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This image depicts the "Reich Party Freedom March of SA" (*Sturmabteilung*, or "Assault Division")—including columns with swastika flags—which took place in Nuremberg between the 10th-16th of September, 1935. *Bundesarchiv* (German Federal Archives), Bild (Picture) 183-1982-0809-502; online via Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)

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 [Stuttgarter Schuldbekennntnis](#) ("Stuttgart Confession of Guilt") issued October 19, 1945 - did the churches of Germany express regret for failing to help. Here is the English translation of the German link:

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 publically confess](#) their own guilt for what had happened to so many people killed in the Holocaust.

The words of Bonhoeffer's friend, [Martin Niemöller](#), attempt to explain this apathy. After Niemöller survived the war (and lived to age 92), he talked about what had 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 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?

EDITOR'S NOTE. AwesomeStories recommends the PBS movie on Bonhoeffer's life, "[Agent of Grace](#)."

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Media Stream



Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Bonhoeffer photo, online courtesy Bonhoeffer Haus-Stettin.

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