

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

Pastor Martin Niemöller.

Mann, Erika

erschlossen

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Censor's Copy

If and when the Germans are looking for a new "Fuehrer", they will want to pick a man who is

- Uncensored*
- 1.) acceptable to the Allies; and who is
 - 2.) not only acceptable, but highly attractive to the majority of the German ~~hhhhhh~~ nation.

Even condition number one is not easy to fulfill. Nazis are out. So are people in any way identified with Hitler's war effort. Communists, while presumably agreeable to the Soviets, may not be equally welcome to the Western Allies. And neither the Russians nor ourselves would wish to deal with anyone lacking in certain essential qualifications - such as education, experience and the measure of popularity needed for the job.

As for condition number two, it is far more difficult to meet. In order to be "highly attractive" to the majority of today's Germans, a fellow must, a) be able to prove that he has been an anti-Nazi over a period of years (if mainly for reasons of expediency, this will be made a *conditio sine qua non*); he must, b), have stayed in Germany and shared the fate of his countrymen. Refugees, no matter how fervently pro-German, will hardly do. c) in his fight against Nazism the aspirant must have remained German to boot. He must not, for instance, have wanted Germany to lose Hitler's war. If, during the war, he sympathized with, or even supported the allied cause, ~~he will~~ ~~hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh~~ he will be considered a traitor by many. d) Since all political parties are almost equally compromised, he had better not be a politician. e) And since 65 % of the nation are Protestants, he shouldn't be a Catholic either. f) Although, under the circumstances, "militarists" ~~hh~~ will not pass, the candidate ought to be a militant type. To enforce discipline and to gain the respect of his war loving nation, a soldierly past will serve him well. g) He ought to inspire faith.

With conditions being what they are, sweet reasonableness - never a favorite with the Germans - will avail little. Certain magnetic powers are highly desirable for Germany's new leader.

If condition number one (acceptability to the Allies) is no mean prerequisite and condition number two (attractiveness to the Germans) is still harder to fulfill, a combination of the two seems almost un-^{meeting} answerable. Yet there exists a man who may prove capable of ~~hhhh~~ them both. His name is Martin Niemoeller.

Even today when Germany is split in four major and many minor occupation zones and no German living, say, in American occupied territory could gain real power over the inhabitants of other sectors, Pastor Niemoeller is an obvious candidate for future national leadership.

The "Church Leaders' Conference" held recently in Treysa near Marburg by 70 prominent Protestant clergymen was proof of this. Most of those present outranked the humble pastor from the small Dahlem parish in Berlin; but even the highest dignitaries fell silent, whenever "our Martin Niemoeller" asked to be heard. As a matter of form, he had been elected co-chairman, with Bishop Theophil Wurm of Wuerttemberg presiding. Actually, however, his ^{powerful} ~~hhhhhh~~ personality, its natural magnetism re-enforced by martyrdom (8 years of concentration camp have turned into so many invisible halos), dominated the convention. Upon his ardent advise, his followers refrained from staging the expected showdown over a "purge" of churchmen thought to have compromised with the Nazis. Instead of recognizing Niemoeller's anti-Nazi "Confessional Church" (Bekenntniskirche) as the only legitimate body, they accepted the conciliatory solution proposed by their chief in the interest of national unity. After five days of deliberation the assembly stated that 1.) it was impossible

to restore the "Constitution of the Protestant Church" of July 11th, 1933, because on the whole its institutions were irreparably compromised.

2.) It was impossible to recognize the "Confessional Church" as the sole bearer of Protestant authority, because of the growing friendship between its "Emergency Organs" and the non-Nazi elements of the old Church.

3.) A "Protestant Council in Germany" had therefore been appointed. It embraced members of both organisations and constituted something like a provisional church government. Once again Bishop Wurm was elected chairman. Niemöller accepted the co-chairmanship of the 12 men council.

The German Protestant, or Evangelical Church has no American counterpart. At the time of the reformation most of Northern Germany went Lutheran, while Bavaria and the Rhine valley remained Catholic. At scattered points in Western Germany the followers of the Swiss reformers Zwingli and Calvin established a Protestant Church called the Reformed, the equivalent of our Presbyterian Church. In 1817 the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches united in Prussia for administrative purposes to form the Evangelical Church. The remainder of Protestant Germany followed this example in 1922, when the 28 churches of the German lands formed a loose union, called the German Evangelical Church. In July 1933 the Nazis caused this Church to adopt a more centralized constitution, without, however, eliminating the different land churches. In the following years the Nazi wing of the Church, led by Reich's Bishop Mueller and known as the "German Christians", took over most high offices. The two main leaders of the anti-Nazi wing were Bishop Wurm, who managed to keep his position and Martin Niemöller who failed to do so. Along with the "German Christians" the national organisation has now been dissolved. For the time being the new "Council" is meant to operate in its place.

Though the ~~Elkhkh~~ delegates devoted much time to legal, constitutional and administrative problems, it was evident that with the Treysa conference the Protestant Church in Germany has started its fight for power. In this struggle, German youth is the most crucial, ~~if~~ By no means the only objective. Among the projects discussed by the conference the early establishment of a Protestant Press figured prominently. Through-
out the Reich Evangelical newspapers are to ~~be strengthened~~ strengthen the authority of the ~~hhhhhh~~ clergy.

"Our church", Pastor Niemoeller told this reporter, "is a sovereign national institution. As such it will not be restricted to purely religious matters, but insists on its right to help re-build the life of the nation. In cooperation with the state - not as its servants - we shall attempt to lead our people out of the darkness."

The churchmen convened in a large hospital for Wehrmacht casualties and the conference room smelled disturbingly of anaesthetics. A number of secret sessions took place in the absence of any allied monitor. All open meetings were attended by Major Earl L. Crum, Head of the Religious Section, G 5, Usfet. Other American and British observers dropped in occasionally.

While most of the delegates looked distinctly like clergymen, Pastor Niemoeller, wearing his shabby gray suit with a certain ~~hhhhhh~~ militant elegance, looks like a German naval officer on furlough.

Born 53 years ago as son of a pastor in Lippstadt, Westphalia, he joined the navy at the age of 18, 4 years before the outbreak of world war number one.

"As a U boat captain", he states in his auto-biography "From the U-Boat to the Pulpit", "I was undescribably happy."

Incidents like the following are quoted to account for this happiness.

Returning to his basis from a mine laying expedition in the Straits of Keos, the young commander is greeted with " an enormous hurrah". "One of our mines", he realtes, "had blown up the hospital ship BRITTANNIC, a 50 000 tonner and the pride of the British merchant marine. Our 'swimming coffin' had at last paid dividends."

Once, in October 1918, Capitain Niemoeller has a narrow escape. rather Hitler-like, "That day", he writes, "has left me with the instictive certainty that a task is waiting for me. Why else should God himself have decided to become my helmsman?"

The end of the war finds the captain in a desparate mood. To him the German revolution is "the crime of 1918" and "only the slender hope that a counter revolution might soon wash off the disgrace of November 9th" keeps him going. As for the "peace" of Verssailles, author Niemoeller never mentions it, except between quotation marks.

He hates and despises the Weimar Republic and is unwilling to serve the new government in any capacity. Though he longs to remain a soldier, he turns down a commission, offered him bei the Reichswehr. Pondering the "task" for which he has been preserved, he thinks of becoming a teacher.

"But as such", he observes, "I would have had to be a servant of the state."

According to Niemoeller, who even today warmly recommends the reading of his puzzling book, the Weimar Republic was devoid of Christianity and would not allow its teachers properly to teach God's word.

"Besides", explains gothine looking Mrs. Niemoeller, white haired and handsome in a becoming black dirndl, "my husband wouldn't have consented to teach history the defeatist way it was taught under Weimar. As a clergyman he was free."

While studying theology in the Ruhr (he acquired a comprehensive knowledge of Hebre within ten weeks), Niemoeller takes up arms once more. On March 13th 1920, Hitler's forerunners, the "Free Corps", attempt to overthrow the Republic and proclaim a new "national government", headed by Herr Kapp. Niemoeller and his friends are jubilant and rush to the aid of the rebels. Their "student's regiment" consists of three battalions with 250 men each. Niemoeller commands the third battalion. But the German people are not yet ripe for a fascist dictatorship; the workers go on strike and after a series of armed clashes between "reds" and "whites", the government gains the upper hand. "Kapp's enterprise", Niemoeller states regretfully, "was insufficiently prepared."

Shortly afterwards, the government, eager to reconcile the disgruntled students, send a good will emissary to Niemoeller's university.

"The Minister of the Interior", writes the latter, "despatched his Under Secretary of State. He appeared before a big official students' assembly and asked for confidence for the government. To make his plea more impressive, he also offered a gift: the state presented us with a handsome new sports field. An anxious minute followed his announcement. The social democrats shouted bravo. The rest of us hissed, booed and rose to leave. But then our President, Dr. Gerhard Schmidt, took the floor. 'Many thanks', he said; 'the Herr Under Secretary of State may rest assured that we shall want to look twice at anything coming from Berlin.' The situation was saved. A storm of applause swept the auditorium Maximum."

Theology, it seems, played but a minor part in student Niemoeller's life. His main concern remains with political and military matters. The year 1921 sees him busily engaged in establishing the notorious "Orgesch" (Organization Escherich), one of the "black" formations set up in violation of the Versailles Treaty for the purpose of heating nationalistic passions and menacing the life of the Republic. Along with what he calls "the more active natures among us former officers", he also joins the anti-republican "Nationalverband".

He is married now and has troubles of his own. His small heritage has been swallowed by the inflation. Even if jobs were less hard to find, his manifold activities would hardly permit him to work his life through college. At the right moment however, - his financial plight is becoming desperate - a letter from the "Amrikahilfe" (America aid) provides the struggling patriot with several hundred Marks. He is America's enemy, but accepts this gift without any apparent embarrassment.

On June 29th, 1924 his studies are completed and he is ordained in the Church of Our Savior at Muenster.

Little is known about his activities during the seven years that followed. As acting Secretary of the "Innere Mission" (Inner Mission) he founded and supervised a number of public welfare institutions and developed into a successful organizer and administrator. But his real interest was preaching and he soon quit the "Mission" to make himself heard from various provincial pulpits. In June 1931 he was called to the Reich's capital and the Niemoellers - now a family of nine - moved to Dahlem-Berlin.

The sermons he held prior to Hitler's ascent to power have not been published. His book, however, shows, that he watched the

rise of Nazism with glowing hopes. As late as in 1934 he prays that "the gigantic work of unification and elation which has been started among us may ^{gain} ~~gain~~ unshakeable ground and lasting validity."

Neither the Reichstag's fire and the blood bath that followed, nor the godlessness apparent in every Nazi utterance suffice to antagonize the pastor. As a Christian he cannot but be shocked by the murderous events of 1933, but as a German militarist he is happy. His gradual abandonment of "the gigantic work" has a simple reason: In contrast to all former German governments, the Hitler regime refuses to recognize the power of the church. Nazism interferes with its every activity and in particular denies to the clergy any influence on youth. Niemöller, long since a trained propagandist against the state, keeps fighting and soon turns his fashionable parish into a center of spiritual resistance. Even while his pro-Nazi book goes to ~~the~~ print, he has his first personal row with Hitler.

"Mein Fuehrer", he tells the latter, "I beg you to understand that all I do and say is dictated by my concern for the nation."

"The nation" replies Hitler, "is solely my concern."

Goering, too, is present at the churchmen's gathering in the Reich's Chancellery. He ^{charges} ~~charges~~ Niemöller's "Pfarrernotbund" (Pastors' Emergency Bund) ^{with} ~~being~~ being financed from abroad. In vain the accused seeks to protest.

When the meeting is over, Hitler shakes hand with all those present.

"I seriously doubted", Niemöller told this reporter, "that the Fuehrer would shake hands with me. I waited anxiously. When he finally stretched out his, I seized it with both my hands. 'Mein Fuehrer', I said,

Here is my word of honour: we have never received as much as one Pfennig from abroad.' I shall always remember the ~~h h h h h h h h h h~~ suspicion and hatred in his eyes. The date was January 25th, 1934."

Between that day and July first, 1937, the day of his arrest, Pastor Niemoeller delivers 28 major sermons against the government. As he is hauled off to prison, the Gestapo confiscate all of his manuscripts. But luckily, one of his followers, a half Jewish girl, has attended every service and taken down every word. After having copied the sermons for "underground" distribution, she escapes to England. The collection appears as a book in both Britain and the United States.

Niemoeller's trial begins in February 1938 and ends on March 2nd, when his sentence - 8 months of "Fortress" (high class prison) has already been served. Legally, the pastor is free. His family and his admirers have filled his home with flowers and joyfully anticipate his return. But the Gestapo decide otherwise. Without having embraced his wife, Niemoeller is taken to Sachsenhausen, the dreaded concentration camp
Oranienburg.
near ~~h h h h h h h h h h~~

When war breaks out, Hitler's prisoner offers his services to the man who jailed him. His offer is not accepted.

On July 11th, 1941 the pastor is moved to Dachau, where he stays until the Americans approach and important internees are evacuated to the South Tirol. By now Himmler ~~h h h~~ wants him shot; but Niemoeller gains the support of an army general who saves him from the Gestapo. With the arrival of American troops, his sufferings come to an end. On June 21, he is released from the American interrogation camp at Wiesbaden and returns to his family in Leoni at the Bavarian lake Starnberg. Of his seven children only three are left. One of his

daughters has died of Diphtheria. One son was killed in Russia, another has disappeared in Polish Upper Silesia and the third is a Soviet prisoner. The latter has been heard from, though.

"As soon as my husband had been found", says Mrs. Niemoeller, "the Russian radio informed us that our boy was safe and well."

She sounds amazed as she recalls this incident.

The pastor's own health has suffered. Although he enjoyed preferential treatment (the 200 English books he read at Dachau are proof of this), eight years of imprisonment have left their mark. He looks very thin and once during the conference he collapsed under a serious heart attack. He did not, however, miss any one session. Will power helped him carry on.

As he talked to me in the tiny hospital room which he shared with Mrs. Niemoeller, his brown eyes shone with fiery determination. "If only", he said, "the Americans would understand, that there is no parallel between their own protestant church and ours. In Germany we have always been a power in public life and we intend to remain just that."

Germany's nazification, he maintained, was caused by unemployment. So was the high percentage of psychopaths among nazi leaders. Psychopaths were the first to be unemployed and consequently the first to turn nazi. Other old party members, such as Goering, were "political idealists". Even so the German people must now atone for what they have done or atoned. As for the part he personally intends to play, the pastor was non-committal. While he plans to visit his old parish, he does not at present wish to preach either there or anywhere else. It seems likely that the ardent patriot hesitates publicly to address an allied-controlled Germany. Even so he may be counted on to remain

active. As co-chairman and de facto leader of the "Council" he exercises considerable influence over the entire protestant clergy and through them over the majority of his countrymen. The spirit of relentless nationalism that emanates from him was felt clearly throughout the Treysa conference. So aggressive were some of the speeches held openly that one wondered what was left to be said in those "secret sessions".

When Pastor Martin Richter, the only delegate from Russian occupied Germany, made his report, the audience was breathlessly quiet. Conditions in Saxony, told Pastor Richter, were heartrending. This part of the country had never been self sufficient, but had imported much of its food supplies from Silesia and East Prussia. Now, nothing but refugees arrived from there. Unfortunately, however, the food situation was such that the fugitives could not be permitted to stay. Two million had been sent on in recent weeks. While it must be admitted that the Soviet occupation forces refrained surprisingly from interfering with general church activities, they kept separating the church from the young. As under the Nazis, political councils were given power over the minds of youth. An even sharper note was sounded, when the pastor referred to "our Sudeten German brothers". Their tragedy, he said, was all the more horrible, since the land from which they had been driven, was "ancient German soil". The Czechs were taking advantage of Germany's present plight. The evacuees arrived penniless. Whatever little they had been permitted to keep, had been confiscated by "so-called boundary guards".

Pastor Richter, though an unforgiving judge of our Czech and Russian allies, mercifully vindicated all of his own compatriots. What was needed now, he proclaimed, needed sorely in every field of life, including the political, was not retribution, but love, grace and

forebearance.

Dr. Mueller, youth pastor of Stuttgart, said nobody could have dreamed that German youth would ever be so completely lost to all things spiritual. That it could become so dull, so empty, so godless. Nazism, he observed, had created no values; hence no values were destroyed by its destruction. While not believing in anything - not even in Nazism - the young insisted that "formerly" (under Hitler) all had been better. Thus dead Nazism proved more dangerously attractive than live Nazism had ever been. The Allies had better recognize this danger and back up the church in its efforts to salvage the souls of German youth. To characterize the state of mind of the young, the pastor quoted Nietzsche: "He, who has lost what you have lost, will halt nowhere."

The problem of German re-education is indeed a towering one and there is much that the Protestant church might contribute to its solution. But the spirit of Treysa failed to inspire complete confidence. Many an earnest and moving word was spoken during the conference and the very establishment of the "Council" made the venture a success. But the hero of the day, yesterday's martyr, valiant, stubborn, gifted, militant, sincere, impassioned and enormously German Martin Niemöller, has never been truly devoted either to the cause of peace or to that of democracy. The second condition to be fulfilled by any new German leader he seems to have met. His attractiveness to ~~his nation~~ ^{his nation} is both logical and unquestionable. As for prerequisite number one, his acceptability to the Allies, no final answer has yet been given, ~~though~~ ^{though thus} far he is free to live, move, talk and act as he sees fit - at least among his fellow Germans. A broadcast he planned to give over the American Forces Network has recently been canceled and it is doubtful whether he would

be permitted to enter either Britain or the United States. Moreover in a speech which Major M.M. Knappen, Chief Religious Affairs Branch, U.S. Group Control Council, delivered on August 27th to the Military Government Conference at Frankfurt, there appears the following paragraph:

"... We must not forget that the church harbours many potential opponents. Church organisations are granted the privilege of freedom of assembly for religious purposes and they afford an excellent cloak for an underground movement..."

Whether or not Major Knappen's statement embraced Martin Niemöller as one of "many potential opponents", was everybody's guess; just as his own ~~ambitions~~ ambitions remained the pastor's closely guarded secret. Three things, however, appear ~~rather~~ reasonably certain:

- 1.) Pastor Niemöller has many followers - many more, it would seem, than any other German known to be alive and at large.
- 2.) Pastor Niemöller bears watching.
- 3.) Pastor Niemöller is being watched.

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