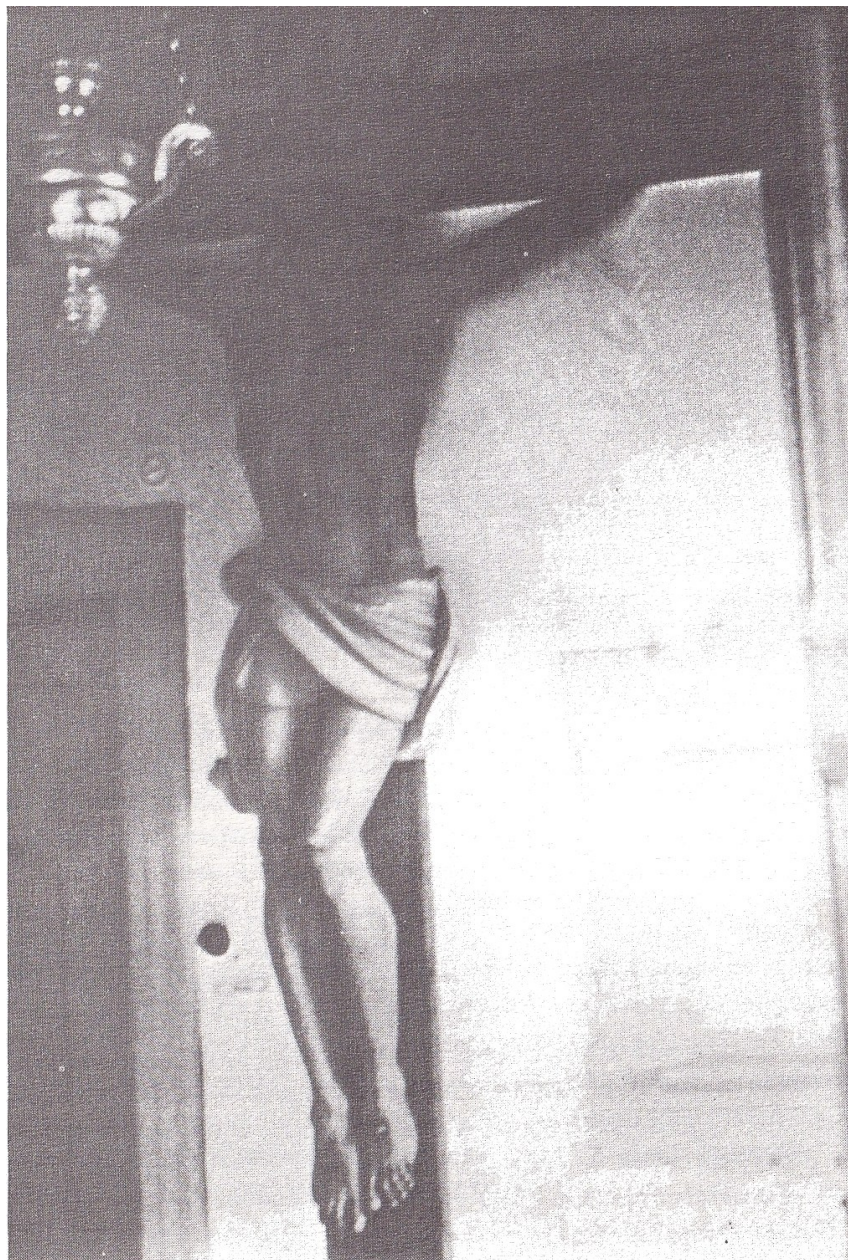
There, the Nazis would have hanged the cathedral preacher because he advocated for the city's surrender. This was Cathedral Preacher Dr. Meier, whose name can be read on the memorial column in Dachauplatz in Regensburg. Homecoming After about 10 days, the Czech officers, who were my fellow prisoners, asked me if I could hold a joint thanksgiving service. I mustered my strength and gladly did so. It was also a celebration of reconciliation across deep divides. If only this could have continued on a larger scale! It would have been the right path to true peace—and would still be today. In the following days, a horse-drawn cart took me to Geisenhausen, the seat of a military government. There, I received the official certificate of my imprisonment in the concentration camp and my release papers. The mayor provided me with clothes—I was still wearing my concentration camp uniform. He gave me a pair of gray military trousers, long soldier's boots, and a black jacket, personally from him. — The local parish priest, whom I visited, initially looked at me suspiciously. Unfortunately, it was the case that we concentration camp prisoners were ultimately lumped together with the criminal convicts from the penitentiary. One of them even stole my meager blanket during the night march. — Therefore, people often didn't have a good opinion of us concentration camp prisoners, because they too had had bad experiences with such released people. Only when I was able to name one of our priests, who came from his parish, did he believe me and then receive me with great concern. He asked me to give a short sermon the next day, May 13th, which he celebrated as Fatima Day, which I did.



*The author's parents' grave in the cemetery of his home village of Sankt Lorenzen am Regen: here, the ashes of a brother of the author, who was violently killed by the brown rulers, are also buried, and the inscriptions of two of his nephews who fell in Hitler's war are placed.*

After a few days, I was able to hitch a ride in a truck to Pfaffenberg near Mallersdorf, where the local innkeeper welcomed me hospitably. There, at the request of the district administrator of Mallersdorf, I dictated my first and only concentration camp report to the innkeeper's daughter, who typed it for me. A few days later, a car took me to Regensburg, where I knocked on the gate of our monastery on Pentecost Saturday at noon. What a surprise to see Father Gebhard alive again! In the late afternoon, I rode a borrowed bicycle out to my home village of Sankt Lorenzen am Regen. The reunion with my 80-year-old father was deeply moving. My mother had already died in 1941.





*Memorial cross of the author at the gate of his monastery on the Mariahilfberg in Neumarkt/Opf., from where he was arrested and to which he returned after his liberation.*

Even at my parents' house, they had long since presumed me dead. The next day, May 20th, the Feast of Pentecost, I was able to hold my homecoming and thanksgiving service in the old village church where I had once served as an altar boy. Ten days later, on May 30, 1945, I was able to travel by train to Neumarkt in an open freight car, despite the pouring rain. Arriving there at midnight, I found a curfew and had to spend the night in the bombed-out train station. — My return to the city where I was arrested was quite peculiar. It was Thursday, May 31st, also Corpus Christi. As I was searching for a way through the completely destroyed old town that morning, the Corpus Christi procession was just forming, and I joined it, just as I was. ... In the afternoon, I slowly made my way up the Stations of the Cross to my beloved Mariahilfberg, where the hour for the final May devotion was just beginning. I was asked to lead it. — This was my welcome to the Blessed Virgin Mary, for whose sermon I had been taken from here and now returned. The Bible says: “O Lord, in your hands is my destiny” (Psalm 30:15-16), the destiny of every mortal. God holds everything in his hands, down to the last thread, down to the last second.

In the Gospel, we read of Jesus: “Omnia bene fecit — He has made all things good” (Mark 7:37), and in my case, too — good and beautiful.



*Father Gebhard Heyder, arrested on July 20, 1944 for preaching, sentenced to death on December 20, 1944, liberated on May 1, 1945, died on May 31, 1984 at the age of eighty.*



List of Books by Father Gebhard Heyder OCD from the Author's Own Publishing House

1. People's Bible — The New Coffine  
Old and New Testaments in Excerpts  
Explained for the Faith Life of the People,  
with many pictures from Palestine and his German Homeland,  
Regensburg 1974 **DM 28**  
New in Small Format 1984 **DM 15**
2. New Testament, Translated from the Original Text,  
with Short Commentary and Small Illustration  
Format 12/17 cm, Regensburg 1978 **DM 15**
3. The Life of Jesus — The Four Gospels in Synoptic Harmony,  
with Short Commentary and Small Illustration  
Format 12/17 cm, Regensburg 1979 **DM 12**
4. The Hidden Treasure — A Guide to the Inner Life of Grace,  
Regensburg 1983, illustrated **DM 9**
5. Signs of God,  
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7. Explanation of the Mass Sacrifice **DM 12**
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Address:

Father Gebhard Heyder OCD  
Kumpfmühler Straße 37  
8400 Regensburg

## Pray a short, necessary prayer daily.

1. *(Latin)*  
**Sancti** Angeli Dei Omnipotentis custodiant nos  
et omnes homines in via angusta,  
ut paradisum aeternum tuto perveniamus. **Amen.**
  
1. *(English)*  
**The** Holy Angels of Almighty God protect us and all people on the  
narrow path, so that we may safely reach Paradise for eternity.  
**Amen.**
  
2. *(Latin)*  
**Sanctus** Deus Trinitas, Pater benignus et Rex noster,  
tribuat nobis et omnibus hominibus pacem, caritatem, lucem,  
gaudium et vitam aeternam. **Amen.**
  
2. *(English)*  
**The** Holy Triune God, our benevolent Father and King, grant us and  
all people peace, love, light, joy, and eternal life. **Amen**
  
3. *(Latinus)*  
**Omnipraesens**, omnipotens et fidelis Sancta Trinitas Deus,  
Pater noster, bonus et pius Deus, Salvator et Rex noster,  
Te rogamus: rege nos et dona nobis et omnibus hominibus  
gratiam Tuam, pacem, caritatem, lucem Tuam et vitam aeternam.  
Sancta Trinitas Deus, Pater, Filius et Spiritus Sanctus, Tu Deus  
Sanctus vivens et verus, unus et inseparabilis, fiat voluntas tua.  
**Amen.**
  
3. *(English)*  
**Omnipresent**, almighty and faithful Holy Triune God, our Father,  
good and loving God, our Savior and King, we ask You: rule us and  
grant us and all people Your grace, peace, love, Your light and  
eternal life. Holy Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
Living, true, one, and inseparable God,  
Thy will be done. **Amen.**

## Short Prayers Against Unclean Spirits, September 11, 2025

**The** Almighty Holy Triune God, † Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, does not force anyone to love Him—every person has free will.

Those who love the Holy God, serve Him, and do His will are on the right path to Paradise.

Whoever remains in mortal sin and does what the devil wants will not reach Paradise, and the devil will take them to Hell.

Everyone can choose and be ready for eternal life with the Holy God, our King and Redeemer, because we do not know the hour when He will come and take us. **Amen.**

**"Depart from me, devil, from me—make way for God and the Holy Spirit, and go where the Holy Triune God commands you. You must never return. Amen."**

### **Eternal Paradise is our goal**

Savior's words, which I—Julijana—received on Thursday in November 2025:

"Our Creator is the Almighty, Holy Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

He is the best Father there is.

Our holy, present, living God is true eternal love, our King and Redeemer, who loves and redeemed us, so that we may reach Paradise.

As long as we live on Earth, we will be tested, to see if we love the Holy God, if we are faithful to Him, have unwavering faith, and do His holy will.

In Paradise, there are many dwellings—nothing is lacking.

There, people are united with My eternal love, My peace, and My light.

There are no discontented souls there.

Nature is never destroyed; there are no atomic bombs, no pistols, and no rifles.

There are no hungry people and no poor people, and no one lives in abundance.

The air And the water is a thousand times purer than on this polluted earth.

There are no toxins to spoil the fruits and vegetables.

We don't need medicine—no one will be sick.

In Paradise, the Holy God is praised, loved, glorified, and worshipped.

The first and second commandments are especially important there:

You shall love the Holy God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Most importantly:

People no longer sin there.

For those who serve Satan, Lucifer, and demons have no access to Paradise.

The Savior said:

"I don't need murderers and liars in Paradise."

Here in Paradise, people praise and glorify Me and are happy.

Almighty, Holy Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless us and all people.

Saint Joseph accompany us in our lives as our great helper and intercessor.

Holy Mother of God—with Your beloved Child—please grant us and all people Your protection and blessing.

May Saint Michael the Archangel protect us and stand by us with the nine choirs of Holy Angels.

We ask all the saints of God in Paradise for their intercession, that we too may enter where they are. **Alleluia. Amen.**

[www.gnadenvolle-gebete.de](http://www.gnadenvolle-gebete.de)

30.11.2025

D-Forbach, Erbersbronn,  
Julijana, Bernhard und Samuel