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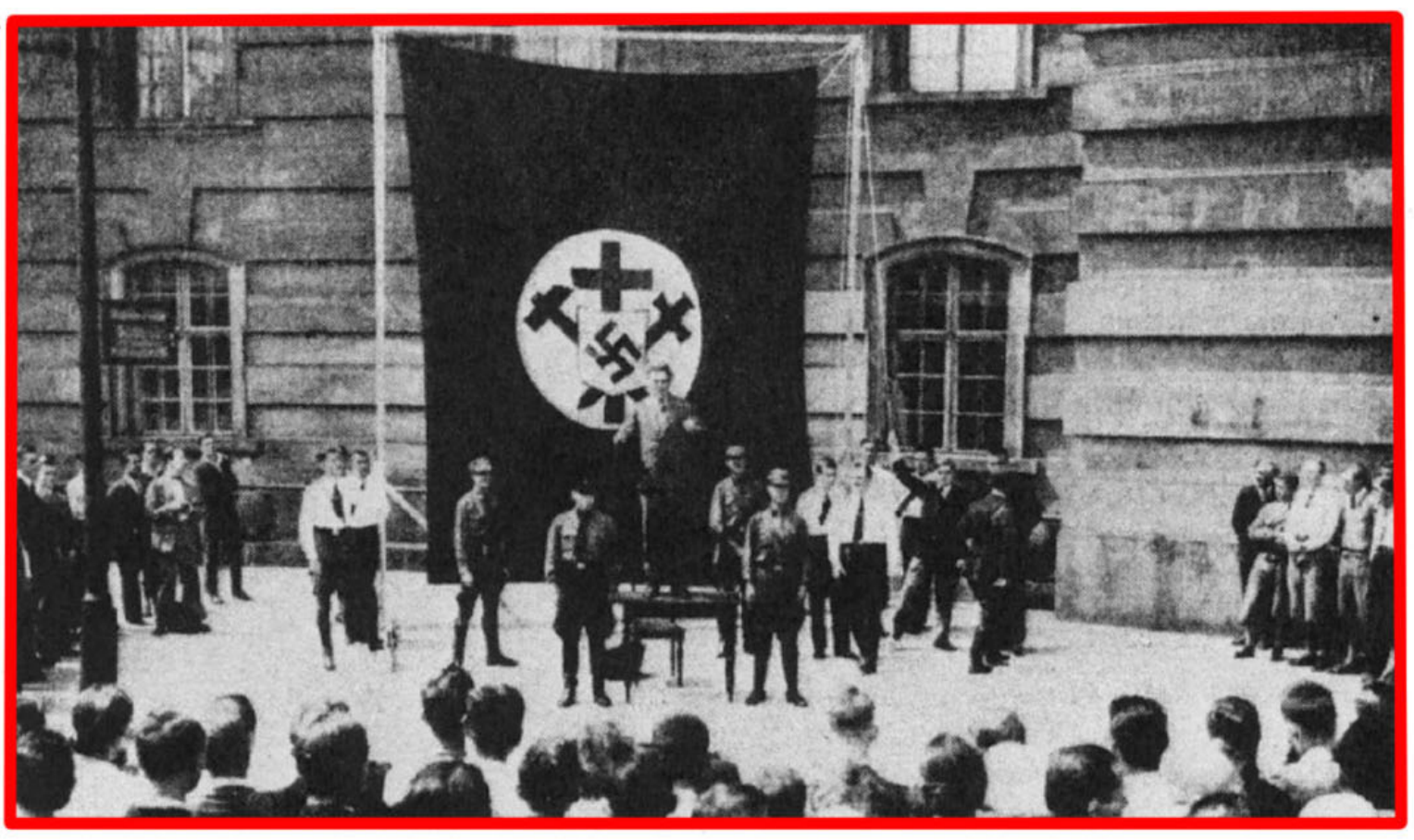
Fearless Foe of Nazi Church Union

Martin Niemöller, U-Boat Commander in War, and Many Other Pastors Outspokenly Challenge Reichsbishop's Authority



Meeting of a student-group of German Christians in Berlin

Martin Niemöller sent more than one enemy ship to the bottom when he was touring the seas as a German submarine's commander during the War. He prayed for those he sank, for he was a Christian, and it always was in his mind to enter the Christian ministry.

One order he disobeyed when he was an officer in the German Navy. He refused to take his ship to Scapa Flow.

But there are no laws of his religious faith that Martin Niemöller will disobey. The story of his struggle to enter the ministry is long. Suffice it to say here that he worked long hours as a common hand while studying theology. Finally, he became pastor of Berlin-Dahlem, which has the wealthiest congregation in Berlin, the members of which number some of the oldest families, loyal to the new Germany—and the old.

There Doctor Niemöller has fought Reichsbishop Ludwig Mueller and Dr. Alfred Rosenberg with all the courage and persistence he exhibited when, as commander of *U-151*, he led the longest submarine-raid of the World War, and brought his boat home.

Outspoken Challenge

Now he is resisting the attack of the German Christian Party, a neopaganistic movement, on the old Protestant faith, on all Christian faith, in fact. He was not molested when he read to his congregation the manifesto of the Confessional Synod's Brotherhood Council.

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"All must know," said Doctor Niemöller. "that there is a bitter propaganda campaign against the Church under way. We must fight against this and for active, not passive, Christianity.

"Jews are not the only ones who crucified Christ."

The manifesto was read in all Protestant pulpits adhering to the Confessional Synod. It attacked the writings of Dr. Alfred Rosenberg, director of the intellectual and philosophical schooling of the Nazi Party, and denounced the religion of race and blood propagated in his anti-Christian book, "Mythology of the Twentieth Century," as pure idolatry.

"Idols of Blood and Race"

"In this new religion," declared the signers of the manifesto, "idols are made of blood and race. Faith in the eternal Germany demanded by this new religion is substituted for faith in the eternal kingdom of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This superstition makes God in the image of man, and in it man honors, justifies, and redeems himself. Such idolatry has nothing to do with positive Christianity. It is anti-Christ."

The totalitarian State, said the document, has no authority save that which it derives from God:

"The State's power and sovereignty are solely a gift from God, Who alone founded and preserves human authority. Whoever puts blood and race in the place of God, the Creator, destroys the State's foundation."

"Earthly sovereignty mistakes the purpose of its heavenly Judge and Protector, and the State itself loses its right to demand obedience when it clothes itself with the character of an eternal Reich, and makes its authority the final instance in all fields of human life and activity."

The Nazis answered the challenge on the following Sunday by arresting 500 pastors belonging to the Confessional Synod in Prussia, including Doctor Niemöller. In some cases German Christian pastors were substituted for the regular pastors. Most of the substitutes spoke, however, to virtually empty pews. Confessional leaders asserted that suppression of their manifesto showed beyond doubt that the Nazi authorities were identifying themselves with the "pagan" doctrines of Doctor Rosenberg.

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