

The spy of God

It is a difficult task to talk about Kurt GERSTEIN in such a way that one might be able to understand him and the way he acted as his actions often do not follow our norms. So I decided not to start this attempt with any historical, philosophical or religious theses, but simply with those things I have experienced myself.

How did Kurt GERSTEIN come to Mönchengladbach, where I was born and are still living? In 1936 my brother Dieter went to a youth retreat of the Confessing Church in Zingst on the Baltic Sea. There Kurt GERSTEIN got to know him as an interesting and dear person. I do not know, when he actually called my parents because he wanted to meet them. My parents and he were both members of the Confessing Church and because of this Kurt Gerstein was invited to our house. While visiting my parents, Kurt GERSTEIN enjoyed very much to listen to my mother's statements because she radically refused the Nazi regime, so he repeatedly visited us again.

On account of the political situation it would have been necessary not to talk loud about such topics. The problem was that at home we usually had to talk very loud and clearly because my father was hard of hearing since the First World War and he even had to watch our mouth to be able to understand everything that was said.

So my parents finally decided that we children should be present when they talked to Kurt Gerstein about these difficult topics. By doing this they hoped to prevent the danger that we would have been listening at the door anyway and maybe babbling something out by accident. The dangerous subjects would have led Kurt Gerstein and my parents right away into a concentration camp. In the end we children really were very apprehensive of the obligation to keep our mouth shut. Besides that we children really liked Kurt GERSTEIN very much – we were allowed to call him "Vatti" and we said "du" to him, as if he belonged to the family. "Vatti" taught us many pranks and jokes. He took us seriously and liked talking to us.

One special evening I will never forget. It must have been in the year 1940, when I was 11 years old. Kurt GERSTEIN explained to my parents that he intended to volunteer to the SS. He wanted to find out about what kind of awful things were really happening in the east. He had heard rumours about mass shootings and inexpressible brutality in the so called "labour camps". My mother, who usually got on with him so well, became quite aggressive and told him, "You are married and you have children, you cannot do this." Kurt Gerstein, however, repeated over and over again, that he needed to find out what was really going on and if necessary make these crimes public to the rest of the world. And actually that is one of the reasons why his French biographer Pierre Joffroy called him „ the spy of God “.

At this point I would like to continue with some brief information about Kurt Gerstein's life in general and what had happened before I actually met him myself. He was born 11th August 1905 as the sixth of seven children of a respectable family in Münster. His father was a judge. Kurt was always a very unconventional child, but very intelligent. At school – he often liked to talk about school – he was known for numerous pranks. When his father moved to

Neuruppin (East Germany), Kurt became a Christian. Influenced by the sons of the Superintendent (a leading position of the protestant church in Germany) there, he joined the YMCA and the "Schülerbibelkreis" a school Bible group. After school he studied mining in Aachen, Marburg and Berlin. In Aachen he got to know the Dutchman Hermann Ubbink, who later played a very important role for him. In 1931 Kurt Gerstein finished his studies as an engineer. Then till November 1935 he was further educated in mining.

In May, 1933 he had already entered the NSDAP together with his father and brothers. However, the disappointment with Hitler's regime came fast, although Hitler had explained that he was for Christianity he decided to desolve the youth organizations of the churches in favour of the "Hitlerjugend", the youth organisation of the Nazis. So in 1934 the Confessing Church was founded. Mainly due to the work of the Swiss Karl BARTH and the German Martin NIEMÖLLER, the Confessing Church did not accept Hitler's picture on the altar. By then many people who felt deceived by Hitler like my parents as well as numerous Alt-Gladbacher Presbyter and priests joined the Confessing Church.

Coming back to my family I have to tell you that as a doctor in the First World War my father was automatically an officer and became a late member in the "Stahlhelm" organisation which was forbidden by the Nazis. Father and mother did not vote for the NSDAP, but for the German Nationalists. My parents belonged neither to the party of the Nazis nor to one of their organizations. My mother even regarded the "Mutterverdienstkreuz" she automatically received as a mother of four children as an insult.

However, back to Gerstein.

On the 30th January, 1935 he was assaulted. During a performance of the racist-pagan funeral play "Wittekind" in the town of Hagen, Kurt Gerstein protested vehemently against the anti-Christian statements of this modern teuton play. He was knocked down and lost two teeth. A police officer who had been at the theatre had seen nothing! It is true, this police officer was obviously one of these loyal people who made it possible for the Nazis to rule Germany.

In 1936 Gerstein used a general meeting of the association of German miners to distribute writings of the Confessing Church. He was arrested, expelled from the NSDAP and dismissed from his state employment as an engineer and inspector of mines. As a heir of a company in Düsseldorf he received a small pension. So he started to study medicine in Tübingen in 1936. A year later he married Elfriede Bensch, the sister of a good friend. Later bishop Otto Dibelius, one of the leading people of the Confessing Church held the wedding ceremony. Actually, that was the time we learned to know Kurt Gerstein, who visited my parents house in 1936 for the first time.

It was the time when Christians started to be more critical of the Nazis. For example, when euthanasia as the extermination of the so-called "life unworthy of existence" started, many Christians could no longer sympathize with the Nazis. In our home town Mönchengladbach, for example, Hephata, an institution that takes care of mentally handicapped people, was threatened to be closed. At that time my father was one of the members of the board of directors, so we were well informed. At the same time the Church still had much influence. After the pastoral of the bishop of Münster, Clemens August Graf of Galen, euthanasia was stopped, but unluckily only for some time.

We in Mönchengladbach usually experienced that the Catholic and Protestant Church had nothing in common and their members were often fighting each other. Nevertheless, the

Catholic pastoral was copied in the office of the Protestant Kirchmeister Dr. Walter Bay from the Schillerstrasse and my two brothers and I were given a list of addresses to which we had to bring the copies. Remembering this incident, I could probably say that this was the first ecumenical activity of the Hollweg's children.

Well, how did Gerstein experience the Nazi euthanasia?

At that time he lost an aunt who had been very close to him by an act of euthanasia in Hadamas. Because of this he was in a complete turmoil and did not know what to do. I do not know what he actually did, but he was arrested and sent to the concentration camp Welzheim near Stuttgart in July 1938 because of subversive activity against the state. Thanks to the good relations of his family the imprisonment lasted only a month.

The next incident I know of is that in September, 1938 Kurt Gerstein being abroad took the chance to write a letter to his uncle Robert in the USA. In this letter he informed his uncle that he had become a member of the board of directors of the state committee for Protestant youth instruction and education. Literally he wrote: „ We have politically affirmed the National Socialism. However, we now realize that we were completely deceived concerning our religious ideas. The National Socialism claims the entire control of the body and soul and wants to govern every human being. “ In his long letter he requested as a precaution whether his uncle would be able to give him shelter if necessary.

However, what did the churches do?

When the Second World War started, the Churches mainly supported the government. It was a tradition of the churches to bless the soldiers who were going to war and to pray for victory. The Confessing Church did this as well.

And what did Gerstein do?

Two years later, in 1941, Gerstein volunteered for the Waffen-SS (the armed branch of the SS). For most of his friends this was completely puzzling or even absolutely incomprehensible.

Nevertheless, in spite of his past Gerstein was accepted. He even made an unusually fast career in the SS, because he was successful in fighting against typhus and typhoid epidemics. Since June, 1941 he had been working for the department for technical hygiene of the Waffen-SS in Berlin the so-called “Hygieneinstitut” and soon was promoted to an “Obersturmbannführer”. His job allowed him to travel around. This gave him the chance to visit Mönchengladbach frequently because he wanted to exchange his ideas with my parents. We children knew about his disguise as a “Waffen-SS” officer and this made him even more interesting.

In January, 1942 he finally became the head of the department for technical hygiene.

The idea of “the final solution” reached him soon enough on the 8th June, 1942. That day Gerstein received the order to organize hydrocyanic acid for the concentration camp in Belzec by the assistant of Günter Eichmann an “Obersturmbannführer”. The order told him, “Those who can destroy vermin successfully, should be able to exterminate racial vermin as well. Healthy bodies should no longer be infected!”

Actually, Gerstein's report about his trip to the concentration camp Belzec is frightening. Gerstein at that point felt that he was really unable to understand what he was looking at. If you want to know about these cruel, inconceivable details that Gerstein actually saw with his own eyes make sure you read his report the “Gersteinbericht” of 1945, which I photocopied for you on demand. It is frightening but true that Gerstein and the university profes-

sor Pfannenstiel from Marburg who accompanied him on this trip were able to watch the gruesome preparations for those who had to die in the gas chamber. Both of them were able to look through an observation hole. So they actually saw how these poor people were suffocated by the gas. While watching Pfannenstiel remarked, "Sounds like in a synagogue." For me it is unbelievable that this man was allowed to teach students even after the war.

On August 20th, 1942, Gerstein travelling back from Warsaw by train met the secretary of the Swedish embassy in Berlin Baron von Otter. After the war this baron said, " Only by great effort Gerstein was moved to speak quietly ". In tears Gerstein described to the baron the act of unbelievable cruelty when Jews and other people were murdered by gas. He asked the baron urgently to pass on this information abroad. He asked above all for the bombardment of the entrance ways because new trains totally overcrowded with victims arrived daily at the camps.

Actually, do you know the movie „Der Stellvertreter“. It shows such freight trains. On their journey to the camps the trains are filled up completely with suffering people and on their return they are totally empty. These pictures are so cruel that I, after watching this film, have often seen them at night, while I was asleep.

Gerstein informed above all the people from the church, like Dibelius and Niemöller, who he visited in the concentration camp, the press attaché of the Swiss embassy in Berlin, D. Strasser, and Dr. Winter, the syndic of the Catholic bishop of Berlin. Besides that he also informed Ehlers and many of his friends. Nobody reacted. All of them kept their mouth shut.

In 1942 the Jews for most Germans were no longer people one had to think or speak about. 10 years of anti-Jewish barrage, three years of war and everyday needs had been enough. The Christian West had turned to a quiet spectator of the eradication of the Jews.

However, the Protestant Gerstein turns to the Catholic Church namely to the papal nuncio Cesare Orsenigo, the successor of Eugenio Pacelli who had become pope Pius XII in 1939. Pacelli who had already been in Berlin as a nuncio had come to a concordat with Hitler on the 20th July, 1933. Unfortunately, we do not really know what happened when Gerstein visited the office of the nuncio. Gerstein possessed by the idea to make the crimes public passed on his report. Once again he risked his own life. Why was an SS-officer visiting the office of the nuncio? Kurt Gerstein accepted the danger because he felt it was his duty to call public attention to the crimes of the Hitler regime.

Although the systematic eradication of millions people, which was already going on for some years, could not remain unknown, many Germans dismissed these reports as hostile propaganda. It was unbelievable. The Germans, people of such a great culture, could not be able to commit such crimes!

Gerstein instead - just like the leader of the Warsaw ghetto Adam Czerniakow – thinks again and again about pamphlets which the allies should drop over Germany, so that the German people must find out the truth about what was really going on. Gerstein thought nothing of an attempt to assassinate Hitler. He was afraid that this could have made Hitler a martyr. And then there would be enough loyal people left in the government to continue the cruel policy. Gerstein believed the misery could only be stopped by a victory of the allies over Germany. Gerstein being a Christian over all, hoped to be supported by the Church - catholic or protestant. But what did the Churches do? Bishop of Gahlen finds no word against the murderers of the Jews, whereas Domprobst Bernhard Lichtenberg

of the Berlin St. Hedwigs cathedral, a Catholic priest, changed Gahlen's speech in favour of the Jews. Consequently he died on the way to Dachau in 1943. You might not know, but in the meantime Lichtenberg has been canonized by the Catholic church. I am not sure what the Catholic Church wants to say by that.

Nevertheless, at that time there existed no official report on these murders. The allied and neutral spokesmen were quiet, although they had various accesses to reports about these crimes. In July, 1942 the Polish exile government in London announced that since the outbreak of war 700,000 Jews had actually been murdered. Why did no one react on such an announcement? Kurt Gerstein, however, tried to stop the cruelty. In 1943, he had a very important contact to his Dutch friend Ubbink, who visited him in Berlin in February. On this visit Gerstein with the help of Ubbink wrote his first Gerstein report in Dutch. Ubbink agreed to broadcast this report to England with the help of the Dutch resistance. The existence of this Dutch Gerstein report has been doubted for decades.

Well, how did I as a 13-year-old boy learn about this report?

During my summer holidays in 1943 I was a guest at the house of my father's brother, a pastor in Berlin. So I visited Kurt Gerstein in the department for technical hygiene. As my mother had taught me, I greeted the people at the office with " Good morning, Sirs. May I speak to Dr. Gerstein?". Immediately I was rebuked. I should have said "Heil Hitler" and "Obersturmbannführer Gerstein", they told me. I shrugged my shoulders and asked them why they minded me wishing them a good morning. People from the Rhineland like me always greeted others like that. And then "Vatti" entered. He knocked his heels smartly together and greeted with upraised hand, "Heil Hitler, Hans-Georg." Then he quickly took me with him into his office and said to me, "You should know what is going on here. Without adjustment one cannot achieve anything." Then he gave me several information for my parents among other things that a Dutch friend would take care of forwarding one of his reports to London. So I learned about the existence of this report.

Then he asked me when I planned to go home? I told him that I would go home in 3 days. Then he informed me that he was going to Krefeld in a fancy Mercedes in some days and he invited me if I did not want to join him. I was thrilled, of course. When he continued to pass on other secrets, I asked him whether he would be alone with his driver, who I knew was a member of the Confessing Church, too. He informed me that two further SS-officers would be with him. After a moment I pledged to be understood correctly, but that I was not sure if I could keep my mouth shut on such a long journey and that I was afraid to talk about something that would cause difficulties. So I would rather go back by train.

As always Vatti took me seriously and pressed me in no way. Three days later at the railway station my cousin helped me to get hold of a place where I could stand at the window. While she held my baggage, I could quickly climb through the window right away into the train. Few minutes later the loudspeaker shouted, " Hans-Georg Hollweg, we have got a message for you, please show yourself." Scared I waved my hand. Then I saw a SS-officer running up towards me and I nearly died of fear. He had probably seen my pale face and therefore patted my hand and told me that it was just "Vatti" who wanted to say goodbye. Now I recognized him as Vatti's driver. Then Vatti himself came and brought me a lunch package. I felt honoured because in spite of the stress of the situation he constantly was in, he still thought of me, a 13-year-old boy. This, however, was typical for him. Later when I told my mother about this incident and that I even had dismissed a ride in a Mercedes to make sure no one would be endangered, she was proud of her education.

Then to my surprise I found out that on account of Gerstein's reports my father even turned away from his Lutheran tradition of being loyal to the sovereign and started to help hiding Jews in 1942/43. These actions were supported by a small circle of the Presbytery - Walter Bay, Heinrich Rosenland, Karl Wiesner and both pastors Rehmann and Weiss in Mönchengladbach.

My father, for example, after some arrangements brought the fishmonger Horn, who was supposed to be very sick, to the border of the Netherlands. There Horn could pass the border, and was given a place to stay at.

Another time my father helped Mr Spiegel, many might still remember the later director of the Dresdner Bank. On a Sunday morning he came to my father and told him that he had received the order to contact the Gestapo the next day. Father gave him my bicycle and told him not to go back home again. He told him where he would meet him in Waldniel (a small town nearby Mönchengladbach) and said that he would follow Spiegel a little later by car. First Mr. Spiegel lived with Mr. and Mrs. Dr. Walter Bay in their boat cellar at the lake Hariksee near Waldniel. However, Spiegel had to leave this place after few months, because the Nazis were searching Walter Bay's brother-in-law, the later head of the department of culture, Hans Schmitz. So my father took Mr. Spiegel back to Mönchengladbach, where he found hiding places at the houses of 2 or 3 loyal parishioners. In our house at Blücherstrasse the food for Mr. Spiegel was collected. Then I had to bring the food to the respective family. Doing so I was always in agony. Yet my role model at that time was Vatti and that helped me to overcome my fears.

Bishop Wurm, who was informed by Gerstein, asked in a letter to the "Führer" in 1943 to spare the so-called privileged Nordic Aryan - these were the Jewish spouses of Nordic Aryans and their children. An executive of the Chancellery of the German "Reich", who was disposed to do something for the Church, destroyed the letter. Otherwise Bishop Wurm surely would have been arrested immediately.

Gerstein had contacts to the conspirators of the Kreisauer circle. However, he was not involved in the attempt to assassinate Hitler on the 20th July. As already said, he did not think that this would stop the government to murder all these people.

In 1944 he seldom visited us. In 1945 he did not come at all. On 26th March, 1945, he suddenly appeared in Tübingen, where his wife and his three children lived. However, he went further west with the intention to surrender himself to the Americans. Yet, he bumped into French troops. He was arrested and got a room at the hotel "Hotel zum Mohren" in Rottweil. From the local priest there he borrowed a small typewriter to write the other famous Gerstein report from Mai 1945. He wrote his report in several versions, in German, in French and in English. One of the copies he sent by post to my father. The letter arrived in July or August, 45. I remember taking it from the mailbox and running to my parents shouting, "Vatti is alive!" In the meantime, unfortunately, he had died.

From Rottweil he was brought to the military prison Cherche-Midi in Paris, where he was accused of war crimes. How he actually died no one can really say till today. The books of this military prison are closed for 100 years. We hoped that Arte, a French-German television channel, would receive a special authorization for their film on Gerstein, which was broadcasted on Good Friday this year. Unfortunately, it did not work out. In fact Vatti's friends still believe that he has committed suicide, whereas the majority of the Gerstein family, not his wife though, think that he has been murdered. It is tragic, but true that exactly two days before Gerstein died, Baron von Otter had tried to find him. On August 7th, 1945 Baron Langerfeld was ordered by the Swedish government to send a memorandum of Kurt

Gerstein to the Foreign office in London. Three years too late for the Jews, 13 days too late for Kurt Gerstein.

Now what happened to those in West Germany after the war that had been close to Gerstein? In the FRG there were different trials that declared Gerstein to be guilty of Nazi crimes. The pension which was paid to his wife was stopped. So his wife Elfriede was forced to fight untiringly for rehabilitation. After the war I visited her several times. Later her son Arnulf stayed with us because he had gained a summer job at Achter und Ebels a textile mill in Mönchengladbach, where he was able to make some money.

Why did nobody acknowledge Gerstein as an upright man, who had actually sacrificed his own life for other people?

It is difficult to understand that Gerstein was found guilty of Nazi crimes, although someone like Mr. Globke became one of the highest German official of the newly founded FRG, in spite of the fact that he had commented on the Nuremberg race laws and even had signed the Wannseekonferenz. Even other executives of the former government, professors, judges, doctors who had all been Nazis remained in their position or found a new one. For me personally, it is also unbelievable, that only about six months ago the newspapers announced that all these years the German Federal Government had known where the criminal Mr Eichmann had stayed.

Actually, I think that is one of the great credits of the local president of the district court, Mrs. Obst-Oellers, that a few years ago she decided to do research on the history of the courts in Mönchengladbach at the Nazi time and to publish her discoveries. It simply shows us for how long even the German government of West Germany tried to avoid to face the truth of their own history, which definitely had been determined by deeds of people like Eichmann. A person like Gerstein, who was difficult anyway, was inconvenient to any government – and therefore rather ignored by the FRG.

Now what was said about Gerstein after the war?

Leon Poliakov, a Jewish historian, said, "Our personal conviction can be described in two words: the German Gerstein was the only fair one in between pagans and his name should be held in honour by history because it is the name of a man with a noble conscience afflicted by doubts". Pastor Niemöller said about Gerstein, "He had extraordinary courage. He had more courage than his body could stand." In 1963 Rolf Hochhuth recognizes the personality of Kurt Gerstein in his play "Der Stellvertreter" (The Deputy). The Vatican felt that this play was an unjustified attack on the former pope's attitude towards the Holocaust. In 1967, Saul Friedländer published a book in French "Kurt Gerstein ou l'ambiguïté du bien", which a year later was published in German as well "Kurt Gerstein oder die Zwiespältigkeit des Guten". Besides, one should know that Friedländer's parents had been murdered in Auschwitz. On the run his parents had come from Prague to the South of France. There they hid their seven-year-old son in a cloister and changed his name. Then they fled to Switzerland. However, they were expelled and sent back to France right into the gas chamber. In 1968 Pierre Joffroy published a biography "The spy of God" and in 1995 an enlarged new edition "Kurt Gerstein – a SS-officer in the opposition".

I held my first talk on Kurt Gerstein in 1978. Literally I said, "Besides my parents there was no other person who has impressed me as a child and teenager in such a profound way." I also pointed out that I believed that Gerstein had committed suicide. I was attacked by different people and accused of spreading lies about Gerstein. Even the fraternity Gerstein had belonged to as a student did not look upon him as a person till some few years ago. In

1978 I asked what Kurt Gerstein really stood for.

I then continued with the following statements, which are still true for me.

- For Germans he is an inconvenient character to almost everybody.
- For foreign countries Gerstein is the one who accuses them of their passiveness and this includes the allies and those that were neutral, but in particular Pius XII.
- For the Jews Gerstein as a SS-officer cannot be a good person.

In 1993 I held the second talk on Kurt GERSTEIN and said that everything I had said in 1978 I could still confirm. Most of the things had even been historically proved by then. The big breakthrough however occurred not that long ago. In 1999. Thanks to the initiative of two Dutchmen, Henk Biersteker and Ben van Kaam, it could be proved that this first Gerstein report, which included the names and localization of the concentration camps in addition to the daily rate of people that were turned to gas in these camps, had been known to the Dutch exile government in London since 1943. One even had passed on the report to the governments in London, Washington, Copenhagen and Bern.

Then Biersteker and van Kaam wanted to find out where the Dutch opposition movement had had its meetings – a barn in Doesburg. This barn which fortunately had not been torn off yet was now taken apart. Finally under the tiles of the roof the original report was found. The explanation, why the allies kept quiet and in spite of their knowledge of the crimes remained inactive, are very different. No entrance ways to the concentration camps were bombed or pamphlets with information dropped, although pamphlets with other texts were dropped in large quantities by the allies. I remember well how a friend of mine and I collected these papers in 1943, when we occasionally went by bike to the fields nearby an airport behind Holt (an outskirt of Mönchengladbach). Naturally it was strictly forbidden to collect these papers.

At this point allow me to mention my friends Gerd and Helga Weinstein.

Helga Weinstein was born at Bismarkstrasse near Heinemann in 1924.

Well, Helga's parents who had fled from Berlin were able to come as far as to the South of France. Unluckily, at that time the Vichy government of that unoccupied part of France signed a contract with Himmler. It said that all Jews being more than 16- years-old were to be delivered to Germany. Thus 9-year-old Helga remained alone at an orphanage of the Quakers. A year later Laval, the leader of the Vichy government, asked Himmler via an now archived telegram to accept the Jewish children as well because he did not want to hold a potential of revenge in his country. Himmler corresponded with pleasure to this wish. In the orphanage 5 Jewish children were already sorted out, when a French farmer took these 5 children in. So Helga survived.

Can you imagine that for many years I could not understand that Helga could accept me as a friend – after all I am German? It was not easy for Gerd and Helga, but after many years they even visited us in Germany.

Not only France, but also other occupied areas delivered Jews to the Germans with the help of the local police. Even on the only English island which had been taken by the armed forces in 1940 the police delivered the local Jews to the Germans! Only Italy and Denmark found ways to prevent the extermination of their Jews.

Which result have I moved from my lifelong employment of these subjects? The Christian churches had poked an anti-Semitism for years, which fitted in the criminal ideas of the Nazis. Then there was an unrestrained greed which we must deplore today again. Most Jews were no poor people and money was required for the war. Furthermore Jews were

unpopular, because they had an elite in science and culture which fulfilled many Christians with great envy. In Europe it often took 40 and more years before people decided to recognize the failure and started to work on it.

Kurt GERSTEIN had to wait more than 5 decades, until the esteem to which he was entitled was given to him by the greater part of his family, by his fraternity and also by the Protestant church. Only two years ago bishop Huber, the highest representative of the Protestant church, explained that Kurt GERSTEIN can be mentioned next to Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a member of the resistance. And how long did it take till Bonhoeffer himself got officially recognized? Even the house of the German opposition in Berlin started to mention Kurt GERSTEIN only seven years ago.

Because of the stage play „Der Stellvertreter“(The Deputy) Gerstein was and is till this day an unaccepted person for the Vatican. A quite new excuse for the silence of the pope has been told approximately 2 years ago from now: the pope had stayed quiet for political reasons and doing so had been quite clever. After the Dutch cardinal de Jong from Utrecht wrote a pastoral against the destruction of the Jews in 1942, an arrest wave started immediately. Well, the Vatican even says that Hochhuth wrote his stage play in 1963 as a paid-up agent of the Russians to defame the pope.

On the 14th March of this year the German newspaper “Die Süddeutsche” took a stand on it and named many Nazis who had escaped their punishment only by the diplomatic help of Vatican. In the magazine “Der Spiegel” No. 22 from the 25th May,2007 Rolf Hochhuth answers the evil arguments of the Vatican, unfortunately, I cannot agree with the language he uses. You see how up to date the subject Kurt GERSTEIN even is today.

The Vatican still holds his archive about these critical years closed. Caused by the disagreement with the Nuntius in Israel at this year's Holocaust anniversary one has accepted to take care of the opening of the archives. I am looking forward to this moment.

Martin Luther as a young theologian has said many positive things about the Jews and stressed the fact that Jews and Christians have very much in common. Whereas when he was older he sinned against the Jews. In his last sermons he presented awful anti-Jewish theses. Five years ago Peter von der Osten-Sacken, professor for new testament and Christian-Jewish studies at the Humboldt university Berlin, describes these things in his book “Martin Luther and the Jews”. Luther's request, “Set the synagogues on fire!“ has been thoroughly followed by the Nazis. Obviously the Protestant Church still has to work on this.

It took a very long time until the Christian churches stopped accusing the Jews for murdering Christ. I once learned, “His blood comes above us and our children “ and Judas was the betrayer! Today we have learned that of Jesus, Maria and Joseph, were all Jews. A positive change in thinking has started for which I am grateful.

On Good Friday this year a film about Kurt GERSTEIN was broadcasted by Arte, a French-German television channel. For me the most important passage of the film is when the statements of Saul FRIEDLÄNDER are presented.

As the best expert of the Holocaust history he received the “price of the book fair in Leipzig“ this year. Just a week ago he likewise received the “peace price of the book trade”. However, Friedländer had already written a book about Kurt GERSTEIN in 1967. So in the film he says that when he started to work on Gerstein he had had his doubts, but now modern research has proved clearly that Kurt Gerstein was an absolutely straight and honest

character, so any doubt about his integrity has been wiped off.

From Jewish side no recognition has occurred yet. Gerstein is accused of delivering the gas to the chambers. I understand that this is an absolutely serious argument for every Jew. But one must understand that Gerstein had to join the Nazis to a certain degree to be able to inform the world about the cruel truth. He has tried several times his best to destroy gas deliveries. These were, unfortunately, only tiny amounts. He alone could not stop the Holocaust, therefore, he believed that Germany had to lose the war. It is dreadful that the western Christian world did actually nothing to stop the holocaust although Gerstein and also others announced these crimes. I do not give up hope that also the Jewish circles recognize that Kurt GERSTEIN is one of the few people who was ready to make sacrifices for them. He was a real Christian. I have never stopped admiring him.

My earlier talks on Gerstein approx. 30 and 15 years ago I both finished with the question,, Would we be ready to venture our honour, family and life for a suppressed, suffering next one? Gerstein did it! “

I would like to finish with a poem of a relative of mine, Ulrike Sasse-Voswinckel from Soest, who in 2001 wrote a book about the Jewish life in Soest till 1942. In 1942 the newspaper declared Soest as Jew-pure.

Stones
On
Jewish Graves

carrier
of thoughts
wishes
memories

stones of prayers
forever

warmed
in hands
laid down
on tombs

stones of thoughts
we have to carry
lifelong

no place
on earth
to put them aside