

Attempts to Force Jehovah's Witnesses to Renounce Their Faith (c. 1938)

Abstract

When conscription in Germany was reintroduced in 1935, Jehovah's Witnesses refused to comply with orders of service. When war began in 1939, Jehovah's Witnesses once again refused to fight in Hitler's conquest of the European continent on the grounds of their religious principles. By 1939, almost 6,000 Jehovah's Witnesses from across the Reich had been arrested and imprisoned. Despite persecution, Witnesses continued to practice their religion while in captivity, often meeting in secret or searching for potential converts among the other inmates. Angering the SS guards, they often refused to submit to military-style procedures, such as daily roll call. While some signed documents renouncing their beliefs in an attempt to escape persecution, most did not. A total of 10,000 Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned by Nazi authorities. Among those, 2,500 to 5,000 men and women died from physical abuse, hunger, and malnutrition in the camp system. Another 200 men were tried by the German War Court for refusing to serve in the Wehrmacht.

Source

Concentration camp
Department II

DECLARATION

I, the
born on
in

hereby make the following declaration:

1. I have recognized that the International Bible Student Association is spreading false doctrine and is merely pursuing goals hostile to the state under the guise of religious activity.
2. I have therefore completely renounced this organization and have also freed myself, internally, from the teachings of this sect.
3. I hereby confirm that I will never again work for the International Bible Student Association. I will immediately report to the police any person who approaches me to promote the false doctrine of the Bible Students or who in any other way expresses his conviction as a Bible Student. If Bible Student pamphlets are sent to me, I will immediately hand them over at the nearest police station.
4. In the future I will respect the laws of the state, and in particular, in the event of war, I will defend my fatherland with arms in hand and fully integrate myself into the national community [*Volksgemeinschaft*].

I have been informed that I will once again be taken into custody again if I fail to comply with the declaration I have made today.

.....Dated.....

.....Signature

Source: Declaration by which Jehovah's Witnesses were to renounce their faith, c. 1938 [Erklärung, mit der Zeugen Jehovas ihrem Glauben abschwören sollten], reprinted in Gerti Malle, „Für alles bin ich stark durch den, der mir Kraft verleiht:“ *Widerstand und Verfolgung der Zeugen Jehovas in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus in Kärnten*. Kitab-Verlag Klagenfurt-Wien, 2011, p. 176. Available online at: <https://alst.org/dokumente/zeugnisse-des-widerstands/erklaerung-die-inhaftierten-und-kz-haeftlingen-in-dieser-form-ab-1938-zur-unterschrift-vorgelegt-wurde/>

Recommended Citation: Attempts to Force Jehovah's Witnesses to Renounce Their Faith (c. 1938), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/nazi-germany-1933-1945/ghdi:document-5127>> [April 30, 2025].