

Decree Concerning Individuals Who Formally Leave their Church (February 18, 1937)

Abstract

Traditionally, most Germans belonged to a church in their community, and a portion of their yearly taxes were paid to that religious institution. If someone decided to leave the church, an official statement had to be sent to the government in order to adjust his or her taxes. Then, at the next service, the name of the departing member was read aloud to the congregation. Below is an official order prohibiting the reading of departing congregants' names from the pulpit. Perceiving the church as a rival to the state's ultimate authority over the individual, the Nazis hoped to loosen the grip of the Christian churches on Germany's many towns and cities. This document is an excellent example of how the Nazi authorities tried to accomplish this goal incrementally. After the issuance of this decree, Germans no longer needed to fear that leaving their local congregation would lead to social shaming. The regime, of course, hoped that this would help wrestle another person away from the churches' influence.

Source

(1) On the basis of the Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of the People and the State of February 28, 1933 (RGBl. 1 p. 83), in agreement with the RuPrMfdkirchLA [Reich and Prussian Ministry for Church Affairs], any public announcement of the names of persons who have left the church is prohibited. In particular, it is prohibited thereafter to read the names of such persons from the pulpit.

(2) Violations shall be punished by imprisonment of not less than one month or by a fine of RM 150 to RM 15,000 in accordance with the decree of February 28, 1933.

Frick

Source: *Die Gesetzgebung des Kabinetts Hitler. Die Gesetze in Reich und Preußen seit dem 30. Januar 1933 in systematischer Ordnung mit Sachverzeichnis*, XXII, p. 676; reprinted in Bernd Sösemann (with Marius Lange), *Propaganda: Medien und Öffentlichkeit in der NS-Diktatur: eine Dokumentation und Edition von Gesetzen, Führerbefehlen und sonstigen Anordnungen sowie propagandistischen Bild- und Textüberlieferungen im kommunikationshistorischen Kontext und in der Wahrnehmung des Publikums*, vol. 1. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011, p. 459.

Translation: Insa Kummer

Recommended Citation: Decree Concerning Individuals Who Formally Leave their Church (February 18, 1937), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/nazi-germany-1933-1945/ghdi:document-5129>> [July 11, 2025].