

The Canonization of Pope John XIII and Pope John Paul II

–April 27, 2014 in Rome

by

Rev. Mr. Michael Conway

1.5 million. That's how many people came to Rome for the beatification of now Pope Saint John Paul II back in May of 2011. In a word, it was chaotic. Streets that were supposed to be closed were open, streets that were supposed to be open were closed, you couldn't find a cab, the police had no idea what was going on, there weren't enough bathrooms, or food, or water...it was a mess.

So of course I couldn't wait to see what the canonization Mass would hold. Since I was, at long last, a deacon, I was holding out hope that I would be needed to do something...

This would be the perfect storm. Not only was it to be the canonization of John Paul II, whose biography is so well-known I scarcely need to give it here, but it was also to be the canonization of Pope John XXIII, whose memory has not faded in the hearts and minds of the Italian people. The icing on the cake is that it would be presided over by Pope Francis, who seemingly can't do anything without catching the world's eye. (And, for good measure, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI joined Pope Francis in the celebration, just to make a big deal...bigger.)

I imagine that many of us have found ourselves in this situation: a few days before company is coming over, you realize your house is a mess, and then you have to spend two or three extraordinarily frantic days to clean it. Well, now imagine that your house is the size of a city, and your guests are the entire Catholic world. Such was the situation the city of Rome found itself in the weeks immediately preceding the canonization. Somehow, the city managed to pull it off. 800,000 bottles of water were trucked in.



Latin admission ticket for Deacon Michael Conway to the dual papal canonization ceremony, Rome.

Thousands of portable toilets were set up at key locations. Long deferred maintenance projects – such as curb repair, pothole filling, and line painting – were suddenly completed. Trash was removed and streets were swept. Not bad for a city facing an 816 million euro budget deficit. (That's not a typo.)

Back to our saints, though – how did we get here? John Paul II's story might be a little more well-known. Typically, there's a five year waiting period after someone dies before they can be considered for sainthood. That was waived about a month after his death. On December 19, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI declared him "Venerable",



Panoramic view of St. Peter's Square from the front of St. Peter's Basilica during the dual papal canonization ceremony, Rome.

All photos courtesy of Rev. Mr. Michael Conway

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meaning after scrutinizing his life, it was found that he was an example of heroic virtue. On January 14, 2011, it was announced that the miraculous cure of a French nun from Parkinson's disease could be attributed to John Paul, and it was announced he would be beatified on May 1 of that year. On April 23, 2013, a panel of Vatican doctors approved a second miracle – the cure of a Costa Rican woman of a terminal brain aneurysm. On July 4 of that year, Pope Francis announced that John Paul II would be canonized with John XXIII on April 27, 2014.

John XXIII's story is slightly different. He was not beatified until September 3, 2000, some 37 years after his death. The miraculous cure of a sick woman was attributed to his intercession, paving the way for his beatification. There was not, however, a second miracle. Instead, on June 3, 2013 (the fiftieth anniversary of his death), Pope Francis visited his tomb and prayed there for a while. Then, while addressing pilgrims from Bergamo (Pope John's hometown), he announced there was no need for a second miracle. Instead, based on the merits of the Second Vatican Council, John XXIII would be canonized. The necessary documentation was signed in July, and the two canonizations were a go.

The days leading up to the canonization were sunny and unseasonably hot, but the day of the canonization itself was gray and dreary. Rain was in the forecast, but it looked like it might hold off until after the Mass had concluded. Providentially, the liturgical office at the Vatican needed lots of deacons to help with the distribution of Holy Communion that day, so my classmates and I were set. We left the seminary pretty early for the short walk to the Basilica, not really knowing what to expect. The streets were indeed packed, with people who had slept out overnight or got up very early to head to the Square. Luckily, we had tickets that enabled us to get into a priority lane for the Basilica and through

security in only a matter of minutes. It helped, too, that there was a veritable army of volunteers, as well as Italian police officers, to keep order and things moving smoothly. In fact, it moved so smoothly that we found ourselves in the basilica almost 45 minutes ahead of time. It was surreal – literally a million people outside, but less than 300 inside – and most of them were bishops and cardinals.

So with time to spare, I decided to visit the two soon-to-be saints. I stopped by John XXIII's tomb first. There's not much seating there, and it was all full – mainly older Italian cardinals and bishops. I didn't stay too long, and then I headed over to John Paul II. Here the crowd was slightly more international – if by international you mean Polish and American. There in the front row was Bishop Zubik, so I went over to say good morning and pray with him for a little bit. And then it was time to get ready for Mass.

It still looked like rain as Mass started, but the skies slowly started to clear. Just as Pope Francis was reading the official decree naming the two new saints, the clouds parted and the sun very clearly shone on the crowds. You would expect something like that from Hollywood, perhaps, but this was real.

There are a lot of different figures being presented regarding the attendance at the canonization. Most are probably wrong; in fact, it seems unlikely anyone could get an accurate count. There were well over 1,500 priests and 700 bishops present; at least 500,000 people in the Square – maybe as many as 800,000 – and who knows how many more along the *Via dela Conciliazione*, and then thousands gathered in various piazzas around the city, watching on video screens. And that's just Rome – there were also millions watching from their homes around the world. But the number of people present that day pales in comparison to the amount of graces God is pouring on His church through these new saints.

Saint John XXIII and Saint John Paul II, pray for us!



Rev. Mr. Michael Conway and Rev. Mr. Thomas Schlupe at the April 27, 2014 canonization of Popes John XXIII and John Paul II.

All photos courtesy of Rev. Mr. Michael Conway.

An American Priest in Nazi Germany: The Story of Fr. Viktor Koch, C.P.

by Katherine Koch

Introduction

In the sleepy farm village of Schwarzenfeld, Germany, a prim, sun-gold monastery and eighteenth-century pilgrimage church rise from the crown of a grassy hill. A plaque adorns the church's facade. The German text engraved upon its granite face translates as follows:

In Gratitude to Honorary Citizen

Fr. Viktor Koch, C.P.

Provincial of the Passionist Order
Through Personal Engagement and Civil Courage
He Prevented in April 1945

An Act of Retribution by U.S. Troops Upon the Population of Schwarzenfeld

The plaque records one of the most remarkable incidents in the historiography of World War II — a story centralized around a Western Pennsylvania native named Fr. Viktor Koch.¹ He left American shores in 1922 to co-establish a new province of the Passionist Order in Germany and Austria. Given the precarious political and religious tensions that overshadowed Germany in the post-World War I period, this was a significant challenge. His tale of struggle and sacrifice behind enemy lines culminated in April 1945, when the American army arrived in Schwarzenfeld and threatened reprisals against the obscure Bavarian town.

A stout figure of 5'9", Fr. Viktor had a warm, fatherly countenance and the fleshy earlobes that are characteristic of men in the Koch family. The Germans described him as a man "with a full personality," and this is apropos, for he was a dynamic individual with qualities that ran the gamut. He was patient and empathetic to friends, family, and parishioners, yet dour and quick-tempered with anyone who threatened them — including the American Army.² A persuasive negotiator, he was willing to bend rules and sidestep restrictions to achieve progress, yet he was absolutely inflexible in his prayer life. During the darkest moments of the war, when it seemed inconvenient or even pointless to carry on the rhythms of monasticism, he doggedly insisted upon observing services at canonical hours. He was ascetic in his faith practices, yet still evinced a zeal for life's pleasures, always quick to indulge in cake, ice cream, and a fine cigar when they were offered to him.³

Early Life

The story of Fr. Viktor Koch begins with Nikolaus Koch and Viktoria Elser, two young immigrants who left their native Fatherland in the 1850s for the promise of freedom and prosperity on American shores. Nikolaus Koch hailed from Noswendel, a small farm town in the Saarland region bordering France, and Viktoria Elser was a native of the state of Baden-Württemberg. Each settled with their families in Hickory Township, Mercer County, Pennsylvania, where they met and then married in July 1868.⁴ The township's population consisted largely of first and second-generation German immigrants, a fact that is evident in area cemeteries: etched in the weathered surfaces of their oldest tombstones are the words, *Hier Rhut in Gott* (Here Rests in God). During the 1800s, coal was abundant in the area, and to support his wife and children, Nikolaus became a coal miner.⁵

On May 26, 1873, Viktoria gave birth to the couple's third child.⁶ He was their first son, and in German custom, they named him after his father — Nikolaus. From all indications, young Nikolaus was bilingual from the start. He learned to speak English at school and spoke fluent *Hochdeutsch* (High German) at home, his pronunciation colored by a distinct American accent. It is apparent that he was a precocious child, because his teachers often tapped him to help tutor children in the lower grades.⁷ His parents inculcated Germanic principles that have been passed down like heirlooms through generations of the Koch family: diligence in all aspects of life, fortitude, dogged perseverance, and above all, faith. The Kochs were instrumental in establishing a new parish church near their homestead on Dutch Lane — St. Rose of Lima.⁸ As a result, the Koch children all grew up with a church within sight of their house.⁹ Doubtless, the daily sight of its steeple and the silvery resonance of its bell tower made them feel closer to God in every way.

During the most formative years of his life, young Nikolaus became well-acquainted with the pain of the human condition. He was only seven when his mother gave birth to the family's sixth child, a son named Fadius. For reasons unknown, the infant died a day after he was born.¹⁰ Then, in 1881, at the tender age of eight, Nikolaus watched his father die of typhoid fever.¹¹ At the time in his life when he needed a father most, he found himself bereaved and catapulted into a paternal

role, raising his two younger brothers, Peter and Albert. The widowed Viktoria shouldered the lonely burden of working to support five children and depended upon her two eldest daughters to manage the farm.

The struggling family was subsequently stricken by another tragedy. Fourteen months after losing his father, young Nikolaus lost his paternal grandmother.¹² His mother, a woman of hardy spiritual character, accepted this chain of



Miesbergkirche in Schwarzenfeld, the pilgrimage church where Fr. Viktor resisted his eviction by entrenching himself in the church flower sacristy. Courtesy: Koch Family Archives.

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hardships with a saint's grace and often quoted a verse from the Book of Job: "God had given, and God hath taken away. Praised be His holy name."¹³ Her attitude shaped young Nikolaus's view of hardship and suffering, and it likely prepared him for the event that would ultimately change the course of his life.

In April 1889, when Nikolaus was sixteen years old, three members of the Congregation of the Passion conducted a parish mission at St. Rose of Lima. This order, commonly known as the Passionists, has a distinctive creed: its members vigorously promote the memory of Christ's Passion.¹⁴ Both Passionist and parishioner alike are encouraged to see pain as the ultimate bonding with the Crucified Christ. They envision the face of Jesus in all who suffer, and strive to provide justice, comfort, and compassion to that powerful specter through their afflicted fellows. When the priests preached this creed from the pulpit at St. Rose of Lima, their words must have touched upon years of painful memories for young Nikolaus and struck him like an epiphany. The words resonated so profoundly that Nikolaus entered the Passionist preparatory school in Dunkirk, New York, that year (1889).¹⁵ On December 2, 1890, he professed his vows, donned the Passionist habit, and received a new name signifying his rebirth into Christ's service — Victor. On September 19, 1896, at age 23, he was ordained a Passionist priest. From that point forward, the former Nikolaus Koch would be forever known as Fr. Victor, C.P.¹⁶

Laboring as a curate, parish priest, and a rector in various parishes during the next 26 years, Fr. Victor earned a reputation for self-sacrifice and perseverance.¹⁷ His commitment to the Passionist message was reflected by his decision to produce "Veronica's Veil," a Passion Play that never had been seen before in North America. The first Pittsburgh staging occurred in 1910 at St. Michael Auditorium on the city's south side. It drew 25,000 attendees at its peak in the 1920s.¹⁸ His work came to the attention of Fr. Silvio Di Vezza, C.P., the Passionist Father General in Rome. Fr. Silvio was searching for a candidate to serve as Provincial for a new branch of the Order in Germany, and was convinced that Fr. Victor was the right man for this undertaking: Germany was reeling in the aftermath of World War I, and the task of establishing a new province was destined to be a formidable one. Undaunted by challenges awaiting him on distant shores, Fr. Victor resigned his position as rector of St. Paul of the Cross Monastery in Pittsburgh. Bidding farewell to tearful, yet proud family members, he boarded a ship bound for Western Europe. There, in the land of his ancestors, he began the work that defined his life.

The World at the Beginning of Fr. Victor's Mission:

An Overview of Political and Religious Factors Influencing the 1920s

At the time of Fr. Victor's ordination, the Passionists were still relatively new to the United States. The American branch of the order was barely four decades old. Four Passionist priests had arrived from Italy in 1852 and opened St. Paul of the Cross Monastery in Pittsburgh, their first cloister in the United States. By the 1920s, the American province had expanded enough to send its own missionaries to other countries. In 1922, it launched its first two missions — one to West Hunan, China, and another to Germany.¹⁹

Social, economic, and political turmoil wracked 1920s Germany,

a fact that likely stirred Fr. Victor's interest and concern as a Passionist. The Treaty of Versailles demanded that his ancestral homeland accept full responsibility for the loss and damage incurred during World War I.²⁰ Germany's fragile economy shattered beneath the weight of exorbitant reparations, subjecting a disillusioned population to staggering poverty. Inflation skyrocketed to such high levels that few Germans could afford basic staples. In 1919, one loaf of bread cost one German Mark; by 1923, that same loaf cost 100 billion Rentenmarks.²¹ When inflation peaked in November 1923, 4.2 trillion Rentenmarks equaled one U.S. dollar.²² Adding to the humiliation, parts of Germany proper were ceded to newly-formed neighboring states, and all colonies in Africa and Asia were ceded to the victors of World War I. War veterans and ethnic German refugees returned to the Fatherland in such numbers that housing became as scarce as food, and the sale of property fell under strict government control.²³

Another facet of German history proved vital in selecting a location for a Passionist mission. The politics of the late nineteenth century had sharply defined religious influences in the period. In the new German Empire of the 1870s, Germany's Protestant majority embraced modernism and liberalism, prompting them to view Catholicism as the backward religion of farm peasants.²⁴ Resentment against Catholic clergy, monks, and laymen burned so hotly in northern Germany that Prussian Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck, a devout Protestant, enacted policies from 1871 to 1878 to reduce the political and social influence of the Catholic Church. Laws strictly curtailed the freedom of religious orders in the state of Prussia, and eventually banned them from the region altogether. At the height of oppression, half of the Prussian bishops were in prison or in exile, a quarter of the parishes had no priest, half the monks and nuns had left, a third of the monasteries and convents were closed, some 1,800 parish priests were imprisoned or exiled, and thousands of laypeople were imprisoned for helping the clergy.²⁵ This secularizing *Kulturkampf*, or "culture struggle," lasted until 1878, leaving northern Germany dominated by Protestants, and southern Germany — most notably Bavaria — a bastion of Catholicism. Time would also show that the *Kulturkampf* galvanized German Catholics, giving them a sense of solidarity that the future Nazi regime would find difficult to penetrate.²⁶

Mission Impossible: Fr. Victor and the Passionists' German Foundation

The idea to establish a Passionist mission in Germany originated with Fr. Valentine Lehnerd, C.P.²⁷ Like Fr. Victor, he hailed from a transplanted German community and both men shared a keen interest in their ancestral homeland. Fr. Victor was tapped to serve as Provincial for the new foundation. Fr. Valentine would assist him as co-founder.²⁸ The men were pragmatists, and they realized that they had an obstacle to overcome: despite their German heritage, they were foreigners in a strange land. In order to ease the natural distrust of native Germans, they began adopting the Germanic versions of their names — Viktor and Valentin.

Three aspects must have been searingly clear to Frs. Viktor and Valentin soon after their arrival in Germany. First, they would have to support their new province entirely on American money, and

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they had conducted fundraising drives in the States for that purpose. Second, their chances of establishing a successful province hinged upon gaining admission into a Bavarian diocese. Third — and much to their chagrin — their mission was destined to be an uphill battle constantly verging on failure.

After the conclusion of World War I, the Weimar government assumed control of Germany, and religious orders exiled during Bismarck's regime returned to the country, concentrating in Catholic Bavaria.²⁹ Fearing that the resurgence might instigate another *Kulturkampf*, the Bavarian bishops held a conference in Fulda, where they unanimously decided to forbid new orders from entering the region. Mustering his characteristic tenacity, Fr. Viktor continued promoting the Passionist mission in Germany and petitioning for help until Michael Cardinal von Faulhaber of Munich and Freising and Dr. Michael Buchberger, Vicar General of that archdiocese, began advising the Passionists.³⁰

The solution to the impasse involved significant wheeling and dealing on Fr. Viktor's part. The Passionist Father General's orders specified that the missionaries focus their work on opening monasteries and creating new Passionist communities. Cardinal von Faulhaber, on the other hand, could not support a Passionist presence in Bavaria unless Frs. Viktor and Valentin took ownership of a parish.³¹ Fr. Viktor purchased a small tract of land in the Munich district of Pasing to fund the construction of a new parish church, and resolved the conflict of interest by making it clear that the Passionists would have no obligation to operate the church itself once construction was complete.³² In Cardinal von Faulhaber's eyes, the fact of Passionist involvement in the establishment of this church was enough to justify their presence in Bavaria. The Passionist Father General was content with the solution and granted his permission to move forward.

Meanwhile, Dr. Michael Buchberger advised the Passionists to acquire the *Schloss Gatterburg*, a Neoclassical mansion spacious enough to serve as a preparatory school. The *Schloss* belonged to eighty-two year old Countess Pauline von Gatterburg, who continued to reside on the premises even as Frs. Viktor and Valentin began converting it into a seminary. Because of the housing crisis, the order's claim upon the property was based upon a mere handshake deal: the Countess could not amend her will and bequeath it to the Passionists without government consent, and at that time, the Socialist-controlled Weimar regime was unlikely to approve.³³ Like the bishops of Bavaria, the Social Democratic Party felt that Germany had reached the tipping point on admitting new religious orders, and its members feared starting another *Kulturkampf*.

Fr. Viktor's struggles were not confined to Europe alone. Back in America, support for the German foundation was lukewarm at best. The tenuous nature of Frs. Viktor and Valentin's negotiations with Cardinal von Faulhaber inspired no confidence in Fr. Stanislaus Grennan, the Passionist superior in Pittsburgh charged with the oversight of the order's foreign missions. In 1925, Fr. Stanislaus wrote a letter to the Passionist Father Procurator in Rome and pronounced the German foundation a total failure. He refused to send further funding unless the province's founders secured legal

ownership of the property they purchased.³⁴ Fr. Viktor made an appeal to the Father General in Rome, lamenting the complete lack of support he'd received from his American mother province. Nine months later, Fr. Stanislaus sent him the money he requested.

Despite the ever-present specter of failure, the German foundation not only survived — it thrived. Frs. Viktor and Valentin successfully started a new German Passionist community in Munich, and by 1925, enough members had advanced in their training to necessitate a second monastery — a novitiate for Passionist novices. Fr. Viktor relied upon the connections he had made in the Bavarian clergy during the past three years. Vienna's Archbishop, Friedrich Gustav Cardinal Piff, assisted the Passionists by granting them ownership of *Maria Schutz*, a shrine nestled amidst the Austrian Alps.³⁵ Fr. Viktor then transferred his residence to Austria, most likely to monitor repairs to the 200-year-old shrine and oversee the new monastic community. After this expansion, the province became the German-Austrian foundation. Additional Passionists left America to help the province train its novices.

In 1931, the lingering question of Passionist admission into Bavaria finally resolved itself. Countess von Gatterburg passed away in October, and the Passionists took legal possession of the *Schloss*. Their lengthy presence in Bavaria may have assuaged misgivings about a new order entering the region. By 1932, the province had 41 priests, brothers, and novices, and 35 students were enrolled in the Preparatory School.

However, the specter of failure loomed over the mission again by 1933: Adolf Hitler came to power, and within months he issued



Rev. Viktor Koch, C.P. (left) and nephew Rev. Basil Bauer, C.P. (right).

Courtesy: Koch and Bauer Family Archives.

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decrees prohibiting Germans from crossing the border into Austria unless they deposited 1,000 Reichsmarks with the government. It was the first step in bringing Austria to her knees and forcing her to join the Third Reich.³⁶ On a yearly basis, the Passionists sent 20 to 30 students from the Preparatory School in Munich, Germany, to the novitiate in *Maria Schutz*, Austria, and they could hardly afford to pay the duties. The province's survival depended upon opening a new novitiate monastery in Germany.

The Passionist Arrival in Schwarzenfeld

Schwarzenfeld lies in the northeastern quarter of Bavaria, in a lush, hilly region known as the Oberpfalz. In the 1930s it was quiet and remote, isolated from the troubled world by an undulating ocean of farmland. The houses were austere white plaster with red-tiled roofs, and cars were a rarity. A pedestrian was far more likely to encounter a cattle herd lumbering along the sinuous dirt roads. The one feature that captured Fr. Viktor's attention was the pilgrimage church soaring from a grassy hill, a stop for travelers making their way to shrines across Europe. Locals called the hill *der Miesberg*, and the church upon its peak the *Miesbergkirche* (Miesberg church). The church had been constructed in 1721 — the same year that St. Paul of the Cross founded the Passionist order. Fr. Viktor and his brethren considered this intriguing coincidence an omen — they had found the location for their third Passionist monastery.³⁷

They also had worldly reasons to give Schwarzenfeld special consideration. In 1933, Nazi fervor was on the rise throughout Germany. After learning that the Passionists intended to construct a monastery in the Oberpfalz and that they had narrowed the list of candidate sites to Burglengenfeld and Schwarzenfeld, a civil district officer familiar with both towns contacted Fr. Viktor and offered his opinion. Even in Bavaria where Catholic spirit had been crystallized by the Prussian *Kulturkampf*, Schwarzenfeld had a special reputation for religiosity:

Burglengenfeld [the alternative site] is less suited to offer as much peace and quiet, high estimation of attention, and attachment and loyalty to ensure the successful establishment of monastic life, than Schwarzenfeld with its devout Catholic population Also may I say that the population there is known to be politically calmer.³⁸

This endorsement decisively shifted the odds in Schwarzenfeld's favor. The Passionists purchased the *Miesbergkirche* and construction of the monastery — the *Miesbergkloster* — began in May 1934. As the civil district officer attested, the townspeople were already predisposed to accept the Passionists with open arms, but another aspect of their arrival made an indelible impression. In 1934, Germany was reeling from the aftermath of the Great Depression. Like their fellow Germans, most Schwarzenfelders were unemployed and destitute. Fr. Viktor arrived with \$200,000 in U.S. funds — enough to hire every able-bodied laborer in the backwater farm village, plus indigents and tradesmen roaming the Oberpfalz in search of work. The exchange rate between the dollar and the languishing Reichsmark easily doubled (and possibly tripled) the money at his disposal.⁴⁰ Schwarzenfeld's chronicle documents what this turn of events meant to the locals:

The relationship between the [Passionists at the] *Miesberg* and the town was not [superficial], but based on material need

The new building measure appeared as a welcome opportunity to give numerous Schwarzenfelders work and bread in the time of widespread unemployment in the early thirties.⁴¹

An evolving bond was also evident in the Passionist foundation's historical Chronicle:

Attention must be drawn here to the fact that in the history of no other foundation of our order did the people cooperate with and support us so generously and wholeheartedly as did the people of Schwarzenfeld and the neighboring villages.⁴²

The implications for Schwarzenfeld are startling when we examine events within the broader historical context. Throughout Germany, a restive population turned to Adolf Hitler to solve their woes. The Nazi propaganda machine brazenly trumpeted that the *Führer* would bring about an "economic miracle," a claim that average Germans found empty — until their living conditions improved. Economic recovery served as one of the initial lures that garnered widespread approval and popularity for Hitler.⁴³ The Schwarzenfelders, on the other hand, saw an entirely different picture: in their eyes, Providence — not Hitler — swept them from poverty into plenty. The leader restoring a sense of stability and hope was an American Passionist from Western Pennsylvania. Accordingly, they directed their unwavering loyalty to him.

Although the *Miesbergkloster's* construction was a watershed moment for the town, all parties involved with the project treaded upon perilous ground. New dictates in the Reich forbade the Catholic Church from establishing new institutions, and thus Fr. Viktor built a new monastery at a time when the Nazis were confiscating and secularizing existing ones.⁴⁴ For the first time, Schwarzenfeld's leaders found themselves in contention with the Nazi regime. Fr. Viktor, on the other hand, had ample experience navigating around the German government. In the end, he and the town leaders took the simplest option possible: they neglected to alert Party authorities of their intentions to build a monastery.⁴⁵ The maneuver succeeded. When the Nazis finally became wise to the ruse, they were forced to let construction continue. The *Miesbergkloster* project caused unemployment to plunge so dramatically in the Oberpfalz that the economic impact — which fell in line with Hitler's promise to restore the German economy — took precedence over objections to the new monastery.⁴⁶ After the monastery was completed in 1935, one repercussion did occur: Schwarzenfeld's Catholic mayor was deposed for having enthusiastically supported the project. He was replaced by a man who was an *Alter Kämpfer* (old fighter), a member of the Nazi party since Hitler's beer hall *putsch* of November 1923.

Rise of the Third Reich and Beginning of World War II

By 1937, Fr. Viktor had spent fifteen years building the German-Austrian Passionist foundation. Over the next five, he'd be forced to watch the Nazis dismantle the entire province.

The seeds of trouble first sprouted in 1933, after the Third Reich negotiated a Concordat in June of that year with the Vatican governing church-state relations between Germany and the Catholic Church. Article 14 of the Concordat strictly prohibited foreign nationals from celebrating Mass and hearing confessions for German citizens.⁴⁷ Eleven American Passionists had joined Frs.

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Viktor and Valentin in Germany, helping the province train new novices in the ways of their order, and Fr. Viktor assured inquiring authorities that the men were not performing pastoral duties. This explanation kept the Nazis at bay for a few years, but by 1936 they began enforcing it with a vengeance. The Gestapo began expelling the American Passionists from Germany, and freshly ordained German Passionists stepped up to succeed them.⁴⁸

In 1938, Frs. Viktor and Valentin discovered a convenient loophole allowing them to circumnavigate the new decrees. In March of that year, Germany annexed Austria (the *Anschluss*), automatically granting Austrians citizenship in the Third Reich. Both Passionists had lived at *Maria Schutz* long enough to satisfy Austria's residency requirement, thus qualifying them as citizens of an expanded Germany. The next time authorities scrutinized Fr. Viktor's papers, they found to their dismay that he was a legal citizen of the Third Reich.⁴⁹

The next setback hit the besieged province in 1937, when Nazi authorities closed the preparatory school in the *Schloss Gatterburg* in Munich and confiscated the building.⁵⁰ Young monastic hopefuls were sent back home, leaving only the older novices, priests, and brothers in *Maria Schutz*, Austria, and the *Miesbergkloster* in Schwarzenfeld. War broke out on September 1, 1939, and all German men of fighting age received army-call up notices.⁵¹ A German Passionist community 41 members strong dropped to 13 overnight. Fr. Viktor maintained correspondences with each of his "spiritual sons," insisting that they send letters weekly to provide a sign of life. They wrote him from the front lines, all addressing their letters to *Lieber Papa*, "Dear Dad."⁵² When parishioners stumbled into the *Miesbergkirche* and sank into a pew, praying fervently for sons fighting on the front lines, or grieving for ones who had fallen in combat, Fr. Viktor could empathize. In his own way, he bore that same cross.

The most devastating blows occurred in 1941. On February 28, Fr. Valentin — Fr. Viktor's co-founder and friend through trial and tribulation — died. The full burden of the broken province now settled upon Fr. Viktor's shoulders, but he barely had time to grieve before the next setback struck. The local branch of the National Socialist People's Welfare Organization needed a building to house children evacuated from air-raid-prone cities to the countryside, and they had chosen the *Miesbergkloster* in Schwarzenfeld.⁵³ On April 16, Nazi officials hammered upon the door of the monastery, ordering Fr. Viktor and his brethren to pack their belongings and leave within one hour. The Passionists had no choice but to comply. If they defied the order to abandon the monastery, they risked arrest.⁵⁴

Fr. Viktor must have reflected upon the words his mother said after their family suffered multiple bereavements: "God had given, and God hath taken away. Praised be His holy name." During his youth, he had learned how to process hardship. Sorrow served as the cornerstone of his very faith. Moreover, he had been born with a obstinacy that ran deep through the Koch family line. The Nazis had ordered him to abandon the monastery, but they had said nothing about the *Miesbergkirche*. Instead of conceding defeat and returning to America, Fr. Viktor stayed in Schwarzenfeld, taking up residence in a dilapidated and miniscule flower sacristy in the church.⁵⁵ The elderly priests and brothers in his depleted province

returned to *Maria Schutz*, the only monastery still in Passionist possession. Awed by Fr. Viktor's tenacity, fellow Austrian Passionist Fr. Paul Böhminghaus refurbished the old flower sacristy and remained with him. Despite the fact that their religious community was all but disbanded, the two Passionists continued to follow the rhythms of monastic life that they had worked so hard to ingrain in their novices.⁵⁶ They continued to observe canonical hours — the division of the day in terms of periods of fixed prayer at regular intervals. These official mandatory prayers known as the "Divine Office" consisted of the following⁵⁷:

PRAYER	APPROXIMATE TIME
MATINS	MIDNIGHT
LAUDS	DAYBREAK
PRIME	6 AM
TIERCE	9 AM
SEXT.....	12 NOON
NONE	3 PM
VESPERS	6 PM
COMPLINE ..	9 PM

Fr. Viktor was especially fond of Matins, the prayer services held at midnight, and Lauds, the observance at daybreak. This staunch observance of prayer was likely his coping mechanism through the vicissitudes of war.

After the eviction, the Schwarzenfelders proved where their loyalties lay. Aware that Frs. Viktor and Paul lacked access to a kitchen, *Frau Paula Dirrigl* volunteered to cook for them every other day. She packed meals into a basket, which her maid, *Fräulein Anna Thanner*, concealed under a shawl and delivered to the sacristy. On alternating days, nuns from a local convent performed the cooking and deliveries.⁵⁸ The priests had access to nothing more than a public toilet on church grounds, so the Gindele family invited them to their house to take baths.⁵⁹

As witnesses to this protest, the Schwarzenfelders were learning a valuable lesson. They were products of a culture that accepted subservience to authority as a way of life. Fr. Viktor, on the other



Approximately 500 Schwarzenfeld townspeople attend the April 25, 1945 funeral for 140 Death March victims. Courtesy: National Archives Records Administration, Signal Corps Photos.

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hand, had been born and raised on American liberty and the right of the individual to protest an injustice — even one inflicted by the State. Living under the shadow of a dictatorship, they were all keenly aware that outright rebellion resulted in arrest.⁶⁰ However, for the first time, Schwarzenfeld's Catholics saw a middle ground between unquestioning compliance and vigorous resistance: they could find ways to morally resist the Third Reich on their own terms.

The War Years: Fr. Viktor's Flock

One must consider the confluence of events in Schwarzenfeld and reflect upon the broader historiography of the Third Reich. Extraordinary circumstances permitted Fr. Viktor to remain on German soil. Schwarzenfeld was apparently the only German town where the population looked to an American citizen for moral and spiritual leadership. Moreover, the Passionists were all but driven from Germany. When Frs. Viktor and Paul began preaching at the *Miesbergkirche*, Schwarzenfeld also became the only German town whose residents regularly heard the central message of the Passionists: "Christ is present in human suffering." In the context of Nazi Germany, no concept could have been more powerful — nor more necessary.

There are ample reasons to believe that Fr. Viktor deeply imbued the town culture with Passionist teaching. No records were made of his sermons, yet to this day, his parishioners remember the conviction that flowed in his accented voice. They described him as being "full of his mission."⁶¹ Additional evidence can be found in the *poesiealbums* of parishioners who personally knew him. A *poesiealbum* is a journal in which German children collect poems, pictures, adages — any nugget of life that they wish to carry with them until they're old and gray.⁶² Aside from the owner, only cherished friends are permitted to write in them. The albums of Schwarzenfeld's elderly Catholics contain Bible verses in Fr. Viktor's bold, wiry handwriting, always followed by the motto of the Passionist order in German: *Das Leiden Jesu Christi sei stets in unserem Herzen!* (May the sufferings of Jesus Christ remain ever in our hearts!)⁶³

Some telling examples of Fr. Viktor's effect on the Schwarzenfelders came from members of the staunchly Catholic Gindele family. Norbert Gindele, father of the family, operated one of Schwarzenfeld's four bakeries before and during the war years.⁶⁴ A discharged soldier who had served the Third Reich in Poland and France, Gindele loathed the war effort so much that he spoke against it — in public — with little self-restraint. "Tell him not to speak any more," friends pleaded with his wife Maria, "He is putting himself in danger."⁶⁵ He often teetered on the brink of arrest, but authorities depended upon him to provide bread, a critical staple in the German diet. They intimidated him with interrogations, then grudgingly released him.

Gindele and his wife Maria were also keenly aware of the disparagement of foreign laborers in Germany. Like many towns in the Third Reich, Schwarzenfeld had suffered a manpower shortage due to army call-up notices, and the Party solved this problem by delivering POWs — Frenchmen, Poles, and eventually Russians — to replace German workers fighting on the front.⁶⁶ In

Schwarzenfeld, a large percentage of these laborers performed the grueling work necessary to run the Buchtalwerk A.G., a ceramics factory incorporated into the expansive Hermann Göring Works.⁶⁷ The strenuous physical labor caused them to go through their rationed food supplies quickly, and when they exhausted them completely, the foreign laborers took their empty ration books to the Gindele bakery. German law obligated Maria Gindele to turn them away until the following Monday, when they received new rations for the week. Instead, she tucked empty cards into her lap, pretending to cut stamps, and doled out bread for free. As a result, foreign laborers in Schwarzenfeld heavily patronized the Gindele bakery.⁶⁸

On the surface this seems to have been a simple act of compassion, yet it was infused with significance. Each ration book specified *down to the gram* how much bread a customer could purchase in a given week. The Reich Office of Nutrition required each bakery to collect customer stamps and record precisely how much bread was sold. The Nutrition Office then tallied stamps, assessed the bakery's needs, and authorized the baker to obtain supplies needed to support his business — again specified down to the gram.⁶⁹ If there was a discrepancy in supply and demand, minimally the Gindeles should have been audited. If authorities had found that bread was being freely distributed to Slavic laborers, the consequences would have been disastrous. Each time Maria Gindele pretended to cut stamps, she and her husband gambled their lives and livelihood. Norbert Gindele relied upon a miller to fictionalize the amount of wheat he ground for the bakery, and thus they evaded detection.⁷⁰ This implies that the Gindeles — and their conspirators — recognized the suffering of the men in their midst, and felt a moral obligation to act, regardless of the danger. Just as Fr. Viktor defied the *Miesbergkloster* eviction by entrenching himself in the church's small flower sacristy, they were morally resisting the Nazis on their own terms.

Two other incidents hint that Schwarzenfeld had an unusual milieu for a German town. In Summer 1941, Nazi Party authorities removed crosses from classrooms throughout Germany, and when students returned in Fall, they discovered that Hitler's portrait had replaced the crucifixes.⁷¹ The realization incited an unprecedented wave of protests and demonstrations throughout Bavaria, but in Schwarzenfeld the townspeople circulated a petition to have the crosses reinstated.⁷² This method of dissent was not unknown to the Germans, though they used it infrequently: the prospect of handing a list of names to Nazi authorities entailed significant danger for all who had signed the document.⁷³ As an American, Fr. Viktor would have considered this a common form of peaceful protest.

On another occasion in July 1944, one of the Passionist novices impressed into the German army wrote Frs. Viktor and Paul about Marian apparitions appearing in the town of Bergamo, Italy. The Blessed Virgin predicted that a miracle would occur on July 13, one that would "bring joy to the world."⁷⁴ Fr. Paul Böhminghaus read the letter aloud at the pulpit during Sunday Mass, prompting both awe and elation from parishioners. Schwarzenfeld's Catholics took it one step further by speculating about the purported miracle: they interpreted it as a sign that Hitler would be assassinated, resulting in

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the war's end.

The rumor snared the attention of the Gestapo. Identifying Fr. Paul as the instigator of the rumor, the secret police paraded him down Schwarzenfeld's main street and imprisoned him for six months.⁷⁵ Much to Fr. Viktor's relief, the Nazis released him in January 1945.

The Face of Evil: Schwarzenfeld and the Flossenbürg Death March⁷⁶

By April 1945, General Patton's Third Army had crossed the Siegfried Line and begun its advance into Germany. S.S. guards operating concentration camps perceived that the invasion marked the beginning of the end for the Third Reich. Fearing that the Allies would liberate the Jews in their captivity, the S.S. herded them into trains or forced them to march on foot, driving them toward camps far from the front.

Flossenbürg, a labor camp fifty miles north of Schwarzenfeld, spawned a number of death marches throughout Bavaria. One train carrying approximately 14,000 Jews departed from the camp on April 15, 1945, and headed south for the death camp at Dachau.⁷⁷ The convoy found itself targeted by American low-flying planes that were monitoring the area. Pilots had been instructed to fire upon all trains crossing German territory, assuming that they carried troops and supplies to the enemy front.⁷⁸

The most devastating attack occurred on April 19, just hours after the train pulled into Schwarzenfeld's railway station.⁷⁹ The S.S. opened the boxcar doors, letting Jews evacuate the doomed train, and at last the pilots realized the true nature of the transport. They refocused their fire upon the locomotive and destroyed the engine, preventing S.S. guards from taking prisoners any farther by railway.⁸⁰ Despite the setback, the S.S. remained determined to prevent captives from falling into Allied hands. They executed prisoners too injured to walk and then marched the rest on foot through Schwarzenfeld.

From all accounts, Frs. Viktor and Paul had been up in the *Miesbergkirche*, far from the sights and events transpiring in town. Their parishioners, on the other hand, were keenly aware. Schwarzenfeld's Catholics peered out doors and windows and saw emaciated prisoners marching by, drawing bony fingers to their lips in a silent plea for food and water. After absorbing years of Passionist teaching, parishioners needed no prompting to see Christ in those tormented faces. *Frau* Barbara Friese darted into the Gindele bakery and emerged with a basket full of bread. She confronted a Capo guard and argued for the right to feed the Jews. "Can't you see these people are starving?" she cried passionately. "Let them go!"⁸¹ *Frau* Friese convinced the guard to let her distribute bread, and the Gindele daughters stood by, ladling water.

While *Frau* Friese proceeded to distribute bread, another stunning episode was occurring just down the road. Realizing that no guards stood in sight, a prisoner broke from the march and fled to the *Gasthof Bauer*, Schwarzenfeld's guest house and brewery. According to eyewitness Herta Arata, the Jew's presence wrenched a crowded barroom to silence. *Herr* Georg Bauer, the guest house owner, shoved back a wall of gawking onlookers and guided him to a table, where a waiter rushed over with a soup bowl. Herta's mother

Rosa was inspired. Emboldened by the atmosphere of sorrow and concern for the prisoner, the German woman put an arm around him in motherly fashion and encouraged him to eat slower.⁸² The spontaneity of these reactions further demonstrated the unique moral and religious influences at work in Schwarzenfeld.

The Flossenbürg death march left the town's Nazi administration with a grim dilemma: the remnants of a massacre lay scattered throughout the train station yard, and U.S. forces would arrive within days. The mayor and his subordinates feared that if the Americans discovered 140 dead Jewish prisoners lying at the station, they would retaliate against the town, or investigate its leaders for suspected war crimes. Their solution opened the darkest chapter of Schwarzenfeld's history and the events that would establish Fr. Viktor as a hero in the eyes of its population.⁸³

The American Arrival and Ultimatum

By Sunday, April 22, 1945, Schwarzenfeld was embroiled in bedlam. The locals had witnessed a death march passing through town. A river of panic-stricken German refugees surged from the east, fleeing Russian forces only forty miles away. Another desperate, battered crowd of civilians staggered up from the south, where the neighboring city of Schwandorf had been carpet-bombed by the R.A.F. just days before.⁸⁴ To make matters worse, a Hungarian S.S. crew arrived with orders to destroy a bridge over a nearby river, frustrating the American advance into Germany. While Fr. Viktor celebrated a First Communion Mass less than a mile away, the S.S. were unpacking crates of dynamite and wiring up bridge piers.⁸⁵ Only the grit of real life could yield moments this surreal.

God's grace shone on Schwarzenfeld that evening. A storm gusted in. When the Hungarian S.S. caught sight of American tanks at 6:00 PM, they groped for matches and found them thoroughly soaked by rain.⁸⁶ Fr. Viktor emerged from the *Miesbergkirche*, met his American countrymen, spoke English — to their great surprise — and arranged Schwarzenfeld's peaceful surrender to military forces.

At this point, Fr. Viktor still seemed oblivious to the death march. He and Fr. Paul had been entrenched in the *Miesbergkirche*, and parishioners had not taken the time to inform them of events. This is attributable to the panic percolating through town, and the prospect of an imminent American invasion. Fr. Viktor reported "smoking a fine cigar" with the Americans on the evening of April 22, 1945, further indicating a lack of tension between himself and his countrymen.⁸⁷ His first omen of trouble occurred early on April 23, when he was summoned to Schwarzenfeld's town hall by the Americans. The liberating units had departed and an infantry unit arrived to enforce marshal law.⁸⁸ Upon entering the town, American scouts stumbled upon a ghastly find: 140 corpses lay rotting in Schwarzenfeld's town dump, their bodies dusted with lime. Local farmers used the mineral to reduce soil acidity and encourage crop growth. It also had additional properties that the Nazis hoped would prove useful — it masked odors and inhibited bacterial growth.⁸⁹

The American troops in Schwarzenfeld were war-hardened men who had witnessed countless horrors on the front lines, yet none compared to this ghastly discovery. Given the captions that

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accompany U.S. Signal Corps photos documenting the event, it is evident that American forces believed Schwarzenfeld to be a town full of Nazi sympathizers. The whole population bore full responsibility for the atrocity.⁹⁰

The American military commander issued a devastating ultimatum: the Schwarzenfelders had to disinter the 140 bodies, wash them, clothe them in donated clothing, construct coffins for all corpses, dig a grave trench in the town cemetery, and hold a proper Christian funeral — all in 24 hours — or the male population would be executed.⁹¹

The significance of sowing Passionist teaching in Germany likely dawned upon Fr. Viktor at that moment. He alone could see the disparity between American perceptions of Germans and the unlikely realities that he'd cultivated in Schwarzenfeld. Half of his male parishioners were driven at gunpoint to the mass grave and ordered to disinter bodies; the other half rushed to the town cemetery, where they began the task of digging a trench broad enough to bury 140 coffins. The task of constructing caskets fell to Schwarzenfeld's women and children, none of whom had touched a hammer or saw in their lives. Wartime supply shortages further hampered the effort: the nails customarily used for carpentry work were in short supply and children scampered to barns around town, collecting spent horseshoe nails.⁹² Fr. Viktor hastened from site to site, coordinating the effort.⁹³ Keenly aware that the Schwarzenfelders were failing to fulfill the ultimatum's conditions, he confronted the commander and pleaded on their behalf.

Frau Zita Mueller, a resident of Schwarzenfeld, had constructed coffins in one of the town's three carpentries. Her recollections convey the psychological magnitude of events, along with her reaction to Fr. Viktor's intervention:

My mother, aunts, and sister were constructing caskets in the carpentry shop. We were terrified, working a whole day and night, and despite the long hours we spent hammering the caskets together, we knew that we would not be able to finish in time. I kept looking at the old carpenter who ran the shop and thinking, "He will die." The next morning, American soldiers burst through the door. We shrank away, crying, crying Then, like an angel, Fr. Viktor appeared in the doorway and physically pushed the soldiers back. He spoke stern words to them, then he spoke to us, calming us down. He told us, "We have another day to complete this task. It's all right. We have another day"⁹⁴

On the morning of April 25th, 1945, Schwarzenfeld's five hundred men, women and children assembled in a grim human wall around 140 hastily constructed caskets, their heads bowed in prayer. The Dean of the district conducted the funerary ceremony, while Fr. Viktor translated services in English for attending American soldiers. Three Polish Jews had escaped the Flossenbürg Death March by hiding in houses and barns in Schwarzenfeld, and they attended the funeral service, saying *Kaddish* for the dead.⁹⁵ They also requested that the crosses be removed from the coffins, a request that Fr. Viktor and the Schwarzenfelders respected. Local children gathered greenery from a nearby garden and placed them

upon the coffins as a decoration.⁹⁶

History shows that U.S. forces compelled German civilians to tend the victims of death marches in approximately 75 other locations throughout Germany, yet Schwarzenfeld's incident was unique in several respects. It is the only case where an American defended Germans. It is also the only known case where an ultimatum accompanied the order to tend the dead. Moreover, it was common for an American commander or chaplain to read the following statement to a town's citizens during a funeral ceremony:

You have been ordered here to look upon this indisputable, this gruesome evidence of German barbarity, and to be solemnly told that the people of the United States and the people of the civilized world hold all Germans responsible for the horrible crimes that resulted in the death of these innocent men

No declaration of collective guilt was read aloud during the funeral in Schwarzenfeld. Fr. Viktor had sown the seeds of Passionist teaching in the obscure Bavarian town, and his flock did not need to hear a statement that injected national shame into their collective psyche. Faith had kept their moral fiber intact. When they gazed upon the rows of pineboard coffins, this reaction occurred naturally.⁹⁹ The silence of American officers was likely a tacit acknowledgment that Fr. Viktor had saved Schwarzenfeld in every way that a priest can save others — morally, physically, and spiritually. Through faith and presence, he had changed the town in remarkable ways.

Fr. Viktor's Legacy

In 1947, two years after Fr. Viktor defended Schwarzenfeld from U.S. forces, newly elected mayor Norbert Gindele signed documents that declared the American Passionist an *Ehrenbürger* — an honorary citizen of the town.¹⁰⁰ This prestigious distinction is common in Germany, recognizing people who have performed outstanding services to the community, but it is extraordinary for a foreigner to receive this recognition. Fr. Viktor accepted the honor humbly, telling onlookers assembled at the *Miesbergkloster*: "Whether [I am an] honor citizen or not, I am and will remain



Map of pre-World War II Passionist foundations in Germany and Austria.

Courtesy: Katherine Koch.

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always ready to help within the framework God set for me."¹⁰¹

In the eyes of the Schwarzenfelders, the venerable old Passionist deserved the honor for more reasons than one. After preventing American forces from inflicting reprisals upon the town, he helped the townspeople emotionally and spiritually cope with the trauma they had endured during the 48-hour incident.¹⁰² He became an intermediary between the Germans and Americans, often pleading for the release of German soldiers held in Allied P.O.W. camps (especially if the prisoners and their families were known to be conscientious people who had rejected National Socialism).¹⁰³ When a local farmer contracted typhoid from concentration camp prisoners who had been hiding in his barn and the possibility of an epidemic overshadowed Schwarzenfeld, Fr. Viktor coordinated with American military authorities to open an apothecary in town and quickly distribute medications necessary to combat the disease.¹⁰⁴ In addition, he arranged the delivery of CARE packages to Schwarzenfeld, and during a visit to the United States in 1947, he ran donation drives, imploring American Catholics to donate money and goods to the indigent citizens of war-torn Germany.¹⁰⁵ To this day, he is still held in fondest regard by many Germans in Schwarzenfeld and beyond.

Schwarzenfeld's veneration of Fr. Viktor didn't end with the declaration of honorary citizenship. When the town opened a new street that would serve as its main thoroughfare, officials named it *Viktor-Koch-Strasse*, in his memory. On April 22, 2005, devoted parishioners affixed a plaque upon the facade of the *Miesbergkirche*, honoring his intervention on Schwarzenfeld's behalf. Every ten years, the town's citizens organize exhibitions and seminars to remember the cataclysmic events that occurred at the end of

World War II, and the actions that made the American Passionist so revered in their eyes. Plans for a 2015 celebration are already underway.

The Passionist province that Fr. Viktor struggled to establish survived the war, and continues to thrive. The monastery at Schwarzenfeld suffered no damage. *Maria Schutz*, on the other hand, required extensive renovation before the church and monastery could continue to serve their original purpose. When the Russians advanced into Austria, the shrine was caught in the crossfire of a battle zone, and virtually the only feature that remained standing was a statue of the Virgin Mary. In 1976 the Passionists moved out of the *Schloss Gatterburg* and established a new monastic house, the monastery of St. Gabriel.¹⁰⁶

Fr. Viktor also had a profound impact on his family back in America. His oldest sister Anna raised thirteen children with her husband John Bauer. Six children followed their uncle's example and pursued religious vocations.¹⁰⁷ Among them was Fr. Basil Bauer, C.P., who worked in West Hunan, China, for twenty-eight years until the Communist regime expelled him in 1952.¹⁰⁸ Frances Koch, the daughter of Fr. Viktor's brother Peter, was also inspired by her uncle to enter religious life, and on August 15, 1929, she entered the Sisters of Mercy at Mercyhurst in Erie, Pennsylvania.¹⁰⁹ In addition, two cousins followed Fr. Viktor into the Passionist Order — Fr. Benedict Huck, C.P., and Fr. Roland Flaherty, C.P.¹¹⁰ Shortly after his ordination on April 28, 1947, Fr. Flaherty and four other American Passionists joined Fr. Viktor in Germany to help rebuild the shattered German-Austrian foundation. He worked in the province for 18 years.

Viktor Religious Order	Motherhouse	Family Member	Relation to Fr.
Fr. Basil (Joseph) Bauer (1898-1970)	Nephew	Passionist Fathers(C.P.)	St. Paul of the Cross Province, West Hoboken, NJ
Sr. Veronica (Clara) Bauer (1899-1979)	Niece	Sisters of the Good Shepherd (S.G.S.)	Pittsburgh, PA
Sr. Basil (Helen) Bauer (1902-1982)	Niece	School Sisters of Notre Dame (S.S.N.D.)	Baltimore, MD
Mother Sylvia (Margaret) Bauer (1904-1976)	Niece	Passionist Sisters (C.P.)	Pittsburgh, PA
Sr. Anne Marie (Anna) Bauer (1905-1977)	Niece	Sisters of Mercy (R.S.M.)	Erie, PA
Sr. Gabriel (Gertrude) Bauer (1909-1980)	Niece	School Sisters of Notre Dame (S.S.N.D.)	Baltimore, MD
Sr. Mary Gabriel (Frances) Koch (1912-1994)	Niece	Sisters of Mercy (R.S.M.)	Erie, PA
Fr. Gilbert (Joseph) Mehler (1874-1964)	First cousin	Passionist Fathers (C.P.)	St. Paul of the Cross Province, West Hoboken, NJ (1891-1906), Diocese of Columbus (1906-1944), and Diocese of Steubenville (1944-1964)
Fr. Benedict (Francis) Huck (1890-1963)	Second cousin	Passionist Fathers (C.P.)	St. Paul of the Cross Province, West Hoboken, NJ
Fr. Roland (Francis) Flaherty (1903-1968)	Third cousin	Passionist Fathers (C.P.)	St. Paul of the Cross Province, Union City, NJ

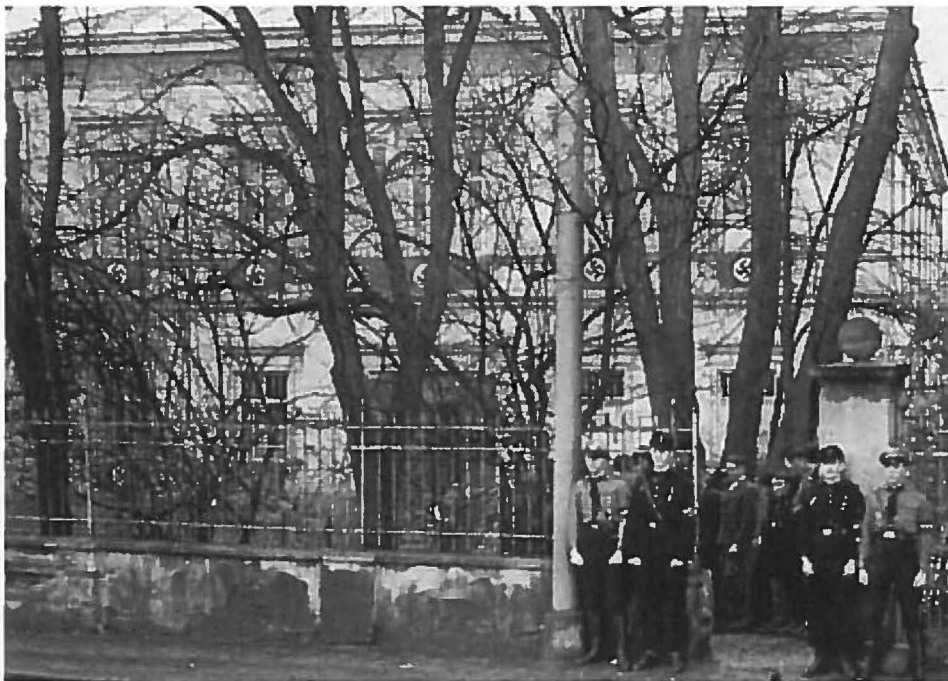
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Fr. Viktor returned to the United States only once in 1947. He clearly felt most at home in Germany. He continued to reside in Schwarzenfeld until his death on December 15, 1955, at the age of 82, passing just as the Passionist community finished Matins and Lauds, the prayer services that he loved most. The Schwarzenfelders laid him to rest in the *Miesbergkirche* cemetery beside Fr. Valentin Lenherd, his friend and co-founder of the German-Austrian Passionist province. May Fr. Viktor Koch rest in peace, knowing that he made an extraordinary impact on this world.

Note on Sources

A chance comment by a relative in Sharon, Pennsylvania, brought to the author's attention the name of the then-deceased Fr. Viktor Koch, who was her great granduncle. Since 2003, the author's research has taken her to such diverse sources as the Passionist Archives in Union City (New Jersey), the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C., the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and finally to the town of Schwarzenfeld in Germany. The following table provides keys to the many sources listed in the endnotes:

ABBREVIATION	SOURCE
BFA	Bauer Family Archives, Sharon, Pennsylvania
GPFA	German Passionist Foundation Archives, Munich, Germany
KFA	Koch Family Archives, Lordstown, Ohio
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.
PHA	Passionist Historical Archives of St. Paul of the Cross Province, Union City, New Jersey
SJCR	St. Joseph Church Records, Sharon, Pennsylvania
SPR	Schwarzenfeld Public Records, State of Bavaria, Germany
USHMMA	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, D.C.



Nazi confiscation in 1937 of Schloss Gatterburg, Passionist preparatory school in Munich, Germany.

Courtesy: German Foundation Photo Album.

FOOTNOTES:

¹ Surviving documentation shows that the spelling of Fr. Viktor's name varies. In the United States he was known as "Fr. Victor." He adopted this version in correspondences with family, the U.S. military, and fellow American Passionists, and it is also the version used in American newspapers. However, German documentation identifies him as "Fr. Viktor," and he invariably uses this spelling when corresponding with German citizens and parishioners. The variance was likely a matter of pragmatism. Being a foreigner in a strange land was a detriment, and using the German spelling among the natives helped ease that difficulty. On the same token, using the Americanized version of his name — especially with Americans after World War II — convinced them that they were dealing with a countryman. The American spelling "Fr. Victor" will be used in U.S.-based sources and documentation for historical accuracy. Its appearance is not a typographical error.

² Parishioner *Frau* Zita Mueller described Fr. Viktor as "fatherly." KFA, Interview of the author with Zita Mueller, Schwarzenfeld, Germany (May 12, 2005). His quick-tempered side was evident with his American countrymen. He wrote the following about an incident with a soldier after the liberation of Schwarzenfeld, Germany, in 1945:

Just once I was a little irritated when a young American soldier climbed up on the outside [of our monastery] through a first story window and wanted to place soldiers in our small apartment and have us get out. I gave him a piece of my mind and asked him if he did not know that this was American property. He left and never returned.

PHA, Letter of Fr. Viktor Koch to [Fr. Bonaventure Oberst], SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Rome (September 26, 1946), 4. The Basilica of SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Rome is home to the Passionists, and is the burial place of the order's founder, St.

FOOTNOTES: An American Priest in Nazi Germany: The Story of Fr. Viktor Koch, C.P. (continued)

Paul of the Cross (1694-1775).

³ Fr. Viktor's love for the pleasures of life was demonstrated in his 1946 letter cited above. He recorded that he shared "a good American cigar" with the Americans the night of their arrival. He also wrote his niece Theresa in 1936, telling a story about indulging in ice cream on a hot day while waiting for a train. PHA, Letter of Fr. Viktor Koch to [Fr. Bonaventure Oberst], 2, and BFA, Letter of Fr. Viktor Koch to Theresa Bauer, Maria Schutz, Austria (June 16, 1936).

⁴ SJCR, Marriage certificate of Nikolaus Koch and Viktoria Elser (1868).

⁵ Nikolaus Koch's occupation of coal miner is established by the 1880 U.S. Census. 1880 U.S. Census, Hickory (Mercer County), Pennsylvania; Roll 1155, Enumeration District 213, Family History Film 1255155, page 155D, Image 0208, appearing at the website: <http://www.ancestry.com>. All websites in this article were accessed May 2014.

⁶ PHA, Fr. Viktor Koch obituary (1955), 1. In paperwork, Fr. Viktor generally listed his birthplace as Sharon, Pennsylvania, and on occasion, it is listed as Hermitage. He was born on Dutch Lane in Hickory Township, which in 1976 was renamed the city of Hermitage.

⁷ PHA, Fr. Viktor Koch obituary (1955), 1.

⁸ The assertion that the Kochs helped found St. Rose of Lima is part of the oral tradition passed on through three generations of the Koch family. This has been confirmed by *The History of Mercer County, Pennsylvania, 1888* (Chicago: Brown, Runk & Co), 539-540. St. Rose of Lima was established in 1860, but changed its name to St. Joseph after a new church was constructed in the city of Sharon in 1893.

⁹ The location of the house is confirmed by an 1873 map of Hickory Township, appearing at <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~pamerce/PA/PL/Maps/1873/hickory/hickory-nw.htm>.

¹⁰ Fadius Koch died on October 31, 1880. SJCR, death record for Fadius Koch (1880).

¹¹ Nikolaus Koch died on April 7, 1881. SJCR, death record for Nikolaus Koch (1881).

¹² Anna Barth Koch died on June 14, 1882. The cause of death on her death certificate is illegible, as the ink is worn. SJCR, death record for Anna Barth Koch (1882).

¹³ PHA, Fr. Viktor Koch obituary (1955), 3.

¹⁴ K. O'Malley and C.J. Yuhaus, "Passionists," *New Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume 10*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Thomson/Gale 2003), 931-933.

¹⁵ PHA, Fr. Viktor Koch obituary (1955), 1.

¹⁶ Note that the author is intentionally using the Americanized version of his name in this context. The spelling is not a typographical error.

¹⁷ PHA, Fr. Viktor Koch obituary (1955), 1.

¹⁸ "Baltimore Pastor Gets Pulpit Here," *The Pittsburg Press* (September 7, 1920), 20.

¹⁹ *Celebrating 150 Years of Passionist Ministry in North America and Beyond, 1852-2002* (Beauceville, Quebec: 2002), 11, 39.

²⁰ Article 231, which became known as the War Guilt Clause, was the opening article in the reparations section of the Treaty of Versailles. See "Article 231" appearing at: http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Versailles/Part_VIII#Article_231.

²¹ "Weimar Republic" appearing at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weimar_Republic. A note on monetary nomenclature: the German Mark became known as the Papiermark with the outbreak of World War I. The Papiermark was later replaced by the Rentenmark in 1923, and then by the Reichsmark in 1924. Information on the Rentenmark and Papiermark appears respectively at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rentenmark> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Papiermark.

²² Judith G. Coffin, *Western Civilizations* (New York: W. W. Norton Inc, 2002), 918.

²³ PHA, [Fr. Walter Mickel or Fr. Leopold Snyder], *The Chronicle of the German Foundation* (Typescript), 3-4.

²⁴ Michael B. Gross, *The War Against Catholicism: Liberalism and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 1.

²⁵ Richard J. Helmstadter, *Freedom and Religion in the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 19.

²⁶ Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 185.

²⁷ PHA, [Mickel/Snyder], *The Chronicle of the German Foundation*, 1. Fr. Lenherd was born July 20, 1868, professed February 3, 1888, and ordained December 17, 1892.

²⁸ A question naturally arises in the history of the German

foundation: If the idea to start a German province originated with Fr. Valentine Lenherd, why was he not tapped to serve as Provincial? It seems that his superiors in the order had a complete lack of confidence in him. Fr. Stanislaus Grennan once wrote to Fr. General Silvio, stating:

We who have lived with [Fr. Valentine] for years, even as Student companions (for he and I were of the same class) — we who were his Superiors for years know him as your Paternity can never know him. Truth compels us to say that he is absolutely unfit to govern — unfit to hold any office, even Vicar or Superior of the Missions. Moreover, his childish vanity carries him to the gravest acts of imprudence, which have, in many cases, seriously injured our Missions in America. His imprudence in preaching a Retreat to the Clergy of Boston almost ruined us in that Archdiocese.

What he did to merit this grim appraisal is unknown. Fr. Stanislaus had no such misgivings about Fr. Viktor, stating that "he is the best man for [the office of Provincial of the German foundation]." PHA, Letter of Fr. Stanislaus Grennan to Fr. General Silvio (April 28, 1924), 2.

²⁹ PHA, [Mickel/Snyder], *The Chronicle of the German Foundation*, 2.

³⁰ Michael Cardinal von Faulhaber was Archbishop of Munich for 35 years, from 1917 until his death in 1952. His profile appears at the Catholic Hierarchy website: <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bvfau.html>. Dr. Michael Buchberger was Vicar General of the Munich and Friesing Archdiocese, and later became the Bishop of Regensburg in 1928. His profile also appears the Catholic Hierarchy website: <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bbuch.html>.

³¹ PHA, [Mickel/Snyder], *The Chronicle of the German Foundation*, 3-5.

³² This solution was originally proposed by Dr. Michael Buchberger. Although the compromise appeased both Cardinal von Faulhaber and the Passionist Father General, Fr. Viktor's superior, Fr. Stanislaus Grennan, considered this maneuver an error in judgment. American donations were being used for a church that the Passionists would not own. He was further irritated by the fact that donors kept asking him when the Passionists would start holding services in their new church, and was loath to tell them that Fr. Viktor would have no affiliation with the building that they had just funded. PHA, [Mickel/Snyder], *The Chronicle of the German Foundation*, 3-5, and PHA, Letter of Fr. Stanislaus Grennan to Fr. Procurator Leone (February 17, 1925), 1-2.

³³ In trying to establish the province, Fr. Viktor walked an incredibly fine line between the German Catholic Church and the Socialist regime. He could persuade the bishops by gifting churches with American money, but during his first few years in Germany, he had little hope of softening the iron will of the Socialists. The Social Democratic Party had warned the Bavarian Bishops not to admit new orders. Thus, secrecy was still needed on the matter of who owned the *Schloss Gatterburg*. PHA, Letter of Fr. Stanislaus Grennan to Fr. Procurator Leone (February 17, 1925), 1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-3.

³⁵ PHA, [Mickel/Snyder], *The Chronicle of the German Foundation*, 7. *Maria Schutz* is the largest site of Marian pilgrimages in Austria. The chapel dates from 1721, and the sanctuary from 1728. For more information, see "*Maria Schutz*" appearing at http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Schutz and <http://pfarre-semmering.at/>. Friedrich Gustav Cardinal Piffl was archbishop of Vienna for approximately 19 years. His profile appears at the Catholic Hierarchy website: <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bpiffl.html>.

³⁶ PHA, [Mickel/Snyder], *The Chronicle of the German Foundation*, 11.

³⁷ When seeking sites for the third monastery in 1933, Fr. Viktor turned to Dr. Michael Buchberger, now Bishop of Regensburg, for advice. The bishop recommended several sites in his diocese, including Schwarzenfeld and Burglengelfeld. PHA, [Mickel/Snyder], *The Chronicle of the German Foundation*, 11.

³⁸ *Passioni Domini Devoti: 50 Jahre Passionisten in Deutschland u. Österreich 1923-1973* (Landshut, 1973), 95-96.

³⁹ Josef Schießl, "Pater Provinzial Viktor Koch ließ sich nicht vom Miesberg in Schwarzenfeld vertreiben," *Mittelbayerische Zeitung* (April 22-23, 1995).

⁴⁰ The date of monetary conversion happened in the period 1933-1934. In January 1933, Fr. Viktor would have received 4.2 Marks for every \$1 USD; in January 1934, he would have received 2.61 Marks for \$1 USD. See R.L. Bidwell, *Currency*

Conversion Tables: A Hundred Years of Change (London: Rex Collings, 1970), 22-24.

⁴¹ *250 Jahre Miesberg in Schwarzenfeld* (Landshut, 1973), 41.

⁴² PHA, [Mickel/Snyder], *The Chronicle of the German Foundation*, 12.

⁴³ Ian Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 48-49, 61-62.

⁴⁴ PHA, Letter of Fr. Christopher Berlo, Battle Creek, Michigan (April 15, 1948), 2.

⁴⁵ *250 Jahre Miesberg in Schwarzenfeld*, op. cit., 71.

⁴⁶ PHA, [Mickel/Snyder], *The Chronicle of the German Foundation*, 12.

⁴⁷ *Persecution of the Catholic Church in the Third Reich: Facts and Documents Translated From the German* (Fort Collins: Roger A. McCaffrey Publishing, 2007), Appendix I, 518.

⁴⁸ *Passioni Domini Devoti*, op. cit., 116.

⁴⁹ The Burgermeister of Schwarzenfeld confirmed Fr. Viktor Koch's German citizenship in an April 9, 1941 memo. SPR, memo from office of the Burgermeister of Schwarzenfeld (April 9, 1941).

⁵⁰ PHA, Letter of Fr. Viktor Koch to [Fr. Bonaventure Oberst], SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Rome (September 26, 1946), 1.

⁵¹ PHA, [Mickel/Snyder], *The Chronicle of the German Foundation*, 15.

⁵² GPPA, Letter of Fr. Viktor Koch to Confrator Leonhard Wölfl, C.P. Schwarzenfeld, Germany (September 17, 1942).

⁵³ From April 1941 to October 1943, the *Miesbergkloster* was occupied by the *Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt* (National Socialist People's Welfare Organization), which received the support of the *Gauleiter* (German state governor) of the Bayerische Ostmark. From 1943 until the end of the war, the monastery became the home of the *Institut für kontinentaleuropäische Forschung* (Continental European Research Institute). The institute was directed by Russian physicist Dr. Alexander Nikuradse and within the cloister's confines, he and his team experimented with "wonder weapon" technologies they hoped would turn the war in Germany's favor. PHA, Letter of Fr. Viktor Koch to [Fr. Bonaventure Oberst], SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Rome (September 26, 1946), 2; *Passioni Domini Devoti*, op. cit., 121-124.

⁵⁴ PHA, [Mickel/Snyder], *The Chronicle of the German Foundation*, 17.

⁵⁵ PHA, Letter of Fr. Viktor Koch to [Fr. Bonaventure Oberst], SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Rome (September 26, 1946), 1.

⁵⁶ PHA, Fr. Viktor Koch obituary (1955), 1.

⁵⁷ A schedule for the Liturgy of the Hours can be found under "Canonical Hours," appearing at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgy_of_the_Hours.

⁵⁸ *250 Jahre Miesberg in Schwarzenfeld*, op. cit., 91.

⁵⁹ KFA, Interview of the author with Liebharda Gindele and Josefine Gindele Vögel, Schwarzenfeld, Germany, Part I (May 13, 2005), 3:25.

⁶⁰ It was well-known that Germans who expressed dissent against the war — especially in the later years — would disappear. KFA, Letter of Joe Koch to Fran Koch, Konegstein, Germany (June 23, 1945), 3.

⁶¹ KFA, Interviews (taped) of the author with various eyewitnesses after Sunday Mass in Schwarzenfeld, Germany (May 15, 2005), 25:50. The observation about Fr. Viktor was made by Irmli Ehrenreich.

⁶² A definition of "*Poesiealbum*" appears at <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poesiealbum>.

⁶³ KFA, *Poesiealbums* of Josefine and Liebharda Gindele (digital scan by author and Gary Koch, 2005).

⁶⁴ In the postwar era, Norbert Gindele became one of Schwarzenfeld's most celebrated town mayors.

⁶⁵ KFA, Interview of the author with Liebharda Gindele and Josefine Gindele Vögel, Part II, Schwarzenfeld, Germany (May 13, 2005), 2:40-10:30.

⁶⁶ A general account of foreign forced labor in Germany can be found in Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labour in Germany under the Third Reich* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁶⁷ As to Buchtalwerks A.G. Schwarzenfeld, see Gottfried Cremer, *Buchtal-Chronik Band I. Vorgeschichte und die Zeit der Gründung bis Ende 1955* (1982) and Winfried Nerdinger, *Bauen im Nationalsozialismus, Bayern 1933-1945*, (München, 1993). An early analysis of the Hermann Goring Works can be found in Kurt Lachmann, "The Hermann Göring Works," *Social Research*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (February 1941), 24-40. A well-documented summary of the Buchtalwerks appears at http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buchtal_A.G.

FOOTNOTES: An American Priest in Nazi Germany: The Story of Fr. Viktor Koch, C.P. (continued)

⁶⁸ KFA, Interview of the author with Liebharda Gindele and Josefine Gindele Vögel, Part II, Schwarzenfeld, Germany (May 13, 2005), 19-55.

⁶⁹ KFA, Letter of Liebharda Gindele to the author, Schwarzenfeld, Germany (April 14, 2008), 2.

⁷⁰ KFA, Letter of Liebharda Gindele to the author, Schwarzenfeld, Germany (July 15, 2008), 2.

⁷¹ German women—the vast majority of them mothers—led protests against the removal of crosses. For this reason, the event is frequently referred to as the “Mother’s Revolt.” Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich*, op. cit., 331-357.

⁷² KFA, Interview of the author with Frau Barbara Friese, Schwarzenfeld, Germany (May 13, 2005), 24:50. Frau Friese was the woman who spearheaded the effort to restore crosses in Schwarzenfeld’s classrooms. She authored and circulated the petition.

⁷³ The author is aware of at least one other documented case where Catholic women circulated a petition to reinstate the crosses. A similar incident occurred in the town of Bodenmais, Bavaria. The incident caught the attention of the Gestapo.

⁷⁴ PHA, Letter of Fr. Viktor Koch to [Fr. Bonaventure Oberst], SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Rome (September 26, 1946), 2.

⁷⁵ Given the nature of the rumor spread by the people of Schwarzenfeld, one wonders if the Gestapo suspected Fr. Paul as a co-conspirator of the July 20th plot against Hitler. To date, the author has found no documentation to suggest that this was the case. His release implies that, had the Nazis suspected his involvement, they found no evidence to corroborate it — nor would they, since it was a coincidence. Also, he was apparently incarcerated in a jail outside the town of Schwandorf, not held in a camp of any kind. *250 Jahre Miesberg in Schwarzenfeld*, op. cit., 91; PHA, Letter of Fr. Viktor Koch to [Fr. Bonaventure Oberst], SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Rome (September 26, 1946), 2.

⁷⁶ The author wishes to thank Dr. Christopher Mauriello, chair of History at Salem State University, for his assistance in researching material on the Flossenbürg Death March. Dr. Mauriello has investigated numerous cases of death marches that led to incidents of “forced confrontation,” where U.S. forces compelled German civilians to view Nazi atrocity sites and tend the dead.

⁷⁷ Isabel Alcoff and Markus Stern, Shema: *Secret of My Survival* (1993), 59.

⁷⁸ NARA, Weekly Intelligence Summary, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, No. 58 (April 29, 1945), record group 331, box 14, section 22. This intelligence summary details the shifting of Allied air attacks on railroads in western Germany to central and southern Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia from April 6 to April 29, 1945. It reports extensive damage to rail centers and rail lines with particular emphasis on the destruction of locomotives.

⁷⁹ USHMM, Benno Fischer, “Death March April 14, 1945-April 24, 1945” (June 1945). See also a documentary film based on Fischer’s testimony: *The Death March of the Jews From the Camp At Flossenbürg* (1997). See further PHA, Letter of Fr. Viktor Koch to [Fr. Bonaventure Oberst], SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Rome (September 26, 1946), 3.

⁸⁰ Survivor Mark Stern described the strafing by American low-fliers upon the train, as well as the ensuing death march. Alcoff and Stern, *Shema: Secret of My Survival*, op. cit., 59-61.

⁸¹ KFA, interview of the author with Frau Barbara Friese (May 13, 2005), 24:00-24:50.

⁸² Herta Arata recorded the incident in a poem titled “Twisted Glory,” composed on January 30, 2006. She also referenced it in a letter. KFA, Letter of Herta Arata to the Koch family, Milford, MA (September 15, 2006), 20.

⁸³ NARA, Sworn Statement of Jakob Troidl and Translation of Sworn Statement of Wilhelm Geldner (May 30, 1945), M-1024, Roll 1.

⁸⁴ Schwandorf was firebombed using phosphorus bombs by Allied air forces on the evening of April 16 and into April 17, 1945. The main target was the train station, but hundreds of residences were also destroyed. Reliable sources estimate the death toll at 1,250. Georg Klitta, *Das Finale des Zweiten Weltkrieges in Schwandorf: Ein Dokumentation* (Meiller Druck und Verlag GmbH Schwandorf, 1970). The bombing continued through April 21, 1945 when the 392nd Bomber Group of the 2nd Air Division Group dropped a total of 236 500-pound GP bombs on Schwandorf. See “Mission #284” appearing at <http://www.b24.net/missions/MM042045.htm>.

⁸⁵ J. Ted Hartman, *Tank Driver With the 11th Armored from the Battle of the Bulge to VE Day* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 96. For First Communion reference, see Markus Glasier, *Die letzten Kriegstage in Schwarzenfeld: Chronologie der Ereignisse zwischen Ostern und 26. April 1945 in Schwarzenfeld* (Schwarzenfeld: eBook, 2005), 20.

⁸⁶ “Ein Mann mit einem weißen Bettlaken näherten sich die Amerikaner,” *Mittelbayerische Zeitung* (May 11-12, 1985).

⁸⁷ PHA, Letter of Fr. Viktor Koch to [Fr. Bonaventure Oberst], SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Rome (September 26, 1946), 3.

⁸⁸ Two units of the 26th “Yankee” Division were in action in Schwarzenfeld between April 22 and April 25, 1945. Elements of the 11th Armored Division arrived first on Sunday, April 22, securing the town. They left at approximately 7:00 AM on April 23, and were replaced by the 328th Infantry Regiment. The unit engaged during the 48-hour ultimatum was the 328th. This is proven by a memo written by the unit’s commanding officer. NARA, C.O. 328th Regiment memo to C.O. 26th Infantry Division (April 23, 1945), Record Group 407, Inf Rgt 328, Box 8305.

⁸⁹ A definition of “agricultural lime” appears at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agricultural_lime. Schwarzenfeld’s town mayor received orders from the *Landrat* (civil county leader) to bury the bodies before they spread disease. Presumably the disinfectant properties of lime would have proven useful.

⁹⁰ There are vague and conflicting explanations as to how the Americans concluded that the Schwarzenfelders were responsible for the atrocity. One account claimed that the Americans were given misinformation. KFA, Letter of Fr. Klemens Hayduck, C.P., to Ed Pancoast, Schwarzenfeld, Germany (March 25, 2000).

⁹¹ The terms of the ultimatum itself varied from one eyewitness to the next. Some remembered a 24-hour ultimatum, while others remembered a 48-hour ultimatum. Still others recalled no ultimatum at all. Eyewitness Josef Schmid recalled the Americans threatening to take the male population to the neighboring town of Deiselkühn, where they would be shot. The official record appears in *250 Jahre Miesberg in Schwarzenfeld*, op. cit., 42. See also KFA, Letter of Oswald Wilhelm to the author, Schwarzenfeld, Germany (April 19, 2004); KFA, Interview of the author with Josef Schmid (May 1, 2005), 26:30.

⁹² KFA, Letter of Peter Bartmann to the author, Schwarzenfeld, Germany (February 27, 2004). The difficulty in acquiring nails is further supported by eyewitness Josef Schmid. KFA, Interview of the author with Josef Schmid (May 1, 2005), 30:00.

⁹³ KFA, Letter of Oswald Wilhelm to the author, Schwarzenfeld, Germany (April 19, 2004).

⁹⁴ KFA, Interview of the author with Zita Mueller, Schwarzenfeld, Germany (May 12, 2005); KFA, Letter of Zita Mueller to the Koch family, Schwarzenfeld, Germany (September 27, 2004).

⁹⁵ PHA, Letter of Fr. Viktor Koch to [Fr. Bonaventure Oberst], SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Rome (September 26, 1946), 3. The Americans had ordered Fr. Viktor and the Schwarzenfelders to hold a Christian funeral. It seems apparent that the Americans were determined to simply bury the dead in a decent manner, and no one stopped to investigate the victims’ religion. Fr. Viktor himself stated that “it remained to be proven” that all the victims were Jews. He was likely concerned that some might be Christian. In May 1957, the victims were exhumed and reburied in the Flossenbürg memorial cemetery. A memorial marker was left at the original grave site in Schwarzenfeld.

⁹⁶ KFA, interview of the author with Zita Mueller (May 12, 2005).

⁹⁷ Katherine Koch and Dr. Christopher Mauriello, “The 48-Hour Ultimatum: US Soldiers and Forced Confrontation of German Civilians in Schwarzenfeld, Germany, April ‘45” (paper presented at the Midwest World History Association 2013 Conference on War and Peace in World History, Wittenberg University, Springfield, Ohio, September 27-28, 2013).

⁹⁸ During burial ceremonies overseen by occupying forces in the German towns of Neunburg vorm Wald, Nammering, Ludwigslust, and other numerous locations, American commanding officers read aloud statements (with the assistance of translators) accusing the townspeople of collective responsibility for the mass murder of innocent Jews, prisoners, slave laborers, and other victims of Nazi atrocities. Paul Coffey,

“The Punishment of Neunburg” (1945), reprinted in the *Santa Fe New Mexican* (June 5, 1995).

⁹⁹ Town historian Oswald Wilhelm affirmed that “Deep embarrassment prevailed with all participants in this funeral ceremony, when they saw the large number of the coffins.” KFA, Letter of Oswald Wilhelm to the author, Schwarzenfeld, Germany (April 19, 2004).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ *250 Jahre Miesberg in Schwarzenfeld*, op. cit., 50.

¹⁰² Ed Pancoast, “Schwarzenfeld, Germany — A Different Kind of Hero,” *Yankee Doings*, LXXXI, No. 3 (September 2000), 30-33.

¹⁰³ Fr. Viktor wrote many letters on behalf of German wives and farmers who were trying to bring their husbands and sons home from P.O.W. camps. Collectively, this comprised a considerable body of correspondence. The scope and magnitude are indicated in his letter to [Fr. Bonaventure Oberst], wherein he stated:

Not only the first days, but for a year and more I was kept busy, for all in the whole surrounding district came to me for advice and help. They came as far away as 50 to 200 kilometers. I was glad to give help where I could, because those who came were not the Nazis, but those who suffered under their regime.

PHA, Letter of Fr. Viktor Koch to [Fr. Bonaventure Oberst], SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Rome (September 26, 1946), 4.

¹⁰⁴ KFA, Letter of Rita Witleben to the Koch Family, Schwarzenfeld, Germany (February 26, 2004).

¹⁰⁵ During his 1947 visit to the United States, Fr. Viktor attempted to convey the dire situation of Germans living in the postwar period. This is evident in the article, “Father Viktor Koch Seeks Help For Starving Victims in Helpless War-torn Lands,” *The Catholic Review* (October 10, 1947). During this trip, he also conducted a donation drive in Baltimore. PHA, Fr. Viktor Koch, C.P., Free Will Offering, St. Michael’s Parish, Baltimore, Maryland (November 9, 1947).

¹⁰⁶ *Celebrating 150 Years of Passionist Ministry in North America and Beyond*, op. cit., 40.

¹⁰⁷ KFA and BFA. Three of Anna Bauer’s grandchildren also joined the Passionists, but all three left during their time in the seminary.

¹⁰⁸ See the biography of Fr. Basil Bauer, C.P., appearing at the website of the Passionist Historical Archives: <http://cprovince.org/archives/bios/717-18b.php>.

¹⁰⁹ Obituary of Sr. Mary Gabriel Koch, R.S.M., *The Erie Times-News* (May 15, 1994), 7B.

¹¹⁰ See the respective biographies of Fr. Roland Flaherty, C.P., and Fr. Benedict Huck, C.P., appearing at the Passionist Historical Archives website: <http://cprovince.org/archives/bios/111-22a.php> and <http://cprovince.org/archives/bios/919-30a.php>. Joseph G. Mehler also followed Fr. Viktor into the Passionist order. He professed as a Passionist on February 20, 1891, was ordained Gilbert of St. Joseph on June 4, 1898, and dispensed of his Passionist vows on July 10, 1906 due to illness. He was later accepted into the Columbus, Ohio diocese. The Diocese of Steubenville was erected on October 21, 1944 out of territory taken from the Diocese of Columbus. Father Mehler, who had been serving within the territory that became part of the Steubenville diocese, was automatically incardinated into the new diocese. He became Right Reverend Monsignor Joseph G. Mehler on December 20, 1945. KFA, Estelle Mehler Kidson, *Mehler – Cook Family Legacy: 1700’s to 2003* (2003), 7.

¹¹¹ West Hoboken was a municipality that existed in Hudson County, New Jersey, United States, from 1861 to 1925. It merged with Union Hill to form Union City on June 1, 1925. Further information can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Hoboken,_New_Jersey.