

Jehovah's Witnesses

Religious sect whose doctrine focuses on the second coming of Jesus. The Jehovah's Witnesses believe that in every generation there will be an "end of days" that is preceded by political disasters, like those that accompanied the Nazi regime. They spread their message primarily through written tracts and door to door canvassing.

The Witnesses were outlawed in Germany in April 1933, despite the fact that at first they did not clearly oppose the Nazis. However, by 1935 the Witnesses refused to serve in the German army or perform the "heil Hitler" salute (they refuse to serve in all armies and refuse to salute flags), and in 1936 an international convention of Witnesses condemned the Nazi regime. As a result, many of the sect's members were arrested during 1936 and 1937. Other widespread arrests took place soon after World War II broke out and in 1944.

The Witnesses encompassed only a small group of prisoners within the concentration camp system. The Nazis promised individual Witnesses their freedom if they would renounce their beliefs, but they refused to do so. The SS tried to keep the Witnesses away from other prisoners in order to avoid new converts. Later they attempted to break up the Witnesses by scattering them throughout the camps. In spite of all this, the Witnesses refused to try to escape from the camps or actively resist the Nazis.