

395

This is in answer to a request of Sgt. Albert (Joe) de Vivo to explain to him how the same people who crowded the Churches in Germany, could be accused of having had Hitler as their only religion.

May 22, 1945
Four Wells

Dear Joe,

This paper was in the typewriter and meant to be used for a letter to the Secretary of the Quaker Work Service; he had invited me to their work camps for preaching on the work on soil and community as we did it in CWJ. At this very moment, Margrit came in with your letter of May 11th and its urgent question on Germany.

Yours was such a fine letter that I simply shall use the sheet in the typewriter for the answer. You will see that the work service has even something to do with your question.

In the same mail which brought your letter, Mrs. Greene sent a note, the last sentence of which ran: "How deep the wisdom of most peoples; how mad are the nations". Now that is your own question all over. For you ask how can there be so much personal religion in Germany and at the same time, it be true that from 1933 to 1945, they were tools of a devil?

You must try to believe that both may be true. Your Catholic tradition should help you to understand that. Most men are such babies, simpletons, that they think a man himself is either good or bad. Not so in the creation of our God. You and I may get involved in terrible calamities because our class, our nation, our family, our church, is rotten and is destroyed.

This is especially true between a man and his nation. But it is true of your profession. You are a cook. Now, suppose that all cooking in U.S. is poor or that your training as a cook is poor. Joe is the same good old soul. But the people will look for a French chef just the same. Or my son Hans is a doctor. And I hope a good one some day. However, the medical profession has not done anything to cure me from my anxiety that any illness in my family may ruin me economically. In this sense, doctors are terrors to me, Hans included. But the thing is most serious between you and your country. Think of a brooder. The chicks in the brooder may be perfect, every one of them. But if the temperature in the brooder is set wrong, what must be the result? A nation is like a brooder, a nursery of the people who live inside its borders. They may have been and be wonderful people. But what happens when the brooder is heated up to 1000 degrees? And that is by and large the German story. In such heat, people lose their judgment.

When President Roosevelt died, the radio over here was wonderful. All the commercials were silent. We had three days of excellent music. Now mind you, what kind of music was it? No hot jazz, next to no American music. By far the largest portion was German music. This is enough to make you pause. The Germans have given to the world one

half of its soul in their music. But music is a softening process. It makes the musician's heart vulnerable. If you put your heart on your sleeve, you are in great danger of being unprotected. A Yankee who has his twang and hardly opens his lips at all, is better protected against the consequences of his own feelings and exuberance.

The German misery came from exactly their greatest virtue. Being of deep feeling and given to its free expression, they were inept in handling the external world. When they lost the first World War, they could have known that this was so and they were not made to play a first class role in world politics. But they were in despair. And although many among them warned, they did what so many people do when somebody in the family is sick. The good doctor says: He is lost. But the family, just the same, goes to the first and the second and the third quack. Hitler was this ultimate quack. He said: "Come under my wings. You are poor politicians and you know it. I will take the whole burden of politics off your shoulders. Do not ask any questions how I do it; I shall have no scruples in your interest. Surrender to my protection." And this all the chicken-hearted Germans, fed up with their defeats, did. Not all. Two million Germans suffered and died in his concentration camps at a time when the diplomats of the other countries did not like to be reminded of the atrocities in Buchenwald and Dachau, in 1933, 1934, etc. But others closed their eyes and ears, in Germany, to these things. "We shall sign up with the devil if this helps Germany. This is only natural", the minister in Giettingen said from the pulpit in 1932. Don't forget, that the individual German who said this, was a minister in Church. And many kind and good natured people did so whom you now may see pray fervently. But they felt so incapable for politics that they let Hitler run the show and were glad if they could remain ignorant of how he did it, and how many human bones were crushed and sacrificed for sparing them the ghastly game of politics. One Britisher or Frenchman can very well take care of himself in politics. One German cannot.

In as far as the Germans were made part of the cauldron of Hitler, they were cooked. And now they are thoroughly miserable, and many must be as bewildered as you. For they were careful enough to ask no questions and to try to do right personally without hearing the cries of Hitler's victims.

You see with your own eyes how wonderful the country is and how well it is kept. Before the Nazis came in, no tree was cut in Germany for eight hundred years without being replaced. Now try to understand this: the Germans were overscrupulous with the good earth; but if the countryside would perhaps have been a little less tidy, they might have loved their neighbor perhaps as well as they do in the States where the forests are cut down ruthlessly but a man is a man, a human being. The American boys cannot make the distinction which I try to make in this letter between the single German and the sins of the nation. Hence, the non-fraternization order. It was a necessity to warn you that behind the wonderful countryside, a terrible monster had been allowed to rule. We do not see the hatchery, the nursery,

the nation engaging us in wars. The Americans were allowed and obliged to win this war because the Germans allowed a gang to rule, a gang based on arbitrary murder. All the governments all over the world would be infected if murderers in any one place could get away with the title of a legal government. The Americans were not guilty of the devilish idea that large parts of the human family were not human. All men are God's children.

In U.S., we have quite another sin. You know the high standard of living here, the many eggs, the steaks, the white bread, ice cream. But, Joe, there was something phony about it and you were in CWJ for this reason. The aggressiveness of our economy exploits the soil and pollutes the rivers and ruins the good earth. This sin the Germans have not committed. What is the American nation's sin? The Earth is the Lord's all the time and not just for the time being. The good earth must be good today and tomorrow and for ever. For the Lord will one day turn in wrath upon our nation's sin and remind us that the earth is his forever and not ours for our making short-shrift of it. Let us hope that we mend our ways in time. Otherwise, there will be no American land by 2000 and God will forsake us as he now has forsaken the land of my birth and upbringing and devout services, Germany. It is not enough to pray for your self and to forget where the steaks come from. I have drawn up this balance sheet of the nation's sins although I honestly think that the American violation of the sacred trust with the good earth can still be remedied peacefully if you all help. But if you see that we too, like to be in the richest country of the world without asking how much oil, coal, topsoil do we waste in one short generation, then you may understand how a nice German could allow himself to live in the most "powerful" state without asking Hitler, at what price he did it.

Write again.

Cordially yours,

Eugen