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Pastor Niemoller who did not Oppose the Nazis, 1947.

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PASTOR NIEMOELLER WHO DID NOT OPPOSE THE NAZIS

On the Occasion of His Visit to Cleveland



By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, February 2, 1947

My purpose in speaking this morning of Pastor Martin Niemöller, who is visiting our city this week is not a polemical one. I am not interested in criticising Pastor Niemöller. There is much in the career of this eminent Pastor, especially in the more recent years, that is deserving of praise. He undoubtedly is a man of courage, of deep religious convictions, a man who ^{is} willing to stand alone if need be, and to suffer for his faith as he sees it.

On the issue of ^{the} regimentation, ^{and} state control of his church, Pastor Niemöller opposed the Nazi regime valiantly and incurred its hostility in consequence of which he spent nearly eight years in Nazi prison camps and concentration camps.

One does not single out such a man for condemnation, and I for one wish neither to condemn him nor to attack him. It is only when the eminent Pastor is extolled as an heroic, ~~an~~ all-out anti-Nazi, the unfaltering champion of human rights under Hitler, the defender of the persecuted Jews of Germany, the prophet and martyr of the noblest ideals of mankind, and the hope and promise of a reborn and regenerate Germany -- it is only then that a note of caution is in order. For by his record, Pastor Niemöller does not fully measure up to any of these designations.

Leadership in all fields of human endeavor is a very critical and decisive business, ^{Especially} is it very critical and decisive in the field of the human spirit and religion and in those areas which involve national morality and the ethics of political ~~of~~ action. The quality of its spiritual leadership will determine in the long run the conduct of ^{the} nation. It is therefore of utmost importance for any people, and more especially for a people which as a result of a self-willed and disastrous war, finds itself in utter physical and spiritual chaos and is groping its way to reconstruction and ^{rehabilitation} ~~liberation~~ -- ~~I believe~~ it is especially important for such a people to examine the credentials of the spiritual leaders who led it before the war, and who now aspire to lead it again.

The rise of the Nazis to power in Germany was the gauntlet thrown down, ~~the challenge~~ to all the intellectual and spiritual forces of that country. The vicious neo-barbarism which Nazism represented, the ~~all-out~~ organized attack on the entire Judaeo-Christian tradition, ^{and} on all the rights of man which came to be established in Western Europe as a result of the French Revolution, this insolent and arrogant and bitterly relentless attack ^{with force} on ~~the~~ spiritual and cultural and intellectual values of man should have aroused the strongest resistance on the part of all intellectual ^{and} academic forces of Germany and on the part of all religious leadership, Protestant and Catholic alike, in that country.

^{TP} The intellectual leadership, the academic and university leadership of Germany, collapsed utterly ^{in the face of} before this onslaught of Nazism. They were ^{cowed} ~~cowed~~ or they were taken in by the chauvenistic preachments of Nazism, ^{they} fed by its opium, or they ^{survived} ~~survived~~ (acquiesced) ⁱⁿ to the new regime of force and terror. No ^{adequate} explanation has yet been given ^{for} of the total and complete collapse ~~before~~ Nazism on the part of the intellectual forces of Germany.

The religious forces did offer some resistance -- and be that said to their eternal credit -- resistance only to a degree, but resistance nevertheless. They resisted the regimentation of their church. They insisted upon the rights and prerogatives of the church, ^{they opposed} ~~refused~~ the Gleichshaltung of their religious ^{institutions} ~~convictions~~. They did not champion, not by any means, democracy in Germany, or freedom. They did not champion the right of free speech, ^a free press, or the rights of the individual which the state was invading. Nor did they warn against the program of territorial expansion which the Nazis ^{announced} ~~proclaimed~~. Nor did they waste much time in fighting racism or the Nazi persecution of the Jews. They did oppose the Nazi attempt to make the church the tool of the state, to super-impose a Nazi control ^{on} of the ecclestical affairs of the church. They did fight the pagan and violent anti-Christian and anti-Church propaganda of the Nazis, for the Nazis hated

Christ and his gospel almost as much as they hated the people who gave ^{both} ~~both~~ to the world.

In 1933, soon after ^{the} ~~the~~ Nazis came into power in Germany, ^{they} ~~they~~ made the effort through the Nazi Church Party to ^{to} ~~to~~ organize the Evangelical Church of Germany. They had already imposed a Reich ^{the} ~~the~~ Bishop, Ludwig Mueller, upon the Church of Germany, a bishop who sided with the Nazi Church faction and who hankered after a Jesus as he put it "after the German fashion." He didn't like the Jewish Jesus, ^{He wanted} ~~but~~ a Nazi Jesus ~~with~~ boots, spurs, Schrecklichkeit and all., ~~And these German Christians,~~ This Nazi Church ^P ~~Party~~ demanded that all Christian clergymen who had any Jewish blood in their veins should be forced out of their positions. ~~And~~ ⁱⁿ that year, thousands of Protestant clergymen -- be it said to their credit -- rose in opposition to this and in defense of these Christian clergymen who had Jewish blood in their veins. And they won.

And ^{at} that time, I recall, in December 1933, I published an article which I called a "Church of Laodiceans?" in which I said:

"Now the millions of men and women throughout the world who applauded their courage and rejoiced in their victory wonder whether they will take the next step which is clearly dictated by the logic of their position. They must surely realize that their moral responsibility as spiritual leaders of their people does not end with the rejection of the race doctrine in their church constitution. Surely they cannot close their eyes to the millions of 'Judaean-Christians' who have been denied equality of political, social and economic status under the new regime because of the Jewish blood in their veins. These millions of Christians who belong to their churches have the right to turn to them in their hour of need and to expect them to speak up in their behalf and to champion their cause.

"And what of the Jews? Do not these clergymen who have now demonstrated their great zeal in protecting the historically Jewish character and values of their religious tradition feel any moral compulsion to speak up in defense of the Jews of Germany?

If anti-Semitism has been found to be a menace to the Christian Church is it not also a menace to a Christian State or to any civilized State?

"Will not the Christian churchmen of the world who upheld the hands of the German clergymen in their war against the invasion of their church by the new Nazi ideology, now urge upon them the moral imperative of courageously championing the cause of the millions of men, women and children who have been denied their elementary human rights in the new Germany and who are being subjected to the crudest discriminations because of their race? Do these German clergymen wish to take upon themselves the reproach which was heaped upon the Church of the Laodiceans: "I know they work that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot."

"Surely Christianity cannot rest content with this first skirmish which it has won. The real battle which will test its soul must still be waged."

I wrote this in December, 1933. But I am afraid that the Church of Germany did not go much beyond ~~their~~ vigorous defense of Christian clergymen of partial Jewish descent, and I am afraid that Pastor Niemöller did not go much beyond these clergymen, although he was perhaps the most eloquent among them, and on this particular issue, the most forthright and uncompromising.

Reference has been made by friends of Niemöller to an article which he published in his church magazine called the "Young Church" in which he championed the cause of the Jews of Germany. I am afraid that is not quite correct. Pastor Niemöller, ~~as a result of that article~~ merely championed the cause of his Christian brethren of Jewish origin.

I read Pastor Niemöller's book called "God is My Fuehrer" which contains the last 28 sermons which he preached in his church just prior to his imprisonment in the years 1936-37. I found in these sermons frequent eloquent and moving defense of the right of his church, the right of his church to denounce attacks against the Christian Church, the right to publish the names of those who seceded from the church, the right to collect offerings and alms, to carry on activities in defense of those who had been imprisoned... but I failed to find in those sermons any defense of the hundreds of thousands of other people, both Jews and non-Jews, who were languishing in German concentration camps because of their political views

their economic views, ^{or} their racial origins. I failed to find any championing of democracy, any attack upon ~~the~~ militarism, or upon dictatorship, or upon racism as such. The Nuremberg Laws ^{be I remembered not long} were adopted in 1935 before these sermons were delivered.

~~One~~ ^{was} ~~is~~ driven to the conclusion that what primarily interested the good Pastor were not ^{the defense of} ~~these~~ basic human rights, defense of human freedom, ^{not equality} ~~the spiritual inde-~~

~~pendence~~ of all human beings, but the rights and prerogatives of his church. ~~and~~

If these ^{had been} ~~were~~ not interfered with, ^{it is clear that} he would be perfectly content with everything ^{else} that was happening in Nazi Germany - ^{or at least not moved to fight against it.}

In the book written by a Jew, Leo Stein, who spent some 22 months in prison with Pastor Niemöller, and who had many conversations with the Pastor, and who has the highest admiration for ^{him} ~~the Pastor~~ -- in this book called "I Was In Hell with Niemöller," there is a passage which gives the Pastor's appraisal of the problem as he saw it, and I quote from this book the words of the Pastor himself:

"Luther once prophesied that a terrible darkness would come over Germany because of contempt for the Bible. How little did I realize then that this prophecy would come true in the very near future. For at that time I thought that good was beginning to overcome evil, that the people had reasserted themselves, and that Luther must have had in mind some other period. The last fourteen years under the Democratic republic were the years of darkness, when men could with impunity criticize God and the Church and refuse to pay their Church assessments. Now, I thought, the years of light were returning, as is always the case after periods of darkness. That is what I told my family and my friends. Today I know that it was altogether wrong that the Evangelical Church should offer its support to Hitler. I was mad to believe him." "But soon," ~~Pastor Niemöller said~~ "we were shockingly awakened from our pleasant dreams. There was no cessation of the propaganda against the churches, as had been promised time and time again by Hitler and his lieutenants. On the contrary, it was intensified. During the time that the Nazis were consolidating their political position ~~they~~ did not attack the churches directly. But when they felt that their position was secure, they put forth a plan for reconstituting

the churches that we could not possibly accept. The plan was to unify all the churches in Germany, and to force them to adjust their doctrines to the Nazi ideology. Without waiting for our consent, or even consulting us, Hitler appointed an army chaplain, Ludwig Mueller, as Reichsbishop. The creation of this new office meant the closest supervision of the Church by the State. The Reichsbishop had supreme control of all the Churches of Christ in Germany.

"The indignant protest of the Evangelical and Roman Catholic Churches were answered with the explanation that in the new Germany only one church could be allowed to exist. And if that church expected moral and financial assistance from the State, it would have to conform to the policies of the State."

Martin Niemöller was a submarine officer during the First World War. ~~And~~ As a result of his disillusionment ~~of~~ the war and what followed, he decided to enter the ministry. He was ordained in 1914. He joined the Nazi Party. One wonders why! There were millions of Germans, not clergymen, who refused to join the Nazi Party... His friends now say he never was a member of the party, but that "he voted for the party in the earlier period." That is not very important -- whether he was a member for a time or whether he only voted for it.

What is important is that he believed in the Nazi program, that he accepted it on its face value ~~the~~ Nazi propaganda -- that he looked to Nazism to save Germany, as Hitler said, "from the menace of Communism," that Nazism was the way of salvation for Germany. He looked upon Hitler, to quote his own words, "as an instrument approved by God for the revival of the German soul and as a bar to the further westward advance of a Godless communism." For years he moved along with the Nazis even after his ordination. He was ~~an~~ anti-Democrat, ~~an~~ anti-Republican, ~~an~~ anti-parliamentarian. Later on, much later on, he acknowledged that he had been deceived. In my humble judgment spiritual leaders are not men who ^{se} claim to leadership is that they had been deceived. ~~and~~ even in the years following Hitler's accession to power, in 1933, and until he was imprisoned, his disillusionment

was not with the Nazi political dictatorship, their pan-Germanism, their war-fomenting militarism, but with their assumption of authority over the church, and their persecution not so much of Jews, as of Christians who had some Jewish blood in their veins.

In
He was sent to the concentration Camp in 1937/1939, when the war broke out as a result of the Nazi effort to dominate the world, ~~in 1939~~ Pastor Niemoeller, from his concentration camp, offered his services to Hitler to fight again as a submarine commander! One wonders why! He did not offer his services as a chaplain to bring spiritual comfort to soldiers, but to fight in the German Navy. Why? He has since endeavored to give an explanation, and I am now quoting the words of Dr. Samuel ^{Uctun} Cavert, General Secretary of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, ^{which organization has} ~~who have~~ been sponsoring the tour of Pastor Niemoeller:

"It is true that Niemoeller offered his service to the German Navy in September 1939. But it must be remembered that at this time he had been interned for two years, most of the time in solitary confinement so that no accurate knowledge either of Hitler's foreign policy or of the international situation. Moreover, as he explained in a published statement, he assumed that there was a movement of underground resistance to Hitler among military and naval officers and that by identifying himself with them he could do more ^{to} ~~than~~ overthrow the Fuehrer than by staying in a concentration camp."

I submit that this is not an adequate explanation. ^{R. 9} ~~and~~ In 1945, when Pastor Niemoeller was finally released from the concentration camp, in an interview which he gave to newspaper men in Naples, ^{he} ~~Pastor Niemoeller~~ stated that he opposed ~~National~~ Socialism only for religious reasons. ^{quote him further!} ~~and I~~
"You must take me for what I am. I had nourished the hope that National Socialism, if it had gone the right way, might have developed into a system for creating good for the German people. I must say that I had been deceived..."

"If there is a war, a German doesn't ask is it just or unjust, but he feels bound to join the ranks... I think the German people will be a little more cautious

in the future, but more than this I cannot promise...

"It may be that Germany can become democratic, but you have got to face the fact that the German people are not adapted to the sort of democracy which exists in Britain and the United States. The German people are different...they like to be governed; they like to feel authority."

~~And~~ I think ^{this} fairly well represents Pastor Niemöller's mind as late as June 1945. I submit that this is not the stuff out of which prophets are made, or the heroes and ^{spiritual} liberators of mankind.

Niemöller was also taken in by Nazi propaganda on the subject of the Jews.

~~And from this book~~, ^{books} Leo Stein's, "I was in Hell with Niemöller" and from other sources and utterances of Niemöller, it is clear that the Pastor believed in

much of the Nazi propaganda about the Jews. He believed that the Jews should not aspire to political equality in Germany, to government office, to seats in the Reichstag. He believed that there were too many Jews in the professions. ~~and~~

Considering the great aim of the Nazis, he ^{believed} ~~said~~ that certain restrictions against the Jews seemed to be tolerable. He accepted the Nazi thesis that Jews were responsible for the Weimar Republic and since that ^{was a} terrible mistake, according to the Nazis, the Jews should not be allowed to hold office ^{under the new regime}.

^{to himself} He had an interview with Hitler in 1932, at which time Hitler promised him ^{that} not to allow pogroms against the Jews. "There will be restrictions against the Jews, but there will be no ghettos, no pogroms, in Germany." And Niemöller was satisfied.

He believed him. But later on he ^{was convinced} ~~remembered~~ that even on these matters, "Hitler betrayed him." I submit ^{that} this failure to read the signs of the time, this readiness to compromise with basic principles of rights and justice, this ease with which one

is taken by lies of clever charlatans, this failure to grasp that "certain ^{restrictions}" ~~restrictions~~ lead on ^{must} ~~and on~~ to other restrictions, to exploitation, to exile, ~~and to~~ massacre and to the extermination of six million people — this failure to grasp

the fundamental issues involved in the whole complex of Nazism and Fascism, over

-9-

I submit that this
the period of a whole generation, do not qualify a man to the role of a prophet or a spiritual leader of men.

Pastor Niemoeller was and is a good, kindly, and well intentioned, *and* courageous man, far more courageous than many others in Germany, and many in this country.

But Unfortunately he did not match his hour. ~~and~~ I question whether he is *even now* still matching his hour. Within the limitations of his perspective he sought to render service, *he* and did. But his perspective must be extended much further, much further, before he can become, as he might well become, a great factor in the spiritual regeneration of his *defeated* ~~beaten~~ people. *and* there is encouragement in *the* ~~that~~ fact that more recently there has been *a* more forthright and consistent line in some of his utterances. He has been stressing the guilt of the German people, *its* ~~the~~ guilt for *the* war, *do* ~~the~~ guilt for the extermination of ~~the~~ six million Jews. That takes courage. That is evidence of spiritual strength and statesmanship.

In Frankfurt on January 6, 1946, before representatives of the Confessional Church, he gave expression to his sense of responsibility for the treatment of the Jews by the German people: *the anti-semitic circles* ~~and~~ I quote from ~~his~~ *his* statement of Rev. Cavert:

"If I meet today a Jew whom I may have known in the past, I, as a Christian, cannot do anything else but say to him, 'My dear Friend, here I am before you and we cannot find each other because there is guilt between us. I have sinned and my people have sinned against your people and yourself. I beg you, in the name of God, to seize and carry away my guilt so that we may rejoice again.'"

Here This is another quotation from an address in Berlin on October 27, 1946:

"So far, we have not taken seriously the conceptions of guilt and atonement. We were dreaming when we thought guilt belonged to the past. When, however, in the midst of a Christian people 6,000,000 persons are deliberately murdered only because they belonged to another race, no one can maintain that the guilt is not a fearful reality."

here and in Germany this
I hope that the Pastor will continue to preach *that* ~~that~~ new conviction which has come to him. *that* I wish he would remain a ~~most~~ realist in his preaching from here on.

On the subject of ~~anti-Semitism~~ ^{um} he recently made a statement that anti-Semitism in Germany is dead. "Compassion and pity for the Jews and the feeling that what was done to the Jew has been avenged not by the Allies, but by God, is one of the most outstanding ^{in our nation} psychic reaction." I am afraid that these words of Pastor Niemöller ^{constitute an} are utterly unrealistic appraisal of the present situation in Germany. Every evidence ~~seems to point~~ ⁱⁿ to the opposite. Anti-semitism is far from ~~being~~ ^{violence} dead. It is manifesting itself with increasing ^{violence} throughout Germany.

What we are most afraid of in this ~~visiting~~ ^{visiting} visit to the United States by Pastor Niemöller is that his visit and utterances may be used to allay the fears of the American people about Germany and ^{to} pave the way for ^{such a} the reconstruction of a Germany which will again make it the menace of the world. The rivalry between the ~~three~~ great powers may provide Germany with ^{again} ~~the~~ ^{an} opportunity ^{similar to that which} that was offered to it after the first world war to become powerful again and to seek ^{under} other slogans and ~~new~~ leadership ^{another occasion} as it sought to do in two world wars to dominate the world.

Germany today needs, and for that matter the whole world needs, real prophetic voices -- ^{a voice like that} the kind of voice of a Jeremiah when he spoke to his people, or an Isaiah, or an Amos ^{It needs leaders} + people who believed in all-out freedom ^{for} of the human soul, who believed in freedom for all peoples, classes, religions, who faced truth uncompromisingly, ^{and} realistically, who ^{do} did not permit themselves to be taken in by the expediency of lesser considerations. Pastor Niemöller may ^{yet} be such a voice in Germany in the days to come. If he will be, the world will acclaim him. On the basis of his record up to now, I am afraid that he has not ~~merited~~ ^{which} fully the designation ~~of~~ ^{as} so many of his admirers would like to give him. Leadership is a severe and searching test. The future will tell whether in Pastor Niemöller, Germany ^{will find} has found a ^{true} spiritual leader or just another popular figure.

1) My purpose in speaking of Pastor Martin Niemöller, who visits our city this week is not a polemical one. I am not interested in criticizing Pastor N. There is much in the career of the Pastor, ~~that~~ esp. in ^{the} more recent years, that is deserving of praise. — He is a man of courage, of deep rel. convictions, willing to stand alone, if need be, and suffer for his faith ^{as he sees it}. On the issue of state control of the church, he opposed the Nazi regime valiantly and incurred its hostility, ^{in consequence, which} he spent nearly 8 yrs. in prison & concentration camps.

2) One does not single out such a man for condemnation, and I ~~will~~ ^{will} not venture to condemn or attack him. It is only ^{when} the Pastor is extolled as ^{an} ~~the~~ ^{all-out} hero, anti-Nazi, the ^{champion} ~~champion~~ of human rights, ^{freedom} ~~freedom~~ ^{against} Hitler's ~~totalitarianism~~, the defender of the persecuted Jews of Germany, ~~and~~ the prophet and martyr of the vibrant religious ideals of mankind, and the hope & promise of a reborn and regenerate Germany, that a note of caution is in order. For, by his record, Pastor N. does not ^{fully} ~~merit~~ ^{warrant} any of these designations.

3) Leadership — in all fields of human thought & endeavor is central & decisive. Esp. so in the field of the human spirit, in religion, and in areas involving national morality and the ethics of pol. actions. The quality ~~and~~ its of leadership will determine the conduct of a nation. It is \therefore of utmost

importance for ~~any~~ people, to ~~examine~~ the esp. one (2)
which as a result of a self-willed and disordered
war, finds itself in utter physical & sp. chaos, and
is seeking its way to new functions - to
examine the credentials of the ^{sp. leaders} ~~men~~ who led it before
the war, and who now aspire to lead it again.

4/ The rise of the Nazis to power challenged all the intell.
& sp. forces of Germany. The victims were Carlsberg,
(^{Brotherhood - Peace} ~~Judeo-Chr. traditions~~ - rights, man-estab. since 71. Parl.)
should have ~~aroused~~ ^{aroused} all the ~~intell.~~ ^{intell.} forces to violent
resistance - & all the entire clergy & secular.

(a) Intell. - collapsed - utterly - corrupted - twisted - charlatans
Opium.

(b) Church did for resistance - To a degree. Resisted
regimentation - insisted upon its rights & prerogatives
speech, free press, rights, intell. - scheme of ten.
Expansion & conquest - Did not work much since as/for
recession & antisemitism - & J. persecution

Did offer - Nazis attempt to make Church a tool, the State, and
to superimpose a Nazi control over the affairs of the
Church.

- They also forgot lost the violent pagan and anti-
Christian ^{anti-church} camp, the Nazis, who
baptized Christ & the Gospel almost as much as they
baptized the people who gave birth to the world.

5/ In 1933 - Nazis made an effort to turn the Nazi Church Party

to organize the Evangelical Church of Germany. They had already ³
unposed a Reich Bishop - Ludwig Mueller - who sided with
the Nazi church faction. - and who talked after a
Jesus "after the German fashion" - boots, guns, scholarship
and all. They demanded that all Chr. clergymen having
Jewish blood should be forced out of their position.

Thousands of Prot. clergymen in fear ran off ⁱⁿ ~~to avoid~~
this threat of force, then Chr. clergymen of dissent -
and they won.

At that time - Dec. 17-1933 - I published ^{an} ~~with an~~
article - "~~a Church of the~~ in which I said: (Jush)

4. I am afraid that Pastor N. - did not go much beyond
most of these clergymen - altho he was perhaps the
most eloquent among them, and on this issue the most
forthright and uncompromising. = ^{article: "The Young Church"}
^{1933 - Jewish religious}
^{from his church - Chr. brethren}
^{7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28}

① I read his book "God is my teacher" - ^{the last 28}
sermons which he preached in his church at ^{in Berlin} Dahleus -
prior to his imprisonment - in 1936-1937.

I find frequent & eloquent running defense, the right
of the Church - to denounce attacks against the Chr. faith,
the right to publish the names, those who seceded from
the Church - and the right to collect offerings &

arms - defense ^{those who have been unjustly}
① other - ^{thousands - unforced - torments - but - even -}
but ② democracy ③ ^(wielded) Dictatorship in other fields
④ Roemer - ^{Germany} 1935 - G. L. G. G. G.
⑤ P. 80 - Leo Stern -

7/ N. was a submarine officer during World War I. = enter the business 4

He was ordained in 1924.

He joined the Nazi party. One wonders why? With his & his
fellow-funerals did not. He surely must have known
their platform.

His friends say that he was never a member of the party -
but that "he voted for the party in the earlier period."

That is not very important - ~~whether~~ he was a member
for a term or only voted for it.

What is important is that he believed in the Nazi program and the Nazi propaganda - that he looked to it to save Germany from the universal Communism - ^{First Communist} And the Nazis there was the way of Salvation. ^{as a threat started 1920} He accepted the Hitler Line. ^{He was dealing with Hitler until 1938} For his part he went along with the Nazis. When his voice should have been raised against their vicious doctrines.

[Marginalia:]
an instrument approved by God for the revival of the German soul and as a factor to the further advancement of Germans everywhere.

But he was anti-democratic and anti-refugees. Later on he rethought that he had been deceived.

→ But ~~and~~ leaders are not men who claim to lead -
 this is that they had been deceived.

And even in the years following Hitler's accession
to power in 1933 and until he was unfurled
his disallowment was not with the Nazis. ^{there was}
dictatorship, their pan. Germanism, their
romantic idealism, but with their assumptions
authority over the church, and their persecution

not so much, Jews or of Christened Jews —
8. After he was in the concentration camp, in 1939, when the war broke out, he offered his services to Hitler to fight again as a volunteer ^{com. member} ~~from~~ ~~with~~
Why? Would you not see a chaplain — or
Why? explanation (Judy) regret that this ~~does~~
not ~~offer~~ an adequate explanation

9. ~~He~~ When he was released from concentration
camp in ^{June} 1945 — interview with newspaper correspondents
he told them — that he offered Nat. Soc. for "religious
reasons". (Judy) — and that is borne out by the record.
I think that that fairly represented his mind.
as of June 1945 —

10. N. also taken in by Nazi propog. on subject Jews:
Leo Steis — "I was in Hall with Himmler" —
- ① Jews should not aspire to part. further or seats in Reichstag.
 - ② Too many Jews in professions —
 - ③ Considering the "great aim", the Nazis' certain res-
olutions against the Jews seemed to him tolerable
 - ④ Jews were repugnant to the new Republic & Jews
that was a mistake — Jews should not be allowed to come

cont.

(5) Ostfaden - dent. assistant -

(6) Had an interview with Hitler in 1932. Shortly before he became Chancellor. H. promised him, ~~and~~ ~~was~~ ~~to~~ ~~allow~~ ~~papers~~ ~~against~~ ~~the~~ ~~Jews~~.. "There will be restrictions against the Jews, but there will be no shuttes, no papers, no forwards" He believed him! "Hitler betrayed him"

11). This is not the stuff out of which prophets & sp.

Leaders & men are made.

This fashion to read the signs, the times - the modern to compare with basic principle of right and justice - the case with which one is duped by lying paper - & clear characters

Failure to grasp ^{that} "certain restrictions" lead on -
don - total - expropriation - only - 6%

12). He was and is a good, kindly, well-intentioned man who did not ~~with~~ ^{match} his home.

But with in the limitations, his perceptions he did render good service - and may increasingly from here on.

I find a far more forthright consistent line

in his utterance of the last 2 yrs.

17

① Just German people - in war - in murder 6/17
(Just)

② Encouraged - Realism

- all ways of life - no departure from

light - allay suspicion

13/ The German people will be a little more cautious in the future, but more than this I cannot promise

Good-will tour - 'on alert' - last was protest tour

Rivalry galleries

14/ ~~if~~ Ger. needs real prophetic voices - all out
freedom for all peoples - substance - close

③ Congress the world -

"Compassion & pity for the Jews & the feeling that what has done to the Jew has been averaged out by the others, but by good in me, the most authentic, say the reactions to the nature in the world."

THE TRUTH ABOUT PASTOR NIEMOELLER

By Samuel McCrea Cavert

General Secretary, Federal Council of the Churches
of Christ in America

The presence of Pastor Niemöller in this country is proving a spiritual blessing to the great number of people who are flocking to hear him. They see in him a living symbol of the fact that in Germany itself there was a courageous resistance to Nazism in the name of Christianity. They remember that he spent nearly eight years in Sachsenhausen and Dachau, although he could have been released at any time by agreeing not to attack the Nazi State. They have not forgotten that it was this evangelical pastor who so infuriated Hitler as to make him declare, "It is Niemöller or I."

In the general chorus of welcome, however, a few captious voices complain that Pastor Niemöller ought not to receive such a tribute from the American people. Curiously enough, some of these voices in the years between 1936 and 1944 were singing paeans of praise about him as an outstanding defender of freedom against Nazi tyranny.

The important issue, of course, is not their attitude toward him but the truth or error of what they are saying. Their criticisms are based on the following allegations:

- (1) that Niemöller was once a member of the Nazi party;
- (2) that he had no quarrel with the political objectives of Hitler and was concerned only with a defense of the Church;
- (3) that he has not admitted the moral responsibility of the German people for their treatment either of the Jews or of the peoples of invaded nations.

Each of these allegations is false. Let us look at the record.

1. Was Niemöller a Nazi?

Pastor Niemöller, according to his own statement and the testimony of those who have known him long and intimately, was never a member of the Nazi party. No evidence has been brought forward by his critics to support the statement that he once belonged to the party. If there is any such evidence it ought not to be difficult to produce it, since the records of the party are now in the hands of Allied military authorities in Germany. It goes without saying that if General Lucius D. Clay or his office possessed such evidence he would not have given Pastor Niemöller an exit permit to come to this country. I talked personally with General Clay in Berlin last July about Niemöller's visit and at no time did he give the slightest intimation that he regarded the pastor as one who had ever been a member of the Nazi party.

It is true, of course, that before the evil genius of the Nazi movement became fully apparent Pastor Niemöller was hopeful that it would do for Germany what it proclaimed it would do. He even voted for the party in a minor election in the earlier period. This was a time, however, when not even the Americans who had abundant opportunity to view the German situation objectively were yet alert to the menace of Hitler's leadership. In 1933 Niemöller broke so completely with Nazism that the press and the radio of the world made it a feature story. This, it should be remembered, was five years before Hitler's triumph

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at Munich - an achievement which was widely hailed in America and England as meaning "peace in our time."

1937 It is also true that Niemöller offered his service to the German navy in September 1939. But it must be remembered that at this time he had been interned for two years, most of the time in solitary confinement so had no accurate knowledge either of Hitler's foreign policy or of the international situation. Moreover, as he explained in a published statement, he assumed that there was a strong movement of underground resistance to Hitler among military and naval officers and that by identifying himself with them he could do more to overthrow the Fuehrer than by staying in a concentration camp. In any case, it is not fair to attach more importance to this single incident than to Niemöller's whole anti-Nazi record.

2. Did Niemöller Oppose Nazi Political Objectives?

It was the Nazi attempt to force the Church, along with all the other social institutions of Germany, into conformity with its own ends that awakened Martin Niemöller to a heroic defense of freedom of conscience. But to infer that this meant that he was concerned solely with an ecclesiastical problem is wholly unjustified. The truth is that it was impossible to separate the particular issue of freedom for the Church from the whole issue of freedom for anybody or anything under the totalitarian regime.

This was illustrated in one of the earliest clashes between Niemöller and Hitler. It had to do with the Nazi racialistic doctrine - more specifically, the so-called "Aryan paragraph", designed to eliminate all those of Jewish descent from any post of leadership anywhere in Germany. Niemöller repudiated the principle by insisting, in an article in "The Young Church" in 1933, that it was contrary to Christian teaching and so must not be applied in the Church. The effect of this action (for which he was temporarily removed from his Dahlem church) was to call the entire theory of racialism into question.

If documented evidence of Niemöller's opposition to Nazi political objectives is desired it is immediately at hand in the famous letter of the Evangelical Church to Chancellor Hitler in June 1936. This was widely quoted in the press and published in full in November of the same year by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. This letter, which bore the signatures of Niemöller and nine others, deals not only with the problems of the Church but also with burning issues of national policy. For example:

"When blood, race, nationality, and honor are thus raised to the rank of qualities that guarantee eternity the Evangelical Christian is bound, by the first commandment, to reject the assumption. When the 'Aryan' human being is glorified, God's Word bears witness to the sinfulness of all men. When, within the compass of the National Socialist view of life, an anti-Semitism is forced on the Christian that binds him to hatred of the Jew, the Christian injunction to love one's neighbor still stands for him opposed to it."

Again, listen to this, from the same document:

"The Evangelical conscience, that shares the responsibility for the people and the government, is most heavily burdened by the fact

that there are still concentration camps in Germany, that describes itself as a country in which justice is administered, and that the measures and actions of the secret State police are exempt from any judicial control."

In speaking as a Christian against the totalitarian regime Niemöller was not merely defending the Church but attacking the whole totalitarian philosophy. It is worth while, in this connection, to recall Albert Einstein's testimony. After pointing out that all the other institutions in Germany, like the universities and the press, succumbed to the Nazi pressure, he adds: "Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing truth. I never had any special interest in the Church before, but now I feel a great affection and admiration because the Church alone has had the courage and persistence to stand for intellectual truth and moral freedom." For that record Martin Niemöller - together with one or two others like Cardinal Faulhaber - is chiefly responsible.

The critics who today allege that Pastor Niemöller did not oppose the political objectives cite the despatches of certain newspaper correspondents who reported an interview with him in Naples in June 1945, just after he had been released from concentration camp. But these despatches gave a gross misinterpretation of his views. When he said, in reply to a question, that he opposed National Socialism for "religious reasons" they jumped to the hasty and unjustified conclusion that he was interested only in Nazi intrusion into ecclesiastical affairs. Fortunately, there is convincing evidence that he meant something very different from what they inferred. Chaplain (Major) David L. Ostergren, who was then in Naples and in daily contact with Niemöller, talked with him on the afternoon of the same day on which the interview took place, and before Niemöller knew what the reporters had said. This is Major Ostergren's account of what Pastor Niemöller told him:

"He said, 'Some people oppose National Socialism for political reasons, some for economic reasons and some for sociological reasons. My reason goes deeper than any of these and includes all of them. For example, National Socialism encouraged socialization of marriage... This violated the commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." National Socialism took over property in a way that was none other than stealing. This violated the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal." National Socialists murdered cruelly, without cause, the Jews and many others. This violated the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." National Socialism disregarded the rights of the individual, making him only a cog in the machine of the state. This is contrary to one of the basic ideas of Christianity which emphasizes the sacredness of human personality.'"

This makes it completely clear that when Pastor Niemöller said he opposed Nazism "for religious reasons" he did not mean that he was interested only in the administration of the Church. What he was really saying was that all his standards of judgment were determined by his understanding of the will of God and his Christian interpretation of human life and conduct. This, surely, is the most deeply-rooted ground of opposition to a totalitarian regime and all its institutions that any man could have. As Pastor Niemöller said in his address at Seattle before the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America on December 4, 1946, summarizing the experience of both Protestants and

Catholics in the fight with Hitler:

"The churches had to bear witness to the validity of God's commandments and of Christian moral standards both for the individual and the social life of the nation. This war could not be avoided and it had to be fought to the end, until either the state renounced its totalitarian claim on the very souls of its subjects or the churches revoked the binding character of God's will for human life."

3. Does Niemoller Confess the Moral Responsibility of the German People?

During the period since he became free to speak to his fellow-countrymen after his release from Dachau, Martin Niemöller has again and again declared his conviction that the German people as a whole must accept moral responsibility for the terrible evil which Nazism let loose upon the world. These addresses are a matter of public record in Germany. They have gone so far in confessing the guilt of Germany that he has been the target of much criticism in his own country. (7)

✓ In his first address before a representative body of the German Church, in Stuttgart in October, 1945 (on an occasion when I myself was present) he affirmed that it was not enough to blame the Nazis. Christians also, he said, had to confess their share of guilt because they had not spoken out sufficiently, and it was because of their failure that tremendous suffering had been caused through the German occupation of Poland, Holland, Czecho-Slovakia, France, Norway, Greece and other countries.

✓ Similarly, in an address at Frankfurt on January 6, 1946, before representatives of the Confessional Church he gave expression to his sense of responsibility for the treatment of the Jews by the German people:

(1) "If I meet today a Jew whom I may have known in the past, I, as a Christian, cannot do anything else but say to him, 'My dear Friend, here I am before you and we cannot find each other because there is guilt between us. I have sinned and my people have sinned against your people and yourself. I beg you, in the name of God, to seize and carry away my guilt so that we may rejoin again.'"

✓ In the same vein he said in an address in Berlin on October 27, 1946:

✓ (2) "So far, we have not taken seriously the conceptions of guilt and atonement. We were dreaming when we thought guilt belonged to the past. When, however, in the midst of a Christian people 6,000,000 persons are deliberately murdered only because they belonged to another race, no one can maintain that the guilt is not a fearful reality."

When Niemöller appeared before the faculty and students of Erlanger University on May 22, 1946, his central theme was the "mountain of accumulated guilt" of the German people. He said, in part:

"Today we must ask ourselves: 'Do we want to repeat our mistakes of 1918? Do we want to trust again in the old ideals?' It looks today as if there was quite a tendency in this direction. Some say: 'The ideals of Nazism were not all bad. And we can build upon what is left

✓ to us, the good conscience of the man who is convinced that he only did his duty, the pride of the honest soldier who followed the call of his country.' For those who believe that, it is very hard to admit that they fought for falsehood and indeed a criminal cause. And if one tells them that everything they believe in was fraud, it creates a terrible situation for a man who thought he was doing something...And yet the sickness that grew into such a crime as the world had never seen before - this sickness started in our nation and nowhere else.

③ "We Christians must face this guilt and confess it. If we do not face it, it will remain. Remember, 30 to 40 million died as the result of our actions - and nobody in Germany seems ready to confess guilt. Adolf Hitler and Himmler got away, but they left us the guilt. And even after a thousand years this guilt will still remain unless we face it. We must start anew and we must begin by saying: 'We are guilty and deserve punishment.'"

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Surely this record is such as to justify the conviction that those who are eager to see a Germany freed from the totalitarian philosophy have a great ally in Pastor Martin Niemöller.



A Prophetic Voice
Hitler Tried to Silence
Speaks
After 8 Years in Prison



Pastor Martin Niemöller

A Public Meeting — Sponsored by
The Cleveland Church Federation.
Music by the Cleveland Lutheran
A Cappella Choir.

3:30 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 2
IN PUBLIC AUDITORIUM

Facts from the Record

Before and during World War II, Pastor Martin Niemoeller was a leader of the opposition to Hitler.

As early as August of 1933 Dr. Niemoeller was removed from his parish for an article attacking Hitler's treatment of the Jews.

His organization of an anti-Nazi opposition, which had grown to national proportions, resulted in his arrest by the Gestapo in July of 1937. The opposition took the name of "Confessional Church".

His trial in February of 1938 brought a sentence of only eight months which he had already served. But Hitler rearrested him and kept him in solitary confinement for three years in Sachsenhausen. The last five years of the war were spent in the Dachau concentration camp.

In Dachau he read over 400 American and English books and learned to speak English well.

At Stuttgart he signed the declaration of church leaders that they felt a personal share in the joint liability of their nation because they had not done more to prevent it from taking the course it did.

Although limited in strength, Pastor Niemoeller is revitalizing the Christian church in Germany. He is vice-president of the Evangelical church there and head of its relations with foreign countries. He is an alternate on the Provisional committee of the World Council of Churches.

Cleveland will be one of a relatively few American cities in which he will speak.

Quotations from His Talks

"It is well known that through the whole period of the Nazi regime a war raged between the totalitarian state and the Christian churches."

"This war could not be avoided and had to be fought to the end, until either the state renounced its totalitarian claim on the very souls of its subjects or the churches revoked the binding character of God's will for human life."

"God has not honored one single denomination by making it the stronghold of Christian resistance; instead, He condescended to choose a remnant in each church body to perform this."

"Through centuries we have lived on in the solitary confinement of our denominational seclusion, not believing that the barriers could be cast down and not even allowing God to do so."

"We knew what to preach and how to say it. Preaching became the most urgent and the most delightful thing in the world. Hundreds of laymen went into the pulpit after the pastors had been taken away by the Gestapo."

"As long as Hitler played God's rival, preaching was not difficult at all At Barmen we had proclaimed the absolute sovereignty of Christ. But after Hitler had gone what did Christ's sovereignty mean? Was our church and was our nation in need of Him? Were we ourselves? Yes, we wanted Him badly. We wanted to be comforted by Him."

"It was the hour of great temptation for us as well as for the whole church. One step only and we should have had the chance of winning the sympathy of our whole nation."

"We had to remember that there is no comfort in the Gospel except for those who enter in at the straight gate, and that we were not authorized to alter Christ's original message, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'."

"That was the way we came to our message. Repentance was to begin in our life and work and only then could we hope to preach the real and full message of Christ's sovereignty in the midst of a world full of guilt, sin and misery."

For additional information write or phone:

The Cleveland Church Federation

1010 Hippodrome Building CHerry 3147

Rev. Raymond L. Spoerri, executive secretary

Dr. Oscar T. Olsen is chairman of a special committee for the event.

Members are the heads of district ministerial associations, representatives of Missouri Lutheran churches and others including Dr. Verner S. Mumbulo, chairman of the religious work department; the Rev. Harry W. Baumer, chairman of the religious education department, and Robert Crawford, chairman of the department of business and finance.

The offering, above expenses, will go to the European relief program of the World Council of Churches.

A new amplification system in the Public Auditorium is expected to be ready.

A CHURCH OF LAODICEANS?

12-17-33

The Germans have at last discovered that Wotan and Jesus cannot be worshipped simultaneously in one and the same church.

The Nazi Church Party, which sought to Aryanize the Evangelical Church of Germany, has been officially disbanded. The Aryan clause which was intended to force Christian clergymen having Jewish blood out of their positions has been rescinded. Choleric Ludwig Mueller, Reich Bishop, who has been hankering after a Jesus "after the German fashion" -- boots, spurs, "schrecklichkeit" and all -- has been forced to sever his connections with the Nazi church faction. The Bible, about which the Germans since the days of Luther have been fighting so much and so gorily, remains the source of Christian authority. The Old Testament, -- that thorn in the flesh of Siegfried's little step-children because Jews wrote it -- has not been eliminated. The New Testament has not been revised and the figure of the gentle, pacifist and communist Jesus has not been recast in the mold of Thor, God of Thunder and of War. Christianity, that "product of a moribund civilization of weary Mediterraneans," remains true to its original Judaic inspiration.

The four thousand Protestant clergymen who rose up in arms against the attempted Nazification of their faith were quick to realize that it was the very soul of Christianity which was involved in the struggle, and their coreligionists in England and America who rallied to their support also realized it.

✓ And now the millions of men and women throughout the world who applauded their courage and rejoiced in their victory wonder whether they will take the next step which is clearly dictated by the logic of their position. They must surely realize that their moral responsibility as spiritual leaders of their people ^{does} ~~did~~ not end with the rejection of the race doctrine in their church constitution. Surely they cannot close their eyes to the millions of "Judeo-Christians" who have been denied equality of political, social and economic status under the new regime because of the Jewish blood in their veins. These millions of Christians who belong to their

churches have the right to turn to them in their hour of need and to expect them to speak up in their behalf and to champion their cause.

And what of the Jews? Do not these clergymen who have now demonstrated their great zeal in protecting the historically Jewish character and values of their religious tradition feel any moral compulsion to speak up in defense of the Jews of Germany? If anti-Semitism has been found to be a menace to the Christian church is it not also a menace to a Christian State or to any civilized State?

Will not the Christian churchmen of the world who upheld the hands of the German clergymen in their war against the invasion of their church by the new Nazi ideology, now urge upon them the moral imperative of courageously championing the cause of the millions of men, women and children who have been denied their elementary human rights in the new Germany and who are being subjected to the cruelest discriminations because of their race? Do these German clergymen wish to take upon themselves the reproach which was heaped upon the Church of the Laodiceans: "I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot."

Surely Christianity cannot rest content with this first skirmish which it has won. The real battle which will test its soul must still be waged.