

ZEUGENSCHRIFTUM

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RELIGIOUS OPPOSITION TO NAZISM IN WESTERN GERMANY

This inquiry was conducted for the most part within the British Zone, and the writer is indebted to several British Military Government Officers for generous assistance and information. The list of German interrogated includes:

- His Excellency, the Bishop of Muenster (Galen)
- His Excellency, the Archbishop of Cologne
- Oberbürgermeister Konrad Adenauer, Cologne
- Professor Sigfried Behn, Bonn University
- Dr. Marie Schlueter-Hemke, now in German Education
- Pfuender, Muenster, former State Secretary in the Reich Chancellery.
- The officials of the Katholische Arbeiterverbände
- The Abbot of Maria Laach
- Dr. Mueller, of the Cologne Caritasverband and other similar officials.
- Ruffini, former secretary of the Rhenish Center Party
- A number of minor Catholic and Protestant officials.

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Protestant opposition centered around the pastors in the so called Confessional group. Percentage wise this very sincere organization suffered more at the hands of the Gestapo and the Party than did the Catholic clergy. Admiration for their stand is universal in Anti Nazi circles, and forms the basis for current proposals to reorganize the Center Party as a "Christian Social Party" with Protestant cooperation. But at least in the Rhineland there appears to have been no very large body of laymen to support these clerics and perhaps one reason for their fate in concentration camps etc., is to be found there. On the other hand, strong groups of Protestant theologians went along with the Pro Nazi "German Christians". They virtually controlled the Protestant theological faculty at Bonn, and appear to have been even stronger at Heidelberg. We were told that Protestant anti-Nazi strength had been greater in cities like Hanover and Hagen, but had no opportunity to check these accounts.

In the Catholic sections of the country, opposition varied considerably. Perhaps the most completely non-Nazi districts were in the Koblenz-Trier areas, where the total Nazi strength is reliably reported to have been less than 4%. Most of the authorities concur that many minor civil servants-railway white collar employees, etc-wore the Party button by reason of compulsion only. Some, however, take the position that such memberships indicate readiness to concur in Party actions and are therefore to be considered reprehensible. The second group includes Mayor Adenauer. That Catholic resistance in Westphalia was strong is clearly shown by the stand of the Bishop who stated very frankly that his addresses would have been impossible had the Nazis not known that the Catholic public eagerly supported him. In addition there are many civil servants who did not conform at all. Perhaps the best known of these in Muenster is Dr. Pfuender, who was removed as Regierungspresident of the district because of his unwillingness to serve the Party.

On the other hand, churchmen are ready to admit that Nazi pressure had considerable results. They do not, as a rule, believe that specific Nazi doctrines-theories of race, etc-seriously misled many. But they observe that as a consequence of the measures taken to curtail the activity of the church much was lost of the older ethical and spiritual heritage. As one priest put it: "Hitler affected us negatively, even as did the war. That is, years of spiritual reconstruction will have to accompany years of material rebuilding."

No exact report on the struggle is available. Appended is a summary prepared by the Archdiocese of Cologne of the principal measures taken to curtail the church. It is hoped that similar summaries can be secured from Muenster and other dioceses, yet even this will be difficult to acquire for some time to come. The Bishop of Muenster pointed out that all the papers of his Chancery office were burned during the incessant air raids visited upon his city. Cologne has promised to provide a detailed account of individual afflictions visited upon Catholics- that is a sort of Martyrology

listing deaths, cases of imprisonment, loss of positions etc. Under existing conditions which hamper communication almost to the point of extinction, it may be a long time before such a document can be obtained.

Perhaps the most effective kinds of moral opposition were three in number. First the writing of pastoral letters by the Bishops and their dissemination. The most important of these letters was probably that of 1942, which outlined the essential principles of the catholic moral law. Listening to, distributing and reading these letters led to almost innumerable arrests and penalties. Some of the Bishops were much more courageous than others. Men like Cardinal Schulte of Cologne were over cautious, if not actually timid. Others, like iron clad Bishop of Muenster, were wholly unrestrained and fearless. Second, the maintenance of selected groups of young people in the parishes. These Kerntruppen were carefully watched by the Gestapo, and any infraction of the rule against anything except purely religious activity was punished. Nevertheless these groups continued despite war conditions, so that there are now nuclei around which the youth organizations can be rebuilt. Third, the resistance offered by the Catholic Worker Societies.

This last is of sufficient importance to merit special consideration. Whereas the Christian Trade Unions were so badly affected that their reconstitution cannot, in the opinion of Adenauer, be contemplated, the Societies remained strong and pretty well built until the end. The Trade Unions have lost practically their entire leadership through death, exile and defection, though the first is the most important factor. But today some of the leaders of the Societies still survive, and their Cologne headquarters have survived the bombing. Throughout the whole period, the position maintained was ostensibly anti-nazi. At the end, some of the leaders were involved in the July uprising, as a result of Goerdeler's visit. Not all were apprehended. Monsignor Kuelter died in a Berlin Jail. The two ablest of the younger men, Dr Letterhaus (once a deputy to the Prussian Landtag, and Dr Gross were hanged. Details of their deaths are available. Nazi practice was to remove the person apprehended to a special cell-block. After that, no news was ever received. The relatives did not in most instances definitely learn whether the victims had been executed. Women were permitted to visit their husbands, prior to removal to the fatal cell-block. If they uttered complaints against the regime, they were seized and put into a concentration camp. The prison chaplain secretly warned many wives to be on their guard. No religious ministrations were permitted prior to execution. Torture was used, but survivors say that the intelligence methods were primitive. Puender, who was involved in the matter but was sentenced by reason of a lack of evidence, tells a dramatic story of his experiences when, after having been found guilty by the Volksgericht, he was nevertheless clamped into prison and then transferred from one concentration camp to another until finally released by American troops. Many of the Arbeitervereine men escaped because the bombing made it possible for them to hide. Evidence indicates that these men were ready to participate in any action against the regime which would muster sufficient strength to have a chance of success.

More generally, catholic leaders complained in particular of the results of family separation. The German authorities in evacuating children, seem to have followed procedures customary in other countries, but the church was excluded from any share of responsibility for the welfare of the children. Catechisms and other religio-educational literature were not permitted, the argument being that a paper shortage prevented actions. What lasting effect the displacement will have is not known. But experienced welfare workers look upon it as very serious. Nearly everybody is aware that what is going on is the liquidation of a civilization. That is no pleasant sight. The question is only: at what point can the trend towards chaos be halted?

We come now to the question of the support given by Catholics as members of the armed forces. The question was put to the Archbishop of Cologne, who answered as follows: "Concerning war de "Fuehrer" made his decisions alone, and in any case consulted only his closest collaborators. The people accepted the war without enthusiasm and

and without being at all clear of what the declarations of war involved. The situation was entirely different from that of 1914, when enthusiasm ran high. There was never any general mobilization. The men were recruited individually, often at night. There was not even a desire for public acts of worship as a result of the outbreak of the war. After war had been declared, the German soldier did his duty in accordance with what they considered the implication of their oath to the flag (Fahneneid). To judge either justice or injustice of the war was practically impossible, since no one had been permitted to know the details of the diplomatic discussions which proceeded and since the public was deprived of any communication with the outside world. The German soldier obeyed and fought well, as long as the injustice and the hopelessness of the conflict were not evident. There is nothing in Catholic moral teaching which condemns the attitude he assumed.

This appears to have been the generally prevailing point of view. Very few Catholics anti-Nazi refused to perform their military duty. Whether the Bishops should have been more vocal in their opposition is an important question which is hotly debated. The Bishops undoubtedly construed their obligation rather narrowly—that is, they acted only when the rules laid down in treaties or moral theology compelled them to do so. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. But in the opinion of many Catholic laymen, the Bishops should have been far more outspoken than they were.

All Catholics expected that when the war was over, the attack on the church would begin in earnest. There is no dissenting opinion about this, among either the clergy or the informed laity. Hitler himself had several times voiced his opinion on this subject. It is certain that he would have met with determined resistance, if one can credit those who were interviewed.

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Dr. GEORGE M. SHUSTER