

TRANSLATION OF G.3, CHRISTEN DEUTSCHLANDS!

GERMAN CHRISTIANS!

On January 14th Dr. William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury and supreme head of the English State Church gave a sermon in one of the German Protestant Churches in London. The Archbishop spoke of the incompatibility of the Christian creed and National Socialism, about the strong opposition by the Norwegian and Dutch Christians and continued:-

Today we think especially of the Church in Germany, because today is the birthday of Martin Niemöller, whose name is become a symbol of Christian fidelity in resistance to oppression.

You will not wish me here to tell again the story of his heroic witness; many of you know it more intimately than I do. But you are good enough to allow me, an Englishman, to express among you here the feelings of reverence which English Christians share with you for the German man who has come to stand in our minds so conspicuously for Christian integrity amidst the spiritual corruption of Nazi Germany.

With him we honour the other leaders of the Christian Church in Germany, both Catholic and Evangelical, who have stood boldly for the rights of Christian people and of the Church itself.

But here, that we may learn from the tragic experience of these days, it is, I believe, my duty to point out the limitations to which, so far as our information goes, this brave witness of German Christians has been subject. There has been protest from the Bishop of Münster and other Roman Catholic Bishops against the treatment of Christian institutions, such as the closing of religious houses throughout Germany. There has been protest from the Protestant Bishop of Württemberg against the suppression of Christian literature and the threat to abolish the religious rite of confirmation; **there has been no protest so far as we know against such crimes as the attempt to exterminate the Poles or the horror of the massacre of the Jews.** It has been protest in self-defence rather than protest on behalf of outraged justice and of brotherly love. The Christians of Holland, for instance, and of France, at great risk to themselves and their Churches, have condemned the treatment of the Jews – not, so far as we have heard, the Christians of Germany. We see how hard it must be to make such a protest.

We may well ask ourselves whether we ourselves in like situation could thus resist our own State in the name of Christ. **Yet because we know we ought to be ready for this, we are obliged, by way of committing ourselves to our own responsibility, to express our sorrow that the Christians of Germany have failed in this respect.** For what is at stake is not merely the survival of an ecclesiastical institution, but the capacity of the Christian fellowship to give fearless testimony to Christian truth.

It is in that testimony that the Christians of the nations at war with one another find even now their unity across all the divisions of conflict and will find it increasingly in days to come. It is not as Englishmen or Dutchmen or Norwegians or Frenchmen or Germans that we can find that unity, but only as fellow witnesses to the one Christian faith. We look forward to the renewal of our intercourse, the knitting up of severed ties with our fellow-disciples in Germany. But as for them, so for us, the ground of our meeting must be something high above all national divisions; it must be the righteousness of God and His love made known in Christ. Each of us in our own land must think out what this means and bear witness to this before our own countrymen. But for all alike it must mean the acceptance of the suffering which the evil in the world creates, and the bearing of this in fellowship with Christ and with each other in Him that it may be redemptive.

For all of us the years after the war must be hard years. For the German people they must inevitably be years of pain and humiliation even to anguish; the German people themselves know full well that the regeneration of Germany from the evils of the Third Reich must involve this for them. If the Christian Church in all lands can accept the days of suffering as the share allotted to that generation of what is left over of the suffering of Christ, while seeking to alleviate the pain of others, we shall for the world make that pain redemptive and for the Church win new loyalty as through the fellowship of Christ's sufferings we learn together something more of the power of His resurrection.

Something like this, I think, is the call of Martin Niemöller's birthday to Christians in Britain and in Europe today; may God give us ears to hear and courage to obey.

[Picture of Pastor Martin Niemöller]