Totalitarianism & Christianity

> "... the banality of evil ..."
> Hannah Arendt
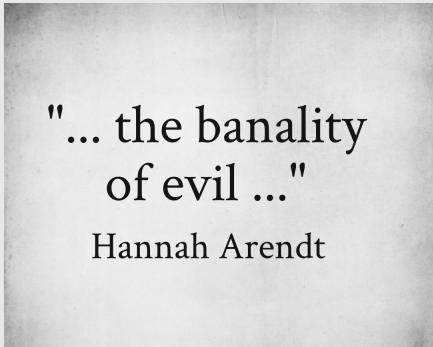
MEMORY JOGGER

"Banality of Evil"

TIMELINE

Aug 8,1920	Founding of NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
1921	Fischer, Baur, and Lenz publish standard work of German racialism (Racial Hygiene).
July 1921	Hitler elected chairman of NSDAP
1922	Hitler sentenced to 3 months prison for disturbing the peace, released after 1 month. Inflation hits.
1923	Inflation briefly stabilizes, then skyrockets. Sept 1USD = 60mil RM Oct Brief Communist takeover of Hamburg
1924	Hitler in prison for Beer Hall Putsch, writes Mein Kampf
1927	Hitler's speaking ban in Bavaria lifted.
1928	NSDAP 2.6% vote in elections
1929	Himmler appointed chief of SS.
Sept 1930	Hitler appeases army, milestone election of National Socialists gaining 6 mil votes = second largest party in Germany

TIMELINE (cont)

1931	Himmler recruits Heydrich to form SD (renamed to SD in 1932) Dec unemployment reaches 5.6 mil.
1932	Hindenburg reelected president with 53% vote, Hitler 37%, communist Thalmann 10.2%. August Poland communist activist murdered by SA, Hitler defends murderers.
Feb 1933	Dissolution of Reichstag. Burning of Reichstag on 27, blamed on communists; 28 Hitler awarded emergency powers - process of totalitarian control.
Mar 1933	Elections = slim majority for Hitler, not for Nazis. Himmler police pres in Munich, Goebbels Reich Minister, Dachau camp opens. First Nazi "racial hygiene" office established. 24 - Enabling Act = power to Chancellor
Apr 1933	1 day boycott of Jewish shops, Himmler police commander of Bavaria. Jews and Communist workers purged from civil service. End of federalism. Goring forms Gestapo in Prussia.
May 1933	Trade union offices stormed by SA, banned from Germany, book burnings.
July 1933	Hitler proclaims Nazi as "only political party in Germany" - rest banned. Imperial agreement signed with Holy See.
Sept 1933	Reich Chamber of Culture established with Goebbels as head.
Oct 1933	Germany withdraws from League of Nations

TIMELINE (cont)

Nov 1933	Reichstag Elections; Nazis 95.2% vote. Gestapo expands to all of Germany. Fall - plan to annex Western Poland and create ring of puppet states.

OUTLINE

1. WHAT IS TOTALITARIANISM?
Encyclopedia definition
Technologies of social control
2. NATIONAL SOCIALISM'S RISE TO POWER IN GERMANY
Timeline: Germany, 1920-1933
3. WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE MAKE TOTALITARIANISM POSSIBLE?
Eichmann: The Third Reich and its makers
4. WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE RESIST TOTALITARIANISM, AND HOW CAN WE BE LIKE THEM?
Le Chambon: The Third Reich and its resisters
5. WHAT TOTALITARIANISM COSTS
Night: The Third Reich and its victims

LOCATION

Germany

CENTURY

20th Century

SUMMARY

From the Preceptor: My central goal for the lecture is to help you think in a personal way about totalitarianism: about what kind of people make totalitarianism possible, and what kind of people resist it, and what it takes to become more like the second group. Particularly, I want to think about how Christians can resist totalitarianism. We're going to do all this by taking Nazi Germany as a case study.

CONCEPTS

What is Totalitarianism?

in which all individual activities and social relationships are subject to surveillance and control by the state. The idea originated in the 1930s and 1940s, one-party government headed by a single powerful individual; promotion of an official ideology; and extensive use of terror tactics by the secret police. (Because of **Technologies of social control**) political system

What kind of people make totalitarianism possible?

Normal people who get caught in the big machine. Totalitarianism functions on illusion - illusion of total control (although only has scary and unethical forms of influence, not total control.) Built on consent and collaboration.

What kind of people resisted totalitarianism?

Example of **Le Chambon** French village that harbored and saved thousands of Jewish refugees. Other examples too.

How can we be like them?

Humility before God, Stay with people who are suffering. Don't try to explain suffering (point to Job and Jesus). Trust God can come and speak to us too. Don't give platitudes.

MEMORY JOGGER

"For God's sake, where is God?"

"Where He is? This is where – hanging from these gallows."
— Night (Elie Wiesel)

PRIMARY TEXTS

"The Banality of Evil: Selections from *Eichmann in Jerusalem*"	Hannah Arendt	1963	Eichmann's trial description. Eichmann's character, how he was an ordinary, ridiculous person.

PRIMARY TEXTS (cont)

Night	Elie Wiesel	1958	Wiesel's first-hand account of the concentration camps as a Jewish Hungarian boy beginning in 1941.

QUOTE 1

"The Banality of Evil: Selections from Eichmann in Jerusalem" Arendt, 1963	"It was as though in those last minutes he was summing up the lesson that this long course in human wickedness has taught us – the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying banality of evil."

QUOTE 2

Night, Wiesel, 1958	Behind me, I heard the same man asking: "For God's sake, where is God?" And form within me, I heard a voice answer: "Where He is? This is where – hanging here from this gallows..." That night the soup tasted of corpses.

PEOPLE

Leni Riefenstahl	Maker of the 1935 propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*

PEOPLE (cont)

Adolf Eichmann	1906-1962. Came to power in the Nazi party, engineer of logistics of deporting and exterminating Jews (Especially in Eastern Block); escaped eventually to Argentina, did not flee, Israel secret police captured and kidnapped him. Didn't think he killed anyone, not a monster, was a fool and bragging man.
Hannah Arendt	Escaped during Nazism; worked for the New Yorker; Sent to report on **Adolf Eichmann's** trial. Reflected on the nature of evil. Coined the phrase **"banality of evil"** because **Eichmann** was not the monster Israel was hoping for, he was a fool - a normal, petty, bragging man, which is unsettling to see that normal people are capable of so much evil. (d.1975)
Elie Wiesel	Author of *Night*, which depicts his Holocaust experience as a young Hungarian in 1941. Loses his whole family, with his father in the camp (but begins to resent him when his father threatens his chances for survival). In interview, describes how Cross and human suffering are the keys to the unfathomable mystery. (b.1928)

TERMS

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Le Chambon	During WWII, French Huguenot village that harbored and helped with the escape of 1000 Jewish refugees (mostly children). Ethicist Halley in the 1970's researched human cruelty read about them, interviewed the villagers. They responded with incomprehension to his claim that they were moral example shining light in dark time. They thought, "what were we supposed to do?" This village had community, French Protestants who were persecuted and oppressed, had humility before God.

TERMS (cont)

"The Banality of Evil"	Quoted by **Hannah Arendt** during the trial of **Adolf Eichmann** in her 1963 book. Shows that Eichmann and those who commit unspeakable crimes are not monsters. Eichmann was a fool, petty bragging man, but he was an ordinary human being - nothing glamorous or dramatic. Normal people get caught in the bigger machine, not able to see beyond own perspective (not an uncommon fault). It is the Augustinian form of sin and evil - sin is turning in on oneself, evil is twisting and turning of good things to what they are not meant to be. It is unsettling to see how normal people can become so evil, hence banality of evil.

TERMS (cont)

"Technologies of social control"	Part of the definition of totalitarianism limits to twentieth century because of advances of technologies. This means ways of surveillance such as wiretapping, other forms of tech such as radio, quicker forms of communication. Propaganda takes on new form with speeches via radio, loud speakers, film propaganda. Technically, means forms of surveillance and propaganda control over society.