

Christoph Probst Das Leben eines Aufrechten

von Peter Schubert

The following is an English translation of a shortened version of an article by the same author in „...damit Deutschland weiterlebt.“ *Christoph Probst. 1919-1943. Hg. Christoph-Probst-Gymnasium Gilching, 2000.* It has been edited especially for the Christoph-Probst-Gymnasium website.

Christoph Probst

Since 8/1/93 we have been allowed to have the name Christoph-Probst-Gymnasium Gilching, in remembrance of a leading member of the White Rose resistance movement against the Nazis and as a warning to all members of our school not to forget the fight against injustice of every kind. The pride and the seriousness with which parents, teachers and students take the name of our school as an obligation, is for example shown by many speeches held by relatives of Christoph Probst and by former members and friends of the White Rose, by the book „... damit Deutschland weiterlebt“, and by a bronze statue which was created by Brigitte Renner, a former arts teacher at our school, who was permanently advised by Christoph Probst's widow. Today the statue decorates our school hall at a striking place. During the 25th anniversary celebrations of our school in April 2000 Christoph Probst's companions like his widow and other resisters of the White Rose met and exchanged their remembrances of this extraordinary person. This was maybe the last chance to gather so many witnesses for conversation. In autumn 2000 the expanded version of our book on Christoph Probst „...damit Deutschland weiterlebt“ will be published.

His Youth

Christoph Probst was born on November 11th 1919 - one year after the end of World War I and the establishment of the first German democracy. The first years of the Weimar Republic were characterized by economic shortages and political fights, with their climax in the year 1923. This year was marked by the “Ruhrkampf” against France,

heavy inflation and, in Munich, by Hitler's Beerhall putsch on November 9th. Christoph's hometown Murnau was also involved in the riots and became soon a stronghold of National Socialism in Upper Bavaria. The family of the private scholar Hermann Probst was never touched by local politics and SA-parades, but like many contemporary intellectuals stayed distanced to the political upheavals. On the whole, the influence of Christoph's parents on his personal development must not be underestimated. As an all-round educated private teacher, who had specialized in Asian culture, his father promoted Christoph's intellectual development and his striving for knowledge through intellectual confrontation, which helped him later to keep up his independent thinking despite difficult circumstances. He had a very good relation to his mother because he didn't go to school in the first year but was taught at home by her. So he got more chances to ask his questions than the other children at school, which surely helped him to develop his critical character. As his parents were divorced very early, Christoph grew up at several places. After living in Kochel he lived some years in Murnau with his mother, then with his father in Oberstdorf and Ruhpolding and finally with his mother in Nürnberg-Wolkersdorf. During this time politics didn't mean anything to Christoph and his sister Angelika, although the NSDAP got more and more popular until 1933. They concentrated on their family, playing, hiking in the mountains and an intensive experience of nature. During his time at grammar school Hitler and the Nazis destroyed democracy and built their inhuman dictatorship. An essential help to the dictatorship was the Hitlerjugend (HJ: Nazi Youth Organisation for boys), which very soon replaced the other youth associations and in which all German youths had to participate from 1936 onwards. Through group meetings, paramilitary training and vacation camps boys and girls were distanced from their parents and made enthusiastic about Hitler and National Socialism. In the beginning Christoph Probst was also influenced by the HJ as he attended the boarding-school in Marquartstein and became a member of the HJ. Roland Klein, his teacher in Marquartstein, describes Christoph (then almost 14) as an unusually intelligent student who was very sympathetic. Klein appreciated his student because of his open-minded character towards other students and his happiness. So Christoph never

seemed depressed to him, not even in the difficult times later. Although Christoph never pushed himself into the forefront, Klein recognized his self-confidence and fearlessness. That is why he called the sport of fencing typical for Christoph as you need adroitness, agility and accuracy of aim. Later Christoph was one of few young people who were able to avoid participation in the HJ: as he changed school to Munich he was able to shake off his membership, and also in Schondorf he kept away from the HJ but participated in some activities to avoid being an outsider in the boarding-school. Finally he had to pay 7.50 marks of contribution fees to get his final A-level certificate. But he could not totally avoid the HJ. In one of his letters he described his visit to the 1936 the party rally (Reichsparteitag) at Nuremberg. On his way he wanted to visit his mother and his stepfather and so he used the time for astronomy, his hobby. A letter shows that he wasn't really impressed by the party rally in as he said that the party rally was boring but that he had a nice time with his mother and at the observatory. So conversation, reading and searching for silence were more important to Christoph than parades and the chaos at the party rally which he mentioned in this letter only in passing. When Christoph went to school in Munich in 1935 he met his friend and fellow-combatant Alexander Schmorell. Alex and Christoph were intellectually and mentally close and shared their hobbies hiking in the mountains and skiing. Christoph wrote in one of his letters about a development of an unbreakable friendship. So it isn't surprising that Alexander Schmorell was best man when Christoph's married Herta Dohrn and godfather of his son Vincent. Later when both of them were soldiers, they practised the same hobby: fencing. After changing school to Schondorf at Ammersee (a lake) he sat his Abitur (A-levels) in 1937. During this time at Schondorf he actively participated in the life at boarding-school and looked after the younger students. On the one hand he complained about the totally disorientated planning of his life which kept him away from astronomy, but on the other hand those duties were very important for him to avoid being an outsider in the school community which he had entered very late. Maybe because of his father's death, lacking an adult and intellectual conversation partner in the family, he found replacement with his teacher, Bernhard Knoop, later is brother in law. Knoop said that is why he was accepted as an equal conversation partner more than a student. The certificate of character which every student received in addition to his final certificate in Schondorf confirms this estimation: "... the adults appreciated his knowledge from the very first day, while some of his companions recognized his character not so quickly..." The just mentioned qualities, the intellectual happiness of life and self-confident ability to judge obviously disagree with the ideal

characteristics of a young Nazi.

The Father

Christoph Probst was the only member of the White Rose who married early, when he was 21, maybe because of the bad experience of his parents' divorce, and wanted a working family life. Herta Dohrn, his wife, came also from a family who was critical about the system. Her brother had to escape from the Gestapo (secret state police) and her father was shot shortly before the end of World War II in April 1945 by the Nazis in Munich. Herta and Christoph had two small sons.

Many photos with his wife, his children and his grandmother show how Christoph enjoyed his life with his family. Sophie Scholl told about a visit at Christoph's house in the mountains: "He was holding his two-year-old son in his arms and looked at his child's face as if spellbound." The family got a young Ukrainian woman called Olga to work in the house, who was accepted in the family and who had a good relationship to them. In January 1943 Herta and Christoph got their third child.

„... gerade mir gibt ja die kleine Familie das Gefühl eines starken Geborgenseins in all dieser Rauhigkeit. Es ist, als ob ich mit ein paar Wurzeln mehr im Boden verankert wäre...“

The University Student

After 1933 the system of universities soon became a basis and stronghold for the Nazi government with only very few critical university lecturers, who were able to keep their jobs after the so-called Gleichschaltung. For example the chemist Heinrich Wieland and Kurt Huber, the mentor of the White Rose, were some of those lecturers. In 1939 after his obligatory army service Christoph Probst started to study medicine in Munich. There he met Hans Scholl at Alexander Schmorell's house (both were members of a student company and were frontline soldiers during their holidays) and got acquainted to the resisters.

Later Christoph had to change universities and continued his studies in the occupied Strasbourg, and from 1942 onwards he studied in Innsbruck. He found it difficult to live there as he missed his family and his friends to discuss the latest news with them. In February 1943 he wrote: "It is not that simple to live in Innsbruck. I'm missing a friend as there are many things you can't stand alone without talking." So he stayed in contact with his family and his friends and used every possibility to meet them.

War

After a war of conquering and destroying almost all of Europe and making it “free of Jews” the eastern front stopped moving in the winter of 1942/1943 near Stalingrad. Almost 300.000 German soldiers were surrounded by the Red Army. In January the German troops had to surrender after numerous casualties. 100.000 soldiers were killed and 91.000 were taken as prisoners of war by the Soviets. The defeat which made the Germans withdraw brought about a change of general opinion. The degree of agreement which Hitler enjoyed at his zenith of power in the summer of 1942 decreased more and more. The crisis of the regime was also to be sensed during a protest by students of the university of Munich. The protest was a reaction to a speech held by the Gauleiter (Party leader) Giesler in front of students in January 1943: “In those times the female students should have children instead of hanging around on the campus.”. Maybe his aides could give a “wonderful experience” to the uglier of the girls. Those sentences led to the maybe biggest scandal at a German university: many students wanted to leave the hall but were not allowed to, they were arrested instead. After some riots they were allowed to leave. Anneliese, Willi Graf’s sister, was an eye witness to this event, the others had stayed away out of protest. Hans Scholl, Alexander Schmorell and Willi Graf were sent to Poland to the Soviet front in 1942. There they closely experienced the atrocities of war and holocaust which strengthened their resistance. As a father of a family Christoph Probst did not have to go to the front and did service in an air force hospital. But he knew about the atrocities of war as he had heard much about it from his friends.

The Time before the “White Rose”

1. The HJ

In their younger years Hans and Sophie Scholl were enthusiastic members of the HJ. Sophie’s patriotism came soon to an end, as she could not agree with the attitudes of the HJ. Especially their anti-Semitism disturbed her. In the beginning Hans was a proud member and became a group leader in the HJ. At a party rally he was allowed to carry the banner, but came back with a changed mind. From that day on he did not want to have anything to do with the HJ.

2. The beginnings of the resistance of the Scholls

The Scholls and their friends participated in the passive resistance against the Nazis by reading

forbidden authors, for example Thomas Mann, Werner Bergengruen or Paul Claudel. The Scholls and their friends were shocked about the events of 9th November 1938, when the SA destroyed most of the German synagogues and shops owned by Jews.

3. Fritz Hartnagel

Fritz Hartnagel was a very good friend of Sophie Scholl. They exchanged letters regularly. As Fritz Hartnagel was an officer keeping up their friendship was very difficult during the war. They met for the last time in 1942. Fritz Hartnagel was injured and evacuated in one of the last airplanes from Stalingrad. The last letter to Fritz was written by Sophie six days before her death. After the war Fritz studied law and cared especially about the war-victims.

The Beginning of the White Rose

1. Manfred Eickemayer

On her 21st birthday Sophie Scholl in 1942 moved to Munich to study biology and philosophy. There she met her brother’s friends who soon got her friends too. She also met the 75-year-old lecturer Karl Muth, who was the publisher of the forbidden magazine “Hochland” and had a great influence on the friends. After the architect from Munich Manfred Eickemayer had told them about the atrocities of the Wehrmacht and the SS they decided to get involved against Hitler themselves.

2. Lecturer Kurt Huber

The lecturer Kurt Huber from Munich supported the friends, who named their group of resistance probably after the book *La Rosa Bianca* by B. Traven, in which a small Mexican hacienda is destroyed by the machinations of an oil company. Kurt Huber supported the members with their thoughts and actions and wrote texts for the leaflets.

3. Active resistance

In addition to the publishing of anti-Nazi texts and leaflets the members did some other active resistance. They collected bread for the prisoners of the Konzentrationslager (concentration camps) and looked after their relatives. They refused contributions for NS-organisations.

4. Connections to other resistance groups

The White Rose had developed into a network of connections mainly in Munich and in Hamburg. In Munich there were over 80 members and supporters, in Hamburg about 50. Hans Scholl had connections to Falk Harnack, the leader of the Communist Rote Kapelle group.

The Scholls

1. The parents

Their father Robert Scholl was mayor of the village of Forchtenberg near Ulm until 1930. Their mother Magdalena formerly was a Lutheran nurse. In 1932 the family moved to Ulm.

2. The other children

The Scholls had five children. Inge Scholl was born in 1917, Elisabeth in 1920 and Werner in 1922. Inge and Elisabeth are the only ones who have survived. Shortly after the war Inge Scholl published the book "The White Rose" to inform all of the world about the actions of her sister and brother. Werner, the youngest son of the family, died as soldier at the eastern front in Russia.

3. Hans and Sophie Scholl

Hans Scholl was born in 1918. He was educated to act on his own and was a very thoughtful, critical and law-abiding person. In the first years after 1933 Hans was perfect for the ideal Nazi and an enthusiastic member of the HJ. He was very proud of being allowed to carry the banner as group leader at a NSDAP- party rally. Hans Scholl Sophie Scholl But he came back from this party rally changed and could not praise the Nazis any longer and distanced himself from the HJ. He studied medicine at Munich University. There he was like his friends a member of the medicine student company, that means in an emergency they could have been sent to one of the places where war took place like an ambulance. Hans was one of the most important members of the White Rose.

Sophie Scholl was born in Forchtenberg in 1921 where she spent her childhood. She was also very thoughtful and striving for justice, but she was also often very cheerful and had fun. After she finished school she studied biology and philosophy in Munich. She discussed politics and entered the White Rose. During the war she had to do her compulsory labour service in an ammunition factory.

The White Rose

At the zenith of the German war victories in the

summer of 1941 Hans Scholl got the last impulse for his will to resist: he heard of the sermons of Bishop Clemens August Earl of Galen from Münster who claimed criminal charges for the killing of mentally disturbed people. Hans's reaction was: "At last someone is brave enough to speak out ... We should have a duplicating machine." Inge Aicher-Scholl, his sister, explained why the students were motivated for resistance:

"The trust and the hope in God could give them the necessary energy. I'm convinced of the Christian attitude of all of them." Even for Christoph Probst, who was baptized only on the day of his execution, that was the main motivation. At a remembrance ceremony in 1946 his sister Angelika even talked about a purely religious motivation for the resistance: "Christoph is not to be described with the words "fighter for freedom" or "revolutionary". Naturally he was no political person. He only seemed to be one, as everything that stood against him or that he disapproved of mentally and lived against was concentrated in politics. So his fight against them was more religious than political."

Hans Scholl started his leaflet actions in the summer of 1942 and soon all of the friends participated. These leaflets, which were distributed in houses and sent by mail, disquieted the Gestapo very strongly: "The content of the leaflets is very subversive... the author has not been found until now. The Munich police are informed." Christoph Probst was not supposed to be integrated that much in order to avoid danger to his family. But he participated very often in the meetings in Munich and appealed to himself to act. At a summer evening meeting in 1942 he said, as Inge Aicher-Scholl remembers:

"We have to do it. We have to show through our attitude and devotion that this is not the end of freedom for the people. We have to risk this 'No!' against a power which raises itself presumptuously above all humanity and threatens to kill all resistants. We have to do it for life's sake. This responsibility can't be taken by anyone else. National Socialism is the name of a mental illness which has infected our people. We must not stand by and watch it dying slowly."

Writing the leaflets Christoph played an important role, too, but he held back from the final activity until the end. The defeat near Stalingrad made him get rid of that reserve and create a leaflet of his own:

"Stalingrad! 200.000 brothers were sacrificed for the prestige of a military impostor. The

human conditions of surrender were kept secret from the sacrificed soldiers. Now the blood of 200.000 men claims criminal charge against Hitler. And do you want to be lied at like the 200.000 men who defended Stalingrad?... Hitler and his political system must fall so that Germany can survive. Decide. Stalingrad and destruction, or Tripolis and a hopeful future. When you have decided, act. ...”

He sent it to Hans. After the Scholls were taken prisoners the Gestapo found it in their flat. Hans wanted to destroy this leaflet and tore to pieces those he couldn't destroy anymore. So the Gestapo were able to find out the author very easily. It was just a matter of time until Christoph was taken into custody when he wanted to visit his ill wife Hertha. He had applied for holiday when he was arrested and transferred to Munich on February 19th 1943.

Important Members of the White Rose

1. Alexander Schmorell

Alexander Schmorell was born in 1917 as the son of a German doctor and his Russian wife. That is why he could speak perfect Russian. He participated in Munich's cultural life and did a lot of sports. He studied medicine and was an ambulance officer with the student company.

2. Willi Graf

Willi Graf was born in 1918. His father was a tradesman. He grew up with two sisters with receiving a very Catholic education which was the reason for his resistance against National Socialism. He studied medicine and was a member of the student company, too.

3. Christoph Probst

Christoph Probst was born in 1919 as the son of quite a rich family. His parents were divorced and together with his sister he attended a boarding grammar school which successfully opposed National Socialist influence for some years. That is why he had a very good relation to his sister. Probst was the only married member.

4. Professor Kurt Huber

Professor Kurt Huber was born in 1893 in Chur in Switzerland. He was a professor for music and psychology at Munich university. Because of his critical speeches his lectures were very popular and often attended by students from many different faculties. He supported the White Rose intellectually by writing texts for the leaflets.

Resistance against Nazism in Germany

The regime distinguished between active and passive resistance. Active resistance was disregard of National Socialist symbols, refusal of charity for NS-institutions, membership in forbidden organizations, help for persecuted people and hidden written criticism by journalists. Passive resistance was keeping distance, speaking against the government and antipathy against Nazi leadership and actions. In addition to the White Rose in Munich and Hamburg there were several other resistance groups: the "Kreisauer Kreis" (circle of Kreisau) with the leader Earl H. J. of Moltke in Kreisau, Silesia, the Red Chapel a communistic resistance organization and some groups of citizens. All of these groups were found out and destroyed by the Gestapo between 1942 and 1944. These resistance groups never presented a real danger for Hitler's political system as there were only a few hundred resistants against 4000 men of the Gestapo.

The Leaflets

1. Financing and producing of the leaflets

The leaflets of the White Rose were produced in hiding-places in Munich, as for example a back street studio. The leaflets were printed from typed stencils and then produced with a duplicating machine. Machines, papers, stencils, envelopes and stamps were financed with charity and private money. Fritz Hartnagel gave 1000 Reichsmark. To avoid suspicion the materials were bought in different shops all over Munich. The leaflets were also published in many big towns in Germany and Austria and in parts of England, Sweden and Norway.

2. The first leaflets

The First leaflet was published in July 1942 with a circulation of 100, which were produced by Hans Scholl, Alexander Schmorell and Christoph Probst. The text begins like this:

“Nothing is more shameful for a civilised nation than handing over government to an irresponsible, barbaric clique.”

Some people who got these leaflets obeyed the law and took them to the police. Some found the involvement against Hitler good. They followed the request to copy the leaflets and gave them to other people. The friends were in great danger because of their work. They kept their actions with the White Rose secret from their families to avoid bringing

danger to them.

3. War service and the three next leaflets

In July 1942 the student company was ordered to Russia and Sophie had to do auxiliary service in an armaments factory for six months. Until the end of 1942 three other leaflets were published to enlighten the population about the Wehrmacht (army) and the SS, and to promote resistance. The texts of the leaflets elucidated the meaninglessness of the National Socialism and the stupidity of the contemporary German leaders.

4. The fifth leaflet

At the beginning of 1943 the leaflet with the title "Request to all Germans" was published by the White Rose. It requested to abolish imperialism and militarism as well as the reintroduction of a constitutional state in Germany with the help of the European countries. 1000 pieces of this leaflet were sent around in Germany, always with the request to copy them again. Important contents were sentences like "The war will surely come to an end", "Hitler cannot win the war he can just lengthen it" or "Decide before it is too late".

5. The speech by Giesler at the 470th anniversary of Munich University

In January 1943 the Gauleiter (party leader) of Munich Giesler made a speech in front of the students. In his speech he said: "Give a child to Hitler instead of hanging around here.". The female students were very angry about this and could rely on the sympathy of their friends. It was a stir. During the following riots there were fights between the students and the SS. The riots held on for almost three weeks.

6. The sixth and last leaflet

The defeat near Stalingrad on February 2nd where 146.000 German soldiers died and another 90.000 were taken prisoners of war made the members of the White Rose publish their sixth leaflet. This leaflet had a circulation of more than 3.000 copies and was sent by mail all around in Germany. In the nights of the 3rd, 5th and 15th February the friends painted slogans like "freedom" and "away with Hitler" on the walls of the university. On February 18th the Scholls decided to distribute the leaflets during the lectures at the university. This action wasn't coordinated with the other members and didn't

agree with their normal way of acting. They took a big suitcase filled with leaflets and put them down in front of the lecture halls and on window sills. Shortly before the end of the lectures they threw a big number of leaflets into the main hall but the caretaker saw them and called the Gestapo so that they got arrested.

Lawsuit, Judgement and Execution

After arresting him the Gestapo questioned Christoph Probst and reconstructed his leaflet.

"Christoph Probst under political arrest, asked about the text of his script, answered as follows: Because of the documents - type writing, photocopy of the original leaflet - given to me I'm able to reconstruct this: ... I managed to reconstruct the text as well as possible. I don't want to say any other word. Christoph Probst."

After being arrested Christoph was very optimistic and did not even think about being executed, which finally was the case. In a letter he wrote to his mother:

"By misfortune I am in a very disagreeable situation. I don't lie if I tell you that I'm fine and that I'm very relaxed. The treatment is all right and life in prison is so that I am not afraid of being arrested for a long time ... I'm only worried about you, my wife, and the small children..."

On February 22nd 1943, after these police investigations, the lawsuit against Christoph Probst, Hans and Sophie Scholl took place. The judge was the notorious Roland Freisler who came especially for this lawsuit from Berlin which shows the significance the White Rose had to the Nazis. In his trial Christoph tried to convince the judges that he had written the leaflet under psychotic depressions to get extenuating circumstances. He said that both the drama of Stalingrad, the political and military situation and his personal problems and family affairs had made him write this leaflet. Because of his family it was important to him to save his head instead of proudly being executed. His strategy wasn't successful. Although Hans Scholl tried to protect him, Probst was sentenced to death. The reason was, as the judges said:

"The defendants have called on people for sabotage of armament and to strike down the National Socialist way of life of our people and insulted our Führer (Hitler) very badly and so helped our enemies and brought damage to our army by publishing leaflets during the war. Therefore they were sentenced to death."

Dr. Probst in diesen Artikel ein. Als zusätzliche Literatur wurde verwendet, so nicht anders gekennzeichnet: - Inge Scholl, Die Weiße Rose, Frankfurt (Fischer) 1977 - Harald Steffahn, Die Weiße Rose, Reinbek (Rowohlt) 1992

About Christoph Probst they said:

“He is an apolitical person, so not a real man! Neither the solicitude of the National Socialist state for his education nor the fact that only the National Socialist population policy made it possible for him to have a family while being a student prevented him from writing a script for Hans Scholl, which used the heroic fight of Stalingrad to call the Führer a con man... Whoever betrays ... our inner front and so in times of war our army, and helps the enemy... threatens our country. This is also correct for Probst who claims that this manuscript was not supposed to become a leaflet. But that does not conform with the printings on the script... If actions like these were not punished with the capital punishment, this would be the beginning of the end like in 1918.”

On the same day Christoph Probst and the Scholls were executed under the guillotine in a Munich prison. Before their execution they got the chance to write to their relatives. The latter were not allowed to receive the letters, they were only allowed to read them in the presence of the Gestapo. So we depend on minutes from memory. Christoph wrote to his mother:

“Thank you for spending life to me. Looking back, I see it was the only way to God... My only sorrow is the pain I bring to you. Don't cry because it would bring pain to me forever. I've just heard that I've got only one hour to live. Now I'm going to be baptized and to receive the Holy Communion. If I'm not able to write another letter send greetings to everyone I love and tell them that my death was easy and happy.”

And to his sister Angelika:

“I didn't know that dying was so easy. I die without any hatred. Soon I'll be closer to you than ever before. I'll wait for you.”

QUELLEN:

Grundlage dieses Artikels sind Materialien, die uns dankenswerterweise von Dr. M. Probst für eine Ausstellung zur Verfügung gestellt wurden. Daneben flossen auch Informationen aus Gesprächen u.a. mit

