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THE STUTTGART DECLARATION OF 1945:
A CASE STUDY OF GUILT, FORGIVENESS AND FOREIGN POLICY

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Abstract: J. B. Torrance was one of the few theologians of our era whose exposition of fundamental Christian theology spoke prophetically to the church's social and political witness to the Gospel. This essay examines how Torrance's analysis of forgiveness casts fresh light on the process whereby relations between the Protestant churches of Europe and America were restored in the chaotic aftermath of postwar Germany. The essay argues that the result of their meeting for reconciliation, the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt, prepared the way for the Allies to set aside policies of collective punishment in favor of policies which supported reconciliation and restoration of relationships.

*The Allied armies are in occupation of the whole of Germany and the German people have begun to atone for the terrible crimes committed under the leadership of those whom in the hour of their success they openly approved and blindly obeyed.*¹

*For our own sakes we should not refuse to be the real and sincere friends of the Germans today.*²

In the late 1970s I was part of the early stream of postgraduates from around the world to study with J. B. Torrance in Aberdeen. In the years that followed, I discovered that his gift of sharing his skills as a theologian were also matched by his generous pastoral care for his students, for which I remain deeply grateful. From the beginning of my studies with Torrance two themes stood out to me. The first was his integration of the spiritual and the academic life. It is captured in the quotation from P. T. Forsyth which he quoted on more than one occasion: "Prayer is to the theologian what original research is to the scientist."³ The second was his penetrating theological conversation with international politics. Few theologians have spoken more prophetically to the contemporary church on political issues than Torrance did on his numerous visits to South Africa during the Apartheid years or, closer to his native Scotland, in his lectures and conversations with religious and political leaders in Northern Ireland during the years of 'the troubles.' Moreover, whenever he did address contemporary politics, it was from the center of his theology: the doctrines of incarnation, atonement and justification by grace alone.⁴

¹ *The Potsdam Declaration*, August 3, 1945. From Henry Morgenthau, Jr., *Germany is Our Problem*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945) Appendix C, III. Germany, paragraph one, 216.

² Karl Barth, *The Only Way. How to Change the German Mind*. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 99. (Lecture delivered in January, 1945.)

³ Forsyth's actual words were "Prayer is for the religious life what original research is for science—by it we get direct contact with reality." P. T. Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer*. (London: The Epworth Press, 1916), 117.

⁴ Alan Torrance has discussed his father's involvement in further detail in this volume as well as in "The Bible as Testimony to our Belonging: The Theological Vision of

Torrance's theological engagement with political realities did not begin in Aberdeen. During his time of study in postwar Basel with Karl Barth, he became well acquainted with Barth's own grappling with the political implications of the Gospel during the tumultuous rise of the Nazis to power in Germany and also in the years of war, devastation and reconstruction in Europe which ensued. As I researched the postwar reconciliation between the Allied and German churches, I began to see how Torrance's unpacking of the meaning of forgiveness casts a clarifying light on how the postwar reconciliation between Germany and her former enemies was accomplished. Moreover, Torrance's reflections offer insight both into the failure of early efforts to rehabilitate Germany (the Morgenthau Plan) and also why later efforts (the Marshall Plan) became a model for international reconstruction.

The Aftermath of War: An Unexpected Visit Amidst Chaos

The hurdles for attempting a gathering to restore ecumenical church relations with the Germans were many. How does one re-establish relations between churches whose members have spent the past five years trying to obliterate the other in a total war? The war's end raised perhaps the fundamental challenge of Christian faith, namely how to practice the difficult love of forgiving one's enemy? Moreover, how does forgiveness function within the complexity of international relations? Is it possible for governments to enact policies of a 'victor's justice' or 'collective punishment' when their churches choose the path of forgiveness and reconciliation?

Torrance's reflections on forgiveness are especially relevant since recent studies have claimed the gathering at Stuttgart was complicated by a deep disagreement between the Lutheran and Reformed parts of Protestantism, with "acrimonious debates" about preconditions to forgiveness in regard to

James B. Torrance," in *An Introduction to Torrance Theology*. Edited by G. S. Dawson, (New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 109, 117-118.

the question of German guilt.⁵ In studying the conversations at Stuttgart, I will suggest that with Torrance's help in clarifying the theological details involved, the notion of acrimonious debates is misleading. Nevertheless a stubborn human reality remains: how do Christians with a shared history of violent estrangement actually practice forgiveness? The ecumenical gathering was awkwardly aware of the risks should their meeting for reconciliation fail. The memory of the failed peace after the 1919 Versailles treaty hung over everyone. Under the famous Article 231, (known as the War Guilt clause), Germany was forced to be liable, both morally and financially, for total responsibility for the war. The toxic consequences of this policy were many, including futile debates about guilt and blame in which ecumenical relations languished for seven long years after WWI, years of bitter resentment toward Europe which helped Hitler get his start.⁶ The representatives at Stuttgart were hoping by God's mercy to shape the trajectory of the second post-war along a different path. It was this hope combined with a sense of urgency that led them to arrange, as soon as humanly possible, a meeting for reconciliation between themselves and representatives of the German Protestant church. For if the church could not practice what they had been called by Jesus to preach to the nations, how could they expect their governments to do anything other than double down on the punitive Versailles policies of World War I?

Willam Visser't Hooft of the Netherlands was the *de facto* leader of what was to become the World Council of Churches. His autobiography describes the actions which now commenced. Through contacts he discovered that the

⁵ Matthew Hockenos, *A Church Divided. German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 74. John Conway asserts that Hans Asmussen delineated "in true Lutheran fashion" that the acknowledgement of guilt was a necessary prerequisite of merciful forgiveness. John S. Conway, "How Shall the Nations Repent? The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt, October 1945," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38, no. 4 (October, 1987), 603.

⁶ Stewart W. Herman, *The Rebirth of the German Church*. (New York: Harper, 1946), 21. The economist J. M. Keynes wrote a devastating economic critique of the treaty, which unfortunately was decades ahead of Allied thinking. Cf. J. M. Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: MacMillan, 1919).

Council of the Evangelical Church of Germany (renamed and reconstituted after the war) was to meet in Stuttgart in mid October. He knew this council had been chosen for their faithful witness during the church conflict with the Nazis. He wondered: would it be possible to gather a team of church leaders from the Allied nations to visit the council in order to create a presence and a pressure for reconciliation?

Through something of a miracle, just four months after hostilities had ceased, a group of eight ecumenical visitors managed to assemble the various permits from military authorities to travel to Stuttgart, Germany on October 17, 1945. Due to shortness of time and woeful communications, it had not even been possible to let the council know they were coming. "So our arrival caused considerable surprise and also much joy."⁷

Only weeks before the surprise gathering at Stuttgart, Karl Barth had written Martin Niemöller to encourage his old friend that in this dark hour of defeat, Christians of many nations wanted to help Germany. But it was *necessary*, said Barth, for Germans to say frankly and clearly, "We Germans have erred—hence the chaos of today—and we Christians in Germany are also Germans!"⁸ Barth knew firsthand that the hands of the Confessing Church were not clean in regards to the German infection. To present herself as untainted by the illness manifest in Nazism was not only "nonsense" but if maintained, would set Germans against one another, the faithful remnant versus the guilty masses, making their lives even more unbearable than they already were.⁹ Somehow the church must act in a way that would join in solidarity with the entire people, even though any action would take place amidst chaotic circumstances.

⁷ W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1973), 191.

⁸ Quoted in James Bentley, *Martin Niemöller, 1892-1984*. (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 175.

⁹ Barth, *The Only Way*, 12,

Chaos is not too strong a word to describe Germany at war's end. The word *Zusammenbruch*, disastrous collapse, was frequently used to describe the shambles that was now Germany.¹⁰ Seven million Germans had perished in the war, half of them civilians. One million soldiers languished in POW camps awaiting their fate at the hands of their conquerors. At least another million were missing, scattered along the roads stretching East of Berlin as far away as Russia. Throughout the country, food, fuel, housing, and transport were scarce or nonexistent. Industrial machinery that had not been destroyed by bombing was being dismantled and sent away daily by the four Allied nations occupying Germany.¹¹ Niemöller reported that due to the shocking conditions which prevailed during the first days of Berlin's occupation by the Russian army, over two hundred persons had committed suicide in his former parish of Dahlem, a wealthy Berlin suburb. Such were the conditions in greater Berlin, that twenty pastors had committed suicide.¹² Niemöller related these dark facts not to blame anyone but simply to illustrate how Germany "has reached the brink of the precipice."¹³ Daily new reports arrived detailing atrocities perpetrated by the Russians, as they took revenge for Hitler's devastating invasion of their homeland in which more than twenty six million Soviet citizens had perished, including nearly three million Soviet POW's.¹⁴

How could a nation be reconciled to its neighbors while it is simultaneously being ravaged by chaos? Moreover, with the war over and Hitler dead, who was responsible for the current crisis? One could argue it was all Hitler's fault. But unlike so many things he did, this chaos was now within the power of others to change.¹⁵ Staring at the collapse of all social order, Niemöller saw his fellow Germans both numb and full of self-pity. He wondered: could Germans move from self-pity and blaming others--Nazis, Hitler, Russians,

¹⁰Conway, 603.

¹¹ Hockenos, 90

¹² Bentley, 175.

¹³ Martin Niemöller, *Of Guilt and Hope*. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 22.

¹⁴ According to Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, (New York: Knopf, 1996), 290.

¹⁵ Herman, 242, 271.

Allies, to begin to take responsibility for their own action and inaction which had enabled this tragedy?¹⁶ He became convinced that a new start was only possible if the church took the lead in self-examination. If he and other pastors led the way on this path, it might help others take a similar responsibility--despite the chaos.

The gathering at Stuttgart became controversial for many reasons, but one reason rarely noted is that the meeting itself bore witness that the ecumenical church was not content to passively submit to its governments' formulation of postwar policies. To put it bluntly, Allied intentions were ominous. In England, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's friend, George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, was anxious that the tone of public comments thus far, including the Potsdam agreement drafted by Truman, Stalin and Britain's newly elected Clement Atlee, revealed a plan to "humiliate and enslave the German nation."¹⁷ In America it was hardly a secret that President Roosevelt's Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, had prepared a thoroughgoing punitive plan of reparations, partition, and de-industrialization; turning Germany back into an agrarian society.¹⁸ This was the grim setting in which the ecumenical church determined not to wait for their governments' intentions to simply play themselves out. Moreover, by taking this initiative, the Stuttgart visitors put a question to the Allied governments: would they pursue a victor's spirit of vengeance or pursue the irenic example of their own churches? Could such contrary approaches co-exist within the same societies or would government and church policies become a house divided?

As early as 1942 Visser't Hooft had received a powerful letter from the Lutheran Pastor Hans Asmussen, stating that he hoped the questions of war guilt would be dealt with spiritually and not politically, in a way that

¹⁶ Dietmar Schmidt, *Pastor Niemöller* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 146.

¹⁷ Conway, 610. Conway is especially helpful in setting the political context.

¹⁸ Morgenthau, 16, 79-80. Morgenthau, writes Beschloss, was a firm believer in collective guilt for German war crimes. Michael Beschloss, *The Conquerors. Roosevelt, Truman and the Destruction of Hitler's Germany, 1941-1945*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 52.

Christians would come together and confess their sins before God and each other. Earlier, with Bishop Bell in Stockholm, Bonhoeffer had spoken plainly that “the only road open to the Christians of Germany was the road of repentance.”¹⁹ In July 1945, Visser’t Hooft wrote to Otto Dibelius, Bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg, to say that future conversations should include frank discussions about both Nazi crimes as well as the sins of omission of the German people. But there was no wish to be Pharisaic or legalistic!²⁰ Visser’t Hooft’s wish was to help Germany move in the direction already spoken by Bonhoeffer as the only way forward for the church’s rebirth after the Nazi era had ended.

Visser’t Hooft, deeply influenced by Barth’s theological witness, writes clearly in his *Memoirs*, that there was no question of seeking to extract a confession of guilt as some kind of precondition; only as a spontaneous gesture would such a confession have any worth.²¹ Yet Barth himself had written Niemöller that it was necessary somehow for Germans, *including the German church*, to acknowledge their failure. How could this acknowledgement take place without becoming a kind of necessary precondition?

Let us recall Bonhoeffer’s 1937 diagnosis at the height of the Nazi era: the church in Germany had been living within a false dream of cheap grace, that is, grace without discipleship, grace as a presumption due to its privileged Lutheran theological inheritance. There could be only one deliverance from such a distorted vision: repentance. Thus the question arises: in the exigency of the postwar environment, should repentance now be framed as a necessary prerequisite for restoration to fellowship?

Repentance: Evangelical or Legal?

As one of his signal contributions to the study of historical theology, Torrance has described how theology in the West frequently confused the

¹⁹ Visser ’t Hooft, 189.

²⁰ Ibid., 190.

²¹ Ibid.

relation between repentance and forgiveness and how this has been profoundly detrimental in the life of the church. Historically, nowhere was this confusion more virulent than during the Medieval era, with its penitential scheme by which forgiveness was framed within a schema of meritorious transaction, conditional upon confession, contrition and satisfaction.²² To understand the representatives who gathered at Stuttgart, it is important to be clear that both Luther and Calvin had broken decisively with the conditionality of the Medieval scheme on the grounds that it had turned the personal relation of forgiveness into a legal transaction. Luther himself had written:

Rome maintains that justification and forgiveness depend on the conditions of penance. Therefore we are not justified by faith alone. We maintain that contrition does not merit the forgiveness of sins. *It is indeed necessary but not the cause.* [my italics.] The cause is the Holy Spirit.²³

Regarding this same topic, John Calvin had left no space between his view and Luther's. He wrote:

But we added that repentance is not the cause of forgiveness of sins. Moreover we have done away with those torments of souls which they would have us perform as a duty. We have taught that the sinner does not dwell upon his own compunction or tears, but fixes both eyes upon the Lord's mercy alone. . . Over against these lies I put freely given remission of sins...what is forgiveness but a gift of sheer liberality! When can he at length be certain of the measure of that

²² J. B. Torrance. "Covenant and Contract, a Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970), 51-76.

²³ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, volume 34, "The Disputation Concerning Justification," (1536). (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 171.

satisfaction? Then he will always doubt whether he has a merciful God; he will always be troubled, and always tremble.²⁴

In this moment of crisis when the Protestant churches of Europe sought to model for their nations the way of reconciliation, did they engage in 'acrimonious debates' about the necessity of repentance as a prerequisite to forgiveness? In effect, were the heirs of the Protestant tradition on the verge of repudiating a shared foundation from the heart of the Reformation? If not, how can we understand both Barth and Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the necessity of repentance?

Much of the confusion lies with the word 'necessary' and here is where Torrance is especially helpful. Luther had written four centuries earlier that repentance "is indeed necessary but not the cause." Weeks earlier, Barth had written his friend Niemöller that it was 'necessary' for the German church to say 'we have erred'. But as we have been reminded by the words of Luther and Calvin, both traditions were united in the hope that God's mercy was not the prisoner of preconditions. The kind of necessity Barth and Luther acknowledged was that of response to God's unconditional grace, not a precondition. That is, repentance was a necessary response to the life-giving power of God's grace. But it is grace alone that releases in the sinner the freedom to confess, to cease making excuses or covering up. It is the same logic of grace which freed Augustine to write his famous *Confessions*--not in order to effect God's pardon, but as a result of having been gripped by God's sheer mercy. As grace had released in Augustine an extraordinary autobiographical honesty, so in Niemöller's mind, grace was the sole grounds upon which the German church could confess its guilt after its long and confusing tale of compromise, collusion and resistance.

²⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.4.3. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 134

Torrance has further noted that to require repentance as a precondition of forgiveness severs repentance from gratitude.²⁵ For when repentance springs from fear of punishment instead of gratitude, notions of bargaining, merit and cunning rush in to disfigure the true necessity of repentance into what the legal mind of Tertullian unfortunately described as the price of which the Lord awards pardon.²⁶ Such a framing deforms repentance from the only proper response to grace into a causally necessary act of merit.

Guilt and Hope

On the evening they arrived, the visitors joined in a public service of worship at which Niemöller, Dibelius and chair of the Council, Theophil Wurm, all spoke. Niemöller preached on Jeremiah 14:7-11. "Though our iniquities testify against us, act, O Lord, for Thy name's sake." In an unforgettable message Niemöller said it was not enough to blame the Nazis. The church must face its own guilt. "Would the Nazis have been able to do what they had done if church members had been truly faithful Christians?"²⁷ Hearing such words, Visser't Hooft was hopeful that sterile debates and mutual recriminations concerning guilt (such as those which followed the first world war) would not be repeated.

At their meeting the following day, Visser't Hooft describes their preparations thus:

On the one hand, we could not make a confession of guilt the condition for a restoration of fellowship for such a confession could only have value as a spontaneous gesture; on the other hand, the obstacles to fellowship could only be removed if a clear word were spoken. Pierre Maury gave us the right phrase. He suggested that we should say: 'We have come to ask you to help us to help you.'²⁸

²⁵ From a remembered personal conversation with James Torrance.

²⁶ Tertullian, "On Repentance," *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3, 661.

²⁷ Quoted in Visser't Hooft, 191.

²⁸ Visser't Hooft, 191-192.

Again, Visser't Hooft is clear: the conversation that day had nothing to do with negotiations. To begin, Visser't Hooft expressed the delegation's desire to re-establish fraternal relations, and to express gratitude for the Confessing Church's witness. He spoke in particular of the sacrifice rendered by Bonhoeffer. Then he picked up the phrase of Pierre Maury (quoted above). Hans Asmussen spoke decisively in reply. He said he determined years ago that at the first opportunity he would say to brothers from other churches, "I have sinned against you as a member of my nation, because I have not shown more courage." Niemöller as always spoke plainly. As a church, he said, we share in the guilt of our nation and pray that God may forgive that guilt. From the Netherlands, Dr. Hendrik Kraemer responded with deep emotion. These words, said Kraemer, contained within them a call to his own church as well, that it could only live by the forgiveness of sins. "It could not be a matter of bartering."²⁹ As the session came to a close, Asmussen proposed the Germans meet alone in council to decide about a public declaration in light of their conversation. The following day, Bishop Wurm read aloud the text the Council had agreed upon.³⁰ Below is the main passage:

We are all the more grateful for this [ecumenical] visit, as we not only know that we are with our people in a large community of suffering, but also in a solidarity of guilt. With great pain we say: By us infinite wrong was brought over many peoples and countries. That which we often testified to in our communities, we express now in the name of the whole church: We did fight for long years in the name of Jesus Christ against the mentality that found its awful expression in the National Socialist regime of violence; but we accuse ourselves for not standing to our beliefs more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously, and for not loving more ardently.

²⁹ Ibid., 192.

³⁰ See Appendix I. The Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt.

The words were a *personal* confession of guilt offered by the representatives of the Confessing Church, despite the fact that they themselves had shown great courage in resisting the Nazis. And yet, as Niemöller made clear, there was a gnawing personal awareness that their own hands were not clean. In the coming months, Niemöller's many sermons would repeatedly describe a visit he made with his wife, Else, to the concentration camp at Dachau shortly after the war's end. There he read a notice fixed to a tree: "Here between the years 1933 and 1945, 238,756 human beings were incinerated." He sensed God asking him, 'Martin, where were you when these people were being slaughtered?'³¹ Of course, imprisonment in a concentration camp was an indisputable alibi from 1937 to 1945. But what about 1933-37? Through the text of Matthew 25, Niemöller sensed God speaking to him personally. To congregations up and down Germany he confessed that when the Communists, and the trade unionists and then the Jews were thrown into concentration camps, he did not recognize Christ in them, suffering and persecuted. He remained silent.

Here the question of guilt reveals for us Christians in Germany its horrible face. The Lord Jesus Christ asks his disciples, his church, he asks you and me, whether we are really without guilt in regard to the horrors which came to pass in our midst. I cannot reply with a clear conscience: 'Yea, Lord, I am without guilt. Thou wast in prison and I came unto Thee.' Indeed I have said: "I do not know this man."³²

Now amidst the chaos of postwar collapse, wherever one turned, multitudes were sick, underfed, and in real danger of collapse. What was to be done? Niemöller urged every believer not to wait for a pastor to come along, but to go one's self, and not pass by Christ yet again as they had done in 1933. "During these days let us keep our eyes wide open for the misery of our

³¹ Schmidt, 150-151.

³² Martin Niemöller, "The Need and the Task of the Church in Germany," preached in 1946 and included in *Best Sermons, 1947-48 Edition*, edited by G. P. Butler. (New York: Harper and Brothers), 210.

neighbor. If this can happen, then Christianity still has a task to perform in Europe.”³³ As expressed in the title of his series of sermons, Niemöller described his postwar preaching as a message both of guilt and of hope, not the one without the other. To meet Christ in one’s suffering neighbor and offer mercy was premised upon hope in God’s mercy; that in showing mercy to the sufferer, the believer was participating in God’s own merciful nature. Torrance’s analysis only helps to clarify Niemöller’s conviction: the sole premise of offering mercy rests in God’s mercy, not as merited by our efforts but as grounded in God’s compassionate nature.

The Legacy of Stuttgart

Why did the Stuttgart Declaration become controversial? Why over time did the church come to view it as probably the most important theological document of the Confessing Church following the war? First, we must recall the context of chaos. In October, 1945, Germany’s civil and industrial infrastructure was basically destroyed. Germany was an occupied country. It had no self-government. It was unable to take any initiative in its own recovery. Deeply influenced by the Morgenthau Plan, the Allied official orders of occupation (JCS 1067) enforced by the U.S. army, directed that nothing must be done to rehabilitate in any way the German economy.³⁴ For Germans to grasp Niemöller’s astringent message of ‘guilt and hope’ while living under an occupation based on ‘guilt and perpetual collective punishment’ was difficult, to say the least. It created strong reactions. Some leaders in the church asked why do we not speak about ‘the guilt of the others’?³⁵ Others felt the clergy had been deviously exploited by the Allies to re-envoke the War Guilt Clause of the hated Versailles treaty in order to justify Germany’s perpetual punishment.

³³ *Of Guilt and Hope*, 14.

³⁴ Beschloss, 169.

³⁵ For example, Helmut Thielicke. Cf. Helmut Thielicke, *Notes from a Wayfarer*. (New York: Paragon House. 1995), 231.

In retrospect, Niemöller considered his efforts a failure.³⁶ His personal acknowledgment of guilt was more than most Germans were willing to imitate. In an interview shortly after Niemöller's escape from his death convoy, an American chaplain asked Niemöller if the world should simply say, 'we forgive Germany' and start all over? Niemöller replied that the world would not be able to say: We forgive you, "but the Christians all over the world should say that, and they will start all over again with us. Measures of punishment against the people will not help."³⁷ Niemöller's words were prophetic. Indeed Christians all over Europe and North America did respond to Stuttgart's message. Many months before any change in Allied policy, food parcels and supplies began arriving from the churches of countries, many of whom had made personal sacrifices in sending them.³⁸

Though the reconciling events at Stuttgart evoked no change in Allied policy for many months, evidence from the testimonies shared in churches throughout Europe and America suggests that the Stuttgart's Confession of Guilt opened the hearts of many people who were tempted to seek perpetual revenge. Visser't Hooft reports that as he relayed the events of Stuttgart to Protestant assemblies in France, Holland, Britain and the U.S., many spoke of how this declaration made it possible for them to acknowledge how their own struggle with the Nazis had not been sufficiently faithful and courageous. Stuttgart was making a more honest Allied response possible. The launching of the World Council of Churches itself in 1948, with the full inclusion of Germany's church would have been impossible without Stuttgart.³⁹

³⁶ Sybil Niemöller von Sell, "Who was Martin Niemöller?," in *Remembrance and Recollection*, Volume XII, ed. By Hubert G. Locke and Marcia Sachs Littell, (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1996), 21. Conway says for the most part the German people refused to accept the challenge which Stuttgart put before them—to take personal responsibility for their nation's tragic course. "How Shall the Nations Repent?," 619.

³⁷ *Of Guilt and Hope*, 77.

³⁸ Schmidt, 152. The encouragement and hope these parcels gave have been commented on by many pastors during this time, including Dibelius and Thielicke.

³⁹ Visser't Hooft, 193-194.

Torrance's analysis of legal versus evangelical repentance helps to summarize the conflicted situation between theology and politics in the aftermath of Stuttgart. Gradually the Allied (Morgenthau) policy of collective punishment ('until Germany had learned its lesson') as a kind of precondition before any restoration was possible, was increasingly exposed as simply punitive. Despite the various food and aid parcels from Europe's and America's churches, all duly acknowledged, the sheer scale of Germany's collapsed economy and infrastructure meant it remained stuck in a near starvation state for three long years after the war, unable to sufficiently repent of its misdeeds to satisfy its conquerors, unable to feed itself, unable to repair its economy, unable to escape from self-pity. Moreover, the policy of punishment and de-industrialization was having a toxic effect on the rest of Europe. Germany's economic collapse was threatening to catch up its neighbors in its vortex.⁴⁰ But on 17 October of 1945, the ecumenical church had not come to encircle Germany with a list of preconditions. They enacted a parable of taking the initiative to restore communion.

In retrospect, we can see that Stuttgart's message created a crisis for the Allies as well as Germans. None of the Allied governments and their various churches were in any doubt they had rescued Europe and indeed, Germany, from a wicked, anti-Christian regime. But what were the implications of Christ's gospel for how one treats a defeated enemy? Should the triumph of a 'Christian civilization' over its 'pagan' (or apostate) enemies entail policies amounting to the permanent degradation of the defeated, including *de facto* the starvation of the most vulnerable-- elderly, women and children?

This was the awkward question facing President Truman when in 1947 he sent former President Herbert Hoover, a committed Quaker, on a fact-finding visit to Germany. In reporting to the White House, Hoover denounced the Morgenthau Plan as "illusory", arguing that it could not work unless the Allies

⁴⁰ One premise of the Marshall Plan was that the recovery of Europe would not be possible without the restoration of the German economy.

were prepared either to re-locate or exterminate twenty-five million Germans. Less than four months later the White House announced Secretary Marshall's plan to reindustrialize Germany, bringing its industrial capacity back to its 1938 levels.⁴¹ It is interesting to note that in preparing this new approach to Germany, Marshall accessed Secretary of War Henry Stimson's private memos to Roosevelt for inspiration. Of all the war cabinet, it was Stimson who had argued most strongly against Morgenthau, insisting that only "through Christianity and kindness" would the problem of German rehabilitation be solved.⁴²

In the end, the Marshall Plan was the clearest evidence of an Allied change of heart. The government in effect determined that only by investing in its former enemy rather than continuing to punish, would healthy democracy and economic recovery take place. In our current political climate it is remarkable to consider that the US government decided the way to increase her own security was not to hoard jealously half of world production, but to share it out in order to generate more wealth for all. Between 1948 and 1951 the Marshall Plan channeled \$13 billion (equivalent to \$130 billion today) to rebuild a war torn Europe. In other words, America devoted "an unheard of" 3% of gross national product and 10 per cent of the federal budget to rebuild Europe, including former enemy, Germany, into a formidable economic rival and partner.⁴³ The lesson here provides an economic analogue to Torrance's theology of forgiveness: positive change is the fruit of mercy, not its cause.

⁴¹ Erik S. Reinert, "Increasing Poverty in a Globalized World: Marshall Plans and Morgenthau Plans as Mechanisms of Polarization of World Incomes," in Ha-Joon Chang, ed., *Rethinking Development Economics*, (London: Anthem Press, 2003), 455.

⁴² According to Michael Beschloss, Beschloss, 278. Stimson is quoted in Beschloss, 105.

⁴³ Elizabeth Pond, *Beyond the Wall. Germany's Road to Unification*. (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1993), 249. Cambridge economist Ha-Joon Chang identifies the abandoning of the Morgenthau Plan in favor of the Marshall Plan as what kickstarted the recovery of post-war Europe. With it, America signaled that it was in everyone's best interest to see that its former enemies prospered. Economically speaking, the result of this strategy was "spectacular." Cf. Ha-Joon Chang, *Bad Samaritans*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2008, 62-64.

However, the memoir of Melita Maschmann illustrates Torrance's point at a more personal level. As a committed and unrepentant Nazi activist, Maschmann was sentenced to a prison camp for Nazis after the war. Though she adamantly refused to accept any guilt for her conduct, due to boredom, she became drawn to the interesting conversation of the chaplain, and gradually a guarded friendship evolved. Though she avoided Jews carefully even in her internment, one day the chaplain brought along a teacher whose parents had both died in concentration camps. Thus as the chaplain introduced them, the teacher already knew of Maschmann's past role as a Nazi activist. Maschmann describes what happened:

I will never forget the glow of spontaneous kindness in this person's eyes when she first held out her hand to me. It bridged all the gulfs, without denying them. At that moment I jumped free from the devil's wheel. I was no longer in danger of converting feelings of guilt into fresh hatred. The forgiving love which I had encountered gave me the strength to accept our guilt and my own. Only now did I cease to be a National Socialist.⁴⁴

Only as the teacher graciously grasped her hand did Maschmann experience the inner miracle of acknowledging her guilt. Similarly, only as the Marshall Plan began to be implemented, could German society make its first steps towards what became known as Germany's economic miracle. The logic of the ecumenical gathering at Stuttgart reflects the same pattern. The Declaration to which it gave birth can be seen as a turning point in truth-telling or better, in encountering the truth that sets us free. Though controversial at the time, the Stuttgart Declaration was not a document acknowledging collective guilt which German pastors were coerced into signing. It was a personal response to the pilgrimage taken by their fellow believers from enemy nations, who took the daring initiative to be reconciled.

⁴⁴ Melita Maschmann, *Account Rendered: A Dossier on my Former Self*, (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1964), 213.

In response, the Evangelical Church of Germany's Stuttgart Declaration blazed a trail for countless Germans to take unprecedented personal responsibility for their moral failure and in the decades since, many Germans have done so with a vast social consensus. As a result, Germany has proceeded on a trajectory that makes it hard to imagine she will ever again be seduced by the militarism and nationalism that had formerly permeated her institutions and made her so vulnerable to Hitler's message of vengeance masquerading as justice.

Thus we see how Torrance's exposition of the meaning of forgiveness sheds a clarifying light on both the personal and political issues raised by the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt. When theology erroneously frames the event of reconciliation as conditional upon repentance, much confusion and mischief results. Persons and nations are 'thrown back upon themselves,' (to borrow another phrase from Torrance) to perform or demonstrate that somehow they deserve (merit) a gracious intervention. This approach also misunderstands the motivations of the ecumenical visitors, as if their actions were framed within the Medieval penitential schema whereby repentance becomes the necessary price of forgiveness. The divine agency in restoring relations is taken for granted and reconciliation becomes essentially a human product, with all the attendant dangers of self-righteousness on one hand and self-loathing and despair on the other. But in life-giving contrast, the extraordinary success of the Marshall Plan confirms Torrance's insistence that truly positive change, which includes taking responsibility for one's moral failure (repentance) is the result of mercy (forgiveness), rather than its cause.

Appendix I Declaration of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany
October 19, 1945

This text of the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* is frequently referred to as the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt

The Council of the Evangelical [Protestant] Church in Germany welcomes representatives of the World Council of Churches to its meeting on October 18-19, 1945, in Stuttgart. We are all the more thankful for this visit, as we know ourselves to be with our people in a great community of suffering, but also in a great solidarity of guilt. With great anguish we state: through us has endless suffering been brought to many peoples and countries. What we have often borne witness to before our congregations, we now declare in the name of the whole Church. We have for many years struggled in the name of Jesus Christ against the spirit which found its terrible expression in the National Socialist regime of tyranny, but we accuse ourselves for not witnessing more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously, and for not loving more ardently.

Now a new beginning can be made in our churches. Grounded on the Holy Scriptures, directed with all earnestness toward the only Lord of the Church, they are now proceeding to cleanse themselves from influences alien to the faith and to set themselves in order. Our hope is in the God of grace and mercy that he will use our churches as his instruments and will give them authority to proclaim his word and in obedience to his will to work creatively among ourselves and among our people. That in this new beginning we may become wholeheartedly united with the other churches of the ecumenical fellowship fills us with deep joy. We hope in God that through the common service of the churches the spirit of violence and revenge which again today is tending to become powerful may be brought under control in the whole world, and that the spirit of peace and love may gain the mastery, wherein alone tortured humanity can find healing. So in an hour in which the whole world needs a new beginning we pray: "Veni Creator Spiritus."

Bishop Wurm

Bishop Meiser

Superintendent Hahn

Bishop Dibelius

Professor Smend

Pastor Asmussen

Pastor Niemoeller

Landesoberkirchenrat Lilje

Superintendent Held

Pastor Niesel

Dr. Heinemann

<http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/protestant-churches/eur/752-ecg1945>

Representatives of the Allied churches led by W. A. Visser't Hooft included George Bell, Bishop of Chichester and Rev. Gordon Rupp of England, Samuel Cavert and S. C. Michelfelder of the USA, Pierre Maury of France, Hendrik Kraemer of Holland, Alphonse Koechlin of Switzerland and Stewart Herman, former pastor of the American Church in Berlin. (Herman, 140)