

0. POLITICALLY INCORRECT HEROES - Story Preface

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As scholars try to understand why organized churches did little to resist Hitler and his Third Reich, [Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#), the young Lutheran pastor, consistently stands apart.

Not until the war was over, in the "[Stuttgart Confession of Guilt](#)" issued 19 October 1945, did the German churches express regret for failing to help. Here is the English translation of the German confession referred to as *Stuttgarter Schuldbekentnis*:

After the war, in Stuttgart on October 19, 1945, the newly formed counsel of the Protestant (Lutheran) church in Germany prepared an acknowledgment of guilt for the NS [National Socialist] time period. This was done despite the protest of many Germans.

For many years, in the name of Jesus, we have fought against the spirit of the NS [National Socialist] under whose authority we lived. But we charge ourselves with not being more bravely known, not faithfully praying, not being more joyful in our beliefs, and not being more sincere in our love.

The Stuttgart acknowledgment of guilt was accepted with much respect by churches in foreign countries.

Not until later, however, did German churches publicly confess their own guilt for what had happened to the Jewish people.

The words of Bonhoeffer's friend, Martin Niemoller, attempt to explain this apathy. After Niemoller survived the war (and lived to age 92), he talked about what happened and why he, Bonhoeffer and a few others formed the Confessing Church. The message with which he concluded most of his speeches applies equally today:

*First they came for the Communists
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Communist.*

*Then they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Jew.*

*Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a trade unionist.*

*Then they came for me
and there was no one left
to speak for me.*

As Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke for the oppressed when it was the politically incorrect thing to do, Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke for the oppressed when it was a suicidal thing to do.

Who, will future generations say, were the "Martins" and "Dietrichs" of today?

NOTE: We recommend an excellent PBS movie on Bonhoeffer's life, "[Agent of Grace](#)," and encourage you to visit a terrific website on German efforts to [end Hitler's regime](#).

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/POLITICALLY-INCORRECT-HEROES-Dietrich-Bonhoeffer>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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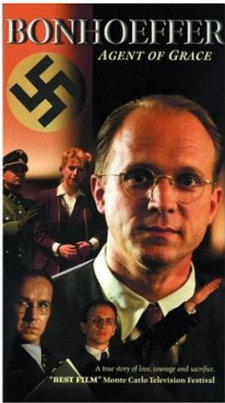


Photo of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Image online, courtesy the [Bonhoeffer-Haus](#) website.

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Agent of Grace Film

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