

State and Religion: Austrian Quaker Nazi Identity in World War II

Abstract:

The interaction between Quakerism and Nazism has been heavily studied in regards to the aid work Quakers provided, but the topic of the Quakers who sided with the Nazis is rarely explored. This thesis examines how it would be possible for a small group of Quakers in the Vienna Meeting to align themselves politically with the Nazi government while still maintaining their Quaker identities. Specifically the case of Rudolph Boeck, the Vienna representative to the German Yearly Meeting and a member of the Nazi government, illustrates this point most clearly. The non-dogmatic ideas behind Quakerism and the unique cultural circumstances of post-World War I Austria made these two ideologies compatible for the Vienna Quakers of the time.

Introduction

World War II has been a source of fascination for scholars and historians since its occurrence. The history, teleologies, aftermath and events of the time have been extensively researched, explained, questioned and revisited. However despite the extensive knowledge on the subject, there are still areas left unexplored. Though there is a wealth of writing on the aid and support Quakers in Austria and Germany provided to Jews, there is practically no writing on those Quakers that aligned themselves with the Nazi party. Despite the lack of inquiry into this topic, there is evidence that some Quakers in the Vienna Meeting not only supported Nazi policy, but a few such as Rudolph Boeck, the Vienna Meeting's representative to the German Yearly Meeting, worked for the Nazi government. This thesis will examine how the seemingly conflicting

ideologies of Nazism and Quakerism could work together due to the understandings of both in this specific place and time.

Out of all those who have written about Quaker involvement in World War II, the only two historians who have touched on the topic of Nazism within the Quaker community are Hans A. Schmitt and Sheila Spielhofer. Schmitt, the first historian I read who interested me in the topic, only very briefly mentions the existence of Quaker Nazism. His book is largely concerned with the varied lives of Quakers during WWII in America and Europe. Spielhofer, on the other hand, focuses solely on the Vienna Meeting, as she discovered after joining the meeting that little was written or studied about its past, especially during WWII. Her book “Stemming the Dark Tide” takes on the task of uncovering the meeting’s history, but her attempts to absolve Vienna Quakers of responsibility do not fully address the ties between the Vienna Quakers and the Nazi party mainly due to the apologist slant of the text.

One of the most interesting questions raised by this double identity of a Nazi Quaker is how did the Nazi Quakers balance these two seemingly conflicting ideologies. The dual identity works together due to the origins of Quakerism in Austria. The result of the devastation of Austria and Germany after WWI was that all social structures, economic structures and basic national identity had collapsed. Quakers were the first aid workers in the area, and due to this, had a large impact on the peoples of Austria and Germany. Prior to this aid work, the Quaker religion had died out in both countries and it was these Quakers that revived Quakerism in the area. Therefore Quakerism in the area was still to be defined and determined by the German Yearly Meeting, which was formed

in 1925¹ by 40 founders and reached a membership of 199 by 1932.² One unique aspect of the German Yearly Meeting central to its formation was that “German Friends decided not to require new members to sever previous religious affiliations, as they did in yearly meetings elsewhere.”³ This was partially because several of the founding members were still involved with their previous religious affiliations, such as Emil Fuchs, a Lutheran minister. Therefore though all members attended Quaker meeting, many were able to comfortably understand and identify multiple ideologies, which would later serve to help some identify with Nazism. The German Yearly Meeting was a center for debate, dissent and disagreement as to the Quaker response to the Nazi movement throughout WWII. Some Quakers such as the well known Emil Fuchs and Margarete Lachmund, felt moved to continue the established tradition of Quaker pacifism and aid work, while others such as Paul Helbeck and Rudolph Boeck felt that the Nazi party was helping to rebuild and restore Austria and Germany. Though German Yearly Meeting tried to advise the members on how to interpret the state, there was no one doctrinal answer to Nazism from the meeting as members were deeply divided.

The varieties of understandings of Quakerism in Austria and Germany lead to tensions between the Quakers, both native and visiting. The German Yearly Meeting deeply divided between their own as to whether or not to support the new government, and could they accept other Quakers, who supported the government, as Quakers. The meeting also had to contend with the views, influences, and foreign ties of the visiting aid workers who remained active and in Germany and Austria from World War I, who

¹ Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 17.

² Ibid, 19.

³ Ibid, 20.

strongly resisted the new government. This returns to the central issue of the relationship between Quakerism and Nazism. Both grew in Germany and Austria in a similar time period, although as Schmitt says “in a time when Hitler’s following increased by tens of thousands, Quaker recruits could at best be counted by the dozens.”⁴ Still, Quakerism through its aid work campaigns reached thousands of needy Germans and Austrians and brought with their aid work a religious message. Nazism bolstered the political hopes of the devastated countries of Germany and Austria. The issues raised in the German Yearly Meeting help to clarify how Quakers thought of themselves and their politics at the time. Though by no means a united front, the German Yearly Meeting displays the tensions between themselves, their understandings of Quakerism and their political ties.

Political allegiances at this time in Germany and Austria were deeply confused by the numerous movements and the complete destruction of the previous social and political structures of the area. Austria and Germany after WWI were devastated by the economic losses of the war and the loss of the previous political and social orders. Therefore both countries sought to rebuild themselves, and the Nazi party rapidly rose to prominence claiming that it would reassert the power and dignity of the two countries. This message appealed to the people as they looked for hope for the future.

The message of hope the Quakers brought to the area spoke to hope for the future through spiritual means, different from the Nazi claim to political power. As I will discuss further, the Quakers coupled their material aid with spiritual messages of their own faith, which appealed to some of the people they helped. From their aid efforts, Quakerism was revived in Austria and Germany. However, due to the lack of a set

⁴ Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 17.

doctrine in the religion, there was room for interpretation by the members and application to the cultural context at hand, rather than being given strict rules to follow. Therefore in this way, the Quakers of the German Yearly Meeting had a diverse population and all guidance was derived from within the meeting itself, and was subject to the needs of the time.

The debates within the German Yearly Meeting were frequent and divided amongst the members. Though the Quaker periodical, *Die Quaker*, reflected the more liberal and activist members of the meeting's opinions, the meeting itself was never able to resolve their conflicts with a clear path for members to follow during the rise of the Nazi party and WWII. Both the liberal and the quietist Quakers tempered all guidance offered by the meeting. Therefore all statements were open to interpretation as to how Quakers should interact with their faith and the state. The openness of both the instructions of the meeting and of the religion are what allowed for some Quakers to have the dual ideologies of Nazism and Quakerism.

Chapter 1: Vulnerable Austria, its People and the Introduction of Quakerism

This chapter will explore the cultural and religious circumstances that helped the growth of both Nazism and Quakerism in this time and place. Austria was socially and economically devastated after World War I. The once vibrant capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was without resources or stable social institutions. The populace had to find new sources of hope for the future and structure for their daily lives. Due to this need, this multiple movements grew from this distress. The two movements explored in

this thesis, Nazism and Quakerism both gained their strongest supports during this time in this place. Though Nazism had far more followers than Quakerism, the growth both experienced result directly from the circumstances of post-WWI Austria and Germany. Though Nazism grew organically from the peoples of Austria and Germany, and foreign aid workers revived Quakerism, they each brought a new ideology to move Austrians and Germans forth to the future.

Interwar Austria

Austria after World War I was devastated by not only the war, but also by the loss of its empire. Though Europeans of the time referred to Austria as holding a “key economic position”⁵ by the interwar period “Austria [had been] reduced from the economic centre of an empire of fifty-six millions to a small non-self-sufficient country surrounded by high tariff walls.”⁶ Though in a key location, Austria itself had no government capable of taking advantage of its position in Europe, and therefore lost any economic capital it might have had before WWI. Austria was unable to sustain itself or its peoples having previously relied on its empire to keep the cultural capital supported. Out of this devastation, the people looked for leadership and a new social order. A scholar at the time, Dr. R. Gessner, in a talk to the Royal Institute of International Affairs in England in 1936, recognized that “In a country which is in a state of extreme misery you get absolutistic, or theocratic thinking producing violent antagonisms. It is because of

⁵ R. Gessner, “The Future of Austria,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1931-1939)*, Vol.15, No. 2 (March-April 1936): 225-44, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2601741> (accessed September 3, 2012), 225.

⁶ Ibid.

the extreme economic misery in Austria that you find such intense political antagonisms.”⁷ His understanding at the time was entirely accurate. It was this extreme economic misery that the Quaker missionaries were responding to in their aid work, but their ministry was only able to go so far in alleviating the suffering of the populace. While economic aid was essential, the construction of a new social order or new ideologies were essential to the devastated populace’s recovery. Due to the extreme conditions, some of the responses, such as Nazism, rose to meet the situation at hand.

From this new start after the devastation of WWI multiple social groups emerged, but one of the fastest growing was the Nazi Party in both Germany and Austria.⁸ Though the Austrian Nazi party was different from the German Nazi party, the two groups had similar ideals and the National Socialism that was preached in both countries gestured towards the power and supremacy of the Germanic nation. “Austria was forced to exist against its own will in 1918. In the first constitution which it gave itself, it declared itself to be part of Germany.”⁹ This shows Austria’s stance on its relationship to Germany. The native language of Austria is German, and immediately after the end of WWI, it declared itself to be part of Germany. However, the path to the *Anschluss*, the unification of Germany and Austria, was marred by the *Putsch*, the failed coup d’état by Nazi Germany to take over the Austrian government.

Despite this, historians have represented Austria’s willingness to join with Germany in a multiplicity of ways following WWII, and clarification is necessary. The

⁷ R. Gessner, “The Future of Austria,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1931-1939)*, Vol.15, No. 2 (March-April 1936): 225-44, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2601741> (accessed September 3, 2012), 230.

⁸ Ibid, 227.

⁹ Ibid, 243.

willingness of the Austrian people to unify with Germany prior to the *Anschluss* has been heavily debated after the end of WWII, due to Austria's first victim myth. The first victim myth removes culpability from Austria, as the country is represented as being the first victims of the Nazi party, rather than accomplices. This has been debunked due to the large amount of evidence against the myth, but is still necessary to clarify in my argument. Jacqueline Vansant succinctly explained Austria's understanding of the myth in *The German Quarterly*;

“In both public and private discourse in Austria, the dominant narratives concerning the seven years under National Socialism portray the country and the general population as victims. The ‘storytellers’ deny widespread Austrian approval of the Anschluss and any complicity in the crimes committed under the National Socialists.”¹⁰

This narrative was so effective for the Austrian people after WWII that it took many years for this mythology to be debunked by historians and critics outside the country, and only recently has the debunking of this mythology become the standard understanding for Austria's role in WWII. Vansant concluded the article by confirming Austria's culpability, “No one can deny that the general Austrian population suffered during World War II. But not everyone who suffers is a victim. By viewing their own suffering as paramount, many Austrians relativize history in order to avoid responsibility or admission of possible gain from others' suffering.”¹¹ By believing the first victim myth, it gives the Austrian people the ability to ignore the benefits Austria gained from the *Anschluss* and Nazi regime.

¹⁰ Jacqueline Vansant, “Challenging Austria's Victim Status: National Socialism and Austrian Personal Narratives,” *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Winter, 1994): 38-57, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/408117> (accessed September 3, 2012), 38.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 41.

Introduction of Quakerism and Quaker Aid in Interwar Austria

In order to understand the different types of Quakers found in Vienna during World War II, it is essential to understand how Quakerism was first brought to the Viennese community. The majority of the Quaker presence in Austria during World War I was comprised largely of missionaries and aid workers, although the War Victims' Relief Committee Reports can be read as intending to conflate the two. These reports were circulated in English to British and American Friends to ask for aid in both time and money, as well as to chronicle the achievements of the Relief Committee abroad. The reports not only measure and assess the work that the Quakers are doing abroad, but are an essential look into the beginnings of Quakerism in Germany and Austria at this time. According Hans Schmitt "Until the mid-twentieth century, the majority were American or British."¹² This, plus the fact that there were no Quaker meetings since the 18th century in Germany, means that the majority of native Austrian Quakers during WWII converted after WWI, or were children of those converts. In this section, I will look at what the Quakers did during WWI and the Interwar period, as well as how they had involved themselves through their aid works with the Austrian people, which caused the revival of Quakerism in Austria.

Though the War Victims' Relief Committee of the Society of Friends was created very early in WWI, they were unable to go to "enemy countries" until after the armistice was declared as they note in their fifth report. Prior to the cessation of hostilities the members of the War Victims' Relief Committee were in Russia, Serbia, Switzerland,

¹² Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), xi.

Armenia, Holland and France. The Committee changed its name to Emergency & War Victims' Relief Committee as they involved themselves in countries with increasingly dire circumstances, such as Poland, Germany and Austria as covered first in their sixth report.¹³ This is due to the fact that since the armistice, the Quakers felt that having separate committees performing the same tasks in the same countries was unnecessary and decided to unite the two committees. Austria and Germany are treated as separate nations in the report, although the subcommittee chair is Harrison Barrow for both Germany and Austria, therefore showing that though listed separately, the situations and peoples are similar enough to fall under the same chairperson on the subcommittee. The sixth report also informed the reader that the Relief Committee was the first organization in "so-called enemy countries"¹⁴ where they were "the pioneers in initiating relief work."¹⁵ This is significant because as the first relief workers in the areas, they made some of the largest impacts in doing small deeds to aid people in need. This, as the first act of help after a devastating war, would have made a large impact on those they fed and clothed in Austria and Germany. This impact would serve to help Quakers receive respect in the countries, and certainly aided the resurrection of the religion in the region.

A very important part of the Relief Committee's work was their spiritual aid, along with their material aid. For those on the Committee, it was their way of enacting their faith in the world to provide aid in foreign countries. However, while fighting was still active during WWI, the aid workers were unable to profess their faith along with

¹³ Emergency & War Victims' Relief Committee of the Society of Friends, *Sixth Report of the Emergency & War Victims' Relief Committee of the Society of Friends: October 1918 to March 1920* (London: Alf Cooke, Ltd., 1920).

¹⁴ Ibid, 5.

¹⁵ Ibid, 5.

their aid work. This was revoked after the cessation of hostilities, as the sixth report stated

“We have to be thankful not only for new areas accessible but for new liberties regained, for with the withdrawal of the declaration which workers used to have to sign that they would undertake no propaganda, we are again free to express in words as well as by deeds the principles which prompt our help to suffering humanity.”¹⁶

This created a different kind of aid work in Austria and Germany, as prior to the sixth report the aid workers were forced to sign a contract that they would undertake no propaganda, which would have also included the spiritual message that the Quaker workers wanted to spread. This spiritual message of Quakerism that the aid workers brought can be defined as Social Witness, the desire to enact the Quaker inner spirituality by improving the world. One essential part of Quakerism for these aid workers was the common humanity of all, including those in need in enemy countries. Therefore when others were hesitate to help those their countries had fought against, the Quakers saw aid work in Germany and Austria as no different than aid work in Britain. The workers' ability to express the inner spirituality was what introduced the true idea of Quaker aid to Austria and Germany. Nowhere else in post-WWI Europe did Quakerism become so firmly connected with their aid work. Therefore the Quaker aid work not only was an important factor for converts, but anyone aided by the Quakers in the post-WWI era remembered it throughout their lives. By bringing non-Quakers into the Quaker fold, their sphere of influence was that much widened. This would serve the Quakers well

¹⁶ Emergency & War Victims' Relief Committee of the Society of Friends, *Sixth Report of the Emergency & War Victims' Relief Committee of the Society of Friends: October 1918 to March 1920* (London: Alf Cooke, Ltd., 1920), 5.

during WWII, as many remembered the effect the Quakers had on individual lives with their aid work.

By bringing a spiritual message to the aid work it became also missionary work, which had not been the case previously during WWI for Quakers. This change was important, because as previously stated, their faith was what motivated the aid workers to carry out their work in Europe. The Quakers were optimistic about their missionary work, though they realized in their reports the limitations of their work, as shown in the Committee's sixth report.

“We believe that no true relief work can be carried on without the spiritual message, the converse is not true, and we may anticipate the maintaining of such centres of Quaker teaching long after the more urgent need for our relief work has ceased...we believe that the practical Christian lives led by our workers and the friendships they have formed with those amongst whom they have lived, are potent influences in turning people to seek whence they draw their inspiration and in creating a desire to know the truth as we believe it.”¹⁷

They believed that not only is their relief work impossible without a spiritual influence, but also that the aid they provided and the connections they made had influenced those they helped to turn towards “the truth as [they] believe it,” i.e., the Quaker religion and way of life. This quote truly sums up the message that the Relief Committee was hoping to bring to Europe with their aid work. That though they understood that the largest impact they may have is to physically aid those in the countries they worked in, their purpose for helping was not only physical, but also spiritual. The aid workers could provide physical aid, but the Quakers felt that it was not only a physical need but also a spiritual need as the countries they were active in were not only physically devastated.

¹⁷ Emergency & War Victims' Relief Committee of the Society of Friends, *Sixth Report of the Emergency & War Victims' Relief Committee of the Society of Friends: October 1918 to March 1920* (London: Alf Cooke, Ltd., 1920), 6.

Therefore it was important to those aid workers to emphasize their Quaker identity and faith to those they helped. The aid workers led by example for those they helped, hoping that perhaps the impoverished peoples of Austria and Germany would be inspired by the missionary aid workers to lead a more Quaker way of life. These attempts are largely successful in their eyes, as stated by the Committee in their seventh report.

“We believe that wherever our workers have been the bearers of physical relief they have been received also as ambassadors of a spirit of brotherhood and reconciliation. We have many and increasing evidences of this fact, and it may truly be said that the peoples of Central Europe have regarded our gifts and services as an earnest of a new spirit.”¹⁸

The emphasis in both reports shows that the spiritual work was the most important part for the aid workers, though the physical gifts and help they brought Central Europe was essential, it was the spiritual message that helped them make connections on a deeper level with the populace. This acknowledgement of the effectiveness of the spiritual message in their report helps to explain the number of converts in the areas visited after the lifting of the ban of missionary work. In this way their work in Austria, Germany and Poland was unique in that the Quakers were able to combine, for the first time during WWI, their aid work with their spiritual message.

All of the “enemy states” were in grave situations after the armistice, but the Quakers felt that especially Austria, and secondly Germany, was in the most danger as discussed in their seventh report.

“It must be remembered that in the first period after the Armistice many were stunned by the overwhelming defeat; in the dissolution of the empire all threads of social organization had been broken and the Austrians, weakened by long

¹⁸ Emergency & War Victims’ Relief Committee of the Society of Friends. *Seventh Report of the Emergency & War Victims’ Relief Committee of the Society of Friends: April 1st, 1920 to March 21st, 1921*, 3.

continued undernourishment, did not find it easy to adapt themselves to the new conditions.”¹⁹

The danger seen here was that not only had previous aid and social structures fallen apart, but that the populace could not find a way in their shock to help themselves. As the situation in Austria had worsened throughout WWI, the populace became increasingly helpless, and after the defeat, there was no system in place to revive the people or the state. The danger seen here was not only of the countries ceasing to function, but that potentially a more dangerous social order could take over these vulnerable countries. The aid workers were concerned for the future of the states, and also for the future of Europe as they witnessed the dire conditions in the countries. “Although Germany has not as yet suffered perhaps as acutely as Austria, the conditions there are very serious, and so far growing worse from day to day, and threaten to become of the utmost gravity, not only to Germany but to the whole of Europe, if steps are not taken to remedy the causes of them.”²⁰ This perhaps helps to explain the focus on the aid work on younger generations. Though there was some help to the elderly, the main push of the aid work was to bring relief to students and children. This would be to try to bring a message of hope to those who would grow up to run the state, such as students, as opposed to letting the people Austria and Germany feel that they have no help and no options.

The Relief Committee’s work in Austria connected them with essential members of the population, namely children, mothers, and students. When the Quakers arrived in

¹⁹ Emergency & War Victims’ Relief Committee of the Society of Friends. *Seventh Report of the Emergency & War Victims’ Relief Committee of the Society of Friends: April 1st, 1920 to March 21st, 1921*, 7.

²⁰ Emergency & War Victims’ Relief Committee of the Society of Friends, *Sixth Report of the Emergency & War Victims’ Relief Committee of the Society of Friends: October 1918 to March 1920* (London: Alf Cooke, Ltd., 1920), 13.

Vienna, they discovered that in Austria the infant mortality rate was far higher than the birthrate due to malnourishment and disease. The sixth report stated, “[Vienna’s] supplies of essentials such as coal, milk, clothes and credit have dwindled to a fraction of what is required.”²¹ The Quakers, in response, worked with Welfare Centres that existed in districts to distribute essentials such as milk, sugar, butter, oatmeal, cocoa and soap. Through this program their aid reached at least 25,000 families in 1919.²² However, this was still not enough to cope with the astounding numbers of ill children. “By the end of October [1921] 83,483 children had been examined; of these only 8,665 were normal” and the rest ranged from “32,267...rather undernourished,” “33,589...badly undernourished” to “8,962...very badly undernourished.”²³ This is a clear example of how devastated the Austrian population was, that such large numbers of children in the center of Vienna could be so ill. Despite the lack of supplies available, the Quakers felt that what they could provide was bringing some comfort to those they reached. The Quakers also felt that their missionary work continued to be needed and brought “hope and faith in the power of Divine Love,”²⁴ as written in the seventh report. This message of hope coupled with the physical aid that made an impact on those they helped, as seen from the numerous thanks from Germans and Austrians the reports feature. It was this spiritual message that sustained the Quaker missionaries in Austria and Germany, and it was also this message of hope that they infused in their aid work.

²¹ Emergency & War Victims’ Relief Committee of the Society of Friends, *Sixth Report of the Emergency & War Victims’ Relief Committee of the Society of Friends: October 1918 to March 1920* (London: Alf Cooke, Ltd., 1920), 12.

²² Ibid, 12.

²³ Emergency & War Victims’ Relief Committee of the Society of Friends. *Seventh Report of the Emergency & War Victims’ Relief Committee of the Society of Friends: April 1st, 1920 to March 21st, 1921*, 5.

²⁴ Ibid, 5.

In addition to their family aid, the Quaker student initiatives were a calculated attempt to not only aid, but also to influence the young adult population of Austria and Germany. The aid workers “found such evidence of real distress and illness among students in Vienna that [they] felt that the future of the State was seriously threatened.”²⁵ The aid workers were concerned that without help that Austria would fail due to malnutrition of its youth, that there would be no newly educated minds to help the country to a new social order. Therefore the student population was one of the most targeted populations of the Quaker aid work. Due to lack of nutrition and lack of appropriate clothing, the student population was in serious danger of starvation or freezing in the Austrian winters. Their first solution in Austria was “Clothing sales...arranged for the poorest of the students at which they are allowed to buy the most necessary garments at the very low price which they can afford. Warm breakfasts have now been arranged to begin shortly, starting with 500 students and increase shortly to 1500.”²⁶ In later reports, and in Germany, they continued to grow their aid programs for students. They saw the students as “perhaps future leaders of Germany” and “[realized] what depends on clear vision and study to fit them for wise judgment and clear foresight, one understands the urgency of doing something to help them.”²⁷ The Quakers were incredibly perceptive in this regard in that they understood not only what population would be most open to their message of a new way of religiously interacting with the

²⁵ Emergency & War Victims’ Relief Committee of the Society of Friends, *Sixth Report of the Emergency & War Victims’ Relief Committee of the Society of Friends: October 1918 to March 1920* (London: Alf Cooke, Ltd., 1920), 13.

²⁶ Ibid, 13.

²⁷ Ibid, 15.

world, but also that they sensed which population was going to be most influential in the upcoming years.

The aid work the Relief Committee provided coupled with their missionary message helps to show why Quakerism revived in Austria and Germany in the mid-twentieth century. Being some of the first to aid the populaces and provide a message of hope after a devastating war clearly left an influence on those they aided, both children and students. Therefore it is unsurprising that though prior to WWI there were few Quakers in Germany and Austria, by WWII there was a mid-sized population of Quakers in both countries. As previously stated by the seventh report, the populace of Austria were stunned by the defeat, and due to the dissolution of the empire lost all threads of social organization. Therefore as the Quakers were some of the first to come with aid, organization and a message of hope, it stands to reason that many connected with the spiritual message of humanity that followed. It was this message of common humanity and hope for a better future that attracted many to Quakerism, as there was a lack of social order and hope for the future in post-WWI Austria and Germany. The unity and accepting message of Quaker beliefs, as will be explained in the next section, helped to provide stability for some members of the devastated populace.

Quaker Belief and Practice

Quakers around the world have a variety of understandings of what their Quakerism asks of them. Therefore there are many ways of understanding and enacting one's faith in Quakerism. Generally Quaker doctrine asks that members interact with the

world and do not lose themselves wholly to the spiritual, but there is not one central dogma or credo that Quakerism follows. As Hans Schmitt says in his introduction, “Quaker theology begins and ends a personal experience.”²⁸ However, a personal experience does not necessitate turning inward on oneself and ignoring the world. This means that for many Quakers, it is their conscience that helps them to understand how to live in the world and how to enact their spirituality. Two of the main Quakers ways of living in the world are quietist and activist. Quietist Quakers believe in the quieting of daily activities and that one’s spirituality is an inward experience. Activist Quakers, such as the missionaries, see their activism coming from their spirituality, and that the activism they carried out in reforming and aiding the world is a direct witness to their Quaker faith. Both of these types of Quakers share a common belief in the main concepts of Quakerism, as outlined in this section, but interact very differently with the world based on their understanding of the behaviors that Quakerism asks of them as opposed to their Quaker spirituality.

One concept that the Quakers who brought Quakerism to Austria and Germany felt was imperative to follow was Social Witness, the combination of their inward spirituality and their outward deeds. This was not an original part of the Quaker faith, but “after early millenarian or perfection hopes had been abandoned [the Quakers] strove...to reform society [rather] than to effect a total change.”²⁹ In this the Quaker missionaries in Austria and Germany carried out their faith by enacting social change such as feeding the starving communities, clothing the poor, and providing medical care for the ill. Instead of

²⁸ Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 1.

²⁹ Peter Brock and Nigel Young, *Pacifism in the Twentieth Century* (Syracuse, NY: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 1999), 7.

trying to overhaul society, the Quakers sought to minister to the humanity in all. Inner Light, the Inner Light of Christ in each person, in the Quaker faith guides individual's religious experience and what he or she feels moves him or her to action. For example, early Quakers "concluded that war and violence, even when employed by the 'saints,' contradicted the Inner Light of Christ within us."³⁰ However, not all Quakers subscribe to this, or they choose to interpret it in different ways, such as conscientious objection or refusing to work in a fighting capacity for the military. Though this is one example of the varieties of understanding Quakerism, and helps to illustrate how the lack of a specific dogma or credo allows for multiple understandings of Quakerism amongst Quakers. It is a personal understanding of one's own Inner Light that dictates action in the world, therefore one's own life and circumstances partially dictate a personal understanding of the Inner Light.

It was partially this freedom of choice in religion that drew some Quakers in German and Austria to the religion.

"Hans Albrecht, clerk of the German Yearly Meeting during the Third Reich, pursued the vision of a community of searchers not bound by doctrine. [In his view, the Quaker community was] 'Not a community of menials whose opinions should be leveled into *one* opinion by some form of coercion and forced into a narrow inescapable lane, but a community of free individuals who seek their way together in mutual responsibility and in responsibility towards God."³¹

For the German Yearly Meeting, Quakerism did not lead them down a strict path of doctrinal religion, but rather let each member come as an individual. In this way the religion placed a great deal of responsibility for one's own spirituality in the individual.

³⁰ Peter Brock and Nigel Young, *Pacifism in the Twentieth Century* (Syracuse, NY: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 1999), 7.

³¹ James Irvin Lichti, *Houses on the Sand?: Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 16.

Therefore it was a community based off of diversity rather than homogeneity, and the mutual responsibility owed to each other was finding the appropriate and spiritual way to live in the world and to live with God. One reason why the Germany Yearly Meeting emphasized individuality was that in the meeting at the time one did not have to sever previous religious ties. Therefore each member was coming in with diverse backgrounds and religious perspectives, despite all being united as Quakers and members of the German Yearly Meeting. Quakerism's goal was not to force one opinion on the members of the meeting, but that there should be discourse and hopefully the members would feel moved to similar conclusions from their inward spiritual life. At the same time, the members were responsible for and to each other, as well as to God. The freedom of debate, dissent and personal choice in Quakerism was an important and lively part of the German and Austrian meetings.

However, this freedom and individual decisions served to allow for different understandings of what each Quaker's responsibility was. Schmitt's observation that "the absence of dogmatic practices has tended to undermine Quaker unity"³² is most clearly shown by the differing opinions of the German Yearly Meeting. Some in the Berlin meeting saw it as their responsibility to help Jews escape the country; some in Vienna saw it as their responsibility to follow the state. Yet both these meetings were part of the same German Yearly Meeting. The differences between the Quakers greatly undermined the unity of the German Yearly Meeting, as it was very difficult to reach consensus between the members. Because there was no doctrine and no one opinion forced on the members of the Berlin and Vienna Meetings, the members did not necessarily have to

³² Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 9.

enact their religion in the same way. However, both could be united in the same German Yearly Meeting as the meeting was a center for debate throughout all of WWII. Each individual was entitled to their opinion, understanding of Quakerism, and way of living in the world, as Quakerism allows. However, this meant that no one strict code of how to interact with the new government could be formed by the meeting. The emphasis placed by the German Yearly Meeting was not necessarily on enacting ethics, but on how the Quakers were to live in their uncertain world during the Interwar period and WWII.

Ethics for Quakers, like many other religions, are not divorced from the main spiritual life of the religion, however, uniquely for Quakerism, that spiritual life is mainly inward, and then brought to the outside world in either a quietist or activist manner. Therefore, if a Quaker feels that what is ethical is to provide aid work, and that his or her faith moves them to, they find a way to provide aid. If a Quaker feels that the best way to live their life ethically is do serve the state and their faith is an inward, private experience, then they may not feel moved to do the same aid work. There was no point for the Quakers of the German Yearly Meeting to have to choose one path or the other based on the principles of the meeting. This means that the Quakers in Germany and Austria during WWII had the freedom to interpret and enact their ethics and faith in whatever manner they felt was appropriate for their own lives.

Chapter 2: The Vienna Meeting, Nazism and Rudolph Boeck

Due to the unique circumstances of the time and place, these Nazism and Quakerism both had a profound effect on many parts of the populace in Germany and

Austria. Quakerism, as the less rigid ideology, found itself needing to react to the overwhelming power of the Nazi institution. This chapter explores the Quaker reactions to the Nazi party as seen through the German Yearly Meeting, the Quaker newspaper *Die Quäker*, and the Quaker Rudolph Boeck. The reactions across the German Yearly Meeting were incredibly diverse, and this was due to the previously discussed deeply personal nature of Quakerism. The German Yearly Meeting attempted to guide its members, but due to dissent and disagreement within, the meeting was unable to ever form a clear response to Nazism. Therefore, as Nazism helped those included within its exclusive boundaries, some Quakers benefitted from this exclusivity.

The German Yearly Meeting's Tensions: Activist or Quietist?

Quakerism as a religion was counted, along with German Mennonites and Seventh Day Adventists, as a *Freikirche*;

“In between the church mainstream and pacifist sects were several pacifist communities closer to the denominational mold. They belonged to a niche of German Christendom known as *Freikirchen*: free churches. Lacking the German provincial churches' ties to the state, they still stood closer to the theological mainstream than the sects.”³³

Lacking the ties to the state allowed the *Freikirchen* the freedom to choose how closely they would align themselves with the state, as their theological views were not so far from the mainstream that they would be considered dangerous. The Nazi reaction to the *Freikirchen* as opposed to the sects and provincial churches was comparatively mild.

“The regime outlawed most sects and sought to diminish the societal stature of provincial

³³ James Irvin Lichti, *Houses on the Sand?: Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 2.

churches; at the same time, it tended to bypass free churches.”³⁴ The cause of this bypassing is unclear, but when Protestant churches, sects and Jehovah’s Witnesses began to suffer, the free churches “remained comparatively untouched.”³⁵ Hans Schmitt offers a few ideas as to why this was, and one the most compelling reasons is that “some Gestapo officials had themselves benefitted from the child feedings of the 1920s, a fact that would continue to surface in a variety of encounters throughout the Nazi era.”³⁶ Schmitt’s evidence combined with Lichti’s description of a dictionary for children that laid out only three religions, Protestantism, Catholicism and Quakerism,³⁷ clearly support the idea that the memory of the aid work the Quakers provided helped to protect the religion during World War II. Therefore, despite the Quakers being the *Freikirche* to remain furthest in message from the Nazi party, they were still dealt with lightly due to the memory of the life saving aid work provided by the Quaker aid workers after World War I.

Many of the free churches, according to Lichti, were reluctant to risk their relatively safer status by criticizing the regime. The Quakers, moreso than the other two free churches, opposed parts of the Nazi regime’s policies in their monthly paper (*Der Quäker*)³⁸, occasionally through anti-Jewish metaphor,³⁹ and “modeled what a Christian

³⁴ James Irvin Lichti, *Houses on the Sand?: Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁶ Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 54.

³⁷ James Irvin Lichti, *Houses on the Sand?: Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 96.

³⁸ Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 126, *Der Quäker* “counted almost six hundred subscribers” at its peak.

³⁹ James Irvin Lichti, *Houses on the Sand?: Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 152.

periodical *did not have to say*.”⁴⁰ Though anti-Jewish metaphor sounds in line with the Nazi party policy, Lichti argues that when employed in *Der Quäker* it was taking nationalist examples from the Old and New Testaments and criticizing the nationalism of the Israelites. Despite opposing the Nazi party policy, this does not mean that the publication was free from bias. In Lichti’s view, the Quaker periodical “...maintained a critical distance to Nazi ideology while Mennonite and SDA periodicals did not.”⁴¹ This may be true, but the editors of the paper were clearly opposed to the regime, having fled their home country in 1933.⁴² Therefore though the paper holds interesting Quaker outlooks on the war and the events in Germany and Austria, the paper has a clear bias towards the opinions that are closer to those held by those who chose to subvert and oppose the Nazi regime than those who upheld the state ideals.

An essential part of understanding the tensions in the German Yearly Meeting is understanding the variety of opinions about the state contained within the Meeting. As Lichti emphasizes, “German Friends never advanced a simplistic understanding of separation of church and state, and certainly never advocated an unconditional regard for the authority of the state. But they also did not present a united front.”⁴³ Therefore there was no clear-cut separation in the lives of the Quakers on how to interact with the state. Though some Quakers perhaps felt it their duty to follow the state’s authority, some felt that what the state was doing went against their religion. The meeting itself did not have one opinion that it put forth, nor did it attempt to instruct its members exactly what to do.

⁴⁰ James Irvin Lichti, *Houses on the Sand?: Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 55.

⁴¹ Ibid, 20.

⁴² Ibid, 18.

⁴³ Ibid, 53.

Instruction would have gone directly against the meeting's choice to allow each individual member to decide his or her path in order with his or her own conscience. This multiplicity of Quaker positions in church and state is partially what created contentious debate in the German Yearly Meeting during the Nazi regime. For most of the German and Austrian Friends, their Quakerism was an essential part of their identity, but Quakerism doctrinally did not dictate their understanding of what authority the state should hold, merely that they should form their own opinions. Therefore it is unsurprising that some Quakers, like most other Austrians and Germans, followed the common practice of trusting and supporting the Nazi regime. German and Austrian Quakerism's official stance on trusting the regime was that they should be "loyal citizens 'to the extent that it is reconcilable with their obedience to God and their recognition of the claims of God upon them.'"⁴⁴ In Quakerism, one's obedience to God and recognizing the claims of God is derived from one's conscience and understanding of one's faith. This is clearly derived from the ways in which Quakerism was brought to Austria and Germany, namely that each individual should do what their faith moves them to do. As the aid workers were moved to go to the "enemy states" and provide aid, their message of conscience dictating action in the world was passed onto those who converted. If a Quaker could reconcile obeying the state and obeying what God has called him or her to do, then a Quaker could easily be both a Nazi and a Quaker. Perhaps for Quakers who joined the Nazi regime, they felt the best way to carry out God's work was to be a part of the state which was, in their eyes, rebuilding Germany and Austria.

⁴⁴ James Irvin Lichti, *Houses on the Sand?: Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 53.

Part of what appealed about political Nazism, which enticed some Quakers, was the inclusive quality of the movement. If one was included in the *Völk*, the German word for people, or the “right” people by Nazi definition, then it was a new kind of inclusiveness that some had not previously experienced. “[The] more ‘inclusive’ dimension of Nazism and nationalism usually gets short shrift. The horror of Nazi ideology lies in its genocidal exclusiveness, but much of its popular appeal lay in its circumscribed inclusiveness.”⁴⁵ Due to the economic distress following World War I, students and those poorly connected found it hard to feed themselves or find work. The inclusive attitude of Nazism and the massive government the Nazi party operated opened up jobs to many who had been unable to find employment. For the first time since WWI, under the Nazi government many Austrians were able to feel included in a larger organization or identity, as they had been in the Hapsburg Empire.

One possible reason Quaker rhetoric and their paper *Der Quäker* largely avoided anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic language and ideas is due to the fact that unlike other churches, they felt no need de-Judaize the bible, as the faith was not based directly on the Christian Bible.⁴⁶ Anti-Judaism and Anti-Semitism despite sounding like similar concepts are not actually that alike. Anti-Judaism is against the religion itself, and creates the supersessionist rhetoric, that Christianity has supplanted Judaism, and desire to remove or criticize the “Jewish” aspects of the Christian Old Testament. Anti-Semitism is against the concept of a Jewish people or race, and despite including attacks against the religion of Judaism, is a different concept than anti-Judaism. There were notable examples in *Der*

⁴⁵ James Irvin Lichti, *Houses on the Sand?: Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 116.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 163.

Quäker of anti-Semitic examples that Lichti asserts were metaphors for criticisms of the anti-international sentiment of the Nazis. Emil Fuchs, a former Lutheran pastor, though not a Nazi, did criticize Judaism with “his conviction that Christianity superseded Judaism: Jesus had transformed the Jewish conception of God, making it ‘infinitely more profound, vast, and noble.’”⁴⁷ Fuchs also presented Jewish religious legalism as ‘the reason why Jews kept falling away from God.’⁴⁸ Both of these examples present Judaism as an inferior religion that is causing its own distance from God, rather than Christianity who Fuchs sees as moving people towards God through more “profound, vast, and noble” means. Though far from the inhumane extremes that the Nazi party reached in response to Judaism, the fact that a Quaker who helped Jews flee Germany would condemn Judaism and Jews in this manner is telling of the general anti-Semitism of the period. “Hostility regarding the presence of Jewish members surfaced even in the German Yearly Meeting. While it never led to the exclusion of Jews from the Quaker body, it illustrates that these sentiments and anxieties were so pervasive that they penetrated even the liberal haven of the German Friends.”⁴⁹ This hostility towards the presence of Jewish members of the meeting shows that the fear of and disregard for Jews was a part of the German Yearly Meeting, at least in part. Not only was there anti-Jewish sentiment in the meeting, but also early in Quakerism’s resurrection in Germany and Austria the German Yearly Meeting took it upon themselves to consider “The Jewish Problem.”

“During the late 1920s, certain German Friends promoted the conventional Christian solution to the ‘Jewish Problem’: conversion to Christianity...One likely reason why the German Yearly Meeting did not adopt the ‘conversion

⁴⁷ James Irvin Lichti, *Houses on the Sand?: Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 164.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 164.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 170.

solution' was that many German Quakers entertained an interfaith perspective. To be precise, German Friends were divided. One sector maintained that Quakerism was specifically Christian; the opposing sector believed that Quakerism transcended Christianity."⁵⁰

As stated earlier, the German Yearly Meeting did not require members to give up their previous religious affiliations. However, this does not mean that some members did not want Quakerism to be exclusively Christian. Therefore as tensions arose in Germany and Austria as to "The Jewish Question," the meeting had to confront the diversity of opinions on religious affiliation within the meeting. This also shows that there were conservative voices within the meeting, but the overall population of the meeting did lean towards the liberal, as there was ultimately no solution created to answer "The Jewish Question."

Despite the strains of anti-Semitism that can be found, many Quakers in the German Yearly Meeting were quite liberal and accepting of all. The Quakers of the Berlin Meeting were perhaps the least anti-Semitic of the Christian organizations in Germany. In 1931, the Berlin Quaker Meeting issued an apology to the Jewish people of Berlin after an attack by anti-Semitic gangs after Rosh Hashanah saying, "*We feel a sense of co-responsibility and complicity, because we did not do enough to detoxify the hate-filled atmosphere.*"⁵¹ Many similar apologies were released after WWII to the Jewish populace by organizations, but the Berlin Meeting was the only unaffected organizations to recognize the atmosphere of the time as it was occurring and to stand up to it in this way. This is one of the many ways that the Berlin Quaker Meeting set itself apart from not only other Germans, but also other Quaker Meetings. The Berlin Quaker Meeting was

⁵⁰ James Irvin Lichti, *Houses on the Sand?: Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 166.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 185-186.

home to numerous Quakers who helped Jews and other oppressed peoples during the Nazi regime. Despite the liberalism and aid work of the meeting, only two years later in 1933 a peace activist named Marie Pleissner came to the Berlin Meeting,

“In the hope that they might issue some form of public protest...she chose the right German Quaker Meeting, for none was more activist or more outspoken in its opposition to anti-Semitism than the Berlin Meeting. She recalled that her plea received a cool reception: ‘They said, ‘If you want to do something, then do it at your own risk.’’ Several leading German Quakers in fact agreed with Pleissner, but more cautious voices prevailed.”⁵²

Well known activist members of the Meeting such as Gerhard Halle, Emil Fuchs, Margarete Lachmund and Grete Sumpf wanted a public statement, but the meeting was unwilling to publicly represent itself as speaking out against *Kristallnacht*, a night of vandalism and violence against the Jews of Germany and their property. Public protest at this time in Germany was dangerous and would have been seen by the government as opposition, which the Nazis did not take kindly. Despite this failing to speak out, the Berlin Meeting’s actions spoke louder than its words and many members of the Berlin Meeting throughout the Third Reich did aid Jews in whatever way they could such as helping them escape to other countries, hiding them and offering them shelter and aid.

The German Yearly Meeting tried to help its members decide how to approach opposing the anti-Semitism and racism of the Nazi regime without encouraging separation from the overall German society. The same three Quakers who sided with Marie Pleissner also attempted to move the German Yearly Meeting to speak out against the oppressive Nuremberg Laws, but “Hans Albrecht and a majority of the membership

⁵² James Irvin Lichti, *Houses on the Sand?: Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 190-191.

rejected any demonstrative act that would jeopardize the existence of the society.”⁵³ A large portion of the German Yearly Meeting realized that to actively demonstrate disapproval at such a public level would endanger all members of the meeting, whether or not they had participated. This protective measure, as also seen by a letter sent to the members of the German Yearly Meeting by the executive council, summarizes the meeting’s approach to society. Though each member was encouraged to individually act on his or her own conscience in reaction to the world, the meeting itself was unwilling to separate itself from society as an important part of Quakerism for many of the Quakers of the meeting was enacting their faith in the world, not removing themselves from it.

“[A confidential letter sent to the members of the German Yearly Meeting] stood by Quaker teachings that challenged Nazism’s chauvinist racism and anti-Semitism, but also made clear that the German Yearly Meeting did not intend to sever all ties to German society and go underground. As a consequence, German Friends never collectively denounced Nazi anti-Jewish policy.”⁵⁴

This letter does not dictate how Quakers should react to the state, it simply outlines that Quakerism believes in the humanity of all people and that the Quakers should not subscribe to the racism and anti-Semitism shown by the Nazi party. However, this letter does not mandate standing up to the regime or opposing the regime. The overall emphasis of the meeting is that it does not intend to become an underground movement and remove itself from society. Therefore, it also allows for members to join society and to support parts of the Nazi party other than the racism, such as the economic policies that were so appealing to many Austrians and Germans. This also means that the German Yearly Meeting was not united enough to collectively denounce the Nazi anti-Jewish policy. As

⁵³ Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 128.

⁵⁴ James Irvin Lichti, *Houses on the Sand?: Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 190.

previously seen, the meeting was unable to present a united front on many debates, and therefore in their collective statements and responses there is room for multiple ways of understanding the message and approaching the world from a personal understanding of Quakerism. Therefore, though the German Yearly Meeting might challenge the Nazi stance, it in no way barred Quakers from identifying with or agreeing with the Nazis, as there was no move to sever ties with or denounce society.

It is difficult to criticize the German Yearly Meeting for refusing to become a target for the Nazi regime as the Meeting had only recently come into being, and the population of German Friends was quite small. Therefore to support the continuation of the religion in the area, it would be wise to not endanger its small community. Though a larger percentage of German Quakers aided Jews, the total number of German Friends willing to put down their names to help Jews at the Berlin Center was only twenty-two.⁵⁵ Lichti feels that “It would be wrong to detach these individual efforts from the German Yearly Meeting; the proportion of members involved suggests that individual efforts emanated from an orientation inspired by the German Yearly Meeting.”⁵⁶ Lichti’s point is supported fully by the fact that those Quakers, who wrote about their experiences in helping Jews and others persecuted by the Nazis, often cited their own Quaker faith as what motivated them to help those in need. However, the German Yearly Meeting was often divided by many different opinions during debates.

“One American Quaker account reported that the presence of members of Jewish descent in the German Yearly Meeting did cause ‘acrimonious dispute within the Society itself, which seemed split by the infection of hate.’...the German Yearly Meeting was not a sealed society of selfless saints. Some accounts of the Vienna

⁵⁵ James Irvin Lichti, *Houses on the Sand?: Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 193.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 194.

Quaker Meeting, for example, describe a singular lack of concern for Jews. And other accounts suggest a cleft between the activist and quietist sectors of the German Yearly Meeting.”⁵⁷

The differences between the activist and the quietest sectors of the meeting are perhaps the most evident, as shown by this observer’s account. The Vienna Meeting is the source of many of the quietist Quakers, and Rudolph Boeck was its representative to the German Yearly Meeting. Though many members of the Berlin Meeting risked their lives due to their activism, the more inward Quakers did not necessarily feel called to do the same work. Therefore, for some of those Quakers that remained in society as quietists with their inward faith, there was no call or need to oppose Nazi policy and stand up to the government. The German Yearly Meeting never demanded activism of its members, and those in the Vienna Meeting did not feel that their Quakerism called them to activism.

Lichti cites differing opinions⁵⁸ on the willingness of the Vienna Meeting to aid Jews and resist the Nazi regime. However, I do not believe he is reading the differences correctly. He reads the sources he has found on the Vienna Meeting as sometimes aiding the Vienna International Quaker Center, but he is not reading these accurately. The Vienna Meeting was not a part of the Vienna Center, and though the Vienna Center did work to aid persecuted Jews, it was largely staffed and run by foreign Quakers. As Schmitt says, “The Quaker office at Singerstrasse 16 became less of a ‘center’ of the Society of Friends in Austria but more an outpost for British and American welfare workers.”⁵⁹ Therefore though Lichti cites a member of the meeting reflecting on the

⁵⁷ James Irvin Lichti, *Houses on the Sand?: Pacifist Denominations in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 195.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 196.

⁵⁹ Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 137.

services offered by the Vienna Center, the member credits all the aid work to the foreign Quakers staffing the Center, and the only interaction the member describes the Vienna Meeting as having with the Center is through using the same space for their meeting for worship. As Schmitt cites, when the Vienna Center rose to attempt to meet the almost immediate challenge of evacuating Vienna's large Jewish population after the *Anschluss*, "they did so without the cooperation of the small meeting in the Austrian capital...[one of the staffers of the Vienna Center] had taxed Vienna Quakers with a lack of courage, contending: 'They will probably take on protective coloring and keep quiet.'"⁶⁰ This comment clearly depicts the political leanings of the Vienna Meeting. The "protective coloring" is the political affiliations with the Nazi party that will safely shepherd them through the Nazi regime. Though "protective coloring" can be interpreted as simply going with who is in power, Vienna Quakers such as Rudolph Boeck can be seen internalizing and supporting the Nazi message. Not only did the aid worker's comments indicate that the Vienna Meeting was aligned with the Nazi party, but the Meeting also "[restricted its] attendance to Aryans."⁶¹ This further distanced the Austrian Quakers from German meetings such as Berlin as no other meeting felt moved to alienate its non-Aryan members.

The Overlap Between Quakerism and the Nazi Party

⁶⁰ Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 136.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 183.

The Quakers in Germany and Austria at the time of the Nazism of the Third Reich were varied, including both native Austrians and Germans and numerous visitors from America and Britain. Despite sharing one religion and one German Yearly Meeting, the Quakers in these countries had very different relationships between themselves, their religion and the world around them. These differing priorities and varieties of Quakerism allowed for the German and Austrian Quakers to have as much discussion and dissent as they did in their meetings. The disagreements on what it means to be a Quaker and how a Quaker approaches the world are central to understanding the differing views of the Quakers in Austria and Germany. Two of the most notable examples of Nazi support in Quaker meetings are the Paul Helbeck controversy and Rudolf Boeck. Both examples exhibit each man's understanding of their Quaker identity, the debates, and disagreements other Quakers had in reaction to Helbeck's and Boeck's support of Nazi policies.

The Paul Helbeck controversy was the case of one of the founding German Quakers who was deeply involved in politics⁶² and wrote a letter to the Nazi newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, and the German Yearly Meeting chastised him for representing his views in the letter as Quaker views. The controversy itself was whether or not Helbeck was pushed out of the Meeting because of this letter, but what is of particular interest is the content of Helbeck's letter and its reception. In his letter "he outlined areas of agreement and disagreement with the party ideologist Alfred Rosenberg's magnum

⁶² Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 47, "Founding member of the Society who was also head of the German Democratic Party in the Wuppertal District."

opus: *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*.”⁶³ Rosenberg’s ideologies were some of the founding tenets of the Nazi Party. Though Helbeck’s letter has been lost, Schmitt’s research did uncover a note written by Helbeck in which Helbeck wrote that “the National Socialists pursue an economic route which [he] substantially agree[d].”⁶⁴ Throughout Schmitt’s recording of this controversy and subsequent debate at the meeting, there is no mention anti-Semitism in Helbeck’s letter. However, there is support of the Nazi party’s economic policies from Helbeck himself. In the minds of the many of the people at the time, the Nazi party was attempting to return Germany and Austria to their former, and rightful, glory.

Schmitt’s research into the minutes of the meeting has preserved the reception of the letter amongst the meeting. The majority of the meeting received it poorly because though “its contents apparently challenged German Friends to consider ‘how far they can cooperate in supporting the acts of the new government here’”⁶⁵ which is not unconditional support for the Nazi party. However, Helbeck did in his letter outline where he felt Quakers could support the government’s economic policies, although there is no mention of the social policies nor of what Helbeck disagreed with in Rosenberg’s book. Many such as the well known Quaker activist, Emil Fuchs, “could not understand how a Quaker could find any area of agreement with a Nazi luminary who had accused pacifists of being simply cowards, ‘at a time when some [Quakers] sat in concentration camps.’”⁶⁶ This view defends his friends in camps without leaving room for the economic

⁶³ Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 47.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 47.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 47.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 47.

gain that some like Helbeck and Boeck found in the Nazi government. Fuchs was not the only member of the Meeting to receive Helbeck's letter with strong resistance. This disagreement shows the internal tensions in the German Yearly Meeting, in that one Quaker could identify, understand and support the Nazi ideologist who publicly denounced pacifists, while other Quakers affirmed pacifism as a central part of being a Quaker and therefore could not accept Rosenberg.

Helbeck also had defenders, further demonstrating the tensions within the Meeting. One such defender was Hans Albrecht who said "Helbeck was free to write to the *Völkischer Beobachter*, but should not have done so as a Quaker."⁶⁷ This a weak defense of Helbeck's Quakerism, but a strong defense of the freedom of the German Yearly Meeting to allow each member his or her own opinion. Albrecht here seems to be seeking to avoid actively aligning or distancing the movement from society, as so many of the statements of the German Yearly Meeting sought to do. Schmitt says that the notes from the Meeting "recorded interruptions from the floor [in response to Albrecht]: 'Can one do anything else?'"⁶⁸ It is obvious from this statement that for some Quakers their Quakerism was intrinsically tied with their activities in the world; that they could not separate their understanding of Quakerism from their daily lives. However, for those that aligned with multiple ideologies or religions, it would be possibly to have multiple vantage points to speak from. This comment also supports that there were multiple perspectives on how Quakerism was involved in the public and private spheres in the German Yearly Meeting. For some members of the Meeting, their Quakerism was private

⁶⁷ Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 48.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 48.

and unrelated to their political views, and for others, pacifism and aiding others in need were essential parts of their Quaker identity. Quakerism was spread in Germany and Austria by aid workers from America and Britain not twenty years earlier, and therefore it seems surprising that some would be able to separate themselves from the not too distant aid workers who so strongly identified their help with their understanding of Quakerism.

Several notable American Quakers were sent to Germany by the American Friends Service Committee to speak with German officials and to survey the situation in Europe shortly after *Kristallnacht*.⁶⁹ These Quakers were Robert Yarnall, a Quaker businessman, Rufus Jones, a Quaker theologian and professor at Haverford College, and George Walton, headmaster of a Quaker school in Pennsylvania. One encounter at the German Yearly Meeting between Yarnall and his Austrian counterpart, Rudolf Boeck is of particular interest. Yarnall calls Boeck, Vienna's representative on the Executive Committee of the German Yearly Meeting "a real, honest, enthusiastic Nazi."⁷⁰ This was surprising for Yarnall; he was not expecting to find a Quaker so different from himself. Having come to attempt to support aid efforts and work with the Nazis to help the Quaker cause of helping those persecuted escape, it is especially surprising to an American Quaker to find an Austrian Quaker, seemingly from the same set of beliefs to be so out of line with what Yarnall understood as his Quakerism. However, as seen from the German Yearly Meeting's guidance and debates, German Quakerism was still forming its identity and its precepts at this time.

⁶⁹ Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 107.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 136-137.

Sheila Spielhofer resists Schmitt's claims and Yarnall's understanding of Rudolph Boeck's Nazi allegiance. Spielhofer takes issue with the fact that Schmitt seems to want to show "how callous Rudi Böck [Rudolph Boeck] had become."⁷¹ However, this is not Schmitt's goal in my understanding, but rather his goal is to show the range of Quaker allegiances and lifestyles during WWII. Spielhofer goes on to say "It seems more likely that the promise that the Nazis had given that they would help the poor and unemployed....that the union with German was the best solution to Austria's problems."⁷² However, this selection undermines the point that Spielhofer was making. That promise is exactly what attracted Boeck to Nazism, but that does not mean that he was not a Nazi. The kind of Nazis I argue the Quakers in Vienna were, were not members of the Gestapo or the SS, they were not aware of the extremes of the camps, they simply wanted to regain the dignity lost from the fall of the empire. Therefore the Nazi promise to solve the problems Austria and Germany were facing was enticing to many of the people included in the Nazi rhetoric.

Both Yarnall and Boeck held important positions as Quakers, yet their Quakerisms, and how this affected their approach to the world was radically different. Their discussion of *Kristallnacht* shows the vast gap in understanding between the two men. "For Boeck, as for other Nazis, the November pogrom [*Kristallnacht*] 'was a spontaneous uprising of the people.' When Yarnall pointed out that this 'spontaneity' occurred at the same time throughout Germany, his Austrian vis-à-vis replied, without thinking, blinking, or blushing: 'Yes, you see, these things must be planned or else they

⁷¹ Sheila Spielhofer, *Stemming the Dark Tide; Quakers in Vienna 1919-1942* (York, England: The Ebor Press, 2001), 133.

⁷² *Ibid*, 133.

get out of hand.”⁷³ Not only was this the Nazi propagated sentiment about the *Kristallnacht* violence, but also it is showing a lack of concern for the violence. The “spontaneous uprising of the people” was violent and had no repercussions, which hardly seems just to anyone questioning the government’s message. Boeck clearly not only believed the government message but also when questioned showed his true belief in the message. Boeck and others around him were not ignorant of the property damage and violence that occurred that night, yet Boeck felt that “these things” had to be organized otherwise they would “get out of hand.” Therefore despite the violence and property damage, Boeck implies that the riot was controlled. However, condoning organized violence goes directly against the message the activist Quakers of the German Yearly Meeting preached, namely their pacifism. Though Schmitt does not provide much further detail on specific encounters with Vienna Friends, he does say, “Boeck and local Quakers also insisted that Quakerism was ‘a faith and a way of life which should not be confused with charity.’”⁷⁴ For Boeck and other Viennese Quakers, the Quaker faith did not call them to “charity” or the Social Witness that had lead American and British Quakers in Austria and Germany in the first place. For these Austrian Quakers, their faith and their Quaker way of life coexisted with their support of the policies and sympathies of the Third Reich. This understanding of Quakerism is what permitted them to have these views that were so surprising to the visiting Quakers. The respect for *Kristallnacht* as an uprising of the people and the resistance to Quaker Social Witness set the Austrian

⁷³ Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 136-137.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 136-137.

Friends far apart from and even at odds with the American and British Quakers who also resided in Vienna, as well as many of their peers in the German Yearly Meeting.

The Nazis promised Austria that they would revive industry, help the poor, and bring Austria back to being a powerful state. Austria never recovered from the loss of the Empire in World War I. Spielhofer proves here that Boeck like so many others fell under the spell of the Nazi propaganda. She says,

“It seems to have been this mechanism which made Rudi Böck accept Goebbels’ version of the *Kristallnacht* as a ‘spontaneous uprising’ rather than admitting that it must have been planned. Had he faced the truth, he would have been forced to share Yarnall’s horror and revulsion and revise his allegiance to the Nazi leadership.”⁷⁵

This is a very ineffective defense of Boeck’s Nazi allegiance, as she explicitly states that he believed the propaganda and in order to continue to his job as an architect under the Nazi regime, he had to be ignorant of what was occurring. Therefore there is no other conclusion but that Boeck was a Nazi, as he worked for the government, supported its economic policies and internalized its propaganda. Though perhaps he may have resisted the anti-Semitic sentiments that the government propagated as the German Yearly Meeting emphasized, he still was a Nazi.

A statement made by the Friends’ World Conference of 1937, which both Hans Albrecht and Rudolph Boeck attended, supported Boeck’s allegiance to the Nazi regime.⁷⁶ Spielhofer provides insight here as to the official Quaker stance from the World Conference on allegiance to Quakerism versus allegiance to one’s nation. “The conclusion reached by the Conference was that ‘the individual must decide for himself,

⁷⁵ Sheila Spielhofer, *Stemming the Dark Tide; Quakers in Vienna 1919-1942* (York, England: The Ebor Press, 2001), 133.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 135.

how far he can go in meeting the demands of the state' and that 'compromise is obviously necessary if we are to live in the world at all.'"⁷⁷ This is a logical conclusion to be reached by a Quaker conference, because as stated earlier, many Quakers believe that involving themselves in the world best manifests their faith. Therefore, for the conference to ask Quakers to remove themselves from society would be unlikely. However, this does not state what Quakers should do according to any sort of set credo in Quakerism. This is another repetition of the freedom of Quakerism and the individuality of the religion; that each individual must decide what their conscience tells them to do in response to their government. This provides validation for the actions of Boeck and others like him in that they supported the state that promised to support them. This however also provides room for the Berlin Quakers, who actively worked against the Nazi state in youth groups and in their meeting to help those around them. Therefore, due to the individuality of Quakerism, there is no inherent incompatibility in being a Nazi and being a Quaker.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Quaker and Nazi ideologies were not so incompatible in Vienna, as seen from prior evidence. Though the Vienna Meeting's resistance to aiding others was unique amongst the meetings belonging to the German Yearly Meeting, they are an important exception to the historical understanding of what Quakers did during WWII. The unique cultural circumstances of the time help to show why these Quakers diverged so far from what American, British and other Quakers of the German Yearly Meeting understood as

⁷⁷ Sheila Spielhofer, *Stemming the Dark Tide; Quakers in Vienna 1919-1942* (York, England: The Ebor Press, 2001), 135.

Quakerism. These Viennese Quakers were just like many of their fellow citizens who were swept up in the inclusive rhetoric of Nazism. Since Quakerism has no set dogma and is guided by conscience, the Quakers of Vienna were able to rationalize and understand their Quaker beliefs and Nazi politics together.

Part of what made Quaker Nazis such a small subset of the Quaker population was that many Quakers followed the aid and humanitarian message brought by the aid workers after World War I, that all of humanity was equal, which was not the Nazi rhetoric. However, as Quakerism is a non-dogmatic, individualized religion, the members of the German Yearly Meeting were guided to follow their own views and conscience, whether that led them to aid work or to promoting the Nazi nationalist cause, the meeting did not pressure members to either end. Therefore for those Austrians who wanted to see their country rebuilt to its former glory and to feel fully included in the population, Nazism was an appealing political option.

There is still further work to be done in truly exploring this topic to its fullest. A search into the records of the German Yearly Meeting and the Vienna Meeting would be informative. However, as those who were present begin to die, the ability of researchers to fully explore what has transpired in the heated discussions mentioned starts to slip away. Though the meeting minutes often mention discord, it is difficult to reconstruct what happened from the minutes, which mainly record decisions reached, and not the journey to the decision.

Throughout Quakerism's history, debate, discussion and personal conscience have played an essential role. Though Quakers are largely remembered for the aid work most

of them contributed to during WWII, a small subset of Quakers identified with and supported the Nazi party while maintaining their Quakerism.

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