



• PRESENTED BY JOHN HENRY CROSBY WITH JOHN F. CROSBY •

MY BATTLE AGAINST HITLER

FAITH, TRUTH, AND DEFIANCE IN THE SHADOW OF THE THIRD REICH

DIETRICH VON HILDEBRAND



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*Faith, Truth, and Defiance
in the Shadow of the Third Reich*

Dietrich von Hildebrand

*Translated and Edited by
John Henry Crosby with John F. Crosby*



IMAGE
NEW YORK

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First Edition

If God permits evils such as Bolshevism and National Socialism, then of course, as St. Paul says, it is to test us; it is precisely our struggle against evil that God wills, even when we suffer external defeat.

DIETRICH VON HILDEBRAND

That damned Hildebrand is the greatest obstacle for National Socialism in Austria. No one causes more harm.

FRANZ VON PAPEN

NAZI AMBASSADOR TO AUSTRIA

He immunized and protected us from the philosophical waves that swept across Germany in those days. Heidegger's melodies no longer had the power to seduce us, for our ears had become more discerning. Whoever understood von Hildebrand was saved. Despite the many factors at work, I think one can rightly say that history might have been quite different had there been more professors like him.

PAUL STÖCKLEIN

STUDENT OF VON HILDEBRAND AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MUNICH

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A FATEFUL DECISION

Better to be a beggar in freedom than to be forced into compromises against my conscience.

—DIETRICH VON HILDEBRAND

In the early months of 1933, the world watched as Adolf Hitler came to power. On January 30, an election after election saw the Nazi Party gaining seats in the German parliament, he was appointed chancellor of Germany. On February 27 the Reichstag building, the seat of the German parliament, was destroyed in a fire. Hitler quickly exploited the resulting unrest to secure emergency powers and suspend basic rights. Terror ensued and thousands of political opponents were arrested.

One German who followed these developments with deepest indignation and sorrow was the philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand. His heart bled at the thought that his beloved country had “fallen into the hands of criminals.” But Hitler’s meteoric rise was more than a source of profound grief for von Hildebrand. It confronted him with a decision. Would he remain in Germany or not? Indeed, *could* he remain? What did his conscience demand? What was God asking of him?

These questions had been on von Hildebrand’s mind ever since the Nazi party was born in his hometown of Munich. He was predestined to be an enemy of Nazism, for even before the rise of the movement he had been a vocal opponent of nationalism, militarism, collectivism, and anti-Semitism, the major pillars of the Nazi ideology. Thus the Nazis had already taken note of von Hildebrand in 1921, not because he had

attacked them by name, but because he had publicly condemned as an “atrocious crime” the German invasion of neutral Belgium at the start of World War I (1914). His remarks, made at a peace conference in Paris in 1921, created an uproar in the German press. He had violated the nationalist tenet of the Nazi orthodoxy, and for this he was marked for execution and then forced to flee in 1923 when Hitler attempted to seize power in Munich.

By 1933 von Hildebrand had reason to believe that his death sentence of ten years prior had long been forgotten. His decision, then, was based not just on consideration of the dangers he might face but whether he could even remain in the Third Reich. Could he live in a land where the state would legalize countless injustices and where opposition could only lead to arrest and torture?

The answer—or rather, his answer—was no. No, as a philosopher and a Catholic he could no longer stay in Germany. To remain would require a measure of silence and set him on a course of inevitable if gradual acquiescence. This, von Hildebrand believed, was as much at odds with his vocation as philosopher to seek the truth wherever it led, as it was with his Christian vocation to bear witness to the truth no matter the cost.

But von Hildebrand also knew that his decision to “abandon everything” was tied to his unique personal vocation—to “my mission,” as he often expressed himself. He knew that not everyone, not even every philosopher, could or should leave Germany. He knew that heroic men like Dietrich Bonhoeffer answered a different call by remaining in Germany and working for the undoing of Nazism from within. He would later support his friends remaining in Germany by encouraging them to nurture a constant “inner rejection” of Nazism and by warning them against the danger of becoming “morally blunted” as a result of living in the midst of an evil regime. But as for himself, he knew that he was called to leave Germany. He knew that he had a particular mission to speak out against Nazism and to help rid Germany and the world of its poison. Where this might lead him he did not know in early March 1933. He abandoned his home, his beloved sisters, his large circle of friends, his rising career at the University of Munich, and his place in the center

of a thriving religious and cultural community which gathered for his famous “afternoons” at the family villa on the Maria-Theresia Strasse. In following his conscience and seeking God’s guidance, he believed the next step would be revealed to him.

Von Hildebrand’s decision was fateful in the deepest sense of the term. It led him to Vienna, where he would establish the premier German-language journal of intellectual resistance to Nazism and Communism. His uncompromising opposition was felt throughout Austria and even deep into Nazi Germany. Hitler repeatedly demanded the Austrian government to suppress von Hildebrand’s journal, and by 1937 he had gained so much attention that the Nazi ambassador in Vienna proposed to Hitler a plan to assassinate von Hildebrand and his collaborators.

One can understand von Hildebrand only up to a point if one does not grasp how radically he lived out of his faith. Indeed, in abandoning Germany, he threw himself into the arms of God. Even as he confidently challenged Nazism on the firm basis of philosophical arguments, the real source of his strength and his amazing peace and joy in those darkest of hours lay in his ever-deepening life of faith. “I had the consciousness that what I was doing was right before God,” he later wrote, “and this gave me such inner freedom that I was not afraid.”

His story might have been forever lost had it not been for his wife, Alice von Hildebrand. His first wife of forty-five years, Gretchen, died in 1957. She was with him during his struggle against Nazism and supported him unreservedly. In 1959, von Hildebrand married Alice Jourdain, with whom he formed a unique intellectual, spiritual, and cultural partnership. One day she said to him, “Being so much younger”—she was over thirty years his junior—“I deeply regret having missed so much of your life.” “Then I will write it for you,” he answered, and he began already the next day. He produced five-thousand handwritten pages recounting his life in vivid detail, beginning with his childhood, his youth, his life of faith, his education, and finally his battle against Nazism.

The epic scope of the memoirs can lead one to believe that von Hildebrand was writing for a great unseen audience of future readers. For what he reports, especially from his fight against Nazism, transcends

the realm of personal recollections by capturing much of the essence of his time. But the original motive for the memoirs, indeed the *original audience*, was his wife, Alice. We owe her a deep debt of gratitude, not only for *instigating* the memoir, but for *inspiring* so much of its intimate and even confessional character.

Dietrich von Hildebrand did not publish his memoirs, nor did he seek to reprint any of his essays against Nazism. In later years he never sought to call attention to his witness in Vienna; he never saw himself as a hero or as someone deserving of special praise. It is a sign of his generous spirit that he left to others the publication of his story. But this volume is truly *by him*. It is a work of autobiography, of self-revelation. In preparing this volume we have sought not to make alterations to his canvas; our aim, rather, was to fashion a well-suited frame, above all in the form of concise historical notes, to enable the reader to relive von Hildebrand's story with all the relevant information at hand.

What might von Hildebrand have called this volume? We can never know, and given his humility he might have suggested a title that honored his collaborators rather than himself. But he did, unwittingly, provide the title. Searching the pages of his memoirs, we discovered that he had entitled an outline for part of his memoirs "*Mein Kampf Gegen Hitler*"—"My Battle Against Hitler." Thus was the present volume christened.

For all the greatness of von Hildebrand's story, his witness remains little known today. May this volume forever change that. And may his voice be heard again and his courage finally be honored, as a memory and a reminder, yes, but also as a warning and a hope.

WHO WAS THIS MAN WHO FOUGHT HITLER?

Dietrich von Hildebrand left Germany for good on March 12, 1933. He was then forty-three years old, nearly the midpoint of his long life. But he was not unready for the witness he was being called to give. His entire life turns out to have been a preparation for this moment.

Dietrich was born on October 12, 1889, at San Francesco, his family's villa in Florence. His father, Adolf von Hildebrand, was by then one of the most renowned sculptors and architects of Germany. His mother, Irene, was a woman of learning and cultivation, even though she received very little formal schooling. Coming after five elder sisters, Dietrich was the youngest member of the von Hildebrand family and Adolf and Irene's only son. In 1898, Adolf received a commission to create a fountain, the famous Wittelsbacher Brunnen in Munich. Thereafter, the family would spend six months in Florence and six months in Munich, where they lived in a great house built by Adolf in the Maria-Theresia-Strasse.

Where in von Hildebrand's early life do we find the first signs of the future "enemy number one" of the Nazis? An anecdote from his memoirs provides a first clue. He was walking with his elder sister, Nini, who was taken aback by his resistance to her claim that all values are relative. When she appealed to their father, himself an ethical relativist, Adolf said, "but Nini, he is just a boy of fourteen." This greatly upset the young Dietrich who countered, "Your argument is clearly very weak if you have nothing but my age as evidence against me." In the last years

of his life, von Hildebrand returned to this episode in the opening paragraphs of an intellectual autobiography he penned. “This episode was quite characteristic of my philosophical outlook,” he writes. For not only does it express “my innermost conviction that objective truth exists and can be known,” it also shows “my capacity for remaining uninfluenced by my environment and my immunity to ideas that are somehow ‘in the air.’”¹

Something that was not in the air at San Francisco was religion, and yet von Hildebrand, already as a child, showed signs of a deeply religious personality.

Adolf and Irene were nominal Protestants and saw to it that their children were baptized. But their true religion, as it were, was at the altar of beauty. As a result, he grew up living and breathing great art, and especially music, for which he had a great affinity. Religion in the sense of revelation and divine worship was not a part of their world. Churches were expressions of artistic beauty, and religion was a source of aesthetic inspiration.

But the rich culture of San Francisco—this “spiritual island,” as von Hildebrand calls it—was fertile ground for more than just a discerning eye and refined ear. This “artistic world of my parents and sisters,” he says, was “lofty, noble, and completely free of all triviality, conventionalism, and mediocrity.” And it was reverent, not in the full sense of a supernatural reverence before God, but reverent in the recognition that the world is full of mystery and that great things call for wonder.

Even as his family’s nominal Christianity all but cut him off from exposure to practice of religion, one can date Dietrich’s faith to the age of five or six, if not earlier. “I don’t know who first spoke to me about Christ,” he writes.

I do not remember anyone around me who was religious. There was a crucifix in our room, and Vivi [his sister] probably told me about Christ. But the love of Jesus that developed in my soul and my firm belief that Christ is God cannot be traced back to the influence of anyone in my surroundings.

His family was understandably taken aback when they began to notice signs of his religious orientation. His sister Bertele later recounted his response when she repeated what their mother had said at the table, namely that Christ was only the son of God in the sense that everyone is a child of God. She was eight and a half, Dietrich just five. He stood on his bed, solemnly stretching out his hand, and said, "I swear to you, Christ is God!"

Most children would still be heavily under the influence of their parents, but not Dietrich. Speaking of his mother, he writes:

She probably prayed the Our Father with us, but as she was not herself a believing Christian, she never spoke to us about the divinity of Christ. But my faith in Christ's divinity was such that I was in no way unsettled by the fact that my beloved mother did not believe in it.

But this lack of faith in his mother was not a skeptical agnosticism. In fact, it would be truer to say that faith could take root in Dietrich's soul, *not so much despite* his parents' unbelief, but *rather because* of the climate of reverence and wonder in which they raised their children. Dietrich captures this in another episode that also highlights his mother's natural religiosity.

When I was alone [about age five], I sometimes prostrated myself on the ground before a copy of Donatello's *Head of Christ* and would remain in adoration of Christ for perhaps ten minutes. This prayer brought me joy. I remember once how my mother opened the door. Seeing me, she quietly withdrew with tears in her eyes. Though she was not herself a committed Christian, she possessed a deep reverence for all religion. Besides, both my parents had the greatest respect for any impulses in the souls of their children.

Dietrich would not allow his burgeoning religious nature to be stifled. When his elder sister Lisl took an eight-year-old Dietrich to the

cathedral in Milan—as an artistic, not a religious outing—he began genuflecting at all the side altars and would not stop thinking that there was something wrong with visiting the church in a merely aesthetic attitude.

A milestone in Dietrich’s religious development was reading a book of bible stories. He was six and the experience was overwhelming, for it expanded his sense of the supernatural. “An indescribable joy filled my heart as the world of revelation disclosed itself to me. Even though I did not understand every word, I somehow felt the solemnity of God’s world as it enveloped me.”

Striking in a different and perhaps subtler way are the signs of a deep ethical sensibility in the young Dietrich. When he was a teenager, his father wanted to show him a nude model. Adolf’s reasons were not prurient; he wanted his son to witness the rare instance of a perfectly proportioned body. The boy refused, not out of puritanical shame, but because he already intuited the mysterious self-revelation of the naked body. He said to his father, “I want to save this experience until I have the privilege of seeing my wife in her nudity.”

One cannot fail to be struck by von Hildebrand’s remarkable independence from his milieu. This is all the more impressive when we remember that he was just a boy of five and six in the earliest instances recounted. In each case, whether intellectual, ethical, or religious, his independence was tied to an uncommon perceptive power. On the occasion with the nude model, for example, it was not just shyness or shame that held him back; rather he intuited a certain mystery of human love connected with the naked human body.

This independence would grow over the course of his intellectual and religious development. Indeed, we will see it again in his immunity to the pervasive anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria and in many other settings as well. Above all, this independence granted him a freedom to see the essence of Nazism and so to recognize that it was beyond redemption, when many of his contemporaries still labored under hopes of shaping Nazism in a Christian direction.

• • •

In 1906, von Hildebrand began to study philosophy at the University of Munich. Most of the foundational ideas in his critique of National Socialism were absorbed and articulated during his university years. In Munich, he first came into contact with the philosophical work of Edmund Husserl, who was then teaching in Göttingen. For von Hildebrand and many of Husserl's early students, the extraordinary appeal of "phenomenology"—as Husserl's approach was called—was its radical opposition to empiricism and its restoration of philosophical "realism." This realism attracted von Hildebrand to Göttingen, where he spent several semesters studying with Husserl, under whose direction he would write a dissertation analyzing moral action. From Husserl, von Hildebrand learned to avoid "reductionism" of all kinds, that is, the "nothing but" philosophy expressed, for example, in the idea that morality is nothing but tribal taboo or in the claim that consciousness is nothing but brain function. This commitment to the objectivity of truth made him a particularly keen critic of the Nazi way of reducing the truth of a statement to its agreement with what they believed to be the "Nordic mentality."

During his time in Munich, von Hildebrand also met the German philosopher Max Scheler, who would become a tremendous source of intellectual inspiration. Though Dietrich never formally studied under Scheler, they were for many years close friends and would spend innumerable hours in discussion. Scheler is the main source of von Hildebrand's personalist approach to philosophy. Actually, von Hildebrand never refers to himself as a "personalist," but his thought has all the hallmarks of a philosophy that seeks to answer the crucial questions of human existence by looking first to the nature and dignity of the human person. From Scheler he learned a deep reverence for the mystery and inviolability of each person. This made him especially alert to the de-personalizing tendencies of National Socialism, as shown in its idea that the individual exists only as a part (dispensable at that) of the nation.

While in Göttingen, von Hildebrand met a young woman named Margarete Denck with whom he soon fell in love. By 1910, he wanted to marry "Gretchen," as she was called, but his parents refused to give their consent, without which he could not legally marry. While they

found Gretchen attractive, they relished neither her north German background nor her relatively undistinguished family pedigree. They also felt that her age (she was over four years older than Dietrich) would push him toward marriage at a moment when he was still unready. At the time, not yet being a Catholic, Dietrich and Gretchen entered a relation of sexual intimacy which both of them understood as a life-long commitment. In early 1911, Gretchen discovered she was pregnant. Dietrich's parents still would not grant him permission to marry but offered to support them financially while he finished his dissertation. The young couple moved to Vienna in the spring of 1911, where they lived until the birth of their son Franz in February 1912. Only after the arrival of their grandson did Adolf and Irene finally consent to their son's marriage, though they did not attend the Protestant ceremony which took place in May 1912. While in Vienna, von Hildebrand completed his dissertation under the direction of Husserl, who gave it a distinction of *opus eximium* (highest honors).

A decisive role in preparing the ground for von Hildebrand's conversion to the Catholic Church was played by Scheler, who made the surprising and arresting claim, "The Catholic Church is the true Church because she produces saints." Scheler spoke to von Hildebrand about St. Francis of Assisi and helped him to understand that the splendor emanating from this saint was not like any natural virtue but pointed to a new and higher source. It was the unearthly beauty shining in the saints that, more than anything else, drew von Hildebrand to Christianity and to Catholicism, to which he and Gretchen converted in 1914.

But if the beauty of Christ and the saints drew von Hildebrand to Christianity, it was his philosophical commitment, honed in his studies with Husserl and Reinach and enriched by his friendship with Scheler, that allowed his faith to mature. "It was not faith that determined my fundamental philosophical orientation," he later wrote; "rather it was my philosophical orientation that leveled the path for my reception into the Catholic Church."² Fideism, in which faith is understood without any dependence on reason, was always foreign to von Hildebrand.

• • •

Part of the fascination we experience with Dietrich von Hildebrand's life comes from the degree to which he remained immune to the siren song of the great ideologies of his time. Just as he showed a striking independence from the milieu of his upbringing, so he showed an unusual independence from the currents of the age.

The First World War broke out on July 28, 1914. As a married man with a son, von Hildebrand was not called to fight and was able to fulfill his military obligation for most of the war by serving as assistant to a surgeon in a Munich hospital. Only in 1918, when Germany was losing the war, was he called up for active duty. He narrowly escaped deployment in the final days of the war when he was diagnosed with chronic appendicitis.

It is difficult for most of us today to imagine a world in which Germany's hatred for its neighbors, notably for France, could stir up frenzied popular support for the war. Von Hildebrand hated this sort of militaristic nationalism, which he thought emanated from the Prussian military culture embodied by the Iron Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck. While he initially sympathized with Austria, which had been attacked in the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, he came increasingly to hate the war. He even secretly began to hope, as he says in his memoirs, that the Allies would win.

Dietrich's characteristic independence also manifested itself in another way: his absolute freedom from anti-Semitism. Like countless others, he was appalled by the violent racism of the Third Reich. But what really sets him apart from many of his contemporaries was his total freedom from the comparatively moderate anti-Semitism widespread during the 1920s and 1930s. Thriving on stereotypes—the liberal, wealthy, exploitative, amoral, and, invariably, socialist Jew—this more moderate anti-Semitism was pervasive. And it had enough currency that even Catholics who spoke out against Nazism—and personally protected Jews—could simultaneously harbor antipathy for the supposed liberalism and moral degeneracy of Jews.

In his memoirs, von Hildebrand describes one of his earliest encounters with anti-Semitism. The year 1920 saw the premiere of the orchestral *Fantastic Apparitions on a Theme by Berlioz* by his brother-

in-law Walter Braunfels, by then one of Germany's leading composers. During the final applause, a man stood up in the concert hall and shouted, "I object to this Jewish music." (Though a convert to Catholicism, Braunfels was half Jewish through his father.) Approaching the man on the stairway outside the hall, von Hildebrand challenged him, "What is the meaning of this nonsense?" The man repeated his charge. When von Hildebrand pointed out, "Braunfels is not even Jewish but Catholic," the man shot back, "By race he is Jewish." All this took place in the presence of the departing concertgoers who stood silently as they waited in line at the cloakroom. "I cannot describe how much the man's outburst upset and outraged me," writes von Hildebrand. "This was the first time I experienced this rubbish which became so widespread: the notion of 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian art' in Bolshevism, and the notion of 'Aryan' and 'Jewish art and mathematics' in Nazism."

In 1919, von Hildebrand became adjunct professor for philosophy of religion at the University of Munich. Throughout his career in Munich he became increasingly outspoken in his critique of National Socialism, using the classroom and his frequent public lectures to speak against its ideological foundations. Many of von Hildebrand's students have commented on his intuitive power. Balduin Schwarz, his leading student in Munich, captures this well: "He had a great talent for detecting what was 'in the air,' almost as if he had a kind of barometer for whatever was ominously brewing in the atmosphere."³ While his comments could be blunt—"I tell you the Nazis are the most vicious animals,"⁴ he said in 1924—he was also enormously persuasive. "He immunized and protected us from the philosophical waves that swept across Germany in those days," remembers his student Paul Stöcklein. "Heidegger's melodies no longer had the power to seduce us, for our ears had become more discerning. Whoever understood von Hildebrand was saved. Despite the many factors at work, I think one can rightly say that history might have been quite different had there been more professors like him."⁵

One German professor who helped history turn out as it did was

Martin Heidegger. Even though Heidegger is probably the best-known German philosopher of the twentieth century, he was notoriously a zealous Nazi, and in fact in later years he never recanted his Nazi allegiance. It is true that von Hildebrand and Heidegger had the same teacher in philosophy, namely Edmund Husserl, but on the question of Nazism, they were as opposed as two thinkers can possibly be. To the scandal of Heidegger's Nazism we oppose the heroic witness of von Hildebrand.

In keeping with his own public stance, von Hildebrand also challenged his students to take action. But this action was distinctly philosophical in nature. Rather than urging direct political involvement, let alone violent agitation, "he sent them to attend gatherings of National Socialists where through pointed questions they could expose the inhumanity and intellectual incoherence of Nazism."⁶

In 1930, von Hildebrand published *The Metaphysics of Community*,⁷ his major work in social philosophy. The book can be seen as the culmination of his reflections on the nature of community, a subject that he thought was badly misunderstood, even by fellow Catholic thinkers. But this book, while a work of fundamental philosophy, was full of implications for the crisis of the day, especially the collectivism of National Socialism. It had prepared him in a unique way to think clearly and outside of the conventional political paradigms and the usual false alternatives, especially the widely held view that one had to choose between collectivism or individualism.

Indeed, he understood why collectivism appealed so strongly to ordinary Germans. He saw that people experienced the bankruptcy of what he called "liberal individualism," which made them feel isolated from one another. National Socialism seemed to offer relief; as a dynamic movement it exploited this deep craving for community and offered a powerful feeling of togetherness. Mingled with the nationalism to which Germany was ever vulnerable, collectivism had something irresistibly appealing about it. But von Hildebrand saw that the intoxication of mass rallies and marches created only a pseudocommunity. It played on a need, but did not offer the real thing. Nazism could produce elation and a sense of national purpose, but it also paved the way for a state in which an individual who opposed its ends was simply eliminated.

We can see other key ideas in von Hildebrand's philosophy at work in his critique of Nazism. Striking is the degree to which he opposed Nazism aside from any harm it might do to him or to his family or to the Catholic Church. Here he was prepared philosophically by the seminal concept of "value," which he had developed in his dissertation and which would form the golden thread throughout his entire body of thought. To see "value" in something in von Hildebrand's sense is to recognize its goodness "in itself" and not only to recognize it as something beneficial for me or others close to me. The same logic carries over to "disvalue," which is badness, not in virtue of any harm it might bring to me, but simply bad in itself.

If abstract in theory, "value" and "disvalue" become concrete in von Hildebrand's anti-Nazism. Take an episode from early 1933. Speaking to a friend who was vice president of the Catholic Academic Association, von Hildebrand expressed his surprise that the Association would hold a previously planned symposium on the grounds that the true work of the Association was surely impossible under the Hitler regime. His friend responded by jubilantly producing a cordial telegram he had received from Franz von Papen, then-vice chancellor of Germany. Von Hildebrand was dismayed:

How could a vice president of the Catholic Academic Association, founded to imbue everything with the spirit of Catholicism, base his judgment of a regime on whether it was courteous toward the Association, rather than looking to the regime's spirit and its first principles?"

Here von Hildebrand speaks out of his value philosophy. While his friend still appraised Nazism in terms of how Hitler would treat the Association, von Hildebrand was looking only at who Hitler really was.

The turbulent years in German public life that coincided with von Hildebrand's tenure at the University in Munich gave him great reason for concern; nevertheless they were exceptionally fruitful for him in terms

of new philosophical insights. In 1922, he gave a series of lectures on the virtue of purity at the Catholic Academic Association, of which he was a leading member. These lectures, published in German in 1927 and in English a few years later as *In Defense of Purity* (1931),⁸ created a stir in Catholic circles, which received them in the awareness that they marked a sea change in the Christian approach to sexuality. Not a few people who read his work on purity in the 1930s and 1940s describe a sudden awakening to a sense of the depth and beauty of conjugal love that was totally unlike what had been presented to them in their religious education. He would expand his reflections in his pathbreaking book *Die Ehe*, published in 1929 (and in English as *Marriage* in 1942). One cannot understand the seismic shift in von Hildebrand's thought on love and sexuality without grasping that for nearly two thousand years Christian teaching had defined the conjugal act almost exclusively in terms of its power to bring about new life. According to historian John Noonan, von Hildebrand was the first Catholic thinker to argue thematically that sexual union was oriented not just to procreation but also to expressing the love between spouses.⁹

The ideas on marriage that von Hildebrand was pioneering during the 1920s would find expression in the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the dual meaning of the conjugal act, namely to generate new life and also to enact the love between spouses.¹⁰

The depth and reverence with which he approached married love empowered him to think with clarity about the attacks on marriage embodied in the Nazi race laws prohibiting intermarriage between Germans and Jews. He saw with particular keenness not just the overreaching of the state but the invasion of this most intimate and sacred of human spheres.

The Nazi crisis led von Hildebrand to address questions that might otherwise not have caught his attention. One of these was the rise of anti-Semitism. He opposed, as already noted, not just the anti-Semitism that aimed at extermination but also the more moderate anti-Semitism found in pervasive stereotypes and antipathies. But anti-Semitism also led him to think deeply on the meaning of the Jewish people. In his writing the "Jewish question" took on an entirely different meaning

than it generally did in German and Austrian political and intellectual life at the time.

The German race laws and even many Catholic thinkers approached the question from a purely racial and ethnic basis. By contrast, von Hildebrand wrote that the Jews are the “only people whose inner point of unity lay not at a racial or cultural level but on the religious level. True belief in the one God,” he says, “and the awaiting of the Messiah constituted the ‘form’ of Israel’s unity.”¹¹ The historian John Connolly, in his book *From Enemy to Brother*, marvels how von Hildebrand could emerge so completely unaffected by the anti-Semitism under which so many other Catholics labored.¹²

The relentlessness of von Hildebrand’s anti-Nazi critique might suggest a stern, even severe, disposition. Nothing could be further from the truth. All who knew him say he radiated a contagious joy and mirth. “He was happy and grateful for all great things that call for reverence,” remembers his student Paul Stöcklein. “His inner happiness made itself felt in the way he spoke. This happiness struck me as free of any self-deception. I had never realized it was possible for someone to be so happy.”¹³ His philosophical genius and extraordinary culture did not make him inaccessible; rather, his “inner wealth” was integrated into a lively concern for the well-being of his friends, his family, and especially his students.

He was spontaneous and effusive, but not in a way that was reducible to natural disposition. It was an expression of how deeply he lived by his own “value philosophy,” with its emphasis on the “due response” to values and disvalues. It was also, for anyone who knew him, an expression of joy that flowed from the deep faith in which he lived moment to moment.

Von Hildebrand’s rich contact with “the world of values” challenges us to think of his political witness not just in terms of resistance and opposition. He was not merely *opposed* to Nazism. Or rather, his opposition was *rooted in his devotion to the West*, which to him above all meant the Judeo-Christian West with its commitment to truth, its

respect for the dignity of the individual person, and its great cultural inheritance.

It is now high time that we open the pages of von Hildebrand's memoirs. The stage has been set. We join him, in Paris, as a youthful professor of thirty-one.

The year is just 1921, yet already battle with Hitler looms on the horizon.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

Most of the texts presented in this volume are drawn from a German edition of von Hildebrand's anti-Nazi papers edited by Austrian historian Ernst Wenisch and published under the title *Memoiren und Aufsätze gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (*Memoirs and Essays Against National Socialism*).¹ Not only did Wenisch have privileged access to the manuscript of the memoirs, from which he made selections for this volume, he also produced a first-rate set of scholarly notes, which form the basis of many of the notes in this volume. Wenisch's volume also includes about a third of von Hildebrand's essays from *Der christliche Ständestaat*, of which we have selected twelve (in many cases just excerpts). Wenisch features two important remembrances of von Hildebrand by Balduin Schwarz and Paul Stöcklein, students of von Hildebrand at the University of Munich. We cite their personal testimonies in "Who Was This Man Who Fought Hitler?"

Our edition also features new material never before published. Of greatest importance are new passages taken directly from the handwritten manuscript of the memoirs, as well as extensive passages, featured in the chapter, "Escape from Vienna," derived from unpublished outlines and sketches by von Hildebrand. One particularly precious source we present is a previously unpublished letter of Michael Braunfels, von Hildebrand's nephew, to Alice von Hildebrand describing his role in helping his uncle and aunt leave Vienna on the night of March 11, 1938.

John Henry Crosby is translator of the memoirs as well as author of "A Fateful Decision," "Who Was This Man Who Fought Hitler?," and

“Escape from Vienna.” William Doyno and David Mills helped in crafting the many passages that introduce and strengthen the narrative flow of the memoirs. John F. Crosby is the principal translator of von Hildebrand’s essays (with help from the team of translators mentioned in the acknowledgments), author of the brief introductions that accompany each of the essays, and his son John Henry Crosby’s indispensable intellectual and editorial partner.

PART I

THE MEMOIRS

1921

In early December 1921, von Hildebrand went to Paris, “with high expectations,” to attend a convention organized by the philosopher and politician Marc Sangnier (1873–1950). Sangnier had become famous for seeking to reconcile Catholicism with the French Republic, and more broadly Christianity and Democracy, in part as a counter to working-class movements that were overtly anticlerical. Sangnier hoped to reevangelize young men by proving Catholicism was sympathetic to their social and economic needs. He also sought common ground with non-Catholics.

At first, the Christian-Democratic movement he started, Le Sillon (The Furrow), won many devoted followers, including numerous bishops. But when it began to advocate new ideas, not yet approved by the Church, Pope Pius X intervened to close the movement in 1910.

Sangnier’s response to “the destruction of his life’s work” is described by von Hildebrand in great detail. Despite the suppression of Le Sillon, many of Sangnier’s ideals about the laity, social justice, ecumenism, and society were fulfilled by Vatican II’s teaching. One of his greatest admirers was Pope John XXIII, who called the Council.

Arriving in Paris, von Hildebrand was met at the train station and brought to the headquarters of the Young Republic League, the political party Sangnier had founded. There he met Sangnier, “this great and noble Catholic”—words similar to those Pius X had used, even as he closed down Le Sillon—and several of his followers at breakfast.

• • •

The spirit of love of neighbor and of Christian warmth, which suffused the milieu, made an overwhelming impression on me. Everything was very simple—typically French coffee, served in a bowl and strongly flavored with chicory, along with a piece of bread—yet I was received as an old friend. The spirit was one of simple togetherness and collaboration. I was delighted.

Marc Sangnier had founded a movement which was the first Catholic movement in France to be established on the footing of the Republic. French Catholics and all of the French bishops were Royalists of a decidedly conservative stripe. Drawing on an encyclical of Pope Leo XIII,¹ in which the Holy Father declared that the Church took a neutral stance toward questions of monarchy and republic, he had founded a religious movement which he called “Le Sillon,” meaning “Furrow.” The purpose of the movement was to bring about a deep religious renewal, and with it a truly Christian spirit.

“Sillon” was the very antithesis of the “Action française.” A predominantly conservative and nationalist movement, the “Action française” valued the Church primarily as a cultural entity, viewing “Catholic” as equivalent to “Latin,” whereby the “Esprit Latin” was naturally equated above all with the spirit of France. The anti-Semitism which had manifested itself in such a dreadful way in the Dreyfus Affair* continued to exist in the “Action française.” In contrast to all of this, “Sillon” was filled with a supranational spirit, free of all anti-Semitism, concerned with social issues, seeing the Catholic Church as the mystical body of Christ, filled with a truly deep Catholic spirit and an obedient and loyal love of the Church.

Late in the evening, Sangnier often went to the basilica of Montmartre with his followers where they spent the night in prayer and religious song. Along the way, he gave them talks on religious subjects. A spirit of boundless readiness to be of service to each other, a joyful, loving, selfless collaboration filled this movement, which quickly spread all over France and soon numbered many young priests and seminarians.

* A reference to Alfred Dreyfus (1859–1935), a French Jewish officer unjustly convicted in 1894 on alleged charges of treason.

“Sillon” represented a real religious springtime and as such became a great and profound center of formation in true Christian living. Sangnier, who came from a very affluent family, had given a great portion of his fortune to this movement.

The bishops—who were all conservative and royalists at the time—took a suspicious, not to say hostile, stance toward “Sillon.” Added to this was the occasional silly and exaggerated statement made by a young and enthusiastic seminarian. The bishops turned to Pope Pius X, to whom they painted an unfavorable image of “Sillon.” Being the time of the struggle against modernism, it was not difficult to portray a movement as dangerous. Pius X wrote a letter to Marc Sangnier in which he called upon him to subordinate his movement to the respective local bishops.

This would have been the end of “Sillon,” since the bishops would have wanted to reshape everything. Pius’ letter was a terrible blow for Sangnier, yet he offered a wonderful and unique example. A quarter of an hour after he had received the letter which destroyed his life’s work, he dissolved “Sillon” and wrote a letter to the Holy Father in which he said, “This is the most beautiful hour of my life, for now I can show how much I love the Church and that I do not want to serve her as I wish but as she wishes.”

He proceeded to found a political movement called the Young Republic League, which, since officially it was purely political, did not need to be placed under the bishops’ control. Yet the deeply Catholic and profoundly Christian spirit continued to exist in this political movement. Everything in the League’s house in the Boulevard Raspail gave evidence of this.

Out of this supranational Catholic spirit, Sangnier had called for a peace congress to which for the first time he had also included Germans as warmly invited guests. He was a great and noble personality. In his presence one felt the tremendous warmth of his heart, the fire of his spirit, his unwavering faith in his ideals. And he also had the immense charm of a Frenchman, a delightful wittiness. He was an orator of exceptional ability, one of the best I ever heard. I was deeply impressed by him, especially after I had heard his entire story, which made the image of his personality emerge with greater liveliness and clarity. He was a

great and devoted son of the Church, a heroic crusader against nationalism and all prejudice, a generous and captivating human being. I felt a real love for him and we were entirely of one mind.

Among the Germans who had been invited were two priests. One was Fr. Metzger from Graz, where he led a religious, pacifist movement called the “White Cross.”* He was originally from Swabia. The other priest was the founder of the German Catholic Association for Peace, a vicar from Ehingen an der Donau.†

Fr. Metzger was a striking personality. Someone later said to me of him that he was a mixture of saint and extraordinarily talented businessman. What predominantly struck me was that, while filled with a heroic religious fervor, he had something of the sectarian in his vegetarianism and his radical opposition to alcoholism. He was very kind and friendly, addressed me with the familiar “Du”‡ a little too quickly, and amazed me by his enormous talent for organization.

During the congress I was utterly appalled to read in a German newspaper an incredibly tactless article about Marc Sangnier. At the very moment when, burdened by great difficulties and attacked from all sides, he dared to invite Germans to Paris and to make this extraordinary friendly gesture to Germany, there appears in a German Catholic newspaper an article in which he is portrayed as a dubious Catholic, having been recently censured by Rome.

I was beside myself with rage and when I met a German journalist by the name of Alfred Nobel,§ I said to him, “which tactless blockhead wrote this article?” Unfortunately he was himself the author and naturally I had made in him a mortal enemy. It was not long before I would feel this directly.

There were many sessions—smaller gatherings as well as public

* Max Josef Metzger (1887–1944), priest who later founded *Una Sancta* and was executed by the Nazis as an opponent of National Socialism.

† Probably Fr. Franziskus Stratmann, OP (1883–1971), cofounder with Fr. Metzger of the German Catholic Association for Peace.

‡ The form of “you” reserved for family and friends.

§ Probably Alphons Nobel, later chief editor of the *Augsburger Postzeitung*.

presentations—at which lectures were delivered by well-known French personalities. During one of the smaller discussions—even so, all of the delegates and many French attendees were present, in all a group of perhaps fifty—a lady from Berlin called out to me in a side room where I was engaged in a private conversation, “Please come. The situation is getting very tense. Perhaps you can be of some help.”

As I approached the table, I heard a Frenchman attacking Sangnier for having invited Germans, saying, “These Germans are not really anti-nationalists and pacifists. I have only to ask them whether they will admit that Germany is responsible for the war and then you will see how their nationalism prevents them from making this admission.” At this I stood up and said, speaking in French, “It would not be sincere on my part to answer this question, for I do not know the Russian archives, I do not know the historical antecedents of the war, and I am not in a position to find out about these things. Besides, the question itself can have different meanings. But if I had the opportunity to get informed and if I saw that Germany was at fault, I would not for a moment hesitate to say so. I am not a nationalist in any sense of the word and so I would feel no inner resistance to admitting it.”

Thereupon the man arose and said, “Very well, then I will put another question to you. Your answer will clearly demonstrate whether you are honest. If you say that you are not a nationalist, then what do you think about the German invasion of Belgium?”* I stood up again and said, “That was an atrocious crime.” Thunderous applause greeted my words. I continued, “I have no problem in admitting that it was a dreadful crime. For I am first a Catholic, then a Catholic, and yet again a Catholic, and so on and on.” Again, thunderous applause.†

Afterwards people congratulated me and a senator from Brussels said to me, “You are a good young man from a family of bad reputation”

* On August 4, 1914, at the very beginning of World War I.

† Belgian neutrality was protected under the Treaty of London (1839), to which England, Austria, France, Prussia, Russia, and the Netherlands were signatories. Von Hildebrand’s repeated profession of his Catholic identity would have been an obvious and poignant allusion to the fact that this treaty was signed “In the name of the Most Holy and Indivisible Trinity.”

(“*Brave jeune homme d’une famille de mauvaise réputation*”). But above all I was surrounded by the followers of Marc Sangnier, all of whom congratulated me. Sangnier was very happy about what I had said, yet I saw in Nobel’s face how outraged he was. I was soon to experience his revenge. Metzger, who was murdered by the Nazis in 1944, as well as the chaplain from Ehingen, however, were entirely in agreement.

As I returned to Munich the next morning and reached our house in the Maria-Theresia Strasse, I found Gretchen in a state of great agitation, for my name was mentioned throughout the German press as one who had committed a kind of high treason for having announced in Paris that Germany alone was guilty of the war. An inquiry had also come from the university: I was immediately to clarify the truth of this charge. The faculty was largely composed of German nationalists who would have preferred to drive me away from the university.

All this had been brought upon me by Nobel through his deliberately false report—I had, after all, explained that I could not take a stance toward this question since I was not educated on the prior history of the situation. For condemning the invasion of Belgium no one could reproach me; after all, Cardinal Faulhaber* had done so too. But of course, as a sworn enemy of nationalism, the nationalists were from their perspective right to hate me.

In any case, I was completely occupied with composing for the press and, in a separate document, for the university, an exact account of the facts and with refuting Nobel’s misrepresentation. I also received a letter from the president of the Catholic Academic Association, Wilhelm Bergmann, in which he wrote to me, “Since to date you have been the chairman of the commission for relations with foreign countries, I would ask that you send me an exact account of the events in Paris.”² This was clearly disavowal of me and a kind of implied removal from the commission. I sent him my statement to the press with a note that this should settle the affair. I did not in any way go into the possibility of being removed from the commission.

* Michael von Faulhaber (1869–1952), archbishop and later cardinal of Munich and Freising.

1922

In the years following World War I, Germany experienced enormous political and economic turbulence. In June 1922, the German foreign minister, Walter Rathenau (1867–1922), was assassinated. “Words cannot express,” says von Hildebrand, “how deeply this latest political assassination upset me.”

Once again the devilish countenance of German ultranationalism smirked at me, which had already so deeply shaken me at the time of Erzberger’s* murder. Once again I felt the increasing barbarization of morals. I remember crying out to Gretchen, “I no longer want to remain in this awful country! I want to leave Germany!” Almost as bad as the awful deed, not to mention the attitude of the murderer, was the perception of the murder by broad segments of the public.

On the occasion of Eisner’s† murder by Count Arco,‡ it was still possible to find mitigating factors, namely the fact that Eisner was a usurper who had toppled the Bavarian monarchy through a revolution and made himself head of state. Even though he did not create a dictatorship, he did permit dangerous elements to take root and systematically pursued his aim—against the will of the people—of attacking the

* Matthias Erzberger (1875–1920), German politician and finance minister.

† Kurt Eisner (1867–1919), German journalist who led the socialist revolution that brought down the Bavarian monarchy.

‡ Count Anton von Arco auf Valley (1897–1945).

Church and imposing a radically socialist spirit. Arco could in good faith view himself as murdering a tyrant, as carrying out the people's will. Of course, his action was morally questionable and problematic, yet it was not a typical case of criminal political murder.

But the case of Erzberger was different. He had done nothing to harm anyone, had for years served as a legitimately elected member of the Reichstag, and had become minister in a constitutionally legitimate manner, governing without even the faintest hint of a dictatorship. He had done much to his credit and was a noble man of conscience. It was thus impossible to find any mitigating factors for his murder. And those who killed him, Tillesen and Schulz, embodied a spirit totally unlike that of the pious and conscientious Arco. Their words, "The pig must be slaughtered" betrayed the depth of the awful, base, petty, and criminal spirit that animated them. The fact that they were motivated by an ugly nationalism and that they viewed themselves as heroes only made their dreadful act of murder all the worse.

I was terribly upset by what even Catholics said to me, at the time. "The ordinary man on the street is not upset by this murder," I would hear, "for he sees how many people died in the war. How can one more death really matter?" As if the decisive factor was not the murder itself! On one occasion a Catholic—a priest, I fear—said to me, "This won't stir up the people. They'll say, 'one Jew more or less is of no consequence.'" I was deeply upset by this moral value blindness and the loss of any sense for the horror of murder, which had permeated German public opinion.

The response of Chancellor Wirth* to the death of his friend and colleague in the Federal Ministry was quite forceful. Expressing his indignation at a session of the Reichstag, which had immediately been convened, he uttered his famous words: "The enemy stands to our right." Wirth was correct inasmuch as the murderous spirit that had led to the assassination reigned above all in ultranationalistic circles. But one could reasonably question whether the term "right" could be ap-

* Joseph Wirth (1879–1946), German politician of the Catholic Center Party.

plied to these circles without qualification. In any case, the problem did not stem from the monarchists and from circles who were conservative in the best sense of the term. Rather, it came from those animated by the spirit of Ludendorff* and by a wild anarchism tainted with strong sympathies for a Greater Germany.† It came from the forerunners of National Socialism who could hardly be called “right” in the traditional sense of the term.

On the other hand, the tremendous danger of Socialism and Communism had not yet been overcome. Just three years before we had had the Socialist Republic in Munich, and in 1922 there had been heavy fighting against the Communists in Essen. Wirth’s articulation thus perhaps oversimplified the situation too much. But I was still happy because he took a strong stance against the murderous spirit of these assassinations and expressed an attitude so different from the one I often encountered in the public.

I still remember walking with my beloved and revered Nuncio Pacelli‡ and Don Mario. This took place shortly after the murder of Rathenau and I spoke with him about what Wirth had said. He was very unhappy about Wirth’s statement because he found the notion of “right” far too vague. He rightly emphasized that one could not allow one or more political murders perpetrated by those on the far right to diminish the danger of Communism and to allow us to forget all the atrocities being committed from that side.

* Erich Ludendorff (1865–1937), German general who was then widely viewed as a hero for his victories in World War I.

† The unification of all German-speaking peoples in a single German nation.

‡ Eugenio Pacelli (1876–1958) nuncio in Munich (1917) and Berlin (1920–29), Vatican secretary of state in 1930, elected Pope Pius XII (1939–58).

1923

Von Hildebrand's denunciation of nationalism at the convention in Paris in April 1921 earned him the hatred of the Nazis. "The political situation was taking on an increasingly threatening character," he writes, while "the Nazi demonstrations were becoming ever more brazen." Von Hildebrand would have his first real brush with danger two and a half years after Paris, when Hitler attempted to seize power in Bavaria in the famous Beer Hall Putsch of November 8 and 9, 1923. Arriving with six hundred Storm Troopers—the paramilitary of the Nazi Party—Hitler entered the Bürgerbräukeller in Munich where Gustav von Kahr (1862–1934), the state commissioner of Bavaria, was holding a rally with a crowd of several thousand supporters.

As Hitler and his henchmen entered the hall that night, a shot was fired at the ceiling, and Hitler took the floor, yelling, "The national revolution has broken out!" Hitler's aim was to depose the Bavarian government and then topple the Weimar Republic government with a "March on Berlin," similar to Mussolini's "March on Rome" the year before. Hitler had Kahr and his associates detained at gunpoint and ordered them to cooperate. A feverish Hitler returned to the podium to declare, "I can say this to you. Either the German revolution begins tonight or we will all be dead by dawn!"

A cheer then went up as General Erich von Ludendorff (1865–1937), a national hero from World War I, appeared to offer the revolutionaries his support. As the chaotic evening unfolded, the putsch rapidly came apart, as Kahr escaped (or was allowed to flee) and the mutiny was soon put down by the Bavarian police. But none of this was known to von Hildebrand when the news first reached him the next morning.

• • •

Thus came November 9, 1923. I attended 7:00 a.m. mass in Bogenhausen. My class was to begin at 9:15 a.m. As I left the church, I met Prince Clemens, the son of Prince Alfons, whose brother was Prince Ludwig Ferdinand.* He asked me if I already knew what had happened last night. I said I hadn't heard anything, and so he told me that, at the Bürgerbräukeller, Ludendorff had been proclaimed President of Germany and Hitler Chancellor. Kahr had acquiesced, while other members of the Bavarian cabinet had been taken captive.

By his account it sounded as if the Nazis in association with Ludendorff were in control, at least in Munich, and as if the army in Bavaria would not offer any resistance. The extent to which this putsch would succeed throughout all of Germany was naturally the question. One could hope that the army would remain faithful to the Reich government.

But I had no time for any of these considerations. I was completely distressed and horrified by this turn of events, about the fact that Bavaria had fallen into the hands of criminals, about the triumph of this horrid ultra-nationalism and this deeply anti-Christian spirit. At the same time, National Socialism and Hitler as its leader represented the epitome of kitsch—a flat, gloomy, and incredibly trivial world, a barren and ignorant mindset. But aside from all these reasons to be distressed, the putsch presented a great and immediate danger for me. I had after all just learned from Marguerite Solbrig[†], my future secretary, who had it from a reliable source, that I was on the Nazi blacklist.

Marguerite told me at the time about an exchange she had with an injured soldier, who had previously been under her care for some time. He was an officer who had lost both his arms and legs. He spoke to her enthusiastically about Hitler, to which she responded that he should discuss this with me as I would clearly show him how false and

* Members of the House of Wittelsbach, the royal family of Bavaria until 1918.

† Marguerite Solbrig (1890–1969), close lifelong friend of von Hildebrand.

un-Christian the ideas of Hitler were. He answered, "What, should I speak with Dietrich von Hildebrand, that traitor? He has long been on our blacklist of those we will execute immediately when we come to power." This information would prove very important for me. The designation "traitor" was naturally due to my critical statement about the German invasion of neutral Belgium at the congress of Marc Sangnier.

I hastened home on my bicycle. I needed to be at the university by 9:00 a.m. for my class. Could I still risk teaching or should I flee without delay? I immediately telephoned Fr. Alois Mager* and asked him what I should do. He recommended that I go to my class since the entire city was not yet in the hands of the Nazis. Kahr had retracted his consent, which he had given under duress.† The Nazis only controlled the city to the right of the Isar River, and of course the university lay to the left.

Fr. Mager was to come to the university after my class to tell me whether I must flee and to advise me in my next steps. So I got onto my bicycle and road across the Bogenhausen bridge right past the SA‡ checkpoint and into the side of the city to the left of the Isar. There was no barricade for civilians. I passed through without being noticed and so, crossing the English Garden, I arrived at the university on time. There, to a reduced class, I gave my lecture on the idea of being and on the difference between essence and existence. All the while, one could hear the sounds of demonstrations around the university, and the entire situation was filled with great tension.

I no longer remember how much I knew that morning about the actual unfolding of the putsch. How much had Prince Clemens told me, how much did he know himself, how much had Fr. Alois told me by telephone?

Having concluded my lecture, I found Fr. Alois standing at the door of my classroom. He said to me, "I inquired and read a placard an-

* Alois Mager, OSB (1885-1946), a prominent Benedictine monk of the Abbey of Beuron and also von Hildebrand's confessor.

† Hitler would take his revenge on Kahr, having him murdered in the so-called "Night of the Long Knives" on June 30, 1934.

‡ Short for "Sturmabteilung," often called "Brownshirts," the original paramilitary of the Nazi Party.

nouncing the establishment of a popular tribunal, where there is only acquittal or the death penalty. The death sentence must be carried out within an hour of being handed down. Even if the Nazis only maintain power for a few hours, this means that your life is at risk. You must leave until order is reestablished or, at least, until the Nazi putsch is quelled. Obviously you cannot go to your home, where you could quickly be found, especially since your house is in the part of Munich occupied by the SA. Come with me to Beuron College.”*

Expressing my thanks, I went with him to the College. From there I spoke with my wife Gretchen[†] by telephone. I told her I wanted to flee with her to Württemberg.[‡] I asked her to pack the necessities and told her that a student of mine, Balduin Schwarz,[§] would come over to carry the suitcase to the train station. Balduin, who was in my course, had naturally heard of all this and had come with me and Fr. Alois to Beuron College. From there he went to the Maria-Theresia Strasse, probably riding his bicycle through the English Garden.

Fr. Alois advised that I ride the streetcar to Pasing and there board the train to Ulm, since a checkpoint for travelers might already have been set up at the central train station in Munich. He thought that my wife Gretchen and our son Franzi[¶] could risk boarding at the central station. Beuron College was close to the Barer Strasse. So I rode with Fr. Alois on the streetcar along the Augustenstrasse to Pasing. This naturally took some time so that we arrived in Pasing around noon.

A friend, Elizabeth Kaufmann, whom—if memory serves—I had met at Beuron College, lent me some money, as I did not have enough with me for the trip. I met Gretchen and Franzi on the train and we rode to Ulm. Already in Augsburg I learned that a battle had broken out between the SA and the army on the Odeonsplatz. Ludendorff stood at

* A Benedictine residence.

† Margarete (née Denck) von Hildebrand (1885–1957) married Dietrich in 1912.

‡ Württemberg was the German state to the east of Bavaria.

§ Balduin Schwarz (1902–93), leading student and close friend of von Hildebrand, taught in Germany, Switzerland, and New York.

¶ Franz von Hildebrand (1912–77), von Hildebrand’s son and only child, who would have been just eleven in 1923.

the front of the Nazis assuming that his presence would be sufficient to deter the army from shooting. Yet this is not what happened. The army opened fire, several Nazis fell, Ludendorff was taken captive, and Hitler fled.

I no longer recall how many details I already knew in Augsburg. In any case, I was aware of the armed confrontation and that Ludendorff had been taken captive, for I still recall getting into a discussion about Ludendorff with another passenger. He was lamenting that this “great man” had been captured, whereas I did not hesitate to say that through his participation in the putsch he had forfeited his life, and that I hoped he would receive the appropriate punishment.

From the rumors I realized that the battle had taken place just as I was riding to Pasing with Fr. Alois. Had we known this, it would no longer have been necessary to flee. Nevertheless, we rode to Ulm where we stayed at a very good hotel well known to us. The next morning, when it was clear that the Nazi putsch had been completely subdued, we rode back to Munich in high spirits. Hitler had been found hiding under Fräulein Hanfstaengl’s bed, and was now under lock and key.*

Our return to Munich was especially joyful. Not only is it remarkable how much more we appreciated public peace and security, having just been in great danger, but also the pathetic failure of the Nazi putsch had a wonderful cleansing effect on the oppressive milieu which had been building up for years. The uncanny feeling that the Nazi movement was becoming an increasing menace, the fact that growing numbers of people saw it as inevitable, even if they did not explicitly welcome it, had been poisoning the political atmosphere for a long time. The government of Kahr had only served to heighten this concern.

Now this danger had suddenly collapsed. Ludendorff was being tried in court. Hitler had made a laughingstock of himself through his Buffalo Bill entrance, his ignominious flight, and discovery under Fräulein Hanfstaengl’s bed. One had the impression that the Nazi nightmare had been definitively averted. Unfortunately this later turned out to be

* In fact, Hitler had been found hiding in a closet in the country home of Ernst (Putzi) Hanfstaengl, who was later head of the Nazi Foreign Press Bureau.

mistaken, but in November 1923 it seemed that way. It was possible to breathe a sigh of relief, and I more than most was overjoyed.

To my great regret Ludendorff was acquitted.* It was unbelievable that one did not dare to punish him because of his status as a World War I hero. The truth is that he should have been punished for his role in the World War, where aside from many war crimes he was also to blame that a truce was not reached in 1917. The Bavarian judges at that time were deeply infected by nationalism. Ludendorff's participation in the Hitler putsch was clearly a crime. Had a leftist done the same thing, he would undoubtedly have been shot.

Even worse was the fact that Hitler, who lacked even the appearance of a national hero, was condemned to a respectable imprisonment rather than at least being sentenced to life in prison. Even so, it seemed that Hitler was finished once and for all. A year later, *Simplicissimus*† ran a caricature depicting Hitler in a restaurant selling his book *Mein Kampf* for two marks. Hitler had written this book during his imprisonment, which had become public knowledge even though it had not yet been published.‡

* The Hitler-Ludendorff trial took place between February 26 and March 27, 1924. In the verdict of April 1, 1924, Ludendorff was acquitted and Hitler was sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

† A satirical German magazine.

‡ Hitler had worked on the book until October 1924. It appeared in two volumes in 1925 and 1926.