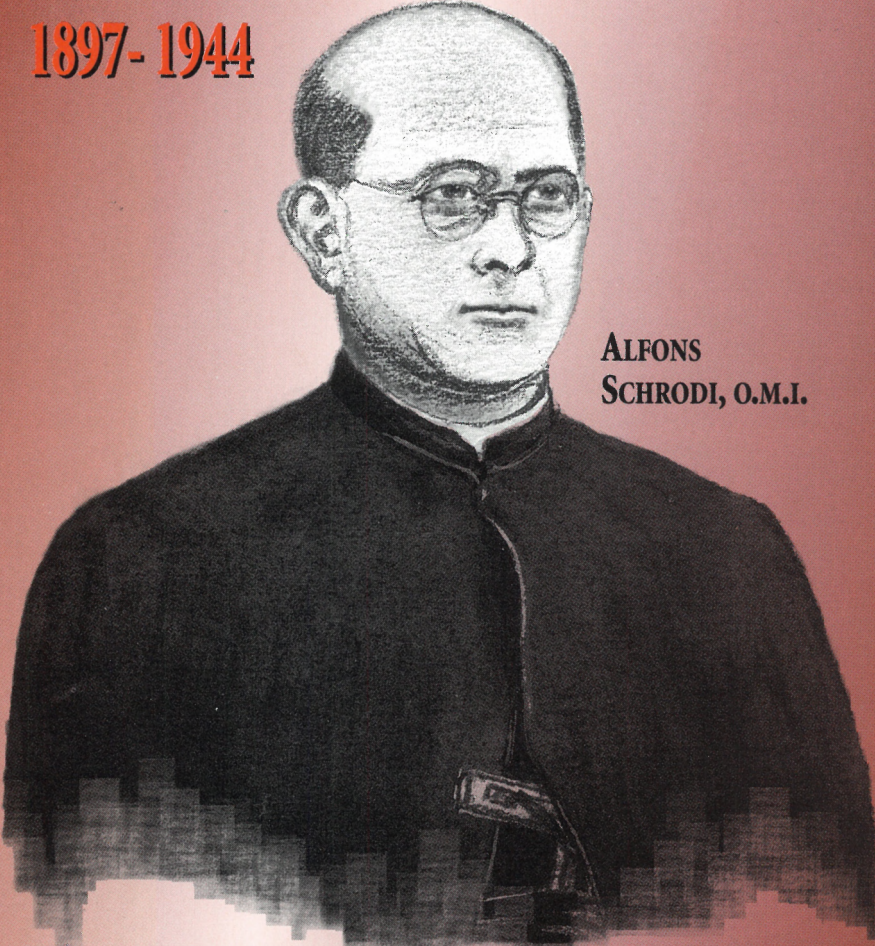



Friedrich Lorenz, O.M.I.

1897-1944

A black and white stippled portrait of Friedrich Lorenz, O.M.I. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark, high-collared clerical jacket and round-rimmed glasses. He has a serious expression and is looking slightly to the right of the viewer.

ALFONS
SCHRODI, O.M.I.

A decorative flourish consisting of a stylized, intertwined scroll or ribbon design, positioned behind the text.

OBLATE
HERITAGE

2

*“A Way of the Cross
in the 20th Century”*

Friedrich Lorenz, O.M.I.

1897-1944

Fr. Alfons Schrodi, O.M.I.

2

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Friedrich Lorenz, O.M.I.

1897 - 1944

It was typical weather for the month of All Souls — cold and overcast. A funeral procession moved towards the graveyard of the Oblates at Hünfeld, Germany, on the 3rd of November, 1947. One of the theological students carried a black-veiled urn containing the ashes of Fr. Friedrich Lorenz, O.M.I. But were they really his? For those who knew the circumstances of his death, it was not an unreasonable question to ask.

We may trust that all the legal formalities were observed after Father Lorenz was dead, but how he had come to his death was a story of injustice and utter disregard for human dignity. In a matter-of-fact way the death certificate tells us:

“It is hereby notified that the body of the clergyman Friedrich Lorenz, born 10. 6. 1897, deceased 13. 11. 1944 at Halle (S) has been incinerated this day in our crematory. The ashes were buried on 17. 11. 1944 on Gertrauden-cemetery, section 4, n. 1520. Signed: The Lord Mayor. By order: (signature illegible) Cemetery Overseer.”

Father P. Drossert, Catholic head-chaplain at the military prison, wrote to Mr. Richard Lorenz, Hildesheim, on November 20th, 1944 (file number Fo.Zi.No. 362/44): “Your brother was buried according to the rites of the Church by Provost Morsbach on Gertrauden-Cemetery at Halle/Saale.” Fr. Morsbach himself confirmed by letter of Sept. 1st, 1947:

“I had promised him before his death to take care of a Christian burial with all the rites of the Church. This I did. I shall never forget with what shining face and courageous

bearing Fr. Lorenz went his last way. The last words he spoke on this earth were a happy 'We meet again in heaven.'"

These were words of strength in the face of death! Nothing Fr. Lorenz said or wrote permits us to conclude that he felt like a hero or even a martyr. But his faith had matured during so many days and nights of suffering to such an extent, that he was able to understand that his way towards the scaffold was a going with Christ towards life's perfection.

Friedrich Lorenz's home stood at Klein Freden near Alfeld/Leine in the diocese of Hildesheim. His father was a postman. Every day he delivered the mail, driving his cart from Freden via Winzenburg to Lamspringe, as he also did on that 10th of June, 1897 when his son Friedrich was born. When in 1902 a railroad was opened connecting Hildesheim via Lamspringe with Gandersheim, Mr. Lorenz found employment at the Hildesheim Post Office. With his wife Mary Ossenkopp and his three children he took lodgings in the parish of St. Bernard, near the post office and railroad station.

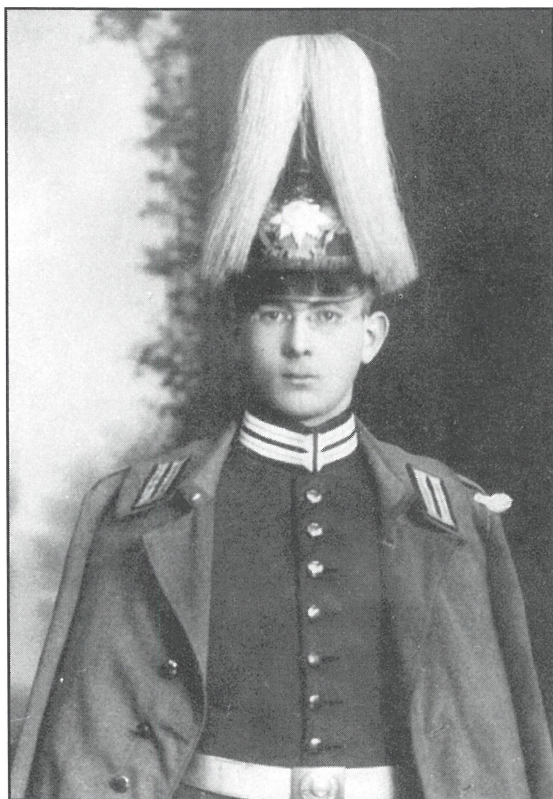
Five-year-old Lorenz had no problem changing from village to town. At primary school he proved an active little imp who held his ground. His achievements as a pupil were highly acknowledged by secular and clerical teachers, and he was allowed to serve public Masses at the parish church. Thus he took his first steps on the way towards his future goal. In 1908 Oblate Father Rudolf Knackstedt celebrated his first Mass in his hometown Hildesheim; three years later it was his brother Joseph's turn. These were also great days for altar boys. Between 1908 and 1911, no less than five of them, impressed by these young priests, demanded admission at St. Charles College, the minor seminary of the German Oblate Province. Only Friedrich Lorenz, who was admitted on April 25th, 1911, held out.

He was 14, far from his home, and homesick, too, for all was new to him. There were about 200 boys from everywhere.

There were the teachers, all priests, who in class were not always smiling happily as did those newly ordained young priests he had met at St. Bernard's sacristy. There were his classmates who were more advanced in studies than he, since he had joined them during the school year. Problems, problems! Friedrich mastered them, as he mastered all the subjects he had to study, and he received top marks for application, behaviour and orderliness. These were good recommendations for the novitiate to which he was admitted at St. Gerlach by novice master Josef Creusen on August 14th, 1916.

To War

The war that had been already consuming Europe's vital forces for two years did not spare Friedrich Lorenz and his classmates. On September 21st, 1916 he was drafted, at a time



when the bloody battles of Verdun and of the Somme made the future look darker than ever. After his basic military training, Lorenz was sent to the western front, took part in those huge battles, and was twice wounded. He obtained the ranks of private first class and corporal, and was decorated with the Iron Cross second class. Later on, during his trial, he used to point out these facts, and incidentally remarked that in 1918 he was not put on the list of aspirant officers, only because he was a theologian and of humble descent.

To the Oblates

The experience of the war did not divert him from his vocation — on the contrary. He could hardly wait to commence his novitiate. The young men in 1919 heading for Maria Engelport novitiate were deeply marked by their various experiences of the war. They now longed to stand the test in a spiritual struggle. Their novice master was Fr. Alois Weber, once their well-loved superior and teacher at St. Charles. Fr. Weber, in a report, described him as a well built, energetic, conscientious man, somewhat, but not extremely, sensitive, of distinguished appearance and manners, with a personality whose character had stood the test during his military life. Friedrich Lorenz was admitted to First Vows on 25th July, 1920. The most decisive step on the path towards his life's goal was taken.



To the Priesthood

The first years of his studies at Hünfeld coincided with a disastrous political and economic situation in Germany. This of course, one might have ignored behind the walls of a scholasticate where there was no lack of food, but where hardly ever a newspaper found its way. Nevertheless, the “war-generation” was wide awake, informed about the situation by letters from home and talks from visiting missionaries. Some of Fr. Lorenz’s statements during his trial show how much the suffering of the people affected him. The incredible inflation that lasted till 1923 not only had a corroding effect on public morals, but also gave rise to innumerable political groups and parties profiting from the various reasons for general

On the Way to People

discontent. Among these was the “*National Socialist Workers Party*”. It had failed in its attempt to seize power by putsch in 1923, and for the moment it seemed reduced to insignificance. The end of inflation went along with a certain political and economic stabilization and growing confidence on the part of the people. It was into this uncertain world that Friedrich was ordained a priest on July 6th, 1924 at Hünfeld.

He received his first obedience on July 6th, 1925, and joined the community of Nikolauskloster, one of the centres for missionary activity in lower Rhineland. Soon he became aware of the difficulty to make theory meet practice. The “old hands” in the preaching profession followed the motto: “Throw him into the water, and he’ll learn how to swim.”

Of course, beginners were not just left without any kind of initiation to their work, and each newcomer was given a “mentor”. In 1926 Fr. Lorenz worked with a missionary band at Langenau, Silesia, which had been formed in 1925. From July 1927 to September 1931 he belonged to the house of Gelsenkirchen, and then to that of Saarbrücken till 1934. But a new challenge was soon presented to him.

To the “Little Flock”

Fr. Lorenz received a new assignment which corresponded to the missionary outlook of the Oblates and was, in a way, even more demanding than the work of a parish missionary. He was sent to serve at Stettin in the region of Pomerania in north-east Germany (now Polish), a region where Catholics were a small minority.

When the “Golden Twenties” drew towards their end, and when the economic crisis deepened, Stettin suffered in a special way from a shortage of labour. There was a growing radicalism among this working people, those “who lined the streets with hard eyes and cold hearts”, as one priest wrote at the time.

The Third Reich

About the time the country witnessed the rise of the “Third Reich”. The formerly red (Communist/Socialist) majority now turned brown (Nazi), more and more aggressive and fanatic, compelled not so much by conviction, but by sheer misery. What the masses wanted was work and bread, and that was promised and given to them. Whatever the reasons, these were undoubted achievements of the new regime — chimneys were smoking again, order and tranquility returned. Such was the



To War Again

situation, when Father Lorenz and his Rector Fr. Leinberger were called to serve the Catholics of the region in 1934.

The change in his situation was not easy for Fr. Lorenz. It is on record that he had more difficulties than others in coping with the adversities of life. By and by, however, he grew fond of pastoral work in the diaspora in spite of its hardships, privations, miserable working and living conditions. It needed zeal and perseverance, and he experienced, that “Success is none of God’s names” (Martin Buber). He had been accustomed to preach in big, beautiful and crowded churches; now he had to rely on his faith alone. On the other hand, he now had a more direct and personal contact with people, and this made him happy.

The political situation in Germany was deteriorating. As early as August 14th, 1937, the German Oblate Provincial, Fr. Georg Fromm, received a letter marked “Secret”. It read: *“In case of war, Fr. Friedrich Lorenz, Stettin-Züllchow, will be expected to serve as divisional chaplain. Please indicate your consent. Consent of the bishop of Berlin will be obtained at the same time.”* The Provincial had no choice but to agree.

More and more the political provocation of the Nazis turned into a military one, and almost inevitably the course of events led towards the dreaded madness of another war.

On August 26th, 1939, Fr. Lorenz was drafted as military chaplain of the 207th infantry division which went to the field on September 1st. The “fanatical pacifist,” so called by Fr. Leinberger, found himself a soldier over night, in a way even a volunteer, since he had accepted the assignment in order to be able to serve the soldiers as a priest, thus avoiding at least the obligation to serve under arms. Several months later his commanding General confirmed that Fr. Lorenz had done far more than his strict duty, and he proposed him for a decoration.

Father Lorenz had indeed done more than his duty, though in a different sense than his General was aware. From a letter of a Catholic Pastor, Fr. Schliep at Zoppot near Gdansk, we gather the following facts:

“When the German troops occupied the port of Gdingen in 1939, I heard of a German military chaplain, one Fr. Lorenz, whom I contacted. I asked him, and he accepted, to get information about my two brothers Kasimir and Bruno, both priests at Lubichau and Suleczyno respectively, places within the combat zone where only Fr. Lorenz was allowed to move about.

“Father Lorenz gave me the impression of a firm character, with a strong sense of duty, totally given to his task as a pastor. He strove to recite his breviary every day. Whenever there was a chance he paid secret visits to us at the presbytery in order to find some quiet for prayer and to exchange a few words with us, but never stayed for more than an hour in order to avoid suspicion. Even in his officer’s uniform he was of modest bearing. His words were sober and very carefully chosen. I learned much about the difficulties he met in the exercise of his ministry. His closest acquaintance among the officers was the General’s aide-de-camp, who had great antipathy for Hitler, just like Fr. Lorenz himself.

“It was dangerous for Fr. Lorenz to have contact with Polish people, especially with Polish Catholic priests. He encouraged them, cautioned them, advised them how to deal with German military and civil authorities. He encouraged pastors to stand by their communities like good shepherds, to share their sufferings, even to face death. The sufferings of the priests chased by the SS and SA weighed heavily on his soul and mind, so much so that very often he was depressed. He had found out that one of my brothers had been murdered by the Nazis, but he felt unable to tell me himself. Numerous are the Polish priests

he prepared to face execution when nothing more could be done for them.

“It seemed to me, divine providence had chosen precisely him to do the ministry of another Vincent of Paul in our particularly afflicted diocese of Chelmo. The bishop had left Pelplin (his residence) at the eve of the German invasion. Most of the canons, the diocesan officials, and the professors were murdered. The diocese was left without any sort of leadership. I asked Fr. Lorenz to explain this state of things to his military bishop, Rarkowski, but he got no reaction. I then suggested that he speak to the bishop of Gdansk, Dr. Carl Maria Splett. At first Fr. Lorenz hesitated, since he was not allowed to take such a step without passing through the official channels of military bureaucracy. By chance, however, he met Bishop Splett at the end of September 1939 at Zoppot. Several times during the first half of October he informed him about the situation in Chelmo diocese, helped him to gather documentation, and, if I remember well, obtained for him a travelling permit to see the Papal Nuntio Orsenigo at Berlin. After Bishop Splett’s return Fr. Lorenz was happy to tell me that the Nuntio had entrusted the administration of Chelmo diocese to the bishop of Gdansk. In my opinion this was Fr. Lorenz’s greatest achievement.”

Nothing of his involvement in this affair was public knowledge at the time. In fact, he had been passing on news which the Nazis tried to keep secret, e.g., concerning the terrible situation in the occupied territories. Had the ever present Gestapo, the secret police, been aware of his role, in all probability he would have been already eliminated at this early stage.

Back to the “Little Flock”

In winter 1939/40 Fr. Lorenz's division was transferred to the Dutch border. In May/June 1940 he followed his troops through the Netherlands and Belgium into France where he remained till the end of 1940. He then was discharged like all religious in officer's rank.

He now resumed his civilian pastoral work made more difficult and more extensive by the war. The number of workers in armament factories around Stettin had increased considerably, among them many forced labourers from Poland and France. There was a shortage of secular clergy because of the great number of drafted priests, so the Archpriest and Dean of St. John's at Stettin asked Fr. Leinberger for help. He was rector of the Oblate house at Züllchow, where Fr. Alois Becher had replaced Fr. Lorenz at the beginning of the war. Now Fr. Lorenz had returned, he was free to accept a chaplaincy at Stettin. In order to avoid too much travelling, he took lodgings at the presbytery of St. John's in November 1942. It was a change that was going to be of heavy consequence for Fr. Friedrich Lorenz.

On the Way of Suffering

No one among the clergy suspected that the Gestapo had been preparing long since a crushing blow against the clergy at Stettin. One of the main actors in this tragedy was a certain “Mr. Hagen,” an Austrian. He had introduced himself at St. John's presbytery in October/November 1942 as an engineer at one of the factories at Stettin. He was 26 years of age, claimed to have been active in giving conferences for Catholic associations in his hometown Graz, and that therefore he was now trying to get in touch with Catholic groups. To prove his sincerity he produced a letter of recommendation from his home pastor at Graz.

The Dean introduced him to his assistant, Father Herbert Simoleit, who was in charge of what work was left to the Church in youth and adult formation. Mr. Hagen rapidly gained the priest's confidence and helped to animate the occasional evening sessions for young people and adults at the

parish, where also many soldiers on leave would go. Father Lorenz occasionally took part in these meetings. They were some of the rare occasions to pass a few hours in an atmosphere not saturated by perpetual Nazi propaganda, and to speak out one's mind in a company of like-minded people. One of the resource persons at such meetings was Mr. Rudolf Mandrella, born in Silesia, till 1941 a lawyer at a district court in Berlin, afterwards attached to a navy office at Stettin. His talks on vital political, historical and other issues were highly appreciated at these meetings in St. John's parish.



Anti-Catholic Political Cartoon
“Show me your friends, and I will tell you who you are.”
from *Der Stürmer* June 23, 1938

The “Wednesday Circle”

Another close friend of Father Simoleit was a certain Monsignor Carl Lampert from Innsbruck, Austria. Ill-famed Gauleiter Franz Hofer had sent him to the concentration camp of Dachau, from where he was released in 1941, but not permitted to return to his home country. Thanks to the intervention of Bishop Konrad von Preysing of Berlin he found refuge at Stettin, where, after recovering from the consequences of ill-treatment at Dachau, he ministered in St. John’s parish.

Taking into consideration all the details now known, it seems probable that in the beginning the secret police (Gestapo) was only interested in Monsignor Lampert, and that in shadowing him they discovered the existence of the “Simoleit Circle”, also called the “Wednesday Circle”. A member of the SS served as an ideal spy — a certain Pissaritsch who for the purpose took the pseudonym of “Hagen”: for it was indeed he who was the friendly gentleman who had insinuated himself into the good graces of Father Simoleit and his Wednesday circle. The detailed notes he wrote down after each meeting eventually amounted to 42 files, and these were sufficient material for Karl Trettin, chief of the secret police at Stettin to launch his surprise raid against the Circle during the night of February 4th, 1943, at 11 p.m. Forty persons were arrested, among them Dutch and Polish workers and ten priests from around Stettin, including Fr. Lorenz. Three more priests were arrested in June, evidently in connection with this action.

Prison

The treatment the prisoners received was that which became known the world over as typical for the SS and Gestapo. For ten months there followed endless interrogations, accompanied by intimidations, threats, tortures. Weeks upon weeks of constant anxiety and growing hopelessness. There were no precise accusations, no written indictment — even asking for one was answered with a beating.

The question, who had betrayed them to the secret police, must have certainly been a painful one for the prisoners. Was it someone out of their own Circle, an abject traitor, or a poor

man trying to save his own skin? The answer came only much later. During the trial at Torgau the president praised “Mr. Hagen” for having succeeded in provoking the prisoners to show their “criminal and treacherous mind” — they had listened to the enemy radio; they had made depreciating comments on the political and military situation and leadership; they had committed high treason by maintaining contact with foreigners.

Father Lorenz admitted that he had occasionally listened to the British radio; all other charges he formally denied as being misinterpretations. He stuck to this denial even when beaten. That he was beaten is evident from the blood found in his clothes. A parishioner of Züllchow was allowed to collect his clothes for washing and furnish him with fresh ones. After some time it was even possible, by bribing the guards, to smuggle some food into his cell, even the essentials for celebrating Mass secretly. It was a source of deep consolation and strength to share the sacrifice of Christ Who has overcome world and death through His resurrection.

But serene resignation did not come immediately to Fr. Lorenz. He was found in tears at the rare and short moments when he was allowed to receive a visitor. In his notes for the defence Fr. Lorenz mentions that till August he had crying fits nearly every day. Gradually, however, he regained his interior balance. This was helped by the fact that the psychological terror had diminished. Even the SS and Gestapo must have realized that the priests were educated and upright people. Moreover, several officials at the police headquarters were convinced that the priests ought to be released, but were unable to influence the course of events, or did not dare to try. Naturally, the press was exploiting the whole affair as a welcome occasion to defame the priests and the Church as such.

On Trial

On December 6th, 1943, Father Lorenz, Monsignor Lampert and Father Simoleit were transferred to the military prison at Halle, and from there, after a first hearing, to Fort Zinna at

The Accusations

Torgau where they were to await their trial by court-martial. The reason for this was that the above mentioned “Wednesday Circle” at the parish was frequented by many military persons, and therefore, suspected for violating military secrets and for “fraternizing” with the enemy. Treatment of the prisoners was much better here than it had been at Stettin. Occasionally they were allowed to assist at Mass celebrated by the prison chaplain. Later on again they were able to celebrate the Eucharist in their own cells.

Finally, on July 24th, 1944, the trial began at Torgau against the three main defendants. Everything was done to keep the trial secret. Nevertheless, we are very well informed of the accusation and the defence. After each session Father Lorenz wrote down all he remembered about the charges against him and his replies, the names and titles of the accusers, judges and witnesses, and he commented on their statements. These notes, now at the provincial archives of the Oblates at Mainz, he kept among the letters he had received. They were handed over to the Rector of the Oblate house at Stettin-Züllchow after the execution, together with a few other belongings.

Father Lorenz was charged with three major offences:

1. Infringement of broadcasting laws;
2. Undermining of the fighting spirit of the people and the army;
3. Fraternizing with the enemy.

These charges were based on notes Mr. Pissaritsch (alias “Hagen”) had taken after the meetings of the “Wednesday Circle” or from individual conversations, and on “avowals” Fr. Lorenz had made under torture in the Gestapo prison at Stettin.

1. INFRINGEMENT OF BROADCASTING LAWS.

Father Lorenz admitted having listened occasionally to the British radio, but never intended to divulge this news to others.

Since he had been a soldier in both wars, his only interest had been to gain as much knowledge as possible about the exact military situation. During the battle of Stalingrad he had listened to the British news in the presence of “Mr. Hagen” who had also expressed his concern about the catastrophic situation, and his regret that these soldiers at the Volga were perishing so miserably.

2. UNDERMINING THE MORALE OF THE PEOPLE AND THE ARMY.

The following are some of the “defeatist” remarks Fr. Lorenz was charged with during the trial, or charged for not having protested against:

— *“The suppression of monasteries and religious houses by the Nazis would bring inevitable doom to them; what good could be expected of people responsible for such acts?”*

— *“If the Nazis won the war, it would mean the destruction of the Church.”*

— *“Even the devil himself could learn from Dr. Goebbels (minister of propaganda).”*

— *“Rommel (at the African front) hasn’t got any chance against the superior forces of the allied.”*

— *“The leading men were trying to persuade the people that Russia was practically beaten, but the war at the eastern front had really only begun; that’s why all men were drafted now.”*

— *“There won’t be any indulgence for the big shots at the final settlement of accounts; they won’t be able to hide somewhere as they did after the first war, they would all be caught.”*

Father Lorenz was charged concerning many more statements like this as appears from his notes. They were certainly mostly spoken in private, but were reported as having been spoken in public, mostly during those “Wednesday Circle” meetings, where many soldiers were present. Therefore they had ceased to be harmless, and were considered as publicly dangerous.

Fr. Lorenz denied resolutely the charge of defeatism as being inconsistent with his whole attitude and outlook on life. He would never have thought of undermining the morale of the military and of the people. What he had said was an expression of his conviction and of his attitude; nothing could be deduced that proved he was a public enemy.

3. FRATERNIZING WITH THE ENEMY

A Frenchman called Mayllard had come to see Father Lorenz frequently at the presbytery. He was one of the many French workers in Germany during the war, probably an engineer working in one of the industrial plants of Stettin. He appeared as a good Catholic who looked for and found contact with the clergy.

The topics of conversation with Father Lorenz had not only been religious ones. The lively Frenchman showed great sympathy for the ideology of National Socialism, which he evidently misunderstood, and dreamed of a close union between France and Nazi-Germany. In fact, he was a partisan of Jacques Doriot, founder of the “Parti Populaire” and of the “Légion Tricolore” which sided with Germany. Mayllard was proud of his party-badge which had a cross in its centre, and he made it a point to draw Father’s attention to it.

The relationship between this Mr. Mayllard and Fr. Lorenz did not escape the S.S. agent Mr. Pissaritsch (alias “Hagen”), and his notes about it were now before the judges. The board of judges, however, showed itself rather skeptical, and decided to send Chief Justice Dr. Speckhart to Paris for an interrogation with Mr. Mayllard about his connection with Fr. Lorenz. The interrogation took place on February 10th, 1944. The result was that Fr. Lorenz was accused of “fraternization with the enemy”. The attorney for the defense told him: “You see, everything is at stake now.” For the first time Fr. Lorenz realized that his life was on the line. Accordingly he was particularly careful in preparing his defence. These were the different charges against him in relation to Mayllard:

— *He had given Mr. Mayllard a book in order to indoctrinate him and his compatriots against the Nazi-State.*

— *He had shown deep hatred for Nazi-Germany.*

— *He had maintained the impossibility and impropriety of a cooperation between France or any other state and Nazi-Germany.*

— *He had admitted he did not like Hitler.*

— *He had called Dr. Goebbels a liar.*

— *In all his conversations he had spoken in favour of the enemy and tried to influence Mayllard against Germany.*

These were some of the main charges against Father Lorenz in connection with Mr. Mayllard. The priest replied first of all that it had been Mr. Mayllard who had approached him, not vice versa. And he had given him “a book” so that he might study for himself all about the ideas and aims of Nazism.

We have been able to identify the book in question: *God and Nation*, written by a young Nazi-enthusiast, Hans Bloethner,

Berlin 1939. The 8th edition was distributed among the army in 1940. It was certainly not one of the “best-sellers” of the times, but we were able to find a copy in the library of Mainz University. It may be sufficient to quote a passage of the chapter *Our Task*:

“A thousand ties bind us to Christianity. But a single blow can make us free. It is our task and sacred duty to strengthen the German people and lead it to the maturity it needs to deal this blow. In Russia they have torn the churches down. In Germany we just abandon the church, so that the true faith may be victorious.”



Military Chaplain - World War II

In court Fr. Lorenz expressed his astonishment that he was accused of recommending a thoroughly Nazi-minded author to the Nazi-fan Mr. Mayllard appeared to be. He had been very cautious not to influence the young man with his own ideas about the Nazi ideology.

There appears to be no reason to suspect that Mr. Mayllard was a false friend and a spy as was “Mr. Hagen”. But during the enquiry in Paris he had expressed his astonishment at Fr. Lorenz’s reluctance to get involved in a discussion on political issues. He was also surprised that a German (Fr. Lorenz) should be able to speak so negatively about his own country.

His fundamental attitude Father Lorenz expressed before the Court in the following terms, sincerely and far from any tactical considerations:

“Already during the first inquiry at Stettin I was blamed for avoiding the questions and trying to deal with the matter philosophically. It may be that this is the impression even in this court. Indeed, I am only interested in the philosophical implications of the events of our times.”

To explain this he pointed out that he had done his duty as a soldier in the First World War. The disastrous outcome of the war in 1918 had deeply shaken him. Why had it come to this? He found only one answer:

“Because belief in God had disappeared, and with it the ultimate moral sanctions. If there is no justice here on earth, it must be given to us from someone else, if there is any meaning to life at all. Such has always been my conviction. I never agreed with priests meddling with politics. The whole chaos of political parties in Germany was not a political, but a philosophical problem to me. The same goes for my attitude towards the rise of Nazism, and this is still how I see it. That is what I meant when I said: ‘Hitler is possessed by his ideas about people and race.’ To

him they are absolute values. But that they cannot be. Beyond them we must acknowledge the absolute value in person, that is God. This is my conviction, but it never induced me to disparage the lawful government or to justify acts against legitimate law and order.”

At such a distance from the events and the circumstances of the time we may not realize how much courage it took to speak up like this before such a court. His faith was put to a severe test. Not only his life was at stake, but also his honour as a priest and the reputation of the Church. Did he hope to impress favourably some of his military judges? Father Lorenz knew about the serious dissensions between a considerable part of the army and the Nazi party and its organisations. They were made particularly evident by the military plot against Hitler and the attempt to assassinate him on July 20th, 1944, a few days before the beginning of Fr. Lorenz’s trial. On the other hand, precisely because of the attempted elimination of the dictator, dissenters were now prosecuted with double ferocity, and people were sentenced for far less than Fr. Lorenz’s dossier contained.

Second Trial: Sentence

The final trial took place from the 24th to the 28th of July 1944. Father Lorenz was informed about it three weeks before, but still received no written indictment. The public was excluded from the session. From Fr. Lorenz’s notes we know who were the 13 persons who composed the board.

On July 24th the indictment was read. Fr. Lorenz noted:

“I gave the answers which I have written down. I protested against the depositions of Mayllard. On July 25th, Mr. Hagen was called into the witness box. From then on, there was a change in the attitude of the court: Hagen’s word is taken for granted; the defendant hasn’t got any chance.”

On July 26th, other witnesses were heard; on the 27th, there were the speeches of the prosecutor and of the attorney for the defence, followed by the deliberations of the board of judges

which lasted till late in the evening. No judgement was pronounced that day.

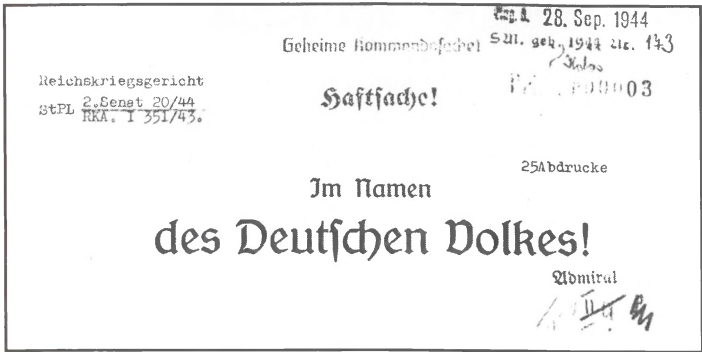
On July 28th, at 11 a.m., the sentence was pronounced: decapitation, because of being found guilty for listening to the enemy radio, for undermining the morale of the people and the army, for fraternizing with the enemy.

The reasons for the sentence:

“The defendant Lorenz admitted some of the remarks he was charged with. His explanations must be considered as evasions. The board is convinced that the notes taken by the witness “Hagen” during the meetings at the parish are correct. Lorenz made no effort to influence Mr. Mayllard in a positive way, on the contrary he constructed a contradiction between National Socialism and Christianity that does not exist. These, under the present circumstances, are crimes which deserve capital punishment.”

The reason why it had taken so long to arrive at a sentence on the night of the 27th July was the profound disagreement between the president of the board, Dr. Lueben, and his four colleagues.

The case of Dr. Lueben, judge within the General Staff, who had protested against Fr. Lorenz’s condemnation at the first trial, and had been absent at the pronouncement of the verdict, deserves special attention. Officially the judge was said to have died in an air raid during the following night, but there hadn’t been any air raid on that particular night. The true story has been researched and published by Benedicta Maria Kempner, wife of Robert Kempner, the vice prosecutor at the Nürnberg Trial. She is the author of *Priests before Hitler’s Tribunals*. In an article published in *Rheinischer Merkur* (Christian weekly paper) on December 8th, 1967 she wrote:



Heading of the 11 page Verdict
in the Trial of Father Lorenz, O.M.I.

“Werner Lueben, judge of the supreme military court, is the only known case of a martyr-judge. He deserves a monument for the heroic human greatness that compelled him to sacrifice his life for justice. Only during my research concerning the martyr-priests I found out about his death. He shot himself in the night of July 28th, 1944 at Torgau because he refused to obey the instruction of the Supreme Nazi Office of Security to pronounce capital sentence for three priests: Dr. Lampert, Father Simoleit and Father Lorenz, which he considered judicial murder.”

Condemned
to Die

Only on the 8th of August did Fr. Lorenz receive the text of the sentence, and after a careful study of the same he wrote on August 9th:

“I protest against the declaration of the court that I undermined the morale and fraternized with the enemy. I protest against the sentence, because I never saw a written bill of indictment before. I blame the fact that witness Mayllard was not present at the trial, that I was not confronted with him.”

He also refuted, one after the other, all the points of the indictment: his remarks had been torn out of their context,

distorted and falsified, and many of the reported remarks he had never made.

It was probably only after the trial that the Oblates at Stettin-Züllchow became acquainted with the various charges raised against Fr. Lorenz. They informed the Bishop of Berlin and the German Provincial, Fr. Robert Becker. Appeals for mercy were written by the Bishop, Frs. Schardt (Berlin) and Leinberger, the rector of Stettin-Züllchow.

Fr. Becker travelled to Torgau to consult the attorney. On August 16th he wrote from Bingen to Fr. Schardt:

“I went to Torgau without much hope. But the trip was a successful one. I was able to talk to the attorney on his way to court on Saturday morning. At the court I met the supreme counsel of the military court, Dr. Speckhart who, after some hesitation, arranged for my visit at Fort Zinna (the prison). All the military officials received me very kindly. In the presence of a First Lieutenant I was allowed to talk to Fr. Lorenz for about half an hour. He made a fresh, unbroken and courageous impression, wore tolerably good civilian clothes, and looked quite well, too. Of course, we were not allowed to talk in detail about the trial, but he told me he firmly trusted that God would help him. This visit was a great consolation for me. Even if I can’t share his hope in every respect, I went home much more optimistic than when I had come. While at Torgau, I sent the appeal for mercy to the president of the court.”

Last Appeal

By decree of the president of the supreme military court the sentence against Fr. Lorenz of July 28th was quashed on August 15th, and a new trial was fixed for the 2nd of September at Torgau. The outcome on September 4th, however, was the same: decapitation.

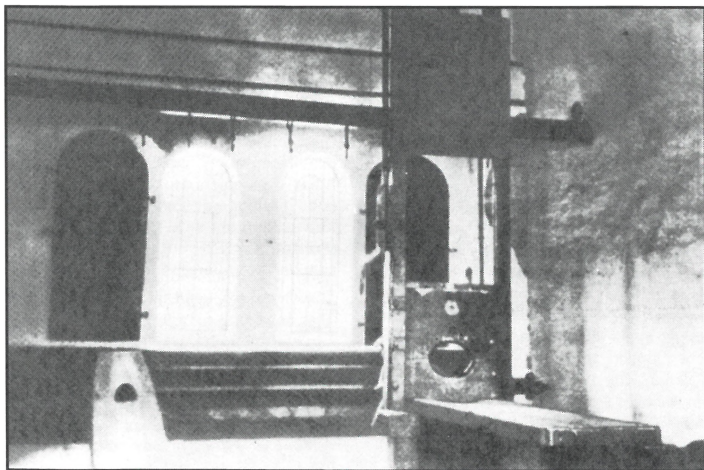
On September 15th, Fr. Lorenz was given the opportunity to comment on the sentence, but to no avail.

“On September 23rd, the chief attorney of the military court, Dr. Kraell in person told me that the sentence of September 4th had been confirmed by the president of the court. There was only left the appeal for mercy.”

In his appeal for mercy of September 28th Fr. Lorenz sums up once more all he considered pertinent to the plea for his discharge. He did not ask for acquittal, but only for amendment of the capital sentence.

His superior, Fr. Leinberger, wrote:

“We had hoped against all hope. To the last, Fr. Lorenz was convinced the sentence would not be executed. On the other hand, he was composed and prepared for the worst. At the beginning of October I had a last chance to speak to him, but only in the presence of two military guards. He was in chains. The sight appalled me, but he seemed quite used to it, and otherwise upright and unbroken. His face had become somewhat more slender, but it was the Fr. Lorenz we knew — the man who spoke his opinion with



**Photograph of the guillotine in the execution room
of Berlin-Plötzensee.**

This is similar to the place of execution of Fr. Lorenz in Halle.

sparkling eyes and energetic gestures. The Bishop of Berlin had already come to see him. Fr. Lorenz wanted to hear news about Stettin, especially about the many sufferings that had come over our parish because of the bombings of May 13th and August 30th, 1944. When I had to go, we told each other; 'See you again, here or up there.' On October 13th he sent me his last greetings, written with a sure hand."

Execution took place on November 13th, 1944, at 4 p.m. in the prison yard of Halle. Together with him, the two other priests from Stettin, Dean Carl Lampert and Father Herbert Simoleit, were also beheaded. Another priest in the same prison witnessed the scene from the window of his cell. He reported that Fr. Lorenz had walked up to the scaffold in perfect calmness. In a letter to Fr. Lorenz's brother, the prison chaplain wrote:

"As chaplain of this prison I had to be near your brother during his last hours. Shortly before his execution he renewed his religious vows and received the sacraments with deep devotion. I was very edified by your brother as priest and religious, especially because, in spite of the circumstances, he left this life reconciled with God and men, and without the least sign of bitterness."

Mein Testament +

◊ Es geschehe der hl. Wille Gottes! Er wolle, daß ich nicht länger als 48 Jahre leben / nicht länger als 20 Jahre Priester sein sollte. ◊ Ich empfehle meine Seele der Barmherzigkeit / Güte und Liebe Gottes ◊ Meinen Leib übergebe ich der Erde / von der er genommen ist. ◊ Blut ist geflossen am Kreuze / Blut fließt auf unseren Altären als Erneuerung des Kreuzesopfers. ◊ Mit diesem Blute vereine ich mein Tröpflein Blut zur Anbetung / Ehre und Verherrlichung Gottes / dem ich gedient habe, ◊ zum Danke für alle Gnaden und Wohltaten / die ich empfangen habe, besonders für die Gnade der Geburt / der hl. Taufe / der 1. hl. Kommunion / der Oblation und der hl. Priesterweihe, ◊ zur Sühne für meine Sünden und die Sünden der ganzen Welt, besonders für jene / die ich nicht verhindert, oder an denen ich gar schuldig bin; ◊ zur Bitte um Gnade für mich und alle, die mir lieb und teuer sind; ◊ Ich sterbe als kath. Priester und als Oblate der Unbefleckten Jungfrau Maria im Namen des Vaters und des Sohnes und des Hl. Geistes Amen! Gelobt sei Jesus Christus und die Unbefleckte Jungfrau Maria.

Amen!

P. FRIEDRICH LORENZ + Halle/Saale, Den 13.11.1944 um 16 Uhr

During his last hours, Father Lorenz wrote his final testament:

“May the Holy Will of God be done! It was his will, that my life should not last more than 48 years, and that I should not be a priest for more than 20 years. I recommend my soul to the mercy, the kindness and love of God. I deliver up my body to the earth from where it was taken. Blood was shed on the cross: blood is shed on our altars at the renewal of the sacrifice of the cross. With this blood I unite my poor drops of blood in adoration, worship and glorification of God whom I have served — in thanksgiving for all the graces and benefits I have received, especially the grace of birth, of holy baptism, of my first holy communion, of my oblation and ordination; in atonement for my sins and the sins of the whole world, particularly those sins which I have not prevented, or for which I may even be responsible; in prayer for all who are near and dear to me. I die as a Catholic priest, and as an Oblate of Mary Immaculate. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen! Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate. Amen!

*Fr. Friedrich Lorenz, Halle/Saale,
November 13th, 1944, 4 p.m.”*

A short time later this gentle man was dead — his head struck from his body.

“It is Your
Tragedy to
be a
Catholic
Priest”

That Father Lorenz was the victim of judicial murder appears from an incident that took place during the first day of trial on July 24th. The counsel for the prosecution called the three priests criminals, the scum of society and asocial creatures. When he was at the height of his invective, the associate president, highly irritated, jumped to his feet and shouted: “This is not a case of criminals or asocial elements. Their only tragedy is that they are Catholic priests.”

Their death was exactly in line with Nazi strategy, which had been outlined in a speech against church, priests and religious on May 1st, 1937: “*We won’t make them martyrs, we’ll make them criminals!*” Father Friedrich Lorenz, O.M.I., died as one of its many victims.

Todesbescheinigung.

4571

*Kinden ist der Name bei unehelichen bei unehelichen das anzugeben.

1. Vor- und Zuname, Stand oder Beruf de **s** Verstorbenen:

Friedrich Lorenz, Geistlicher

Familienstand

ledig

2. Jahr, Tag und Ort der Geburt de **s** Verstorbenen:

1. Juni 1897, Hl. Dora Hellenfeld/Leine

Alter?

(volle Lebensjahre)

47

Hausnummer, Vorderhäus, in welchem Geraden?

3. Wohnung de **s** Verstorbenen: *Hellenfeldstr. 20*

4. Tag und Stunde des Todes: *18. November 1944*

Relig.

Bekenntnis

kat.

vormittags *16⁰⁰* Uhr

nachmittags

5. Todesursache: *nistlicher Herztod - Herztstillstand*

Kinder?

unter

21 Jahre

alt

über

21 Jahre

alt

Die Grundkrankheit ist die Nummer des durch Verord. vom 3 Juni 1932 v. Todesursachen zu bezeichnen. Die Todesursache sowie Krankheiten, die nach Krankheiten sind die (Leiden), die den Tod herbeiführt, mit dem üblich möglichst deutlich zu bezeichnen. Zum der Verdacht eines an Todes besitz von stehen Sterbefälle - d. Mord, Totschlag und - sind besonders anzugeben zu machen.

1. Grundkrankheit? (Grundleiden?)

2. Begleitkrankheiten?

3. Nachfolgende Krankheiten?

4. Welche der vorgenannten Krankheiten (Leiden) hat den Tod herbeigeführt?

6. Sonstige ärztliche Bemerkungen: *enthusiast*

7. Name des behandelnden Arztes: *X*

8. Hat die Behandlung durch jemanden der nicht Arzt ist, stattgefunden?

Dessen Name und Wohnort: *X*

9. Bei Kindbettfieber und Tod im Wochenbett, Name der Hebamme, die bei den Entbindungen zugegen war: *X*

Bei Kindern, die im 1. und 2. Lebensjahr verstorben sind: ob, so durch Muttermilch, Ammenmilch, künstliche Nahrung (z. B. Kuhmilch, Soxhletapparat, Beckhaus u. a. m.) oder gemischt- Nahrung ernährt worden sind.

Daß ich mich durch eigene Wahrnehmungen von dem ungezügelteren Tode überzeugt und die Todesursache nach eigener Beobachtung des dem Tode vorausgegangenen Leidens, durch Untersuchung der Leiche und der Umgebung des Verstorbenen eingehenden Erkundigung sowie durch die Beerdigung sowie daß gegen die Beerdigung keine Hindernisse vorliegen, sowie ich ebenso wie die Richtigkeit der obigen den Tod betreffenden Angaben durch meine Namensunterschrift.

Halle (Saale), den *18. November 1944*

enden wollen un Rückseite beachten!

*) Nichtzutreffendes durchstreichen.

Photo of Death Certificate of Father Lorenz, O.M.I.

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