

Mennonite Responses to Nazi Human Rights Abuses: A Family in Prussia/Danzig

Christiana Epp Duschinsky, *Ottawa*

Human rights abuses are always tragic and that tragedy is magnified many millions of times when one examines the human rights abuses of the Nazi regime of Germany, the worst of its kind of the twentieth century. The record is well known, but here is a brief summary of the brutality. In Germany itself, the Nazis jailed and tortured their political opponents; as the existing jails were soon full, the Nazis set up their infamous system of concentration camps, enabling systematic terror and torture. German Jews were systematically persecuted while some 100,000 “Aryan” Germans who were considered “unworthy of life” were murdered. After 1939 the Third Reich invaded and controlled most of continental Europe. In conquered Poland and the Soviet Union, the Nazi regime targeted the “inferior” Slavic-speaking populations with enslavement and mass-murder. Estimates vary, but at least five million civilians,¹ possibly many more, were intentionally executed or worked and starved to death. In addition, all Jews and Roma (Gypsies) in all Nazi-controlled areas were slated for genocidal murder and some six million were killed.

When Hitler took dictatorial power in Germany with the Enabling Act of March 23, 1933 and transformed the country into the aggressive, totalitarian state he called The Third Reich, there were some 7,599 Mennonites in Prussia, a few thousand more in the rest of Germany, and a further 5,600 in the region of the Free City of Danzig, the area with the largest concentration of Mennonites in the German-speaking areas.² In March 1933 very few German Mennonites, indeed very few Germans in general, foresaw the degree of brutality and murder the Nazis would visit on their fellow Germans and on the people they would conquer. Nor, given the fact that the Nazi government made some effort to disguise the worst of its genocides by placing large death camps such as Auschwitz in conquered territory outside of Germany proper, would many Mennonites learn the true nature of Nazi atrocities during the war. Still, it is significant that from the beginning, the Nazi regime proudly and publicly announced its extreme racism, especially anti-Semitism, and its blatant human rights violations and preparation for war.

Mennonite responses to Nazism have not yet been fully analyzed, but available evidence indicates that their responses differed little from those of other Germans. In spite of the centuries-old, gospel-based Mennonite traditions of non-resistance and universal human love, German Mennonites generally were compliant with the Nazi regime and Mennonite leaders and newspapers praised Hitler and his government. For example, in 1940 the West Prussian Mennonite Conference publicly declared: "The Conference will not do anything that gives even the faintest appearance of opposition to the policy of our *Fuehrer*."³

Just how deeply some Mennonites internalized Nazi ideology is shown by the following incident, which was related to me by my mother. In 1944, while my father was imprisoned, my mother worked for a time as a dressmaker for my father's Mennonite aunts who had a farm at Tiegenhof, close to the old border between Prussia and Danzig. This farm was located close to the railway line that led to Stutthof Concentration Camp. At one point my mother heard terrible, distressed screams. When she asked one of the aunts about the screaming, she was told, "They are separating the Jewish mothers from their children." When my mother protested that this could not be right, the aunt responded, "Hitler must know what he is doing."⁴

Most Mennonites complied almost wholly with Nazi laws and policies and many internalized aspects of Nazi propaganda. Some Mennonites went even further, becoming active supporters of the Nazi government and sometimes beneficiaries of Nazi rule. When considering human rights violations, it is especially important to remember that some Russian and German Mennonites helped perpetrate the Holocaust.⁵ It is also, of course, important to recognize the exceptional

moral integrity of those individuals within the Mennonite community who in some way opposed the opinions and behaviour demanded by the Nazis and enforced by terror. Examples include the statements and sermons critical of anti-Semitism of Pastor Goettner of Danzig and the attempt made to protect Jews from persecution in 1938 by the Mennonite mayor of Albisheim, Adolf Hahn. Christian Neff was another Mennonite leader who attempted to take a public anti-Nazi position and as a result had his periodical forcibly closed.⁶

My own family had a diverse response to Nazism. Family documents and memories of my grandparents, Herman Aron and Helene Epp (nee Dueck) of Marienau and Danzig and their four adult children, (hereafter called the Epp family), indicate the range of these responses. Obviously, the attitudes and actions of six individuals are not statistically significant, nevertheless, they can increase our understanding of German Mennonites' responses to Nazism. They illustrate sharply different attitudes to and interactions with Nazism, ranging from positions of responsibility within the Nazi regime to imprisonment in Stutthof Concentration Camp. And while some members were enthusiastically compliant, others mixed a limited compliance with resistance. Then, too, the levels of commitment and compliance shifted over time for some of the family members. While the roles of 'victim', 'beneficiary', and 'advocate' were suggested by the organizers of the 2012 University of Winnipeg Conference on Mennonites and Human Rights as roles in the human rights spectrum, these roles were blurred in this family.

Secularism⁷ and economic factors are among the major reasons that have been suggested for German Mennonite co-operation with Nazism. The importance of serious economic constraints in Germany in facilitating Hitler's rise and control of power has been emphasized by major historians from Alan Bullock to Richard Evens.⁸ The few analysts who have looked specifically at German Mennonite acceptance of Nazism also emphasize economic factors while adding the importance of secularism, and in particular the German Mennonites' acceptance of military service in the nineteenth century.⁹ Both of these factors operated in the Epp family and shaped the mixed pattern of compliance and resistance among family members.

A brief narrative of the lives of the Epp Family members before and during the Third Reich is necessary to clarify these disparate response. Hermann Aron Epp (1882-1945) and Helene Epp (nee Dueck) (1892-1945) were the parents of four children, all sons: my father, Hermann (1909-1961), then Waldemar (1912-1983), Siegfried (1913-1944), and Erwin (1918-1943).¹⁰ This family was very secular; although all four sons were baptized as Mennonites in their youth, church-attendance was restricted to four to five times a year.¹¹ This secular stamp can

be ascribed to the father, Hermann Aron, who moved away from traditional Mennonite practices as a youth. Instead of serving in a local regiment or medical corp, as Mennonites had since the late nineteenth century, Hermann Aron volunteered for service with an elite imperial guard regiment in Berlin, at great cost to his family. The regiment's environment, saturated with nationalistic and militaristic attitudes, seems to have produced what Hermann Aron later described as the happiest period of his life.¹² He embraced the secular values of nationalism and militarism, and later added anti-Semitism to these attitudes.

On his return to the Danzig area, Hermann Aron embarked on more traditional Mennonite pursuits: marrying, farming the substantial farm he and his wife bought, and raising a family. This period was interrupted by World War I, a war in which he won an Iron Cross, suggesting active military service, while his wife ran the farm.¹³ Germany's defeat in 1918 brought him bitterness, the more so as Danzig was severed from the Prussian part of Germany to allow Poland access to the sea. The Treaty of Versailles included the provision that Danzig and a small hinterland become the politically autonomous Free City of Danzig, which was placed in an economic union with Poland.¹⁴

Free trade with Poland and the economic disruption that followed World War I caused serious problems for the farmers of the Danzig hinterland, as the price for agricultural products collapsed. In what seems to have been an effort to diversify, Hermann Aron invested in a food oil mill with other relatives, but this enterprise failed. By 1928 the family faced bankruptcy and was forced to sell its farm. Hermann Aron was not able to find permanent employment until 1934, so for several years the family was very poor.¹⁵ The change from substantial landowner to poor jobseeker must have been painful for him.

In the 1920s, miniature versions of German political parties were established in the Free City of Danzig. Hermann Aron supported the rural-oriented, conservative and strongly anti-Semitic German Nationalists. Then, in 1932 he joined the Danzig Nazi Party,¹⁶ completely obedient to Hitler even before the Nazis had state power in Germany. In voluntarily joining the Danzig Nazis, Hermann Aron had to swear an oath of loyalty to Hitler, thus rejecting another Mennonite precept. (In certain "Gau" of Germany, Mennonites were granted membership in the Nazi Party by an affirmation rather than an oath; however, the Danzig Nazi Party demanded an oath.¹⁷) In the elections of May 1933 in Danzig, the Nazi Party won 50.03 percent of the vote, and took control of the Danzig government.¹⁸ Hermann Aron, as an active Nazi supporter, seems also to have been a Nazi beneficiary¹⁹ as it is probable that he owed his 1934 job to his Nazi contacts. Certainly during the years of Nazi power, his favourable position within the Nazi Party provided him with a good social standing.

Hermann Aron's positive evaluation of strong nationalism, militarism and anti-Semitism, and after 1932 of Nazism, certainly influenced his entire family, but not with uniform result. A number of analysts, including Hans-Jurgen Goertz and James Irvin Lichdi, have presented the relative secularism of German Mennonites, in particular their acceptance of military conscription in the nineteenth century, as a major reason for German Mennonites' almost universal compliance with Nazism. While Hermann Aron clearly fits this interpretation, his family had a range of responses to Nazism.

Hermann Aron's wife, Helene Epp, for example, seems to have taken a largely apolitical stance. Her concern was for harmony in the family. When in the 1930s, her eldest son, the younger Hermann, developed both a left-wing political orientation and friendships with Jews, his mother continued to give him support and cultivate close relationships with him.²⁰ Helene may have been compliant with the Nazis, and her husband's wishes, but she does not seem to have given the regime enthusiastic or active support. A few years earlier, a woman's apolitical stance would have been regarded as normative behaviour, especially as women in Germany and Danzig did not receive the vote until after 1918. However, for the Nazi regime, an apolitical stance was not good enough. The official Nazi aim was to have every German man, woman and child give Hitler and his policies enthusiastic, dedicated support. Considering her husband's enthusiastic acceptance of Nazi beliefs, Helene Epp's marked lack of commitment is significant.

Then consider the Epp family's two younger sons who both served in the *Wehrmacht* (the Nazi armed forces) and died on the Eastern Front. In spite of this similarity, a significant difference in their response to Nazism seems to have existed. Siegfried was conscripted into the *Wehrmacht*, while Erwin joined as a volunteer. In 1938, a time when Danzig was still officially separated from Germany, Erwin moved to Germany in order to volunteer for the *Wehrmacht*.²¹ Limited job opportunities in Danzig may have been a factor in his decision, but like his father, Erwin clearly had a positive view of both the Nazis and the military. Siegfried's life as an adult is more obscure. Based on my memory and a written family history, he followed a career in business, met and married a woman from Vienna, and then moved to Vienna where he and his wife had two sons. He was conscripted into the *Wehrmacht* and was killed on the Eastern Front in late 1944. Certainly he was compliant with the Nazi regime. Yet, according to a written family history when Siegfried in Ukraine at Easter 1943 observed (or heard news of) the murder of 200 Jews, he retained enough of his original Mennonite values to see this brutal human rights abuse as shocking and to write to his more influential brother, Waldemar, about the incident.²²

Of the four brothers, it was Waldemar who became most deeply entrenched with the Nazi state. When the local Nazis took over the Danzig government in May 1933, Waldemar had a job in business and was a volunteer youth group leader with the local YMCA. In a 1974 account he described his experiences during the Nazi period, saying that he enjoyed his volunteer work and was considering a full-time career as a youth worker, when the Danzig YMCA was forcibly absorbed by the Hitler Youth on January 1, 1934. According to Waldemar, "I had to choose between working in the Hitler Youth or leaving youth work."²³ He chose the Hitler Youth and soon was in charge of its activities for 10 to 14 year-old boys in the villages around Danzig. In his account he emphasizes the similarity between his Hitler Youth activities and his work in his YMCA youth group, with the "exceptions" that now "forming-up, marching and issuing commands" and the singing of Nazi songs were included and there was no longer a closing devotion.²⁴ He may have been attempting to distance himself from Nazism as much as possible after the fact. Certainly, a wide-spread (though far from general) response of German citizens to Nazism was to comply with the system while personally undercutting its repugnant aspects, a strategy of Germans in many positions, including ordinary Mennonite farmers.²⁵ Waldemar also asserts that he left the Hitler Youth in 1936 and for two reasons: first, his knowledge of the use of physical torture against young men following the Roehm Putsch of 1934; secondly, an anti-Christian remark made by Baldur von Schirach, the *Reichsfuehrer* of the Hitler Youth, at a leaders conference Waldemar attended. However, Waldemar's 1974 account is selective. He does not mention that in 1936, upon moving to Germany to begin university studies in law, he joined the Nazi Party.²⁶

In 1938 Waldemar transferred to the Law Faculty of the University of Geneva, in Switzerland. While there, he became chair of the German Students' Association, a position he would not have obtained without voluntary effort. It also made him a quasi-member of the Nazi state's overseas apparatus. On the night of November 10-11, 1938 (*Krystallnacht*) the Nazis carried out large-scale attacks on Jews in Germany, including the burning of synagogues, beatings, murders, and mass imprisonment. The day after *Krystallnacht*, the professor of civil law at Geneva's Law Faculty began his lecture with a short critique of *Krystallnacht*, whereupon students from Germany left the lecture hall in protest. The matter gained wide publicity in the Swiss press and Waldemar, in his semi-official capacity, worked together with the German Consul-General, Dr. Krauel, and the university authorities to have the matter "set aside,"²⁷ that is, to make sure that the German students' pro-Nazi demonstration not harm their position as students in Switzerland. Waldemar had moved beyond simple compliance with Nazism.

When Germany attacked Poland on September 1, 1939, Waldemar volunteered for the *Wehrmacht* and took part in the annihilating German campaign until he became ill and was invalided-out in November 1939. His 1974 account does not speak of his motives for volunteering, although certainly anger at Danzig's separation from Germany would have influenced him, as it influenced most Germans. Soon after, German Consul-General Krauel in Geneva recommended Waldemar for a position as a scientific/scholarly employee at the German Foreign Office.²⁸ This was a well-paid position that held significant prestige value. Thus, from 1934 to at least 1943, Waldemar was an active supporter and beneficiary of Nazism. However, as I note below, there is evidence that he then became an advocate for the victims of the Holocaust.

The experiences of the younger Hermann, my father and the eldest son of the Epp Family, were at odds with that of Waldemar and anyone else in his family. The younger Hermann, was briefly a member of the youth group of his father's right-wing German Nationalist Party, but then moved in a significantly different direction. Although I don't know the exact order, the following events occurred when he was a young man in his mid-twenties:²⁹ being a lover of literature, he found a job in a bookstore and for a time studied German Literature at the University of Koenigsberg; he began a close friendship with a Jewish woman from Danzig; and he started to engage in left-wing political activities, including taking part in anti-Nazi demonstrations, some under Communist leadership.³⁰ In the violent spirit of the times, these demonstrations often became street battles and Hermann was arrested several times, although always released after only a brief incarceration.³¹

In 1938 his Jewish friend had no option but to emigrate to Switzerland and Hermann chose to go with her. Unfortunately, he was not able to obtain a work permit in Switzerland and faced destitution. At the time Hermann was counselled by no less a figure than Hermann Rauschnig, a former leader of the Danzig Nazi Party and one of the few early Nazis to break with the Party,³² about the painful lot of the refugee and advised to return to Germany, if he could ascertain that he would not face prosecution.³³ Thus, in early 1939, Hermann asked his brother Waldemar to make enquiries among Danzig's Nazi leaders to see if it was safe for him to return. On receiving such an assurance, Hermann returned to Danzig in April 1939.³⁴ A few weeks later he met my mother and the two were married that October in the Danzig Mennonite Church by Pastor Goettner,³⁵ although my mother remained a Lutheran.

Political events were to cast huge shadows on the couple's early life together. A few weeks before their marriage, within days of the beginning of the German attack on Poland, Germany annexed Danzig

to the Third Reich. At some point in this period, Waldemar helped my father find a job as a researcher at the scholarly Baltic Institute.³⁶ With Danzig's incorporation into the Third Reich in September 1939, the Nazi regime would inevitably have utilized the research done by this institute. Despite his return to Danzig and job in an institute which served the Nazi state, Hermann's repugnance for the Nazis did not disappear. Compliant on the surface, he became part of "The Inner Resistance", meeting with a small, ecumenical, political discussion group (he was the only Mennonite in regular attendance) critical of Nazism. My older sister, a child at the time, remembers a feeling of caution at these meetings and that the apartment door and windows were swathed in blankets so that the words of the conversation could not be overheard.³⁷ Hermann took a further step into more active resistance when he helped a friend engaged in surreptitious anti-Nazi sabotage to elude the Gestapo.³⁸

The birth of Hermann and his wife's first child in 1940 marked a significant turn in his life. The little boy soon developed seizures and developmental delays, factors noted in his official health record. In 1943, given the Nazi state's keen interest in the health of the 'Aryan' German population, Hermann and his wife were told to bring the child to a state hospital for what was called 'treatment'. Hermann's contacts had informed him of the true nature of the 'treatment' and when the couple did not comply, the child was forcibly removed. A few weeks later he was killed as part of the Nazi effort to eliminate 'worthless' Germans.³⁹

This personal tragedy seems to have increased Hermann's long-standing disapproval of the Nazis. He certainly must have felt deep anger and extreme frustration. On a number of occasions he did not guard his tongue and in public places said things critical of the Nazis, including at least once at his place of work. In March 1944 Hermann was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned in the Stutthof Concentration Camp near Danzig,⁴⁰ a slave labour camp with a death rate so high it had its own crematorium. Hermann spent three months there without specific knowledge of why he had been arrested. (To the best of my knowledge, the younger Hermann was the only German Mennonite who was imprisoned in a concentration camp by the Nazi regime.) At one point Hermann's wife (at the time, a pregnant 'Aryan' woman and so fairly safe) went to inquire about his incarceration and was simply told, "To us he is not an unwritten book."⁴¹

When Waldemar heard of Hermann's incarceration, he used his position at the German Foreign Office to discuss the case with the Foreign Office's SS liaison officer. He was, thus, able to arrange Hermann's release, not from the concentration camp, as Waldemar was not powerful enough for that, but for his transfer to the Gestapo prison

system. Here prisoners were fed more than in the concentration camps, although the risk of torture remained high. (Horst Klausnitzer, a close friend of my father's in Danzig and a member of the critical discussion group, later said that he owed his life to my father's fortitude, as Hermann had refused to disclose any names during his interrogations, even though he was most probably tortured).⁴²

Once in Gestapo custody, Hermann was charged with "subversive defeatism", which carried the death penalty. He was transferred to Berlin and tried by the infamous Peoples' Court, the *Volksgericht* (again, to my knowledge, the only Mennonite to appear before this part of the Nazi terror apparatus). A key missing witness led to the unusual verdict of "not guilty,"⁴³ unusual since most cases before the *Volksgericht* ended with the death penalty. The Gestapo, however, did not release Hermann and merely transferred him back to the Gestapo cells in Danzig. In November 1944, when his mother received word that the second of her two soldier sons had fallen in combat, she took the telegram to Gestapo headquarters and begged for Hermann's release. With the Red Army almost at the door, the Gestapo did indeed release Hermann a few hours later, though with orders to enter the militia immediately.⁴⁴ Instead, Hermann went into hiding and was able to survive the collapse of the Third Reich, coming to Canada with his family in 1948 with the help of the Mennonite Central Committee.

Information on Waldemar's help for his brother Hermann is found in several family sources. However, in his 1974 account, Waldemar implies that he acted not only from family considerations but also because he was in complete sympathy with Hermann's anti-Nazi attitude and had himself become involved with resistance. In fact, Waldemar titled his 1974 account, "Contribution to Research on Opposition to Adolph Hitler", and sent a copy to the German Federal Archives.⁴⁵ Interestingly, Waldemar's account does not examine the discrepancy between his early career-building within the Nazi state and his claim to later resistance. The problem in assessing Waldemar's claims is that, at this point in time, there is little substantiating evidence other than his own word.⁴⁶ Waldemar states that before Hermann's arrest, he had provided Hermann with classified information to pass on to the members of the Danzig Inner Resistance group and had himself joined the group when he was in Danzig and that from the summer of 1943 he had assisted members of a similar group in Berlin with food he was able to bring from abroad. Perhaps to give emphasis to the integrity of his opposition to the Nazis, Waldemar claims that with a colleague, Otto Mueller, he considered the possibility of assassinating Hitler, as from their lightly-guarded (two SS men) corridor in the Foreign Office, he and his colleague had a clear view of Hitler's regular walks with his dog in the garden of the Chancellery next door. Waldemar states that

his lack of contacts with higher echelons of the Resistance prevented him obtaining the necessary sharpshooters to implement this plan.⁴⁷

Further, in his account, Waldemar outlines an important personal act of human rights advocacy. He states that from May 1943 to February 1945, using his ability to travel abroad as an official of the German Foreign Office, he personally gave information to the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, specifically to Dr. Carl J. Burckhardt,⁴⁸ about the mass murder of Jews in Eastern Europe, information he had from German Foreign Office sources and two reports from persons he trusted, one of whom was his brother Siegfried. In the autumn of 1944, using information he had from a friend in the Propaganda Office, he informed the Red Cross that 3.5 million Jews had already been murdered.⁴⁹ This important act of advocacy against genocide would have been taken at the risk of Waldemar's own life. However, there is only Waldemar's own word for this act of advocacy plus one further piece of evidence: the fact that Carl J. Burckhardt, the effective head of the International Committee of the Red Cross, interceded in the spring of 1945 to have Waldemar moved from a prisoner of war camp to a refugee camp, strongly indicating that he knew Waldemar and had a positive view of him.⁵⁰

Conclusion

While the lives of Hermann and Waldemar during the Nazi period were atypical of the lives of German Mennonites as a whole, the lives and experiences of the other family members were very typical. Although further research is needed to place the Epp family's experiences into a more accurate analytical context of Mennonite experiences in the Nazi era, all members of the Epp family became compliant with the Nazi regime. Yet this pattern of general co-operation was underlain by nuance and complexity. The Epp family's responses to Nazism ranged from the strongly positive to the strongly negative. Also, as personal and political circumstances shifted, so did some family members' regard for Nazism. Secular attitudes and economic constraints, emphasized by analysts interpreting German Mennonite responses to Nazism, clearly influenced all the Epp family members, but again in a nuanced manner.

The family patriarch, Hermann Aron, was a secular German Mennonite who had come to value a military ethos and accept strong German nationalism and anti-Semitism. His example doubtless influenced his entire family: Irwin, the youngest son, voluntarily chose a career in the Nazi military, the *Wehrmacht*; likewise, Waldemar, at least initially, sought to build his career from within the Nazi party and

state. On the other hand, Helene and Siegfried were both compliant with the Nazi regime but showed no evidence of positive commitment to the regime, and in time became skeptics of Nazism and advocates for its victims. The younger Hermann's response to Nazism was the most consistently rejectionist in the family. Forced to find work, he did accept a position with a research institute whose work would be utilized by the Nazi state, although his inner rejection of the Nazis continued and, in fact, increased with time and led to his arrest by the Gestapo in 1944. Hermann's and Waldemar's lives provide the clearest examples in the Epp family of complex responses to Nazism. In some respects they were mirror opposites, with Hermann a long-term, active opponent of Nazism who from 1939 to 1944 complied with the regime in order to make a living, and Waldemar a willing worker for the regime, albeit one who later claimed to have used the advantages of his position to oppose the Holocaust.

In trying to explain the almost complete compliance with Nazism of German Mennonites, several analysts have emphasized the role of secularism among German Mennonites, especially their acceptance of military service. The experiences of the secular Epp family certainly substantiate this interpretation. However, in this family the role of secularism was nuanced, leading not only to compliance with Nazism, but also to wide-ranging 'worldly' new experiences, including resistance. Certainly, economic constraints led members of the Epp family to comply with the Nazi regime for it not only created jobs, it controlled them. But economic constraint did not alone produce active co-operation. Active co-operation demanded a frame of mind that accepted key elements of Nazi ideology, especially militarism, strong German nationalism and anti-Semitism. Clearly the father, Hermann Aron, was consistently, actively co-operative with the regime, as was the youngest son, Erwin, with Waldemar apparently vacillating.

The above analysis of the experiences of the Epp family in the Nazi era seeks to demonstrate how the roles of "victim", "beneficiary", and "advocate" became so blurred. In one sense, all six family members were victims of the Nazi regime, as the aggressiveness of the regime was responsible for its own downfall, depriving the entire family of its Danzig home and heritage. In addition, four of the six family members died as a result of the Nazi-instigated Second World War, with the two parents losing their lives as a result of end-of-war deprivation and the brutality of the Red Army. However, the father and two sons, in actively co-operating with the Nazis, became beneficiaries of a party committed to human rights abuse. There is evidence that Waldemar, in part assisted by Siegfried, then also became an advocate for the regime's victims. Hermann began as an overt opponent of Nazi human rights abuses, before becoming briefly a beneficiary and then a victim.

The mother, Helene experienced all three roles, albeit in a consistently quiet manner. There is no evidence to indicate that Hermann Aron ever relinquished his commitment to Nazism, although one wonders what went through the father's mind as he lost his sons one by one and then witnessed the rape of his wife⁵¹.

Finally I would like to reiterate the importance of the extremely difficult conditions in Germany and Danzig of the years from 1919 to 1945. These conditions strongly moulded the varying responses to National Socialism of the six adults in this family. Their opinions and choices were difficult and limited. Their lives show us a little of the individual human dilemmas that exist when human rights abuses are present in a society.

Notes

- ¹ There is general agreement among historians as to the number of dead in most major categories of Nazi victims. An exception to this is the category of civilian victims in Eastern Europe intentionally targeted by the Nazi regime. One of the more conservative estimates of losses in the Soviet Union is made by John Keegan, who places Soviet civilian losses at 7 million, where "most...died as a result of deprivation, reprisals and forced labour." (From this number must be subtracted the approximately one million Soviet Jews, who in this article are considered separately as victims of genocide.) John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1990), 590-591. Polish non-Jewish civilian victims of the Nazi regime numbered many hundred of thousands, possibly over one million. Note that the figure of about five million non-Jewish civilians murdered in Eastern Europe does not include the millions of Soviet and Polish prisoners of war deliberately murdered by the Nazis, usually through overwork and starvation.
- ² The Mennonite population statistics for Prussia are from the census of 1922 taken from Crous, Ernst, "Prussia", *Global Anabaptist and Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* 1959, accessed June 15, 2012, <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Prussia&oldid=103313>. The statistics for the Free City of Danzig are from the are from the census of 1925 taken from Mannhardt, H. G., and Harold S, Bender, "Danzig, Free City of" *Global Anabaptist and Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* 1959, accessed June 15, 2012, <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Danzig Free City&oldid=94294>. Although the main German Mennonite concentrations were in Prussia and Danzig, there were also several thousand more Mennonites scattered throughout western and southern Germany.
- ³ Hans-Jurgen Goertz, "Nationale Erhebung und Religioser Niedergang", *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*, 26 (1974): 61-90. As quoted in Steven Mark Schroeder, "Prussian Mennonites in the Third Reich and Beyond: The Uneasy Synthesis of National and Religious Myths" (Master's Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2001), 27.
- ⁴ Conversation between the author and her mother, Friederike Epp, 1987, Kelowna, British Columbia.
- ⁵ Gehard Rempel, "Mennonites and the Holocaust", *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84 (October 2010): 507-549.
- ⁶ Information on Pastor Goettner may be found in Horst Gerlach, "The Final Years of Mennonites in East and West Prussia 1943-45, Part One", *Mennonite Quarterly*

- (April 1992): 224. Information on Adolph Hahn and Christian Neff may be found in Schroeder, 28-32.
- ⁷ Hans-Jurgen Goertz's 1974 article "Nationale Erhebung und religiöser Niedergang", *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*, 26 first raised in a significant manner the issue of nineteenth century secular accommodation with the state among German Mennonites and their acceptance of Nazism.
 - ⁸ Alan J. Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (New York: Bantam Books, 1952), Richard Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York, Penguin Press, 2005).
 - ⁹ A good example of an analysis of the role of secularism and economic constraints among German Mennonites in the Nazi period is to be found in Diether Götz Lichdi, "National Socialism (Nazism) (Germany)" *Global Anabaptist and Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1987. [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=National_Socialism_\(Nazism\)_\(Germany\)&oldid=76103](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=National_Socialism_(Nazism)_(Germany)&oldid=76103).
 - ¹⁰ This information is taken from an unpublished German manuscript in the author's possession. It was written by Waldemar Epp (the author's uncle) in Germany in 1979 and is entitled "Familie und Heimat" (Family and Homeland). Translations from this manuscript into English are by the author.
 - ¹¹ Conversation between the author and Waldemar Epp. Cologne, Germany, 1978.
 - ¹² Epp, "Familie und Heimat", 4.
 - ¹³ *Ibid.*, 5.
 - ¹⁴ Waldemar Epp, *Danzig, Schicksal einer Stadt* (Esslingen, Bechtle Verlag, 1983), 188. (This is the only published work by Waldemar Epp.)
 - ¹⁵ Waldemar Epp, "Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler", 1. This is an unpublished article in the possession of the author, given to her by Waldemar Epp in 1980. It was written in German in 1974. Waldemar Epp informed the author that he had also sent a copy to the German Federal Archives. In English, the title is "Contribution to Research on the Resistance to Adolf Hitler". Translations from the article are by the author.
 - ¹⁶ Epp, "Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler", 1.
 - ¹⁷ James Irvin Lichti, *Houses on Sand: Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York, Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2008), 35.
 - ¹⁸ Epp, *Danzig, Schicksal einer Stadt*, 210.
 - ¹⁹ During my childhood, I heard my mother on a number of occasions speak of my father's father, Hermann Aron, as having been a prominent Nazi. She spoke of him as having been "Der Siebte von Danzig" (the seventh [Party member] in Danzig). Her remarks were made in the 1950s, approximately a decade after the end of the Nazi Period. However, to date, I have not been able to find any concrete information on Hermann Aron's activities during his years of Party membership.
 - ²⁰ Epp "Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler", 1. Similar information on the close relationship between Helene and her son Hermann is contained in the unpublished memoir, in my possession, of Hermann's wife (and my mother), Friederike Epp. The memoir was written in German in Kelowna, British Columbia in 1977.
 - ²¹ Epp, "Familie und Heimat", 2-3.
 - ²² The limited information on Siegfried's life is drawn from my memory of family conversations in my childhood, augmented by information in Waldemar Epp's "Familie und Heimat", 2-3. The information on Siegfried's letter to Waldemar is from Epp's "Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler", 13. To the best of my knowledge, Siegfried's letter to Waldemar did not survive the destruction of the Second World War. Most German families from Prussia and Danzig, including mine, lost everything or close to everything in the bombings and flight of 1943-45. Waldemar had stored some personal papers at his parents apartment in Danzig; this apartment was burned in March 1945. Epp, "Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes Adolf Hitler", 8 and "Familie und Heimat" 5. As Waldemar in a conversation with the author in Cologne in 1978 told me about

the information in the letter he received from Siegfried, but did not produce the letter itself, (Waldemar was meticulous in keeping papers properly filed) I have always assumed that the letter had been destroyed in the War Years.

²³ Ibid., 2.

²⁴ Ibid., 2-4.

²⁵ In *The Third Reich in Power*, Richard J. Evans extensively analyzes the transformation of pre-Nazi Germany into the Nazi state and discusses the responses of many groups and individuals. Ian Kershaw's two volume biography of Hitler provides further analysis, as does his *Hitler, the Germans and the Final Solution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press). Specifically on Mennonites, Horst Gerlach provides some information in "The Final Years of Mennonites in East and West Prussia, 1943-45" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 66 (April 1992): 221-246.

²⁶ The information on Waldemar Epp's membership in the Nazi Party is found in Gerald Steinacher's *Nazis on the Run: How Hitler's Henchmen Fled Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 39. In the original German edition of this book, (*Nazis auf der Flucht*, Innsbrucker Forschung zur Zeitgeschichte, Band 26, 2008) Steinacher's information on Waldemar Epp was full of serious inaccuracies. The actual inaccuracies were eliminated in the translated Oxford University Press edition. However, in this edition, in the short section on Waldemar Epp, Steinacher speaks of "Nazi perpetrators and Party members." While Waldemar Epp was clearly a Nazi Party member, Steinacher presents no evidence to indicate that he had any reason to use the term "perpetrator" with reference to Waldemar Epp. In fact, the information about Waldemar Epp that he presents in no way contradicts (although it does slightly augment) the information in Epp's own "Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler".

²⁷ The information on Waldemar Epp's activities in Geneva is taken from Epp, "Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler", 4-7. Information about Consul-General Dr Wolfgang Krauel can be found in Klements von Klemperer, *German Resistance Against Hitler: The Search for Allies Abroad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 299. Klemperer does not refer to Waldemar Epp or the post-Krystallnacht incident of the demonstration of German students at the University of Geneva, which is outside the scope of his topic. However, it is worth noting that Klemperer sees Consul-General Krauel as one of the members of the German Foreign Office who, while continuing to work for the German government after the Nazis took control of it, was essentially anti-Nazi. Since according to Waldemar, he owed his position with the German Foreign Office to the recommendation of Consul-General Krauel, it is possible that in his contact with Waldemar, Krauel observed a lack of total commitment to Nazism in Waldemar, and that this factored in his recommendation.

²⁸ Ibid., 7.

²⁹ The limited information I have on Hermann Epp's actions as a young man is based chiefly on my memory of family conversations during my childhood, including those during a visit to my father's friend Fanny Lewinsohn in Zurich, Switzerland in 1957. My mother also included a few details in her unpublished manuscript. I had little contact with my uncle Waldemar Epp while I was growing up; yet when in 1980 he sent me both of his unpublished manuscripts ("Familie und Heimat" and "Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler"), I found very little there that contradicted what as a child I had learned from family conversations. There was, though, a significant amount of information that was new to me, especially about Waldemar's own past.

³⁰ Waldemar Epp speaks of his brother Hermann as having been a member of the Communist Party. Epp, "Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes Adolph Hitler", 1. Given that throughout its history, membership in the Communist Party was strictly controlled and usually took several years to obtain, it is unlikely

that Hermann Epp was ever a Communist Party member. However, it is entirely possible that Hermann was a member of a Communist youth group. Before 1939, the German Communists were seen as Hitler's strongest opponents.

- 31 My mother told me of my father's street battles and consequent arrest when I was a child. She also wrote of this in her unpublished memoir. This information was corroborated by Waldemar Epp in a conversation I had with him in Cologne, Germany in 1978.
- 32 Epp, "Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler", 6. Information on Hermann Rauschnig and the controversy surrounding his writings is easily available on the internet. However, there is no controversy about Rauschnings brief importance in the Danzig Nazi movement, his early break with the Nazis, and subsequent exile.
- 33 It is worth remembering that a number of North American Mennonite leaders seem to have been favourably disposed toward Nazism and that no Mennonite agency offered assistance to Mennonites wishing to leave Nazi-controlled areas. For information on the attitudes of North American Mennonite leaders to Nazism see Gerhard Rempel's "Heinrich Hajo Schroeder: The Allure of Race and Space in Hitler's Empire" *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 29 (2011): 227-254.
- 34 Epp, "Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler", 6.
- 35 Single manuscript page in the author's possession from the estate of Hermann Epp.
- 36 Epp, "Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler", 8.
- 37 Conversation with Ruth Hein, October 2012, Lanigen, Saskatchewan.
- 38 The author's memory of childhood conversations with her mother. Waldemar in our 1978 conversation in Cologne also spoke of Hermann having contact with individuals in the Danzig area who were engaged in "cautious" (Waldemar's word) sabotage against the Nazis.
- 39 The circumstances of this child's tragic death are described in Friederike Epp's unpublished manuscript. They were also remembered by my older half-sister and other family members.
- 40 Friederike Epp writes of Hermann's arrest and imprisonment in her unpublished memoir, Kelowna British Columbia, 1977. Waldemar Epp describes the same events in his "Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler". Although the two manuscripts were written completely independent of one another, they vary only in a few details.
- 41 The author's memory of childhood conversations with her mother, Friederike Epp.
- 42 Conversation between the author and Horst Klausnitzer, Hamburg, Germany, 1965.
- 43 Volksgericht Abschrift KL 358/44 4 J 779/44. The transcript of Hermann Epp's trial by the Peoples' Court (*Volksgericht*) survived the Third Reich in a somewhat damaged, though mainly readable, form. In the post- World War II period, Waldemar Epp obtained a photocopy copy of the transcript from the German Federal Archives and in 1980 sent me a photocopy of his photocopy, which is still in my possession.
- 44 Letter of November 30, 1944 from Helene Epp to Irmgard Epp, Erwin's widow. This letter is cited in Waldemar Epp, "Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler", 2.
- 45 Waldemar's account is in German and he lived in Germany until his death.
- 46 Waldemar Epp's account gives an unemotional, 'dry' impression, perhaps because he was attempting to appear as objective as possible. He outlines his order of work and describes a number of former co-workers. Also, Waldemar states clearly that information on the genocide of the Jews was not difficult to obtain by people working in the German Foreign Office. He states that it would have been impossible for Kurt Georg Kiesinger, later Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, to be unaware of the Holocaust, as the latter claimed ("Beitrag zur Erforschung des

Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler”, 15). In a similar vein, in April 1967, Waldemar Epp wrote a letter to the editor of *Der Spiegel*, Germany’s major news magazine, in which he describes a dressing-down of Swiss journalists by Dr. Paul Schmidt, the Ribbentrop-appointed head of the Foreign Office’s press division. (Dr. Paul Schmidt later changed his name to Carell and became a well-known writer of military histories.) Waldemar Epp appended a copy of his published letter to the editor of *Der Spiegel* to his “Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler”.

⁴⁷ Epp, “Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler”, 13-14.

⁴⁸ Detailed information on the position of Dr. Carl J. Burckhardt in the International Committee of the Red Cross can be found in Jean-Claude Favez *The Red Cross and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Favez states that Burckhardt had many sources of information from inside Germany and the German-conquered territories on the emerging Holocaust. While Favez mentions some of Burckhardt’s more important sources, he does not mention Waldemar Epp. Favez does, however, refer to the fact that Burckhardt had many sources beyond the ones specifically mentioned. These are referred to in several contexts throughout the book.

⁴⁹ Epp, “Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler”, 13-14.

⁵⁰ Epp’s “Beitrag zur Erforschung des Widerstandes gegen Adolf Hitler” does not relate his experiences in the Nazi era beyond February 1945, when he states that he had his last meeting with Burckhardt in Geneva, Switzerland (14). However, Gerald Steinacker traces Waldemar Epp’s steps beyond February, of that year. Steinacker states that Waldemar Epp was arrested in South Tyrol “along with the German Embassy Staff associated with the Reich Plenipotentiary in Italy, Rudolf Rahm” but that “[a]fter the intervention of the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Carl Jacob Burckhardt, Epp was transferred...to Bozen Refugee camp.” (Steinacker, *Nazis on the Run*, 40). Throughout the War and the post-War period, Burckhardt was an important and busy individual; it is highly unlikely that he would have interceded for Waldemar Epp if Burckhardt had not felt that Waldemar had done something worthy of such intercession. (Steinacker does not address the issue of why Burckhardt interceded for Waldemar Epp.)

⁵¹ Epp, “Familie und Heimat” 5.