

THEY CAME FOR MARTIN NIEMÖELLER



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.

In Germany, the Nazis came for the Communists,
and I didn't speak up
because I wasn't a Communist.

Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up
because I wasn't a Jew.

Then they came for the trade unionists,
and I didn't speak up
because I wasn't a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Catholics,
and I didn't speak up
because I wasn't a Catholic.

Then they came for me...
and by that time there was no one left to speak for me.



ABOUT THE POET

Friedrich Gustav Emil Martin Niemöeller (1892–1984) was a Protestant pastor who initially supported the Nazis until the church lost its power to state authority.

In 1934, he started the Pastors' Emergency League to defend the church. Hitler became angered by Niemöeller's rebellious sermons and popularity and had him arrested on July 1, 1937. He was tried the following year and sentenced to seven months in prison and fined. After his release, Hitler ordered him arrested again. He spent the next seven years in concentration camps in "protective custody."

He was liberated in 1945, and served as President of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (1947–1964) and President of the World Council of Churches in the 1960s.

Adapted from a famous poem "First they came..." (author unknown) derived from Martin Niemöeller's most noted speech given on January 6, 1946 before representatives of the Confessing Church in Frankfurt. There are numerous translations and variants of the poem, and Niemöeller himself came up with different versions.