

Protestant Church Leaders Respond to the July 20, 1944, Assassination Attempt (July 30, 1944)

Abstract

On July 20, 1944, Claus von Stauffenberg (1907–1944) placed a bomb inside the Wolf's Lair, Adolf Hitler's field headquarters in East Prussia. The bomb, which exploded shortly thereafter, ignited a failed coup d'état against Hitler's regime. Among the conspirators, in what was known as Operation Valkyrie, were several military leaders and traditional conservative politicians, as well as known members of the Confessing Church, the strain of Protestantism most adverse to the Nazis' worldview. After the failed assassination attempt of July 20, Hitler invoked the ancient tradition known as *Sippenhaft* to punish the crimes of those considered traitors. With *Sippenhaft*, a person could be guilty simply by association. Starting with those connected to the failed attack, family members, friends, and colleagues of the conspirators were also held responsible. This tradition was used to justify the imprisonment and sometimes murder of thousands of people.

Hans Koch (1893–1945), a professed Confessing Church member and lawyer, was sentenced to death in April 1945 for his involvement in the coup. This document is a clear statement from the Protestant Church against the failed attempt on Hitler's life. Here, Church leaders call out the perpetrators as murderers and traitors and reinforce their loyalty to the Reich and its Führer. Learning of the ties between the resistance movement and the Confessing Church, Protestant authorities feared guilt by association and the consequences that came with it.

Source

Declaration of Loyalty by the German Protestant Church

Attempt on the Führer's Life

With indignation and disgust, the German people turn away from the deed of July 20, which, in an hour requiring the utmost in unity, undertook to overthrow the Reich in turmoil of incalculable proportions by means of murder and treachery. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank the Almighty for the salvation of the leader and ask Him to continue to keep him under His protection. This request comes with a pledge of renewed loyalty and the resolution to submit ourselves even more earnestly than before to the relentless demands of this time, to which the Fuehrer is restlessly devoting himself entirely.

After the attempt on the life of the Führer, the German Protestant Church Chancellery and the Spiritual Council of the German Protestant Church expressed their gratitude to God for his gracious protection in telegrams of loyalty to the Führer. At the same time, the Spiritual Council of Confidence noted that on the Sunday after the assassination attempt, prayers for the Führer were said in Protestant services all over the Reich.

Source: *Das Evangelische Deutschland. Kirchliche Rundschau für das Gesamtgebiet der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche*, Nr. 30-31/1944, p. 74; 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, volume 1. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011, p. 708.

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