

Reason for talk on Holocaust said 'to save life'

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"The first thing to be said about the Holocaust is that if we're to speak at all, it has to be to save life. It's not a conversation piece."

So said Dr. Franklin H. Littell, professor of religion at Temple University in Philadelphia, in a dialogue of Christians and Jews at Spring Hill Avenue Temple. The program was the last in a series of dialogues for this season. More local dialogues are expected beginning next fall.

The Holocaust is the word applied to the Nazi slaughter of European Jews before and during World War II.

Littell said one who speaks about the Holocaust "has to speak under compulsion. . . If the moral compulsion is there, and if the moral earnestness is sustained by a pledge to life out of death, then perhaps we may speak — but with hesitation."

The speaker, an ordained United Methodist minister, said the Holocaust raises credibility questions concerning Christianity.

He asked, "How could it be that after 19 centuries in which we were supposed to be memorizing the Sermon on the Mount and the 13th chapter of I Corinthians and modeling our lives after the style of life and service and brotherhood love of that Jew of Nazareth, Jesus, that 6 million Jews could be murdered by baptized Christians in the heart of Christendom — and speaking as a Protestant — in the heart of the Reformation land?"

According to Littell, German dictator Adolf Hitler, who perpetrated the Holocaust, died a Roman Catholic. Hermann Goring, a leader of the Nazi party, died a

He said Christians must share the blame because "for centuries we have taught contempt for the Jewish people. . . We have said it is the business of the Jews, now that they've produced Jesus of Nazareth, to disappear. God is finished with them. . . The only way a Jew can be saved and get into salvation history again is to convert and to be baptized and to disappear as a Jew."

He continued, "In terms of an authentic Christianity, our textbooks, our church presses, our preaching and our teaching have got to be changed." Since the meeting of the Second Vatican Council in the mid-1960s, Catholic teaching groups in various countries have made "a vigorous effort" to "be healed in this area," but studies indicate Protestant bodies "haven't learned anything in terms of their church school literature."

Educators must share the blame for the Holocaust, said the speaker. "The Holocaust is not something done by a bunch of illiterate, superstitious savages out some place in the bushes. The Holocaust was perfected and carried through relentlessly by the products of what was up until then, by and large, the best university system in the world. The death camps were built, as it were, by professors and Ph.D.s."

He asked, "What have we learned? If you were to ask me privately so that I wouldn't have to say it out loud, what we are doing at Temple University or for that matter Heidelberg or for that matter the University of Michigan — I won't come closer — is turning out every year, by and large — except for a few saving exceptions or some student who is touched in an unusual way — technically competent barbarians, specialists able to

Protestant.

"Neither one of them was warned, let alone excommunicated. Now it's too late to say they were heathens, they were pagans. Of course they were. If we had said it 35 years ago, we might have delivered our own souls, but as it is now we have to live with it and to work our way through the time of mourning for the years when literally millions of Christians danced around tribal fires and followed a heathen, indeed blasphemous message."

Littell said 11,000 to 12,000 Christians did stand bravely with the Jews and became martyrs. Among them was German-born theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a man Littell knew at Union Theological Seminary in New York before the war.

"I remember Bonhoeffer in the spring of 1939 wrestling with the question — which was to decide his life or death as it turned out — whether he should accept the invitation. . . to stay and teach at Union till times had changed."

Eventually Bonhoeffer made a decision "that he could not accept the invitation to stay in security in the United States." He decided for moral reasons that he must participate "in the sufferings of his people."

Bonhoeffer was imprisoned by the Nazis in 1943 and two years later was executed.

Said the speaker, "People want to say, 'We're Americans. Of course, that was those Germans.' Young people especially want to say, 'That was the other generation, not mine.'"

However, according to Littell, the United States also shares blame for the Holocaust because a cabal in the U.S. State Department "prevented emergency action."

work" for any country — "whoever will pay them."

Because of a lack of commitment "to ethical norms" in education, "the credibility crisis seems to me to be acute."

Among others who must face self-examination are doctors and lawyers. "What do doctors have to learn when they review the record of the German Medical Journal" concerning "terrible experiments on living human beings? What have the doctors learned about professional ethics, vocational ethics, morals? When do the doctors say no?"

Records indicate, according to the speaker, that lawyers, "like good technical experts, always found the necessary paragraphs and clauses to commit monstrous wickedness" in the Holocaust.

Littell divided persons into perpetrators, victims and spectators of the Holocaust.

He said, "The question is how did it happen that in Christendom when the Jewish people were standing there as sacrifices to the honor and memory of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — who is the Christians' God, too, if they stay Christians — that so many Christians were up there in the bleachers looking on (as spectators) instead of being in the arena fighting it out."

Said Littell, "If the Christians were to understand the meaning of the Holocaust they would mourn it more than the Jews. The crisis of faith, the questions of life and death of 40 years ago that tormented the Jewish people have been answered by a time of renewal culturally, spiritually, intellectually such as Jewry has not seen for centuries, and the cup of trembling has been passed to those who persecuted them."