

# The White Rose: An Interview with Mrs. Susanne Zeller-Hirzel

by [D. L. Adams](#) (October 2009)

## Background

The White Rose was a civilian resistance organization that actively opposed Adolf Hitler in Nazi Germany during WWII. It was composed of students from the University of Munich and their philosophy professor, Kurt Huber. The group became known for an anonymous leaflet campaign, lasting from June 1942 until February 1943, calling for active resistance to the Third Reich. Upwards of 9,000 copies of the White Rose leaflets were distributed across Germany leading to an investigation by the Gestapo. Six members of the group were arrested; endured show trials conducted by Nazi Judge [Roland Freisler](#) and were executed by decapitation in 1943. The story of the valiant White Rose resistance group has been the subject of a film [Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage](#) (*Sophie Scholl: The Final Days*), [Weisse Rose](#) (White Rose) a [chamber opera](#) by Udo Zimmerman that debuted in Hamburg in 1986 to international acclaim and many books, most recently: [Sophie Scholl and the White Rose](#) in 2006.



Members of the White Rose, Munich 1942

The [first leaflet](#) from the White Rose read:

Isn't it true that every honest German is ashamed of his government these days? Who among us has any conception of the dimensions of shame that will befall us and our children when one day the veil has fallen from our eyes and the most horrible of crimes – crimes that infinitely outdistance every human measure – reach the light

of day?

The second leaflet read:

Since the conquest of Poland three hundred thousand Jews have been murdered in this country in the most bestial way ... The German people slumber on in their dull, stupid sleep and encourage these fascist criminals ... Each man wants to be exonerated of a guilt of this kind, each one continues on his way with the most placid, the calmest conscience. But he cannot be exonerated; he is guilty, guilty, guilty! (see another [here](#))

The [sixth leaflet](#) from the White Rose resistance group was about the disaster at Stalingrad. It was smuggled out of Nazi Germany to Scandinavia. Re-titled as "The Manifesto of the Students of Munich" thousands of copies were dropped over Germany from allied aircraft.

Mrs. Suzanne Zeller – Hirzel is one of only two survivors of the White Rose Society. She is a member of the [Peoples Movement PAX EUROPA" \(BPE\)](#) that opposes the Islamization of Germany and Europe. Mrs. Zeller – Hirzel is the author of a memoir of her experiences during the Hitler era in Germany: Susanne Hirzel: [From Yes to No. A Schwabian Youth. 1933 to 1945] [Vom Ja zum Nein. Eine schwäbische Jugend 1933 bis 1945.](#) Silberburg-Verlag, 2000.

This interview was conducted by D.L. Adams.

The following interview was translated from the German.



**Adams:** During the war, you and Sophie Scholl were members of the League of German Girls (BDM) prior to the formation of the White Rose; was there a particular event that caused you to turn away from Nazism and take an active position against it?

**Zeller – Hirzel:** I got to know Sophie Scholl when she was my group leader in the BDM. I admired her because of her eloquence and her behavior and she quickly became my very best friend. I often stayed at

Sophie's parents' home and got to know her brother Hans and her sister Inge. The BDM was a scouting organization for girls. Political indoctrination was only one aspect among many others and I even became a troop leader (Scharführerin). Sophie's father Robert Scholl was a determined Catholic pacifist and a sincere Christian. He told us about his experiences and that influenced my thinking. At that time, we jointly decided that we should do something against Hitler.

**Adams:** What component(s) of character did all the members of the White Rose group share in common?

**Zeller – Hirzel:** We all were oppositional patriots, but with a Christian understanding. Although the Scholls were Catholic and I was Protestant (my father was a Lutheran parish priest), we shared almost everything in common.

**Adams:** I understand that Sophie's brother was an enlisted soldier in the Wehrmacht. Was Hans involved in a silent movement within the Wehrmacht against Hitlerism? If such a movement existed can you tell us about it? In addition, was there a feeling among Germans against Hitlerism that you felt the White Rose could encourage?

**Zeller – Hirzel:** Yes, there were within the armed forces an anti-Nazi underground movement ([Count Claus von Stauffenberg](#), etc.). Mainly officers were involved. My brother Hans was only an ordinary soldier. Soldiers were rarely drawn into their confidence by officers. So Hans had no contact with them. There was no support among the population since the prevailing erroneous opinion was: "As long as our sons at the front are fighting for their country, resistance would be a betrayal." Another fellow who was looking for contact with the White Rose sympathizers in Berlin, Falk Harnack, was also forced into the armed forces. He failed to make contact with the underground resistance. He was surprisingly acquitted on April 19, 1943 by Freisler's [People's Court](#). Harnack benefitted from his profession; he was a theatrical arts director. During the trial Freisler's assessment of me as a young naive girl enabled me to get off lightly, although I feared a death sentence from my prison cell.

**Adams:** It is known that Hitler had a deep fascination and affection for Islam. Hitler once said that he would have preferred if Germany had been an Islamic culture as he thought the German people would then have been more brutal fighters. Hitler also understood that Jews were despised by Mohammed. The oppression and killing of Jews is a common thread between

Nazism and Islamic doctrine. Were you aware of this linkage during the White Rose times? Were there Muslims in Munich? Did Professor Huber or any other White Rose members ever discuss the linkage between Islam and Nazism with the group?

**Zeller – Hirzel:** Islam and Muslims in general at that time were not an issue with us. I was not aware that there were any Muslims in Germany. Hitler's collaboration with Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem was not known even though Hitler invited him to reside in Berlin from 1941 to war's end and the Grand Mufti recruited SS divisions of Bosnian Muslims. All this was unknown to us.

**Adams:** There is a documentary film about one of Hitler's personal secretaries, [Traudl Junge](#). The film is called "[Blind Spot](#)". It is an excellent film and shows how an otherwise decent person can make excuses and be silent in the face of the cruelties and brutalities of dictators and totalitarian systems. Do you have any comment on ordinary Germans like Trudle Junge who went along with the Nazi Party and Hitler but may have felt that what they were supporting was wrong? We know that dictatorships and totalitarian systems only can work when decent people remain silent.

**Zeller – Hirzel:** I know the film and the book, "[Until the Final Hour.](#)" Mrs. Junge was probably a young woman with a nice nature, but was otherwise fairly simple. Hitler preferred to be accompanied by that kind of women. Why did millions follow the Nazis? Well, there was poverty in many parts of the population. In addition, the majority felt the "shame of Versailles," which culminated in accusations of treason against the politicians of the Weimar Republic. Hitler gave them back, at least emotionally, a sense of national self-respect. I was very angry and disappointed to see my teachers, professors and the rector voluntarily wearing brown shirts (the Nazi dress code) in school and in University; they said they want to give the Nazis "a helping hand." These were people who previously had served me as role models. I think today, it would be the same teachers and professors describing themselves as Islamophiles, multiculturalists and "helping hands" for Muslim associations as they did at that time for the Nazis. However, I must say that the Classical scholars were the most courageous and distant among the teachers.

**Adams:** You are now involved in the "[Peoples Movement PAX EUROPA](#)" (BPE) in Germany. We understand this to be one of the more important anti-Jihad

organizations in Germany. What prompted you to get involved in the anti-Islamist movement?

**Zeller – Hirzel:** I read many, many books on the subject; especially the books by Mark Gabriel (see [“Islam and Terrorism”](#)). So I realized that one must not simply accept these things passively but also do something about it. One must support this cause by necessity.

**Adams:** Do you see similarities between Islam and Nazism? If so, what are these similarities?

**Zeller – Hirzel:** The fanaticism, the absolute claim of possessing the only truth and the spiritual simplicity are very similar between Islam and the Nazism.

**Adams:** Do you view opposing Islamization as the same battle you were fighting when the White Rose fought Nazism?

**Zeller – Hirzel:** Not quite yet. Critics of the Nazi ideology were then immediately arrested. We have not yet reached that point. But if we do nothing, it will come back to that. Then they might lock up the critics of Islam.

**Adams:** In your view why is it so difficult to explain the threat of Islamization to the public? What is stopping us from getting our message across to the public? What can we do better?

**Zeller – Hirzel:** The general indifference to religious matters make it difficult. The public believes we to have to be “fair” to everyone. That is counterproductive. Additionally, there is general prosperity with a relatively high standard of living that makes people lazy. I say: Only education can help. Education can aid.

**Adams:** What is the best way to approach a person who knows nothing about Islam? How do we build a base of support among people so that we are never in the desperate position that entrapped you, Sophie and the heroes of the White Rose resistance group?

**Zeller – Hirzel:** As I said before: Education! We need to conduct neighborhood meetings, community and church events. The distress in the population is indeed there, but apparently not big enough. “Hitler is the scourge of God,” once said Robert Scholl, Sophie’s father. But he was then promptly convicted.

**Adams:** When you and your colleagues of the White Rose were leafleting in Munich and elsewhere, did you believe that the population could be

converted to anti-Hitlerism?

**Zeller – Hirzel:** Yes, we really believed that. We actually thought we could move public opinion. Even if it happened to be in vain, we tried it before history. And yet we were afraid. The very few supporters we had were scared. We were afraid of death sentences, meted out by Freisler's People's Court, afraid of his screaming. But screaming is also a weakness.

**Adams:** We know that the memory of Sophie Scholl, you and your colleagues is held in great esteem across the world by lovers of freedom and justice. How best do we motivate people today to fight against the Islamization of Europe and the West?

**Zeller – Hirzel:** I think something terrible needs to happen before Germans awaken. 9/11 was too far away from the German people. The churches fail miserably in the task of informing people about Islamic ideology. That can only happen through grassroots activism, education and instruction. Even if in Europe the churches play an increasingly smaller social role, the people ought to be agitating in church institutions, in the parishes and so forth.

**Adams:** What words of encouragement can you give us to help in our fight against the enemy of freedom, and humanity?

**Zeller – Hirzel:** Strive for Unity. It makes resistance powerful and courageous!

**Adams:** Thank you, Mrs. Zeller- Hirzel, for your thoughts and comments. It is an honor to interview you. You, Sophie, Hans and Kurt and all of your colleagues are heroes to us and to all who love life and liberty and oppose barbarism, totalitarianism, and hatred.

**Zeller – Hirzel:** I also thank Mr. Adams and our American friends of SIOA and wish them the very best success in their fight for the preservation of freedom and human rights.

**Adams:** Thank you, Mrs. Susanne Zeller- Hirzel; you are a model for us in this struggle against Islamization.

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**DL Adams** is an American historian.