

The man who risked everything to oppose the culture of death

by Chuck Colson



Please Return To: Mrs. Mary Mueller

January 24, 2011 ([Breakpoint.org](http://www.breakpoint.org)) - You have probably never heard of Lothar Kreyssig—I hadn't until recently. Yet, after hearing his story, I realized Kreyssig was a hero for our times: a man whom, at almost unbelievable risk, stood up for the sanctity of human life.

In October, 1939, the Third Reich created what came to be known as the "Action T4" program. In furtherance of what the Nazis called "racial hygiene," Reich bureaucrats, working with doctors, were authorized to identify and kill those deemed to be "unworthy of life," that is, institutionalized patients with "severe disabilities."

Of course, expressions like "unworthy" and even "severe" are subjective. In reality, they were a license for mass murder. Hitler called for at least 70,000 people to be killed under this program, so doctors and officials set about meeting the Fuhrer's quotas.

Fearing domestic and international reaction, the Nazis tried to hide what was going on: they lied to patients' families and, fore-shadowing Auschwitz, they disguised the gas chambers as showers.

When I think of what happened to those people, especially the children—some like my autistic grandson, Max—it breaks my heart—horrifies me.

The Nazis also took pains to provide a patina of legality to the murders: Hitler personally ordered German judges not to prosecute doctors for killing their patients. And that's where Kreyssig comes in: He was a highly regarded judge in his native Saxony.

But he was more than a judge—Kreyssig was a leader in the Confessing Church, which resisted the Reich's efforts to "Nazify" protestant churches. To be a

Confessing Churchman, never mind a leader, was to live with a bull's-eye painted on your back.

As more and more death certificates for mentally ill people crossed his desk, Kreyssig realized that something terrible was happening.

He wrote the Reich Minister of Justice protesting not only the Action T4 program but also the treatment of prisoners in concentration camps. He then charged a doctor with murder in connection with the deaths of his patients. When he was called into the Minister's office, where he was told that Hitler himself had authorized the program. To which Kreyssig replied: "The Führer's word does not create a right."

The courage to say that to a government official in Nazi Germany was extraordinary. Kreyssig was forced to retire. Although the Gestapo tried to get him sent to a concentration camp, fears over drawing attention to the T4 program probably saved Kreyssig's life.

He spent the rest of the war at home tending to his farm and, oh yes, hiding Jews on his property.

The only judge to stand up to the Nazis outlived the "1000-year Reich" by forty-one years. Twenty years after his death, Germany held a memorial honoring his bravery and compassion.

In a culture where "go along to get along" was literally a survival strategy, Kreyssig refused to be silent. When the majority of German Protestants adapted the faith to the demands of the Reich, he refused to go along and made it clear that there was a higher law.

Thankfully, defending the sanctity of life nowadays doesn't require anything like Kreyssig's courage. But it does require courage. And it requires, as well, as an understanding of Whose Word does create a right.

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