



RICORDIAMO INSIEME

Mosaic of Thoughts

The diaries of Ferdy, Willy and Herbert Wallbrecher 1938 - 1941

A year ago I found five diaries of my father Herbert's two older brothers: Ferdy and Willy. The diaries date from 1938-1941: for 80 years these books lay unread in a box. The handwriting in old German calligraphy, often complicated to read, required careful transcription. My father's diary had already been available to us.



What moved these three young men ten months before the outbreak of the Second World War?



Willy



Ferdy



Herbert

All three were very committed members of the *Bund Neudeutschland (Union New Germany)* , a men's association of young Catholic students in Germany. At the same time they also belonged to the Hitler Youth.



*Tent camp of the Union New Germanu
Neuerburg, Prnyrcodtr 1934
ND-Bundesarchiv*



*Tent camp of the Westmark, Union New Germanu
1930 Archive Diocese of Essen*

On 30 October 38, at the age of sixteen, my father opened his diary with this picture of the imperial eagle over the greek monogram of Christ and the motto of the Union New Germany:



„Everything for Germany – Germany for Christ“

namely an unconditional commitment to the homeland. Military service is therefore not only understood as a self-evident duty, but also as a concrete expression of love for the fatherland.

In fact, the three young Catholic academics describe Hitler's seizure of power in 1933 in their diaries as a "national revolution" and mention it quite positively.

At the same time, they want to be convinced Christians, regularly go to mass on Sundays and celebrate all church feasts, even though in practice the commitment to Germany is clearly more important.



Flag procession to a field mass



Field Mass of the Union New Germany



Closing ceremony of the Holy Year 1934 - Italy trip of the Union New Germany

I was touched by their strong loyalty to Rome and their enthusiasm for Italy; all three brothers make trips to Italy, to Rome, which they document very lovingly in their diaries and travel books.

This tension between "nation and faith" is evident in Ferdy, the eldest, even during his novitiate with the Jesuits from 1938 to 1940: very committed, he reports on his studies and his religious efforts.

He is musically very gifted and leads the Shola. His heart is especially attached to the Union New Germany and the youth work.

FERDY WALLBRECHER



But the great fascination and inner confrontation with the contents of National Socialism is also clearly visible in him. Let's listen to the words of the 19-year-old:

Sunday, 21.VIII.38

I still have a lot to learn to be able to give the boys something really valuable.... They are waiting for a real insight into religious things: that is, really Catholic religion, truth and essential preaching.

Saturday, 27.VIII.38

With Fr. Gronenborn once again really experienced music (...) then (we spoke) in a fabulous conversation (...) about the whole modern development up to National - Socialism, its nature, its way, its end and goal.

Wednesday, 1.II.39

On the 6th anniversary of the Nat. Revolution we had expected something; but the Fuehrer (Leader = Hitler) seems only to have uttered some threats relating to the separation of Church and State; as if there was anything left to separate.

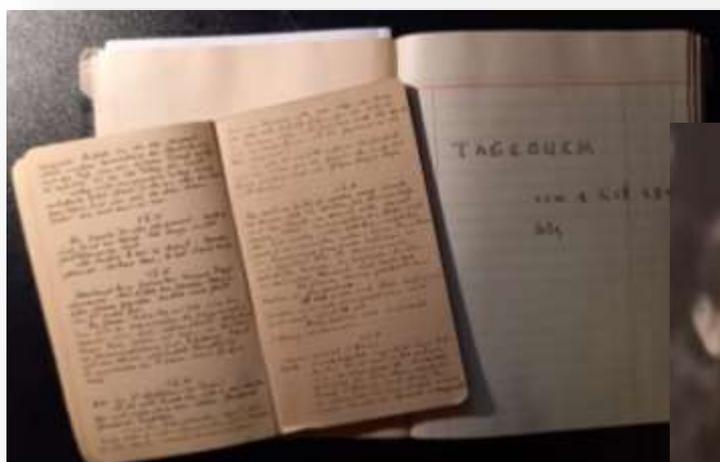
Friday, 3.II.39

Talked at length with (a friend) last night about the possibility of saying religious things at all today (....) Finally we were faced again with the problem: bourgeois moralism or really new Christianity.

He is a pretty catastrophic theorist: Germany has to go through a civil war to bring everyone back to an essential level. It may be!

P. Magister (...) read the Fuehrer speech to us: very clever and rhetorically very fine... nothing special for us.

In two years, the words Jew or Israel do not appear once in his diary, neither during this period of novitiate with the Jesuits nor when he began studying national economics and philosophy in Freiburg im Breisgau.



He notices that he has changed inwardly since he left the Order.

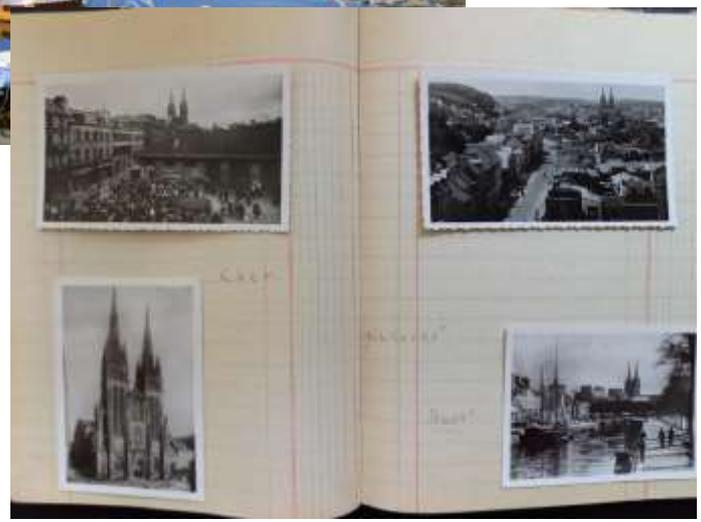
Almost enthusiastically, he becomes a soldier and describes his experiences and adventures in detail:

He is sent to France, to Tréboul in northern France: he speaks French and gets along very well there:

Military passport of Ferdy Wallbrecher



"Our" Cathedral



over "our" city

On 19 January 1941 he wrote:

A strange meeting: I am standing guard. A soldier comes by,... I look at him, the face is familiar. It is indeed Car(l). Klein from Hoch Elten. Both of us are quite perplexed by the coincidence ... Of course we soon get to talk about the conditions (at home) ... about theological questions etc.... It is like a return to a world that used to be my world ...

"A world that used to be my world", that was also the impression of a book about Léon Bloy that I read yesterday. ... His being a "believer", his furious throwing himself into faith and his will to destroy everything that is not faith, shows a humanity or at least a human situation that cannot mean anything to me. In contrast, we have in fact carried out a revaluation of all values.



Léon Bloy, 1846-1917, French Catholic writer, poet and journalist

Almost at the end of his notes, only once, the word "Jews" appears in his diaries - when he quotes a Hitler speech favourably. On 31 January 1941, Ferdy writes:

The Führer speaks again on 30 Jan. (the anniversary of Hitler's seizure of power) We hear him: The Duce (Mussolini) and I are not Jews and profiteers. When we shake hands, it's on! - You will feel that we have not slept: the army has completed its equipment, gathered new strength in further training; with the spring the real submarine warfare will begin and the Air force will introduce itself further. - You can be sure that we have taken into account all possibilities!"

Text on balcony: With our flags is the Victory



*30 Januar 1941: Adolf Hitler gives a speech in Berlin at the Sportpalast to commemorate the seizure of power on 30.01.1933.
Foto: Hitler Archives, a Biography in Pictures*

From France he was transferred with his troops to Poland.
In Laukischken (near Königsberg) he writes on 3 March 41:

*Greetings from Laukischken, East Prussia, Dorfstraße
Archives images East Pruzsia*



Königsberg in Prussia



Catholic Church in Königsberg

There is Sunday, holiday....

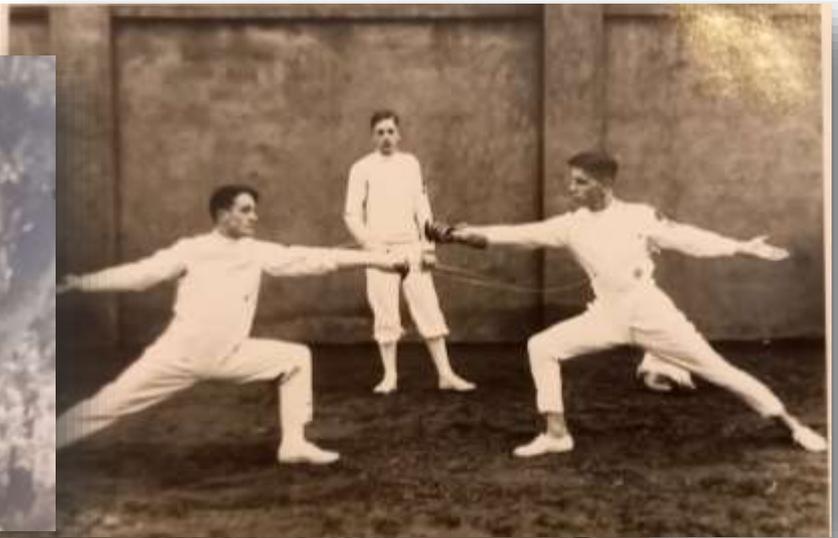
I get up, wash a little and go on pilgrimage again. I look for the Catholic church, just coming in for the consecration: a wonderfully familiar atmosphere, but in the end I have to leave - I can't stand it anymore.

From father's second brother Willy we have three diaries, covering exactly three years, from April 1938 to April 1941.

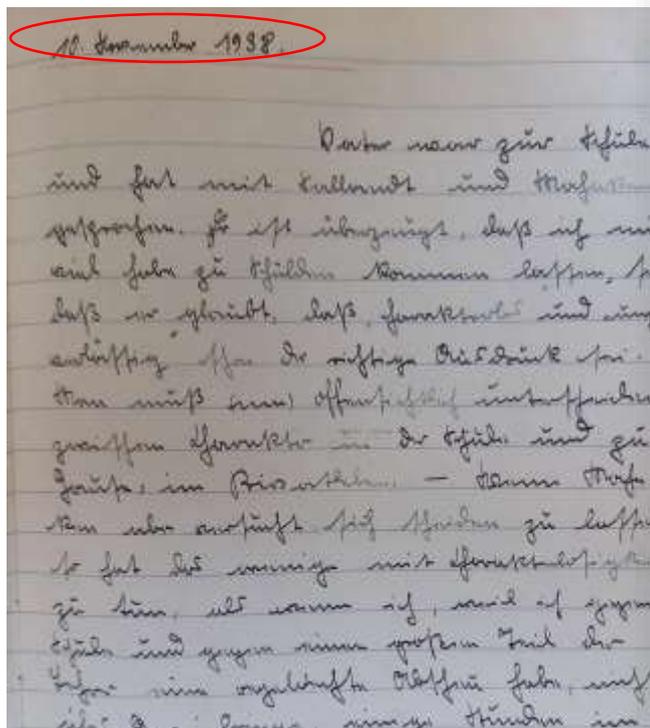
He was very sporty and took part in the National German Fencing Championships organised by the Hitler Youth in 1939.

He was also an enthusiastic member of the Union New Germany. He originally wanted to become an officer, but when, to his great disappointment, he was not recruited, he decided to study medicine.

WILLY WALLBRECHER



The words "Jew" and "Jews" occur much more frequently in his work than in Ferdy's, sometimes in a descriptive sense, but mainly in a negative sense:



His notes on the day after the Program Night are very revealing.

Eighteen-year-old Willy writes:

10. November 1938.

Father went to the school and talked to ... (the director). He is convinced....that "characterless and unreliable" is the right expression. One must (now) obviously distinguish between character at school and at home, in private life. - But when the director tries to divorce, it has less to do with lack of character than when I, because I have a downright loathing for school and for a large part of the teachers, (can't) bring myself to study a few hours a day just to get better grades. - On the contrary, I dislike people who manage to work for a school, such as our circus, just to please. -

Last night, all the Jews had their windows and chunks of glass(!) smashed. - It was something organized. Sally Stern's hats were lying in the street and Cohn's hams were floating in the (river) Volme together with club chairs and other inventory. "The synagogue was on fire." (indeed!)

Without commenting on the brutal attacks on Jews with a single word, he continues:

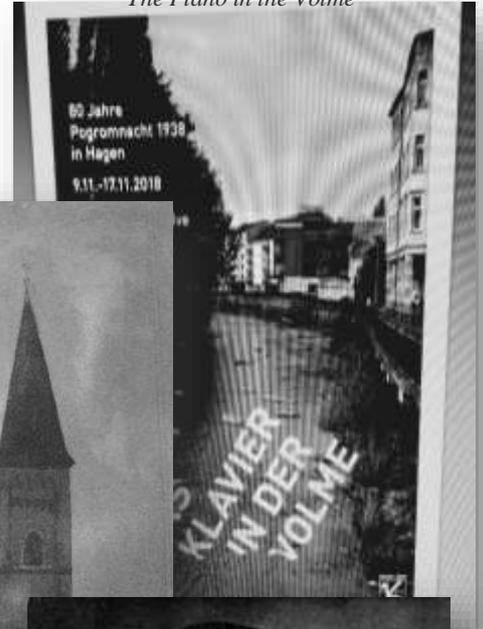
We were at (a friend's) place for 2½ hours. Of course it was very interesting again. (He) had learned all kinds of new things at a conference of theologians, ..., and also to report. - Then I finally also read Rosenberg's "clarifying" speech, I will keep it.

(In this speech) the plan of struggle against the "Black Hoax" (disgraceful name for the catholic church) ... is set out quite clearly. But they do not want to fall into the mistake that Bismarck made. They will courageously covertly and surreptitiously deal the death blow to Catholicism with genuinely Jewish-Jesuit methods. They realise that the trials have been of little use.

The horse slaughterhouse of the Cohn family



Poster for an exhibition (2018) – 89 years of Night of Pogroms in Hagen "The Piano in the Volme"



Hagen Synagogue



Alfred Rosenberg – German war criminal and ideologue of the Nazi Party

A month later he attends an Hitler Youth rally and writes:

Tuesday, 6 December 1938

I have just been to a youth rally in Hagen. –

The old guard speaks to the youth.

In moving words, the Führer's old comrade-in-arms spoke of the miracle that the Lord God had worked for us in our Führer. He also said that it was no miracle if someone brought out a Jew who had been lying in the grave stinking for six days.

Then he spoke of the holiest, of our blood, which is a stream from the ancestors, passed on through us, to eternity. We swim as a link in this stream and have the duty to pass it on to as many as possible, that is what the Lord God wants. And when he then pointed out with scorn and derision those who do not want to pass on this stream, but instead want to give their spirit into God's hands in a "loose loose" way, a veritable canon of applause came from the ranks of the young listeners.

Then he also spoke of the large number of children in his family and clan, his sister brought it up to 16. This is how it should be in all German families. These were German people, but it disgusted him to look into the faces of Catholic and Protestant bishops or into the face of a Jew or Marxist, as they were compiled on a page in the "I.B. (Illustrated Observer)". With this he spoke to me and many others from the soul, and it often gets to me when I look at these faces. - These speakers should speak to us more often, so that all boys and girls would realise what it is all about.



*Willy (1940) in the Reich
Labour Service*



Willy (1941) as a recruit in the army

How can a committed Catholic share such thoughts, how can he be enthusiastic about such speeches?

After Willy was finally not admitted to the Abitur along with two other classmates, he writes on 14.12.38:

Karl Hense, Theo Roßmann and I (!) are not allowed. - I could not believe that (the director) would enforce this.

I could break the old man's hunks and him too, but unfortunately only his wife is Jewish.

A fortnight later, shortly before Christmas 1938, he attends a retreat for two days given by the founder of Union New Germany, the Jesuit Father Ludwig Esch:

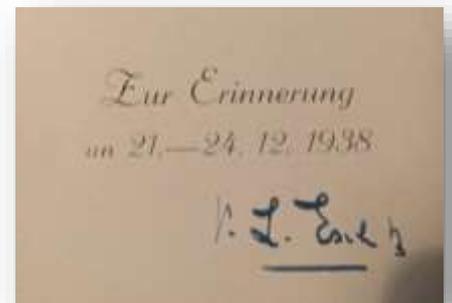
The theme of the first day is: What makes a good modern Catholic?



P. Ludwig Esch – Founder of the Union New Germany



Saint Michael



Remembrance card for this retreat signed by Fr. Esch

On the second day, Fr Esch presents living Catholic politicians:

On 22 December 1938 Willy notes:

Catholic statesmen and politicians in the present (answer to a question).

Mussolini Letter to the Pope: „I wish to die as a good Catholic“.

(He has) re-erected the cross in the Coliseum.

(He has) introduced the cross in all Italian schools.

Ciano was educated by Jesuits in Rome.

Balbo and Grandi also very religious.

Pilsudski buried with the image of Our Lady in his hands.

Franko prays the rosary with his family every evening when he has the opportunity to do so.

President of Portugal and Hungarian Foreign Minister Imredi very religious.

Seys-Inquart makes frequent retreats. His brother is a clergyman.

To my horror and deep shame, I must state that all the "contemporary Catholic politicians" presented as role models to these young Germans 83 years ago by Catholic clerics were, without exception, fascists or National Socialists. They were all openly anti-Semitic, dictators or future dictators; the others were condemned as war criminals eight years later at Nuremberg.



Benito Mussolini



Galeazzo Ciano



Italo Balbo



Dino Grandi



Jozef Piłsudski



Francisco Franco



António de Oliveira Salazar



Béla Imre



Arthur Seyß-Inquart

Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that the Union New Germany was banned on 1 July 1939, although these ideas, which were so close to the regime, were taught there.

On 2. 7.1939 Willy writes:

"The Union was banned yesterday at 12 o'clock by the Stapo (domestic secret service) the diary must disappear again with all the other things for a few weeks. I have always exercised the greatest restraint. But: "Seek and (find)... That also applies to the Stapo."



Willy Wallbrecher , ca 1940

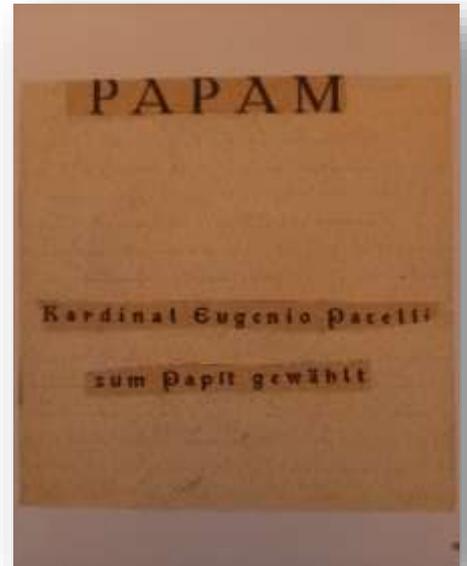
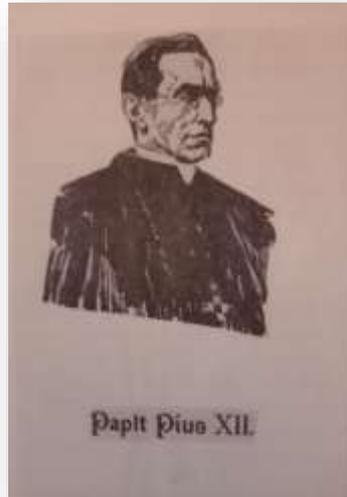
The election of Eugenio Pacelli as Pope Pius XII is particularly emphasised in all three diaries:

My father Herbert wrote on 14. 3. 1939:

(...) "Habemus Papam". We have a Pope. A great joy. God, Christ, has immediately given us, the Church, another new Pope, a new Father. I, too, want to rejoice with all my heart and shout inwardly with the Christians gathered in St Peter's Square at the coronation: Viva il Papa.



Herbert Wallbrecher - 1939



A clear and unambiguous, an unequivocal and courageous word for the discernment of spirits, against the ideologies and dangers of fascism and national socialism would certainly have been taken up by these three young men. Unfortunately, this message did not come from the Pope.

Ferdy and Willy died as recruits on their way to Russia at the age of 21 and 22 respectively in August and October 1941.

German military cemetery in Tallinn (Estonia) Burial place of Ferdy Wallbrecher



Herbert Wallbrecher, as a soldier ca 1944



Herbert Wallbrecher ca, 1959

My father survived through extensive training as an airline pilot. Throughout his life he was aware of his privileged situation, seen as a perpetual demand and incentive: two-thirds of the fortune he inherited was not actually his. He did not want to bequeath it to his children but wanted to ensure that it served the church and its new beginnings.

The terrible consequences of the war and the great shame of the Shoah awakened in him a desire for a better understanding of Christianity. This led him to the meeting with my mother and thus to their common journey, which is discussed in the video "Traudl Wallbrecher, fragments of life", which can also be viewed on our website: www.ricordiamoinsieme.org



Traudl Weiss, ca. 1943



Herbert Wallbrecher, ca. 1948