

Recorder* _____ Student born closest to school
Reporter** _____ Student born furthest from school
Moderator** _____ That leaves you

Group Work

Below is an article from the 1938 constitution of an organization of Protestant Christian churches in Germany. In the original German, the word “people” appears as *Volk*. As you read this together, discuss when *Volk* appears. On another piece of paper, explain how your understanding of the meaning of *Volk*. Do you think it has a different meaning than the common understanding of “people” in American documents? For instance, the word *Volk* appears in the original German word for “People’s Welfare System.” Would the use of this word indicate that *all* Germans would be beneficiaries of this system? How do you think Jews would be seen in relationship to this welfare system?

Compare the second paragraph’s attitude to the “nation’s leadership” and “earthly authorities” to the understanding of “earthly authority” in the Declaration of Independence. According to the Declaration’s Preamble, can governments do anything they see fit to those they govern? What does it mean to “promise all loyalty and every obedience” to the state? Are there boundaries to Americans’ loyalty and obedience to our elected officials?

Finally, read the last two paragraphs. What does it mean to say that one’s government’s actions are “divinely willed?” Given the belief these Germans had that their “race” needed to be purified, what do you think they felt toward their German Jewish neighbors? Do you think they felt any responsibility to help them?

Extract from the Constitution of the Congregational Federation Mühlheim/Ruhr

Article 7

Attitude of the Church towards People (Volk) and State (Reich) Translated by Fritz B. Voll

With thankfulness towards God we confess that we are, according to his providence, members of the German people. The dependence on God and the mind of Jesus Christ enable us to stand with our people (Volk) with body and life, with possessions and blood. The energetic support of all public endeavors of the People’s Welfare System (Bestrebungen der *Volkswohlfahrt*) is to us the duty of our Christian conscience.

We honor and accept the nation’s leadership and government. In sincerity we promise all loyalty and every obedience, which we are indebted to render together with all Christians to our earthly authorities according to God’s will and the word and spirit of our Lord, Mark 2:17; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-4; 1 Peter. 2:13-17.

We acknowledge that it is in keeping with the order of the divine Creator when the leadership of the people in wisdom and righteousness issues laws and bylaws, which are appropriate to form a dam against incurable inherited diseases and against the resulting misery, which in the past has been visible in the body of the people (Volk). Wherever our spiritual superintendents and ministers of the Word have to give information and counseling to those affected, they declare themselves wholeheartedly prepared.

In the race laws we see a divinely willed and biblically founded endeavor to purify and to keep pure the people (Volk) from mixture with alien races.

The leading-out of the Jews from the community of our people (Volkes), as also from other peoples (Völker), is for us a process according to divine providence and divine will.

Sources: Voll, Fritz. Translation of Article 7 from the Constitution of the Congregational Federation Mühlheim/Ruhr. Used with permission

*** Recorders listen as well as contribute to group discussions and complete any writing tasks assigned to the group

** Reporters listen as well as contribute to group discussions and are prepared to report the groups work to the class.

* Moderators listen as well as contribute to group discussion, encouraging the group to stay on topic. Moderators also make sure this sheet is turned in at the end of class.

Prepared by Jan-Ruth Mills