

Krémer against Hitler: A Case of Mennonite Resistance in Alsace-Moselle (1940–1945)¹

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Abstract: In 1940 the Mennonites of Alsace and the Moselle in France were finally annexed into the Third Reich. Under Nazi law they faced multiple constraints. Although some of them adapted or took up a “wait and see” attitude, the majority survived in opposition with acts of resistance or acts of solidarity with the victims of the regime. A true spiritual and nonviolent resistance was organized in the Sarrebourg and Colmar churches around the leadership of the elder Émile Krémer and the outsider Charles Frommer. At a time when Mennonite historiography is focused on the various collaborations of the movement with Nazism, this article brings to light an unpublished opposition to Hitler, its circumstances, its sources, and its dramatic consequences.

INTRODUCTION

When Alsace-Moselle was finally annexed by the Germans on October 18, 1940, Mennonites in those departments found themselves under Nazi domination. They were attached to Gau Oberrhein (Alsace) and Gau Westmark (Lorraine), submitted to germanization and Nazification by a regime that meant to control all aspects of daily life. Most of the church assemblies continued their activities, but some were closely watched, sometimes harrassed or closed down, as was the case with the Assembly of Colmar-Pulversheim.² As the historian Jean Séguy wrote, “local circumstances in large part determined the attitudes of the authorities vis-à-vis the Mennonites.”³ Unlike German Mennonites who stood “united behind Hitler, not recognizing the criminal energy that motivated him,”⁴

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¹ Translated by Arnold Snyder and Greg van Horn.

² See Box 3, 1941 Jan–Jun, Mennonitische Forschungsstelle, Weierhof; Box 3, 1941 Jul–Dez, Mennonitische Forschungsstelle, Weierhof. Kindly shared by Ben Goossen.

³ Jean Séguy, *Les assemblées anabaptistes-mennonites de France* (Paris: EHESS, 1977), 614.

⁴ *Testing Faith and Tradition*, Global Mennonite History Series, vol. 2, Europe, eds. Alle G. Hoekema and Hanspeter Jecker (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006), 125. The relationships between Mennonites and Nazism have been the subject of important studies following the foundational article by Gerhard Rempel, “Mennonites and the holocaust, from collaboration

Mennonites from Alsace-Moselle were generally hostile to the Nazi presence.⁵ They didn't submit readily to the authorities, guided by their conscience and a wait-and-see attitude, and more often than not were coerced into submission. My research has shown a full range of avoidance tactics and many acts of resistance: Mennonites hid Allied aviators, deserters, and Jews whose lives were at risk; others served as smugglers on the escape routes; and there are traditional Mennonite names in the armed resistance.

The discovery in 2016 of a voluminous dossier in the departmental archives of Moselle revealed the existence of a center of radical spiritual resistance to Nazism among the French Mennonites.⁶ The dossier brings to light a trial carried out by the Nazis in 1943 against Émile Krémer, Charles Frommer, and members of the Assembly of Sarrebourg (Moselle). They were accused before the special court (*Sondergericht*) of Metz of failing to recognize national symbols and standing against the Nazi Party and the State.⁷

So the question is, how does one explain this "French exception"? It is all the more surprising given the multiple connections (historical, familial, ecclesiastical, and humanitarian⁸) that existed between Mennonites on both sides of the border, including the fact that their linguistic and cultural blueprints were similar.⁹ In the 1970s German historiography forged the concept of "*Resistenz*" to explain the "reaction of auto-defense" by certain groups faced with the requirements of a totalitarian state.¹⁰ This distinguished it from political or armed resistance

to perpetuation," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84 (Oct. 2010): 507–50. See especially Benjamin W. Goossen, *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Mark Jantzen and John D. Thiessen, eds., *European Mennonites and the Holocaust* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), 250–69.

⁵ Their attitude was quite similar to that of Alsatians in general who were annexed. See Catherine Maurer and Jérôme Schweitzer, *Face au nazisme, Le cas alsacien* (Strasbourg: Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire de Strasbourg, 2022); Lottar Kettenacker, *Nationalsozialistische Volkstumspolitik in Elsass* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1973).

⁶ Departmental Archives of Metz, AD 57 (Metz), 335 W 88 KLS 151/43. Unless otherwise indicated, this is the source for all archival references hereafter. Jean Séguy notes, without going into details, that "It appears that at Colmar, in particular, an opposition movement was produced which is difficult to disentangle from the religious motivations of others." — Jean Séguy, *Les assemblées anabaptistes-mennonites de France*, 614.

⁷ See the arrest warrant for Émile Krémer, November 23, 1942. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43.

⁸ Notably, the joint relief work to help Mennonites in the Soviet Ukraine.

⁹ Pierre Sommer, one of the primary leaders of the French Mennonites, was a close friend of Christian Neff, leader of the Southern German Mennonites, pastor, and professor at the Weierhof. Sommer had studied with him and maintained an important correspondence with him.

¹⁰ The concept was forged in the 1970s by the functionalist school led by Martin Broszat. See *L'État hitlérien, L'origine et l'évolution du IIIe Reich* (Paris: Fayard, 2012). For presentation and debate of the concept, see Gilbert Merlio, *Les résistances allemandes à Hitler* (Paris:

(*Widerstand*) and cast it more as a passive reaction to the encroachments of the regime. In this sense it did not necessarily aim to bring down the dictatorship, but rather to limit its constraints. This study seeks to show that Émile Krémer's resistance belongs more to what Jacques Sémelin has called "civil resistance"¹¹ or, more precisely, a "spiritual resistance" such as Patrick Cabanel has described for French Protestants.¹² For it included a reasoned deconstruction of Nazism, non-participation in its gestures (the Hitler salute, chants, parades, etc.) and national structures (the Nazi Party, Hitler Youth and, if possible, the Army) based on a religious counter-narrative, the specifics of which will be outlined in what follows.

ÉMILE KRÉMER AND CHARLES FROMMER,
"FANATICAL OPPONENTS OF THE GERMAN NATION"

Early Awareness

The investigation of the Mennonites of Sarrebourg began in October 1942 with a denunciation. The informer identified Émile Krémer, Charles Frommer, and Louis Girardin as the heads of the resistance:

The head leaders of the local Mennonite assembly are Émile Krémer of Colmar, Charles-Jean Frommer whose place of residence is uncertain, and the forester Girardin of Langatte. These three men are especially dangerous and they act in an especially subversive way. They are fanatically opposed to the German nation and will never change their manner of thinking.¹³

Émile Krémer (1895–1990), elder of the Mennonite assemblies of Colmar and Sarrebourg, had opposed Nazism from the very beginning.

After the publication of Hitler's program in Munich in 1925, which announced his project of suppressing the Jews, God let me understand, through His Word in Jeremiah 16:16 ("I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks"), that if Hitler would come to power, he would well and truly be one of the "hunters" spoken of there.¹⁴

Tallandier, 2003), 40–47; Frédéric Sallée, *Anatomie du nazisme* (Paris: Le Cavalier bleu, Paris, 2018), 105–12; and above all, Jacques Sémelin, *Sans armes face à Hitler, La résistance civile en Europe 1939-1945* (Paris: Les Arènes, 2013), 73–86.

¹¹ "The act of resistance is characterized by the will not to give way to the domination of the aggressor. It is founded on a radical attitude of non-cooperation and confrontation with the adversary." — Jacques Sémelin, *Sans armes face à Hitler*, 79.

¹² Patrick Cabanel, *De la paix aux résistances, Les protestants français (1930-1945)* (Paris: Fayard, 2015); *Résister, voix protestantes* (Nîmes: Alcide, 2012).

¹³ Deposition of Walter Apelt, October 31, 1942. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43.

¹⁴ Émile Krémer, *Tout est possible à Dieu* (Tours: Évangile pour tous, n.d.), 19.

In many cases, pro-semitism has been decisive in “the awakening of the Christian conscience.”¹⁵ Krémer was one of the evangelicals instructed in dispensationalism, which considered the Jewish people to be the “pupils of God” and the “prophetic timepiece of the nations.” The “sharing of the Book” with the Jews allowed him to pass “in the same sentence from the Old Testament to the present reality.”¹⁶

When I noted that the history of the four successive empires (of the book of Daniel), whose prophetic evocation so struck me during my discovery of the Old Testament, always revolved around the Jewish people, the people [God] had chosen to bring salvation to the nations, God spread the love for His people in my heart, by His Word.¹⁷

Although Hitler had not yet determined the fate of the Jews in 1925, his hatred of the Jews revealed the demonic character of his doctrine. Krémer decided then

to announce the Word of God in Alsace, in Lorraine and in Baden, with a view to exhort the people in the meetings to be living witnesses of Jesus and of the victory of the cross against all the powers of darkness, and to never follow Hitler’s political movement, particularly against the Jews.¹⁸

Through his ministry, Krémer had the opportunity to follow the evolution of political events in Germany and to spread his anti-Nazi views, which earned him the disapproval of leading German Mennonites. Denounced for the first time at Colmar in 1941, he was assigned to house arrest by the Gestapo but, without worrying about it, he continued his role as itinerant sentinel until 1943.

Krémer’s journey of resistance¹⁹ is part of a biography already marked by difficult positions. Born in 1895 into a Mennonite family, he was a German non-commissioned officer on the eastern front during the First World War. Traumatized, he left the faith, took up a career as a general guard working for the Inspector of Water and Forests at Colmar. But in 1922 he experienced a radical conversion during a meeting of the Salvation Army. This led to a vocation: in 1924 he became a preacher and later, in

¹⁵ Jacques Sémelin, *Persécutions et entraides dans la France occupée* (Paris: Les Arènes-Seuil, 2013), 648.

¹⁶ Patrick Cabanel, *Résister, voix protestantes*, 34.

¹⁷ Krémer, *Tout est possible à Dieu*, 19.

¹⁸ Krémer, *Tout est possible à Dieu*, 23.

¹⁹ See Patrick Cabanel and André Encrevé, *Dictionnaire biographique des protestants français*, vol 3, H-L (Paris: Les Éditions de Paris-Max Chaleil, 2022), 506–7. For biographical details and issues of his ministry, see Stéphane Zehr, *Histoire de la Mission Timothée, Les jours des petits commencements (1972-1986)* (Alès: Calvin éditions, 2023), especially the first part, “Le milieu Krémer (1922-1972).”

1927, elder of the churches of Sarrebourg and Colmar. He entered the work of the Awakening, which was begun in 1901 by people such as Valentin Pelsy, Pierre Sommer, and Joseph Muller. But Krémer concluded that conversions were not enough unless they led to sanctification. In his view, it was the occult, the current medicinal and agricultural superstitions in the background of these rural communities, which prevented people from growing in the faith. He introduced the healing of souls into Mennonite pastoral work, but his message and his divisive personality met much opposition. So, as the war erupted, although he was one of the most influential leaders at the head of the Mennonite conference, he was also one of the most controversial. He was used to holding his convictions in the face of adversity.

Frommer, the Peculiar Man

Charles Frommer, the other man in question here, was a temporary travelling companion of the Mennonites. Born in 1892 at Steige in the precinct of Sélestat, he joined the German army in 1909 and participated in the First World War before being taken prisoner by the French. In 1921 he was hired by the police of the state of Hesse (at the time of his death he had reached the rank of captain); he was moving up the ranks but came into conflict with his superiors, whom he said were under Marxist influence. He resigned from the police in 1926 and established himself in Hamburg until 1933 as a sales representative of Neuerburg-Reemtsma, a cigarette consortium. Around 1928 he joined a paramilitary organization, the "League of Steel" (*Stahlheim*)²⁰ and in 1929 he offered his services as an intelligence agent for the *Reichswirtschaftsministerium*, the Reich's ministry of economic affairs. This included the mission of investigating the state of the military borderlines of Alsace-Lorraine (the Maginot Line). His informant was René Haul, an agent of Charles Roos (1878–1940).²¹ During this time he maintained his position and salary with Neuerburg-Reemtsma which, under the cover of sick leave, made him available to the government.

Two unfortunate marriages ending in divorce plunged him into depression; he abandoned his work in order to collect himself. Around 1934, at the Hamburg train station, an old woman offered him a New Testament. After a short conversation she led him "to the path of Holy Scripture." For a brief time he attended a Baptist church, but was dis-

²⁰ A radical monarchist and anti-parliamentary body created after the defeat in 1918, and opposed to the politics of the Weimar Republic.

²¹ Charles Roos (1878–1940) was a defender of autonomy who fought against Alsace becoming French. He became a National Socialist and a renowned agent of the Third Reich. The French executed him for espionage in 1940.

appointed that the believers did not put into practice what they confessed, and so he kept his distance. He subsequently maintained an unobtrusive existence, living on his pension and savings, spending his days studying the Bible alone. It was sometime between 1937 and 1938, during a visit to his mother in Alsace, that he made the acquaintance of Émile Krémer, with whom he discovered a common understanding of faith. One evening in 1938 he came for the first time to the chapel of Sarrebourg, where he “gave his testimony.” During this period he was bothered several times by the Nazis, including in 1937 for his relationship with a Jehovah’s Witness. On February 4, 1941 he was interrogated for his beliefs by the secret police of Hamburg and then interned at the Friedrichsberg psychiatric hospital. He escaped, and in 1942 returned to Sarrebourg, without papers, without work, hiding with various families and exhorting them to remain firmly opposed to Nazism.

The Question of the Jewish People

A confiscated sermon of 1939 demonstrates that the question of the Jewish people was also a determining factor for Frommer. In a context of radicalized anti-Semitic violence (*Kristallnacht* had happened six months before), Frommer interpreted the racial census of 1939 as a sign of the end of time:

This sort of census, with the separation between Jews and Aryan nations, is certainly according to the will of God for the repatriation of all Jews from among all people, where they are rejected because of the hardening [of their hearts] and their disbelief (Acts 13:36–47, 28:27–28; Luke 21:24; Matthew 23:37–39; 2 Corinthians 3:14–16). This beginning of the separation and gathering of the Jews is an indubitable sign of the end of the judgement of the Jews and the time of grace for the pagans (John 10:26; Matthew 24:14; Romans 11:11–26), and that the second coming of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:11) is at our door.²²

The event was placed in a dispensationalist,²³ Zionist, and millennial perspective: the gathering of the Jews needed to take place before the second coming of Jesus Christ. Frommer’s reasoning took an astounding

²² Charles Frommer, “La condamnation à mort de Dieu à la croix à Golgotha de toutes les races par la résurrection de Jésus-Christ Homme et Fils de Dieu,” [“The condemnation to death by God on the cross of Golgotha of all the races by the resurrection of Jesus Christ and Son of God”], Sermon of May 17, 1939. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43. Frommer was taken by the Hamburg police in 1939 and passed on to the Gestapo in 1943, along with trial evidence.

²³ Concerning the origins of dispensationalist theology, see Clarence B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism, Its Historical Genesis and Ecclesial Implications* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005). Dispensationalism spread primarily in the context of the Cold War.

route: beginning with traditional elements of anti-Judaism²⁴—the “sin of the Jews,” their “hardening and disbelief”—he affirmed the “condemnation of all the races” such that all needed to be regenerated in Christ.

The content and the goal of the plan of salvation as the Holy Scriptures attest, is “Behold, I (God) make all things new” (Acts [Rev.] 21:5). “It is all accomplished,” says Jesus on the cross, meaning that “God is all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28). The course of world events therefore is not an uninterrupted cycle, but completely determined and, according to divine revelation, serving the renewal of fallen humanity—Jews and nations—by Jesus Christ.²⁵

Far from being racially inferior to the Aryans, the Jews are the reflection of their disbelief.

It is only because of their disbelief, and not because of their race, that Christ described the Jews as children of the devil. This judgment is addressed to all human beings who do not believe in God, like Abraham (John 8:40–45, 7: 7; 8: 23–24).²⁶

Without being pro-Semitic in a completely unambiguous way (the census counting of the Jews serves the plan of God), Frommer’s sermon is nevertheless subversive with regard to Nazi ideology, which proclaimed the purity of Germans, “the only moral race,” and considered Jews to be a “non-race” or a “counter-race.”²⁷

RESILIENCE AND REFUSAL OF A SPIRITUAL RESISTANCE

Deconstruction and Demonization of Nazism

Émile Krémer’s position in favor of the Jews contrasted strongly with the hesitant attitude of German churches,²⁸ including Mennonite churches, which could draw advantages from the racist politics of the Reich.²⁹ Krémer’s position initiated a deconstruction of Nazism close to

²⁴ Danielle Cohen-Levinas, Antoine Guggenheim, *L’antijudaïsme à l’épreuve de la philosophie et de la théologie, Le genre humain*, n. 56–57 (Paris: Seuil, 2016); David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism, The Western Tradition* (New York/London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013).

²⁵ Charles Frommer, “La condamnation à mort . . .”

²⁶ Charles Frommer, “La condamnation à mort . . .”

²⁷ Johann Chapoutot, *La loi du sang, Penser et agir en nazi* (Paris: Gallimard, 2014), 95.

²⁸ Christoph Strohm, *Les Églises allemandes sous le Troisième Reich*, trans. Pierre-Olivier Léchot (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2022), 157–69.

²⁹ The Mennonites (particularly those in the ethnic colonies in Soviet Ukraine) served as models for studies of “Aryan racial purity.” They also benefited in certain situations from the plunder of Jewish goods. See Benjamin W. Goossen, *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era*, particularly chapter 5: “The racial church. Nazis, antisemitism and the science of blood.”

that of the Catholic elites or Protestant observers such as Denis de Rougement,³⁰ who had clearly perceived its neo-pagan character. Likewise, in developing his own arguments, Krémer understood Hitler's ideology as a secular religion, "carnal," behind which the "forces of darkness" were active.³¹

Krémer's and Frommer's sympathizers, for example, saw in the swastika "the broken cross of Christ,"³² an occult symbol that drew its efficacy from a desecration of Christ's cross. For them it was impossible to wear it or to follow a movement that promoted it. The Pelsy people were accused of burning a swastika flag, and also refused the Hitler salute. Frommer stated:

In my opinion, the salutation "Heil Hitler" signifies that one wishes the Führer salvation, for the length of his journey, thanks to the efforts of the masses of one race and, vice versa, that one awaits from him the way of salvation, clearly on the earthly level. Biblically we are commanded to "seek first the kingdom of God" and "all things above will be given to you." This is never about human performances, but the only faith that counts for salvation comes from Christ's work on the cross. According to the biblical verse, "There is no salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given to human beings by which you will be saved." Insofar as I am Christian, I wish with all my heart salvation in Christ for Adolf Hitler, the chancellor of the Reich.

Raising one's right hand during the German salute reflects the same idea. If the gesture were only a simple sign of respect, with no reference to salvation, I would have no scruples in raising my right hand, with joy. But raising the right hand during the German salute is, in my eyes, participating in a religious symbol and affirming the human will to establish peace and prosperity on earth, without Christ. But the Bible says: "It is the law of the Eternal One who was raised, and it is the law of the Eternal One who assures the victory." In other words, this means to say that salvation comes from God alone.³³

³⁰ Patrick Cabanel, *De la paix aux résistances, Les protestants en France (1930-1945)*, 23–29.

³¹ Krémer, *Tout est possible à Dieu*, 23.

³² "This exclusion of Christ is symbolized by the swastika in the form of a broken cross. For the reasons given above, it is impossible for me to subscribe to this symbol. Personally I can neither carry this sign nor participate in an association that is pleased with the swastika symbol. It is above all a human symbol that places all hope in force and in blood (of his race). All of that goes against the work of Jesus Christ. A Christian believer ought to reject it." Deposition of Charles Frommer, November 2, 1942. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43.

³³ Deposition of Charles Frommer, November 2, 1942.

This opposition was founded on an evangelical conception of conversion as exclusive to Jesus Christ. In claiming the title of Führer and demanding that people salute him as such, Hitler usurps the place of the Messiah. This was a recurring affirmation in the depositions, as expressed by Marcel Salzmann: "I have my 'Führer.' He is called Jesus Christ. I have committed myself to him, and my life belongs to him."³⁴

The demonization of the regime also moved into word games based on Nazi acronyms. The "SS" became *Satans Söhne* ("Satan's Sons"). The NSDAP (the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*: the Nazi Party) signified *Nazarener schweige, der Antichrist posaunt* ("The Nazarene keeps silent, the Antichrist broadcasts"). Frommer made this clear to the Gestapo, attempting to hide nothing.

That means that where the Antichrist reigns ("sound of the trumpet"), Christ (the Nazarene) must hush up. [. . .] I gladly accept the reproach of having insulted National Socialism with my word game. But thanks to this symbolic explanation I have been able to alert believers, and then explain it to the authorities and the party. I wish to warn them for insulting a country that can only exist thanks to God's redemption in Jesus Christ.³⁵

Finally, the Gestapo wanted to know if this meant that the Mennonites considered Hitler to be the Antichrist. Given that the Reich is the "attempt by natural man to establish by his own power 'the Thousand-Year Kingdom,' as the chancellor of the Reich had declared many times,"³⁶ this identification was clearly a possibility. But Frommer went further:

When I refer to the "Antichrist" I am not referring to Adolf Hitler, the chancellor of the Reich. I have always refused to personify the Antichrist in my biblical studies. [. . .] The Antichrist is incarnated in every human being who claims to establish the Kingdom with his own leader, without invoking divine assistance. This concerns the Führer as much as the members of the Party. Adolf Hitler himself has said it: "I am you, and you are me!" The Führer and the members of the Party are all instruments of the satanic seduction, because they render glory to the spirit of their own strength.³⁷

Anabaptist Reasons for the Resistance

In addition to these grounds for resistance there were others that were specifically Anabaptist. Fundamentally, the confrontation with Nazism

³⁴ Marcel Salzmann, *Prisonnier mais libre* (Geneva: Éditions de Radio Réveil, n.d.), 18.

³⁵ Deposition of Charles Frommer, November 4, 1942. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43.

³⁶ Deposition of Charles Frommer, November 4, 1942. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43.

³⁷ Deposition of Charles Frommer, November 4, 1942. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43.

was structured by a theology of two kingdoms,³⁸ often affirmed by Krémer. This put him and his followers into a situation of being witnesses and martyrs, which can help explain the astonishingly audacious (or naïve) details of their depositions. A letter seized from Krémer to members of his church explicitly made the link between persecution and testimony. His son, Jean-Paul, seventeen years old, had been arrested and was going to be deported.

We have considered this to be a test of faith for him, a preparation for his removal and as a testimony to be given before the authorities and the world. This is why he is particularly in need of your intercession, so that he stands firm in his faith in Jesus Christ in the face of the threats and tricks, and that he might be able to be a testimony to his comrades and his superiors.

He will face great difficulties because of his position which does not allow him to take the oath nor to salute the flag every day, or to say the salutation. [. . .] I accompanied him and spoke for about an hour with the chief of the section. By grace I was able to give a clear testimony of Jesus, such that he is up to date on the entire situation. All depends now on the grace of the Lord to make Jean-Paul a witness of Jesus in spite of all the difficulties, and that he remain faithful. This is what he wants!³⁹

Persecution became the occasion for a confession of faith “before the authorities and the world.” It transferred the SS office into the pulpit, the court into the gallery; the stigma was reversed, and the church members were judging the Nazi illusion.⁴⁰

In this sense, persecution led these Mennonites to renew the Anabaptist tradition that “understands Christian history as the history of a martyr church whose origin is Jesus, who was born under the cross, walked under the cross, and indeed died on the cross.”⁴¹ This tradition articulated a necessary nonviolence,⁴² implying the love of neighbor, non-defense, and

³⁸ Robert Friedmann, *La théologie anabaptiste, Une interprétation* (Les Ponts-de-Martel [Switzerland]: Talwogne, 2016), 43–57.

³⁹ Letter of Émile Krémer dated 12.08.1942.

⁴⁰ “A long interrogation of two hours then ensued, during which the Lord granted me to experience literally the promise of Luke 21:14–15: ‘I will give you a mouth and a wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to resist or contradict.’ . . . It was to such a point that the two leading officers of the Gestapo had their mouths closed and had to call to the rescue all those they could still find in the building.” — Émile Krémer, *Tout est possible à Dieu*, 22–23.

⁴¹ John S. Oyer and Robert S. Kreider, eds., *Miroir des martyrs* (Charols: Excelsis, 2003), 11.

⁴² Mennonite literature on nonviolence and its different expressions (pacifism, non-resistance, non-defense, etc.) grew enormously after the 1940s. See the pioneering study of Guy F. Herschberger, *War, Peace and Nonresistance* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press 1944; 1953). Most recently, David C. Cramer and Myles Werntz, *A Field Guide to Christian Nonviolence*:

the rejection of war and the carrying of arms: "For the Christian, war is unacceptable; a Christian should justly reject it."⁴³ As Louis Girardin stated:

In no case will I touch a weapon that kills. I include the bayonet, the hand grenade, the firearm, the flame-thrower, anti-aircraft artillery, for it is written in Genesis (9:6): "Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed. For God has made humankind in his own image." In Matthew 5:44 Jesus says: "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven." Inasmuch as I am a Christian I will do this. I have no enemies and I put into practice love as commanded by Christ. In all of life's opportunities, I prefer to lose my life rather than take someone else's, because of Jesus's will. If someone unjustly hits me on the cheek, I don't respond in return.⁴⁴

Adeline Stobberg, a Mennonite from Sarrebourg, confirmed that this non-violence was shared by the faithful, even if putting it into practice was difficult.

For me, the Word of God is the true way. Mennonites are held to live and act according to the Word of God. Mennonites in the past did not take part in war according to our commandment: "You shall not kill but rather love your neighbor." During the present conflict Mennonites have also been called to conscription. This is only by obligation. My son has also left for the war. According to my Christian convictions, I would never leave to go to war.⁴⁵

Nonviolence extends pardon and blessing of enemies. All the prisoners affirmed that although they refused to salute Hitler, they had no personal hatred toward him: "But being a Christian, I have to make it clear that I love the Führer Adolf Hitler and that I can conclude a letter with no problem saying: 'I wish salvation in Christ to the Führer Adolf Hitler!'"⁴⁶

Prophetic Elements

Finally, Krémer's resistance relied on very surprising elements of the prophetic type: "visions," "revelations," and "predictions." In the 1930s Jean Séguy identified them as "pentecostal" or "pentecostalish" elements

Key Thinkers, Activists, and Movements for the Gospel of Peace (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022).

⁴³ Deposition of Émile Krémer, November 6, 1942. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43.

⁴⁴ Deposition of Louis Girardin, 28.10.1942. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43.

⁴⁵ Deposition of Adeline Stobberg, 1.11.1942. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43.

⁴⁶ Deposition of Paul Pelsy, 1.11.1942. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43.

within the Mennonite assemblies.⁴⁷ In reality, insofar as these influences came from outside the Mennonites, they originated with members of the Protestant Lutheran or Reformed churches. Those interrogated gave the names of the “visionaries”: M. and Mme Hickel, Protestants, of Balbronn; the farmer Jenny, of Vogelsheim, Protestant; Maria Laach of Marienthal; and especially Erna Sutter, an Alsatian teacher of Protestant origin and attached to the Mennonites. A document from 1959, preserved in Frommer’s police dossier, contained prophecies he pronounced during the war (which came true).⁴⁸

Krémer in fact was aware of these manifestations that were expressed in prayer meetings. He entered them in a notebook (which the Gestapo seized and for which he was required to answer) and sought to interpret them “when he was able.” Erna Sutter’s prophecies, in particular, drew attention because of their political dimension. She affirmed having seen a “flat” swastika flying above Sarrebourg, which Krémer along with others interpreted as the imminent coming of the end of Nazism.

The political visions of Sutter concern events (illegible part) yet to come. Even if they are inspired by the Spirit of God, I cannot demonstrate their truth, as if for example Mussolini will become the Antichrist. It is similar for “the pliers?” (handwriting difficult to read) of Sutter; according to this vision, the power of Hitler and the Gestapo has come to an end. We cannot certify this; one can only wait for it.⁴⁹

These visions appeared to be above all a source of encouragement to persevere in spite of persecution whose end is coming soon. The abolition of the border between natural and supernatural, visible and invisible, reveals how Krémer’s resistance was thought to be a spiritual combat that God sustained with extraordinary signs.

THE PRICE OF FAITHFULNESS: TENSIONS, RECANTATIONS, AND SENTENCES

Betrayal

Resistance in Alsace was precarious.⁵⁰ Beginning in 1942 repression intensified, arrests increased, and in 1943 the possibility of an Allied landing

⁴⁷ Jean Séguy, *Les assemblées anabaptistes-mennonites de France*, 589–91. I have nuanced and made more precise Émile Krémer’s report of pentecostalism, in Stéphane Zehr, *Histoire de la Mission Timothée, Les jours des petits commencements (1972-1986)* (Alès: Calvin éditions, 2023).

⁴⁸ “Friedrich Zürcher zu Polizeibehörde, Hamburg-Altona, May 25, 1959,” Hamburg, Staatsarchiv, 331–8_180, Frommer, Karl Johann.

⁴⁹ Deposition of Émile Krémer, November 6, 1942. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43.

⁵⁰ Éric Le Normand, “La résistance alsacienne et son rôle dans la Libération,” in *La lettre de la Fondation de la Résistance, Dossier Thématique: La Résistance alsacienne*, n. 85 (June 2016), 2–4.

led the Nazi authorities to harden their position.⁵¹ In this context, Krémer, Frommer, and their followers were orally denounced at the end of 1942 by a Wehrmacht soldier named Walter Apelt. As was often the case, ideological considerations and personal interests and reasons were mixed together to justify the denunciation.⁵² Apelt was close to the Mennonites of Sarrebourg, where he was convalescing after an injury suffered on the eastern front. His integration into the community was quick, since he had been a member of a free church in Leipzig. Once or twice he had led a Bible study, but his uniform with the swastika posed a problem and created tension. In fact, Apelt was a Nazi. He was a member of the Hitler Youth, and an activist in the *Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* (a union of German Nazi students). He next became a *Schütze* in the *Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps* (NSKK), a low rank in this Nazi paramilitary organization dealing with transportation. Émile Krémer and Erna Sutter confronted him at a meeting about his wearing the swastika. They asked him to repent and leave it behind, but he refused. During this same time, he was discovered to be in an adulterous relationship with a married woman, a member of the church assembly. Krémer and Frommer disciplined him. It is therefore probable that his betrayal was motivated by vengeance. The Mennonite church of Sarrebourg was subsequently closed by the Nazis.

Places of Struggle

The Nazi security police (SiPo-SD)⁵³ interrogated about a dozen persons and imprisoned several of them.⁵⁴ It is clear that in several areas, Krémer and Frommer's nonconformity to the world resulted in struggles, hesitations, and reversals. The first line of tension concerned belonging to political institutions of the Reich, such as the *Deutsche Volksgemeinschaft* (DVG: Community of German people).⁵⁵ Krémer and Frommer affirmed that one could not belong to both the church and the DVG. Valentin Zehr, a Mennonite farmer from Misselhof, illustrates the struggles of conscience that resulted. At first convinced by Frommer, he decided to leave the DVG but rejoined six months later, doubting the merits of such a radical move

⁵¹ Olivier Wieviorka, *Histoire de la Résistance, 1940-1945* (Paris: Perrin, 2013), 451.

⁵² Laurent Joly (dir.), *La délation dans la France des années noires* (Paris: Perrin, 2012).

⁵³ SiPo (the *Sicherheitspolizei* or security police) was created by Heinrich Himmler in 1936. It was closely related with the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*), the intelligence agency of the SS. See the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum online: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org>, security police (SIPO).

⁵⁴ The persons questioned were Charles Frommer, no profession; Louis Girardin, forester guard; Adeline Krémer-Stobberg, no profession; Émile Krémer, general guard of water and forests; Paul Pelsy, farmer; Erna Sutter, teacher; Karl Weibel; Heinz Will; Valentin and Arsène Zehr, farmers.

⁵⁵ The DVG was an association drawn up under the Nazi Party (NSDAP) and imposed on residents of the department of Moselle at the beginning of August 1942.

in light of the price to be paid.⁵⁶ The question arose again in the case of the Hitler Youth or participation in the air defense service (*Luftschutz*). In each case the Mennonites were confronted with the consequences of civil disobedience.

The most important point of tension, however, was generated by the induction of soldiers into the Wehrmacht, decreed in August of 1942, that implicated 130,000 Alsatians and residents of the Moselle. Young Mennonites experienced a conflict of conscience. Some were able to take refuge in Switzerland because of their nationality. Others attempted to postpone incorporation, or to plead exemption for reasons of family or health. But the majority were obliged to take part. Only Jean-Paul Krémer, the son of Émile Krémer, refused, which led to his deportation.⁵⁷ The others held as much as possible to this line of thinking: Submission to the authorities was accepted in the hope that God would spare them from having to use violence. In Krémer's group, some held more nuanced opinions, such as Paul Pelsy.

I do not reject military service. I was a French soldier during the war and I carried a firearm, but God be thanked, I did not have to use it to shoot a human being. If the German regime orders me to take up arms today I will of course respond to that request. I would request that they place me in a position in which I would not have to carry arms. If that was refused, I would carry arms. I would hand over the act of shooting into God's hands, who will show me in the moment if I am able to not hurt and eventually kill the enemy.⁵⁸

Refusal of violence remained foundational, but it was negotiated in the hope of not having to use it.

In several cases, prison and intimidation led to recantations. Heinz Will, Karl Weiber, and Louis Girardin were imprisoned from November 1942 to February–March 1943. Heinz Will affirmed that he was ready to obey the Nazi authorities, against his conscience.

In my opinion, a Christian cannot wear the swastika because it is the broken cross and as such is the sign of the Antichrist. [. . .] On the day that I become a soldier and the authorities order me to wear the swastika, I will wear it because it has been commanded. Also when they order me to raise the swastika flag. If I am called to the army I will

⁵⁶ Deposition of Valentin Zehr, no date. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43.

⁵⁷ Concerning the individual suffering of Jean-Paul Krémer in the camps, see Jean-Paul Krémer, *Le salut ne vient pas d'Hitler, Un mennonite déporté à Natzweiler et Buchenwald* (Alès: Calvin éditions, 2020), and Stéphane Zehr, "Un mennonite au KL. Jean-Paul Krémer, la foi et la fraternité dans l'univers concentrationnaire (1942-1945)," *Positions Luthériennes* (2019/3), 203–19.

⁵⁸ Deposition of Paul Pelsy, November 1, 1942. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43.

carry out my duty. I will confront the enemy, weapons in hand, Sundays as well.⁵⁹

To convince Girardin, the Gestapo used his sense of “familial responsibility” (*Sippenhaft*) “which consisted of holding all members of a family or clan responsible with their goods and their liberty on the basis of the ‘illegal’ actions committed by one of the group.”⁶⁰ Louis’s wife Élise, their children (a boy and a girl who as a result suffered mental health consequences) and his stepfather David Zehr were sent to Germany to a “recovery camp.” After four months, Louis Girardin recanted his views concerning the swastika, the army, the uniform, and the duties owed to the state. But he continued to refuse to belong to the DVG or to perform the Nazi salute.⁶¹ His family was then able to return to Moselle. Paul Pelsy obeyed the order to cease preaching. In the end Karl Weibel rejected most of his earlier ideas. In these three cases, recantation meant the end of the lawsuits against them.

The Sentences

As historian Jacques Sémelin has written, “resistance obeys the logic of sacrifice.”⁶² After eleven months in various prisons, Charles Frommer and Émile Krémer were called to appear before the Special Court (*Sondergericht*) of Metz on the October 15, 1943. They were accused of “sedition infringing on the military force” and placed in preventative detention for the following:

having sown confusion in their followers in the Mennonite assembly of Sarrebourg and its surroundings in 1942 with their sermons and disseminating confusion insidiously by taking up positions against the national symbols, the institutions of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) and those of the state. They are suspected of this crime and it is urgent that they be charged because they will immediately use their liberty to contravene the laws.⁶³

The sentences for anti-German propaganda and demoralizing words were for two-thirds to one year in prison.⁶⁴ But what was pronounced

⁵⁹ Declaration of Heinz Will, 23.02.1943. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43. He would renew it on 4.03.1943, without signing it. His detention in prison did not last longer than six months.

⁶⁰ Gilbert Merlio, *Les résistances allemandes à Hitler*, 32.

⁶¹ Declaration of Louis Girardin, February 23–24, 1943. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43.

⁶² Jacques Sémelin, *Sans armes face à Hitler, La résistance civile en Europe 1939-1945* (Paris: Les Arènes, 2013), 242.

⁶³ Arrest warrant, Sarreguemines, November 13, 1942. AD 57, 335 W 88 KLS 151/43.

⁶⁴ But the sentences could lead to deportation if the Gestapo thought them too lenient. Marcel Neigert, “La répression allemande en Moselle (1940-1945),” *Revue d’histoire de la*

instead was an acquittal: "The two defendants are acquitted, cleared of this accusation of sedition. The two defendants are to be placed in a psychiatric hospital."⁶⁵

The reason for this astounding outcome lies in their "non-responsibility." The expertise of the court-assigned doctor (whom Krémer said in his memoirs was known to him)⁶⁶ had convinced an indecisive tribunal by playing the card of fanaticism and psychological fragility. In the case of Frommer it was not difficult to prove. Frommer's first stay in a psychiatric facility had been in 1917 following "fits of rage." In 1941 he spent three weeks as a security measure at the Friedrichberg hospital (Hamburg). A diagnosis followed of an "unstable nervous system." The judges declared that "he is not normal, incapable of measuring his behavior according to norms,"⁶⁷ which in judicial terms made him not responsible. In the case of Émile Krémer, the doctor spoke likewise of "pathology," of a "nervous fragility," and of an "aberrant way of thinking"⁶⁸ because he believed persons with mental problems and their prophecies, and also believed in "astrology." He was therefore recognized as incapable of evaluating what was illicit in his actions.⁶⁹ As troubling as Erna Sutter's visions were, they served as a last sacrament for Krémer for the psychiatricization of his religious thought. Sutter herself was acquitted, for identical reasons: she was thought to have been a victim of "schizophrenic episodes," clearly mentally ill during the events of 1942. Krémer and Sutter were placed in the hospital of Lorquin, and Frommer in a hospital in Germany (where he disappeared until his death in 1959), for "their persuasive teaching absolutely and rapidly required their quick internment in a psychiatric facility."

The Deportation of Jean-Paul Krémer

Émile Krémer's son Jean-Paul was the one who paid heavily for his spiritual resistance. At the Matthias Grünewalde high school at Colmar he would not perform the Nazi salute or sing the national anthems, nor would he join the Hitler Youth, although these things were obligatory after January 2, 1941. He was denounced and dismissed in 1942. At the

Deuxième Guerre mondiale, 27e Année, No. 105, La Lorraine pendant la Guerre (January 1977): 79–100.

⁶⁵ Sentence (*Urteil*). LSK Ls 151/43.

⁶⁶ Krémer, *Tout est possible à Dieu*, 36–37.

⁶⁷ Sentence (*Urteil*). LSK Ls 151/43.

⁶⁸ "Auch den Angeklagten Krémer hält der Sachverständige für einen pathologisch erkrankten, nervenschwachen und neurasthenischen Psychopathen mit einer Abwegigen grenzenden Denkweise." Sentence (*Urteil*). LSK Ls 151/41, 17.

⁶⁹ "Kremer unfähig war . . . , das Unerlaubte seiner Tätigkeit einzusehen oder nach dieser Einsicht zu handeln." Sentence (*Urteil*). LSK Ls 151/41, 17–18.

beginning of August he was summoned by the RAD,⁷⁰ then placed in the disciplinary section (*Abteilung 4/276, Truppe 12*), where he discovered the arbitrary and violent nature of Nazi discipline. His induction into the Wehrmacht on August 25, 1942 marked the turning point of his tragedy: all the members of his section were supposed to take a public oath (*Vereidigung*) before the officers. In spite of the pressure from the group and the hierarchy, in spite of the symbolic tension of such an event, he refused to comply. He was taken out of the group, and for him it was the beginning of the end.

On September 1, 1942 Jean-Paul Krémer was placed under five days of severe arrest (*Verschärften Arrest*).⁷¹ Since he still persisted in his refusals to obey, the length of the sentence was extended to ten days, then to forty in the bunker, as decreed by Berlin. For that he was demobilized to the seat of the Gestapo in Freiburg, where he was repeatedly interrogated and tortured. Biblical passages communicated by letter maintained his resolve: "Do not fear, for I am with you" (Isaiah 43:1–2), but at the beginning of December he was deported. His detention order stipulated that it was "because of his religious fanaticism."⁷² After several days' journey by wagon, during which he almost died of cold and privations, he arrived, all of 18 years old, in the depth of winter at the Narzweiler-Struthof concentration camp (*Konzentrationslager*). This was a "small" (category III) concentration camp located in annexed Alsace; it was one of the most severe in the system. At first it was devoted to the mining of a granite quarry for the SS. It quickly served the German war economy and developed into nebulous "satellite camps" on both sides of the Rhine. The conditions were known to be terrifying. The "Struthof" was the place of detention for 52,000 prisoners; 22,000 died there, decimated by forced labor, the climate, scientific experiments, and death marches. More than half of the deaths (54.3 percent) occurred before three months, with 81.6 percent dead in the first six months.⁷³ Thanks to his linguistic gifts, his age, and the assistance of other detainees, Jean-Paul Krémer (detainee 1670) was placed in the *Effektenkammer*,⁷⁴ an easier assignment than the quarry.

⁷⁰ This was the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, a kind of pre-military work service created in 1935 in order to enlist German youth. It obliged them to complete a service of six months.

⁷¹ According to this procedure, the prisoner passed the first to five days of isolation in a cell, with one piece of bread and one pitcher of water per day (a plate every fourth day), and ordered to remain standing.

⁷² Dossier Jean-Paul Krémer, GR 16P/323541. Archives des victimes des conflits contemporains du Service historique de la Défense [Archives of the victims of contemporary conflicts in the historical service of the defense], Caen.

⁷³ Robert Steegman, *Le camp de Natzweiler-Struthof* (Paris: Seuil, 2009), 307–8.

⁷⁴ The place where prisoners' effects were consigned.

On March 8, 1943 he was transferred to Buchenwald concentration camp (detainee 10564). There again he lived in daily terror, in a significantly disadvantageous position: a young insubordinate soldier of the Wehrmacht and considered a German, isolated, he also did not belong to the communist faction that dominated the camp. He was thus a victim completely marked out for the vindictiveness of the SS, as Nikolaus Wachsmann has written: "That which the SS truly fought against was not the religious convictions of the detainees, but rather their obstinate behavior. . . . The leaders of the passive resistance were hit with great ferocity."⁷⁵ But the organization of Buchenwald also possessed one particular aspect that would be favorable to Jean-Paul Krémer. In effect, after numerous dangerous underground battles against the "greens" (criminal prisoners), the German communist prisoners gained the almost-total leadership of the internal administration. Among other things, that meant that they were in charge of the distribution of work.

This clandestine resistance of the "politiques" created an invisible wall between the masses and the SS that was difficult to maintain but nevertheless efficient. It ameliorated and saved the lives of a number of detainees.⁷⁶ While he was working for the locksmith unit, Krémer was taken by surprise by the SS responsible for the workshop: after the day of work and a lengthy evening, he was summoned to dig a trench alone until two in the morning for a week. He then benefited from unexpected protection: his *Vorarbeiter* (captain), a German communist, realized that Krémer was going to die there and arranged for a transfer to the shoe repair unit. The camp was sufficiently large enough that this went unnoticed. Krémer barely survived. At the shoe repair unit, thanks to a trick while counting shoes, he managed to get dozens of pairs out for prisoners who had been deprived of them, thus saving their lives. For more than two years he and his companions in misfortune saw

arrests and the stay in prison . . . , the 'great journey' piled up in animal wagons, hunger, the thirst that sometimes led to madness, the shock of arrival, the interrogation, the shower, the shaving of bodies, the herds, the zebra-striped costumes, the quarantine, the counting of everyone such that names were replaced by numbers, the red triangle of political prisoners . . . , the hunger, the lack of hygiene, the infernal promiscuity, the toilets, the glow of the crematorium . . . , the leader of the block, the kapo, the bedsteads, the barbed wire and those thrown against it, the

⁷⁵ Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL, Une histoire des camps de concentration nazis* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), 174.

⁷⁶ See Olivier Laliou, *La résistance française à Buchenwald* (Paris: Tallandier, 2012).

dysentery, the lice and the typhus, the marches, the endless summons where the detainees were counted and recounted, the blows, etc.⁷⁷

For most detainees it was not possible to survive without suffering the after-effects of these procedures designed to break one's character and to humiliate one's personhood. I have shown elsewhere how Jean-Paul Krémer's faith had been decisive in his overcoming the test of deportation.⁷⁸ Up to the liberation of Buchenwald by the American army on April 11, 1945, he said that he had experienced "the reality of Jesus Christ in a completely tangible manner."⁷⁹

CONCLUSION

One question remains: How can it be that, without being entirely unknown, Krémer's resistance has disappeared from the memory of Mennonites?⁸⁰ Several reasons could be proposed, tied to the fact that Krémer had been controversial even before the war. His fight against the occult, his cure of souls, and his anti-Nazi positions put him in tension with the French and German [Mennonite] conferences. But he turned out to be just as embarrassing for the American representatives of the Mennonite Central Committee. When they arrived in Alsace to participate in the post-war reconstruction effort, they brought financial and humanitarian means as well as a new theology, presented as a restoration of true Anabaptism. This "Anabaptist Vision," articulated by Harold Bender in 1942 and translated into French in 1950, was expressed through a particular narrative: the French had abandoned the principles of non-resistance, and the Americans brought a return to the purity of the origins.⁸¹ But we have seen that nonviolence structured the basic positions of the Mennonites who sympathized with Krémer, creating struggles and

⁷⁷ Robert Steegman, *Le camp de Natzweiler-Struthof*, 107.

⁷⁸ Stéphane Zehr, "Un mennonite au KL," 203–19.

⁷⁹ Jean-Paul Krémer, *La protection de Dieu, Expériences derrière les barbelés (Témoignage transcrit d'une réunion donnée à Châteauroux en septembre 1985)* (Tours: Évangile pour Tous, n.d.).

⁸⁰ Historian Neal Blough mentions a letter of theologian John H. Yoder, who cites "the case of an elder from Colmar, Émile Krémer, who refused to say 'Heil Hitler.' One of his sons was sent to a concentration camp for refusing military service." Neal Blough, "Harold Bender, la 'vision anabaptiste' et les mennonites de France," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français, Anabaptismes, de l'exclusion à la reconnaissance, Actes réunis par Catherine Dejeumont et Bernard Roussel* (Paris-Genève: Droz, 2002/1), 155. The investigation of this fact, however, was not pursued further.

⁸¹ Neal Blough wrote this: "Note also that (the Awakening among the Mennonites) did not create the occasion to insert non-violence as one of the fundamental aspects of Anabaptist Mennonite theology . . . There is no known case of conscientious objection among the French Mennonites during the Second World War and Alsatian Mennonites were incorporated by force into Hitler's armies. One wonders at the welcome French Mennonites would give North American Mennonites, when the latter told them forcefully that a Christian does not participate in war." Neal Blough, "Harold Bender," 154–55.

suffering in the face of the difficulties that practicing nonviolence entailed under Nazi law.

In fact, the vision promulgated by the Americans implied a change of paradigm: they wanted the Mennonites to move from a communitarian withdrawal from the world to a social activism in the world centered in a “peace theology.” This change implied passing over in silence the tendency represented by Krémer, whose pacifism was grounded in non-conformity to the world—that is, a pacifism based in an Anabaptism judged to be sectarian and pietist that the Americans were about to reform. In this perspective, the French forms of Mennonite resistance to the Nazis could only weaken the American narrative. So, while Mennonite historiography narrates the various collaborations of the French community with Nazism, the archives bring to light the neglected story of a spiritual, radical, and nonviolent resistance among the French Mennonites. The strength of the archives is that they offer a fair representation of what actually happened. Beyond the silences of memory, beyond the organization of the past for confessional or theological ends, the archives allow the embarrassing elements to persist, without which history is simply myth.