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# YOUNG CHRISTIANS IN NORWAY, NATIONAL SOCIALISM, AND THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF 1940-1945

## ABSTRACT

The German occupation of Norway during the Second World War caused unprecedented problems for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway and other Christian denominations. The subordination of the church to the *de facto* Nazi state eventually led its bishops and most of its pastors to sever their ties to the government while remaining in their ministries. Churchmen and scholars have explored dimensions of this challenging episode in Norwegian church history, but little has been published about the plight of most of the para-church organizations. This article explores crucial dimensions of the ministry of the Norwegian Christian Student Association. Particular attention is paid to how both its pietistic heritage and tradition of social ministry continued to nurture its members and to how the exigencies of living under an oppressive regime compelled the leadership as well as the members of the organization to shift certain emphases in their proclamation and ministry.

The predicament of the Church of Norway during the occupation of the country by German forces beginning in April 1940 and with the co-operation of the puppet government of Vidkun Quisling from 1942 until 1945 has long been the subject of scholarly and semi-popular inquiry. Publications about aspects of the general theme began to appear shortly after the end of the Second World War with Hartvig C. Christie's *Den norske kirke i kamp*,<sup>1</sup> Ingvald B. Carlsen's *Kirkefronten i Norge under okkupasjonen 1940-1045*,<sup>2</sup> and Ludwig Schübeler's *Kirkekampen slik som jeg så den*.<sup>3</sup>

1 Hartvig C. Christie, *Den norske kirke i kamp* (Oslo: Land og Kirke, 1945).

2 Ingvald B. Carlsen, *Kirkefronten i Norge under okkupasjonen 1940-1045* (Oslo: H. Aschehoug & Co., 1945).

3 Ludwig Schübeler, *Kirkekampen slik som jeg så den* (Oslo: Lutherstiftelsens Forlag, 1946).

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Renewed interest in the theological dimensions of the *kirkekamp*, or struggle of the church, was manifested during the 1970s, especially in Torleiv Austad's masterly study of pivotal confessional aspects, *Kirkens Grunn. Analyse av en kirkelig bekjennelse fra okkupasjonstiden 1940-1945*.<sup>4</sup> More recently, scholars on both sides of the Atlantic have reconsidered the *kirkekamp* its broader implications. The Swedish church historian Ragnar Norrman published his *Quislingkyrkan. Nasjonal Samlings kyrkopolitik 1940-1945* in 1998,<sup>5</sup> Pål A. Berg his *Kirke i krig. Den norske kirke under 2. verdenskrig* the following year,<sup>6</sup> and in 2005 Austad's highly useful edition of pertinent documents appeared under the title *Kirkelig motstand*.<sup>7</sup> Awaited is Arne Hassing's extensive general history of the subject.

These works have shed countless photons of light on central matters of the struggle, focusing chiefly on the confrontation between the bishops and other clergymen of the Church of Norway on the one hand and the Quisling administration on the other. Still unilluminated in the published scholarly literature, however, are the role of many other dimensions of Christian life in Norway during the Nazi occupation. Among these are the numerous parachurch organizations, both Lutheran and non-Lutheran, which responded to their nation's travail in a variety of ways. They claimed the allegiance of and were central to the spiritual life of large numbers of adherents of the state church and smaller numbers outside it. No less than the Church of Norway as an organizational ecclesiastical entity, they were compelled to decide whether they were ultimately responsible to God or a government which they believed was illegitimate and an enormous offense to fundamental Christian principles.

Most of what has been published about the predicament of the Norwegian churches in the war has been in Norwegian, with a smaller amount in other Scandinavian languages, especially when one considers books and journal articles of a scholarly nature. Exceptions to this generalisation include *inter alia* articles by Hassing. It thus seems particularly germane to make more aspects of the general topic accessible to readers internationally who cannot read those languages. In the present article I shall take initial steps towards filling one especially noteworthy *lacuna* in the scholarly literature by considering

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4 Torleiv Austad, *Kirkens Grunn. Analyse av en kirkelig bekjennelse fra okkupasjonstiden 1940-1945* (Oslo: Luther, 1974).

5 Ragnar Norrman, *Quislingkyrkan. Nasjonal Samlings kyrkopolitik 1940-1945* (Skellefteå: Norma, 1998).

6 Pål A. Berg, *Kirke i krig. Den norske kirke under 2. verdenskrig* (n.p.: Genesis Forlag, 1999). This volume appears to have been privately published by its author.

7 Torleiv Austad, *Kirkelig motstand. Dokumenter fra den norske kirkekamp under okkupasjonen 1940-45 med innledninger og kommentarer* (Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlag, 2005).

aspects of the history of the Norwegian Christian Student and School Youth Organisation, or *Norges Kristelige Student- og Skoleungdomslag* (NKSS). This large para-church body is particularly germane to the history of the *kirkekamp*, because it had a fairly comprehensive network of local affiliates across much of Norway and by 1940 encompassed many thousands of members, a considerable number of whom joined the active resistance movement. In this article I shall describe the origins and pre-war spiritual and ethical emphases of the NKSS and how some of its members interpreted the rise of the Third Reich during the 1930s, then consider several aspects of the predicament into which the occupation of Norway thrust it, how it coped with this unprecedented situation, and how its proclamation of the Gospel was shaped by the circumstances in which both the leadership and members in general found themselves.

## 1. THE ORIGINS AND IDENTITY OF THE NKSS

The formation and identity of the NKSS during a period of rapid social transformation and theological strife in Norwegian Christianity influenced the shape of its activities and, indirectly, the way it responded to the German occupation of Norway. It is therefore essential to consider the birth and theological profile of the organization. In brief, the NKSS was one of several essentially Lutheran Christian student and youth associations which were founded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when approximately 97 or 98 percent of the population were nominal members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, which the constitution of 1814 had defined as the “official religion of the state”, and differed significantly from its predecessors. The first of these, the Student Missionary Union (*Studenternes Missionsforening*), was established in 1881. It was soon followed by the Women Students’ Christian Union (*Kvinnelige Studenters Kristelige Forbund*) and the Academic Volunteers’ Mission Union (*Akademiske Frivilliges Missionsforbund*). These and other organizations coalesced in 1899 to form the Norwegian Christian Student Union (*Norske Studenters kristelige Forbund*), which long remained a relatively large body, though almost entirely in Kristiania (after 1924 Oslo).

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, and continuing through the first three decades of the twentieth, Norwegian Lutheranism experienced a period of almost unbroken and at times bitter theological strife as radical Biblical criticism and other modernist impulses vied with the denomination’s confessional heritage as well as both lay and clerical pietism in what is generally known as the *kirkestrid* (i.e. church struggle). Most of the details of this tumultuous chapter of Norwegian ecclesiastical history are of little relevance to the origins and identity of the NKSS. However, the establishment in 1907 of the Independent Faculty of Theology (*Menighetsfakultet*) as a conservative

counterweight to liberal theological impulses at the University of Kristiania was crucial. It soon attracted considerable numbers of pietistic students preparing for ministry in the Church of Norway. Many expressed dissatisfaction with the liberalism of the Norwegian Christian Student Association, not least the openness of some of its leaders, such as Kristian Schjelderup, to the study of other religions, and Social Gospel emphases, in contrast to what they believed should be individual spiritual edification. In tandem with like-minded students from the other Nordic countries, they began in 1921 to hold annual "Evangelical Summer Meetings for Students". These drew increasingly larger numbers of theologically conservative participants.<sup>8</sup>

The NKSS was inspired in part by this aestival development. Its *primus motor* was Gunvald Kvarstein, a student at the Independent Faculty of Theology, who became dissatisfied with the Christian Student Union in the early 1920s. He and other students from both the Independent Faculty of Theology and the University of Kristiania established the NKSS in 1924.<sup>9</sup>

From the outset, therefore, an organic linkage between the confessionally conservative Independent Faculty of Theology and the new organization was manifest. This did not, however, comprehensively shape the theological profile of the NKSS. Its constitution required only that members affirm the Apostles' Creed, a demand which, at least in theory, allowed non-Lutherans to join its affiliates. Although the overwhelming majority of its members always appear to have belonged to the state Lutheran Church or the Lutheran Free Church, it was, at least in theory and in practice on a small scale, an ecumenical Christian body. Such distinctively Lutheran documents as the Augsburg Confession were not part of the essence of the NKSS. This did not, however, appear to have significantly diminished its Lutheran profile or influence the way in which it responded to interrelated political and ecclesiastical developments in the Third Reich, the occupation of Norway, or the resistance movement, or the resistance movement there.

Probably owing to the rapid increase in the numbers of both students at the country's one general university and other tertiary institutions and pupils at its secondary schools during the interwar period as well as to the spiritual vibrancy of the NKSS, the membership of the new organization grew quite rapidly. By February 1939, it had no fewer than ninety-three local chapters spread across most of Norway. More than half of these affiliates encompassed exclusively

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8 Georg Johnsen, "Evangeliet i sentrum," *Lagsbevegelsen gjennorm 40 år* (Oslo: Credo Forlag, 1964), p. 26; Ole Hallsby, "Vårt program," *Student og Kristen. Jubileumsskrift* (Oslo: Komiteen for De nordiske Student- or Gymnasiastermøter på bibelsk grunn, 1931), p. 8.

9 Gunvald Kvarstein, "Om dannelsen av Norges kristelige Studentlag", NKSS archives, Oslo.

boys and girls enrolled at secondary schools, while those in Trondheim and Bergen included both such members and tertiary students.<sup>10</sup> In addition to unremunerated student leaders, NKSS employed a very small professional staff to coordinate its activities. One of these was the publication of its monthly periodical, *Credo*, the first issue of which appeared in 1933. Notably, among the most prominent of the pastors who served in these capacities, including the editorship of *Credo*, was Carl Fredrik Wisløff, a staunchly confessional Lutheran who remained a central voice of theological conservatism for much of the twentieth century.

## 2. AN EVOLVING TRADITION OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONCERNS

Despite the seemingly apolitical and almost purely spiritual profile of the NKSS in its early years, there is considerable evidence, especially in its publications, that many of its leaders were keenly conscious of the political and economic crises affecting Norway and other European countries during the 1930s. This was not an anomaly; at that time the Norwegian press gave the Third Reich considerable coverage. Much of this was critical, especially in the newspapers which supported the Labor Party, but before the mid-1930s there was also public expressions of respect for certain contemporary economic achievements in Germany. This was fully in accordance with the mixed perceptions of the Third Reich in many other countries. The Church of Norway did not stand isolated from such opinion. As Stein Uglevik Larsen observed retrospectively in his commentary about this, *some* Norwegian churchmen reacted critically to persecution of Jews and other groups as well as other developments in Germany and sought to call attention to the dangers they posed to both domestic harmony and international security, although in his view the response was generally weak.<sup>11</sup>

The NKSS, at least in its university-level membership and its leadership, arguably represented one of the most literate strata of Norwegian society, and in its publications there is abundant evidence of concern about domestic social, economic, and political concerns as well as the course of events in the Third Reich, not least as they affected the life and spiritual tenor of the German churches. One study of the thematic content of its publications during the 1930s calculated that slightly less than 50 percent of the articles in *Credo* dealt with theological topics, while some 25 related to the activities of the

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10 "Fra lag til lag," *Credo*, no. 5 (June 1939), p. 11.

11 Stein Uglevik Larsen, "Med korset mot hammeren. Nazistenes utfordring til Den norske krike", in Ingunn Montgomery and Stein Ugelvik Larsen (eds.), *Kirken krisen og krigen* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1982), pp. 279, 292.

NKSS. All told, approximately 26 percent related to secular concerns, many of which were in the broadly defined area of social ethics, and among these articles the Third Reich received a crescendo of attention.<sup>12</sup>

As early as 1934 articles of the secular type began to appear in the pages of *Credo*. Late that year Pastor Egil Brekke, in an essay titled “Revolusjon”, challenged young Norwegians to ponder anew the relationship of their faith to their society: “It should be a Christian duty for everyone to take part in the eradication of material need and to work for the establishment of a good and just social order.” It seemed to him that Christians in Norway had too often shirked their duty in this regard and allowed the political Left to take the initiative. Brekke found it lamentable that as a consequence of this inaction in much of Norwegian society “the church represented the bastion of conservatism and reaction.” He admonished readers to act promptly before it was too late: “Let us wake up to social responsibility and apply our Christian faith in practical action.”<sup>13</sup>

To be sure, there is evidence of appreciation of certain seemingly moral emphases in the Third Reich during the first half of the 1930s in the NKSS, some of it in the pages of *Credo*. Hans Høivik, for example, contributed to it an article in September 1934 (*i.e.* a year and a half after the Nazi seizure of power) in which he thought that anti-pornographic measures in Germany could offer a model for emulation in Norway. By that time members of the NKSS had taken a stance against what they perceived as an unacceptable increase in the amount of sexually explicit material published in their homeland as modernist trends made their influence felt in contemporary literature. That Høivik could laud steps taken in Germany to stem a corresponding (and indeed much greater) manifestation of pornography may have surprised his readers less than his suggestion that Christians in Norway, where anti-Catholic sentiments still ran strong in pietistic Lutheran and free church circles, could learn from the rigor with which Roman Catholics in the United States were confronting the same challenge. He urged his compatriots metaphorically to use a broom to sweep the national media clean of what many regarded as ethically objectionable content.<sup>14</sup>

It cannot be overemphasized, however, that this sentiment did not endure as a *Leitmotif* in the publications of the NKSS. By the middle of the 1930s its members were hearing and reading warnings about the incompatibility of their Christian faith with the Nazi emphasis on *Germanentum*. Early in 1935 *Credo* carried an article by a semi-anonymous author, “J.N.,” about precisely

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12 Aasta Holm, “The Norwegian Christian Student Association”, M.A. thesis, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, 1985, p. 35.

13 Egil Brekke, “Revolusjon”, *Credo*, no. 6 (December 1934), p. 6.

14 Hans Høivik, “Boken som burde dø”, *Credo*, no. 2 (September 1934), p. 3.

this. He quoted critically a senior German clergyman who had declared that “in faith National Socialism fought to victory and thereby given a strong example of the power of faith”. This pro-Nazi cleric had explicitly lauded the *Führer* for not abandoning hope at times when people with less confidence in their movements may have given up and declared that “this faith demands that one profess belief in Germany and the *Führer*.” J.N. was categorically unimpressed. Underscoring his case against what he perceived as dangerous ethnic nationalism as an ostensible *Ersatz* for Christianity, he cited a volume titled *Das ABC des Deutschen Heiden*: “Wir glauben an das heilige Blut”, which of course, in Nazi racial ideology, meant not the blood of Jesus Christ but that of the supposedly pure German *Volk*. The author had presented faith (*Glaube*) as a belief in and unswerving commitment to “ein einiges, freies, heiliges Deutschland unter dem Hakenkreuz”. In his detailed rejection of this anti-Christian ideology, “J.N.” called attention to the *Bekennende Kirche*, or Confessing Church, which had been founded by a variety of German Protestants in 1934 as a response to what they regarded as the unacceptable subordination of the Evangelical Church in Germany to Nazi ideology. The need for such a movement had become especially acute after the pro-Nazi “German Christians” gained the upper hand in the leadership of the Evangelical Church in Germany in 1933.<sup>15</sup> He explained that members of the new group did not reject their ethnic heritage but had refused to transform it into an idol. But the existence of this prophetic voice within German Protestantism did not prevent “J.N.” from generalizing that, regrettably, the German *Volk* had become trapped in a non-Christian mentality according to which their highest obligation was to the *Reich*.<sup>16</sup>

Later the same year another ordained leader of the NKSS, *Credo* editor Georg Johnsen, echoed a related sentiment in an editorial titled “På vei mot

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15 The historiography of the “German Christians” and the Confessing Church is extensive. Among the most useful books pertaining thereto are Klaus Scholder, *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich*, I, *Vorgeschichte und Zeit der Illusionen 1918-1934* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Ullstein, 1977); Klaus Scholder, *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich*, II, *Das Jahr der Ernüchterung 1934. Barmen und Rom* (Berlin: Wolf. Jobst Siedler Verlag, 1985); Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Gerhard Besier, et al. (eds.), *Zwischen “nationaler Revolution” und militärischen Aggression. Transformationen in Kirche und Gesellschaft während der konsolidierten NS-Gewaltherrschaft (1934-1039)* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2001); Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979); Hans-Joachim Sonne, *Die politische Theologie der Deutschen Christen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982); and Wolfgang Stegemann (ed.), *Kirche und Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1990).

16 J.N., “En ny tid i et gammelt folk”, *Credo*, no. 2 (March 1935), p. 6.

hedenskapet”, in which he cautioned that the anti-Christian ethnic religion of Nazism had become perceptible in Norway, namely among right-wing extremists. He quoted a brief bit of doggerel gleaned from the Norwegian Nazi periodical *Ragnarokk*:

Bland ei blod med treller,  
 Bryt ei tro med feller,  
 Dyrk de gamle guder.

(Do not mix your blood with slaves,  
 Do not desert comrades,  
 Cultivate the old gods.)

This obviously hearkened back to pre-Christian Old Norse religion. In a second example, Johnsen cited an editorial in *Fronten*, a periodical whose editors had paraded their enthusiasm for the Third Reich. One of them had stressed that the Nazi racialist *Weltanschauung* was incompatible with the moral precepts of Jesus Christ and declared flatly: “We cannot live with the weak knees of the Nazarene. Pure blood carries divine purity, clearly and beautifully, in its red stream through the eternal life of the race.” He had identified himself and his followers as “pagans” and explained that they did not pray to God at all, because they were “too proud” to do so, because “prayer offends the divine spark in our soul.” Johnsen, of course, rejected this categorically and stated that “there is no salvation in anyone but Christ.”<sup>17</sup>

The NKSS became tangentially involved in the Second World War even before the invasion of Norway in April 1940. Four months earlier, Høivik interviewed a student from the Independent Faculty of Theology, Hans Christian Mamen, who was about to leave for Finland to work in the Red Cross during what would become known as the “Winter War” of 1939-1940. In this interview, which was published in *Credo* under the title “De første av Lagets studenter drar til Finnland”, Mamen declared candidly his cognizance that he might die there, *i.e.* that his Red Cross uniform could not guarantee his safety. Undeterred, however, this future pastor expressed his conviction that it was his Christian obligation to alleviate suffering by victims of war, regardless of their nationality or their civilian or military status. Clearly impressed by Mamen’s courage and willingness to risk his life for his faith, Høivik encouraged other Norwegians to consider doing likewise.<sup>18</sup>

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17 George Johnsen, “På vei mot hedenskapet”, *Credo*, no. 5 (October 1935), p. 3.

18 Hans Høivik, “De første av Lagets studenter drar til Finnland”, *Credo*, no. 1 (January 1940), p. 4.



### 3. ADAPTING TO THE INVASION OF 1940

It was as a vibrant, growing, and reasonably financially solid organization that the NKSS experienced the initial phase of the occupation and ensuing Quisling regime. Owing to increases in membership, the proliferation of chapters, and monetary support from the state, it had been able to give serious consideration literally on the eve of the invasion to enhance its salaried staff by hiring a third secretary.<sup>19</sup>

Like most other Norwegians, the leaders of the NKSS were taken by surprise when German forces invaded and, overcoming relatively weak resistance, installed a puppet government led by the *Nasjonal Samling*, or Norwegian Nazi party. Challenges of various kinds immediately confronted the NKSS leadership. Secretary Olav Egeland rushed back to Oslo on the day of the invasion; he and his minuscule staff were soon inundated with telephone calls from *inter alia* parents inquiring about their children in the capital and members who sought help in fleeing the country.<sup>20</sup> That Norway had become a *de facto* military police state in which private citizens had few rights and little power of resistance to authority soon became apparent, and this too had repercussions for the NKSS. During the summer of 1940 its National Council adopted a policy requesting its members to avoid unnecessarily provoking civil authorities and thereby risking a clampdown on the activities of the organization while remaining faithful to the Gospel and continuing to nurture their personal faith and Christian fellowship.<sup>21</sup> Such caution undoubtedly seemed only prudent and pragmatic at the time, even though it was known that some members of the NKSS had already become active in the armed resistance movement which was training in mountainous areas in the hope of contributing to an eventual Allied counter-invasion of Norway. There is no compelling reason to speculate that the policy was a fruit of the traditional Lutheran teaching of the “two kingdoms” in which church and state generally refrained in interfering with each other’s affairs.

At any rate, within weeks of the invasion it became apparent that owing to restrictions on travel, the cessation of financial support from the state, and other factors the activities of the NKSS would be curtailed. Austerity measures were adopted within a few weeks. The National Council of the NKSS held a special meeting before the end of April. Egeland accepted a 50 percent reduction in his salary, and it was decided to postpone the hiring of an additional pastor for the central staff. A move to smaller premises in Oslo was also approved. It was decided to continue to publish *Credo*, the vibrant magazine which served

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19 NKSS Archives, Oslo, minutes of the NKSS National Council, 8 April 1940.

20 Interview with Olav Egeland, Oslo, 22 March 1983.

21 NKSS Archives, minutes of the NKSS National Council, 19 August 1940.

as a chief means of communication between the leadership and the individual members of the NKSS, but it was drastically reduced to four pages.<sup>22</sup>

One short-term consequence of this was the cancellation of the eleven summer camps that had been planned for 1940. The temporary ending of this popular tradition was not welcomed by the membership. Egeland, who spent part of the spring and summer of 1940 traveling from town to town on a bicycle in his leadership capacity, found it necessary to inform would-be participants that the camps simply would not be held. In response to popular demand, however, and because the financial situation of the NKSS was less dire than initially feared, three of the eleven were arranged in 1940. These annual gatherings were continued for the next three years and allowed increasing numbers of young Norwegians to assemble to discuss their faith, hear speakers, and enjoy Christian fellowship. Only about 500 participated in 1940, but this rose to 1,300 the following year, 1,740 in 1942, and more than 2,300 in 1943.<sup>23</sup> The government then ordered the NKSS to stop arranging these annual convocations because, in Egeland's words, they competed against the Nazi youth camps for the attention of the nation's youth.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4. THE PRINTED WORD OF THE NKSS

In occupied Norway, communication between the NKSS chapters and between them and the central headquarters remained no less crucial than it had been before the invasion. However, because of state control of the major media and, during the spring of 1940 the suspension of postal services, the NKSS had to rely more than ever on its own means of communication to continue to function.

The magazine *Credo*, which was meant primarily for university students, continued to be published in a reduced format. Its first post-invasion issue featured an article based on the first verse of John 14, in which Jesus, at the Last Supper, implored his disciples, "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me." Its author, Olav Myklebust, urged members to retain hope even though they were living in the worst situation of their lives. He encouraged them to continue to read their Bibles and contribute to each other's faith through Christian fellowship as well as provide support for the needy in their suffering country.<sup>25</sup> The same brief issue of *Credo* carried an editorial by Egeland who also stressed also these matters and suggested

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22 NKSS Archives, minutes of the NKSS National Council, 29 April 1940.

23 Holm, "The Norwegian Christian Student Association", p. 104.

24 Interview with Olav Egeland, Oslo, 22 March 1983.

25 Olav G. Myklebust, "Eders hjerte forferdes ikke!" *Credo*, no. 4 (May 1940), pp. 1-2.

that repentance was always current, even when people were enduring unjust hardship and were tempted to engage in Pharisaic behaviour by blaming others for their tribulations.<sup>26</sup>

For approximately two and a half years after the occupation began, *Credo* was published just as frequently as it had been before the war. Moreover, the reduction to a mere four pages proved to be only a temporary measure. The importance of this independent magazine to Norwegian students is underscored by the fact that subscriptions rose by approximately 30 per cent during this time. However, at the end of 1942 the government announced that its publication would be terminated, ostensibly because of a shortage of paper. This was communicated to readers in the December issue of that year.<sup>27</sup>

The suppression of *Credo* did not mark the end of the NKSS's war-time publishing programme. The organisation had a second periodical, *Bli med* (*i.e.* Come Along), which was aimed at younger readers. After *Credo* was halted, *Bli med* was sent to all subscribers of the former magazine, and in its pages was section carrying articles and other material for university-level readers. This *modus operandi* allowed the NKSS to maintain the main thrust of this part of its publishing programme for the duration of the war, *i.e.* until the renaissance of *Credo*.<sup>28</sup>

Vocal music had been a pillar of NKSS fellowship virtually since its inception, and the centrality of this dimension of organised religious life appears to have been accentuated during the occupation. The NKSS had first published a book of popular Christian songs for various occasions in the mid-1930s. In January 1942 its National Council elected to print and distribute 5,000 copies of it, a considerable number given the difficulty which many organisations were experiencing in securing paper during the war.<sup>29</sup> So popular was this volume that a year and a half later the National Council approved the publication of an enhanced edition of it containing some 400 songs.<sup>30</sup>

## 5. A SUBDUED OR TRUNCATED GOSPEL?

As indicated above, the conservative theological stance of the NKSS had not prevented it from placing part of its emphasis on social ethics during the 1920s and 1930s, not least as reflected in the content of *Credo* and other publications. Of necessity, the German occupation and ensuing authoritarian nature of the Quisling puppet government compelled the organisation to

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26 Olav Egeland, "Kjære venner i bygd og by", *Credo*, no. 4 (May 1940), p. 3.

27 Hans Høivik, "Credo er 10 år", *Credo*, no. 9 (December 1942), p. 6.

28 Interview with Olav Egeland, Oslo, 22 March 1983.

29 NKSS Archives, minutes of the NKSS National Council, 12 January 1942.

30 NKSS Archives, minutes of the NKSS National Council, 31 August 1943.

reduce this aspect of its ministry to a considerable extent. For the most part, the proclamation of the NKSS was on personal spirituality within the context of supportive Christian fellowship for the duration of the war.

This was evident in several facets of the organisation's work. One was the thematic spiritual content of the summer camps and other meetings. These gatherings in all likelihood attracted the attention of the government well before they were halted, as did various other assemblies of moderate size. It seems entirely plausible that the organisers therefore guided the preaching and Bible studies in ways that avoided anything that could be construed as challenges to the governing authorities. One parish pastor, Ludwig Schübeler, who, despite his utterly German name, was in the Church of Norway, preached at a variety of gatherings and described the spiritual focus in a book which he wrote about the *kirkekamp* shortly after the restoration of peace. He wrote in *Credo* that although the students at the camps continued to have intellectual concerns, matters of the head tended to be subordinated to those of the heart, *i.e.* that their personal "responses to God in soul and mind" were at the forefront. Schübeler further thought that for the most part the students at the camps were perforce taking life very seriously.<sup>31</sup>

The inescapable question of pain in individuals' Christian lives also came to the fore as the NKSS related its war-time ministry to the plight of its members. This was featured as a theme at *inter alia* the 1941 summer camps. Marie Monsen, a missionary whose name was widely recognised in Norwegian Lutheran circles, addressed participants on this topic. She linked the issue to the vision of hope, including the vision that the tribulations endured during the war would lead to greater insights into the love of God, stimulate more Christians to pray frequently, and rejoice in the Lord. It was suggested by a leader of the NKSS who wrote in *Credo* about the camps that year that they would give members who attended further understanding of their faith and its implications for serving humanity in "everyday Christian life".<sup>32</sup>

Concomitantly, in order to prevent the NKSS central leadership (and, for that matter, its local members) from risking their freedom and possibly jeopardising the existence of the organisation, it was necessary to avoid open discussion of political and, of course, military matters. These as well as many cultural issues were thus toned down or simply not mentioned during the occupation. Egeland stressed this in his retrospective comments about how the NKSS actually functioned. He also underscored, however, that although they generally followed the previously mentioned policy of not provoking the

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31 Ludwig Schübeler, "Refleksjoner fra prekestolen", *Credo*, no. 5 (June 1941), pp. 6-7.

32 Hans Høivik, *et al.*, "Fra sommerens stevner i jubileumsåret", *Credo*, no. 9 (September 1941), p. 6.

authorities, they at times engaged in subterfuge to facilitate matters for pastors and lay members alike. Egeland's possession of a *Reiseschein*, or licence to travel with few restrictions within Norway, proved useful in this respect. Among the acts in which he and other leaders of the NKSS engaged was serving as couriers to bring financial support to pastors who had severed their ties to the government, and thus no longer received salaries, after 1942.<sup>33</sup>

The minds of young Norwegian Christians, like those of their compatriots generally, were fired by nationalist feelings during the German occupation. It was virtually inevitable that these sentiments became intertwined with their hostility to what members of the NKSS regarded as unjust, oppressive, and unchristian policies of the Quisling government and sometimes came to expression in the publications of the organisation. Seven months after the invasion, a major article in *Credo* dealt with the relationship of patriotism and Christian faith. It included quotations from the national anthem and a poem by the eminent Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen. The author of the essay, titled "Fedreav og folkeansvar" (National Heritage and Popular Responsibility), Håkon Flottorp, emphasised the primacy of God's sovereignty, and that this should be seen not only as a present reality but also one linked to hope for the future. He expressed his conviction that an awareness of this could spur Christians to pray fervently and care for their fellow citizens with great devotion in times of acute need.<sup>34</sup>

In the minds of some NKSS members, responses to war-time woes were a conscious continuation of the pre-war emphasis on social concerns discussed above. This was broached by a local leader in Oslo in an essay which *Credo* carried in 1941. She wrote that the tribulations then being experienced by Norwegians could strengthen the bonds which united the people to each other and to their country in general. This young woman recalled that prior to the war students at what was then Norway's only university had evinced an appreciable amount of social concern and that this was now coming to expression in practical ministry to compatriots who were coping with various kinds of problems.<sup>35</sup>

In individual chapters of the NKSS, members discussed specifically what they could do to alleviate suffering during the national crisis. Occasionally their suggestions found their way into print. In the Norwegian capital, for instance, the youth wrote that while their resources were limited, at least they could do volunteer work of various kinds and sell stickers for an organisation which provided relief to needy families. These young Norwegians also stressed their obligation to pray regularly, not least for the salvation of Norway "from the

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33 Interview with Olav Egeland, Oslo, 22 March 1983.

34 Håkon Flottorp, "Fedreav og folkeansvar", *Credo*, no. 5 (November 1940), p. 1.

35 Rigmor Dahl, "Bønnen for vårt folk", *Credo*, no. 1 (February 1941), p. 2.

tribulation which has been inflicted on it". In a rare instance of defiance which probably would have caused a strong reaction from the government had it appeared in a prominent publication rather than in a local, hand-written one, they quoted at length a poem about German occupation forces which had ostensibly arrived as allies but then devastated several towns in Norway.<sup>36</sup>

That patriotic sentiments could run ahead of personal faith was a reality which some members of the NKSS also addressed. In the crucial year 1942, two months after the momentous event at Easter when most of the Lutheran pastors severed their ties to the state, *Credo* featured an article which dealt with Norwegian culture. The author of this piece, a pastor in what had been the established church, called attention to the rich cultural legacy of the nation and how love of Norway had long been manifested in music, literature, and the like. He observed that large numbers of his countrymen were attending Norwegian cultural events and that songs embodying love of Norway were extremely popular. This pastor cautioned, however, that however valuable and understandable these war-time phenomena were, they should not be perverted into worship of the country; God alone was worthy of the highest praise. The Word of God, he reminded readers, was the most valuable component of the national heritage.<sup>37</sup>

## 6. CONCLUSION

Research on this dimension of the *kirkekamp* is in its infancy, as are various other dimensions, not least those involving various para-church organisations and denominations other than the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The present study has demonstrated that despite its pietistic heritage and the Lutheran "two kingdoms" understanding of relations between church and state, members of the NKSS evinced a keen awareness of and interest in political events of the day long before the invasion of Norway in 1940. Restrictions imposed by the collaborationist government of Vidkun Quisling limited significantly the organisation's freedom to minister to students of various ages without completely halting its activities. Both the central leaders and many local and regional members of the NKSS managed to find ways of coping with the political, military, psychological, and financial exigencies of the times, and in certain respects the level of group involvement remained fairly high. Future investigations of church-state relations in war-time Norway can benefit from detailed consideration of the kinds of grass-roots ministries which the NKSS and other agencies conducted. Furthermore, it is conceivable that

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36 Liv Rasmussen, "Hva kan vi her i Laget gjøre for landet vårt?" *Hevreka*, 9 June 1941.

37 Dagfinn Hauge, "Guds ord det er vårt arvegods", *Credo*, no. 5 (June 1942), pp. 1-2.

comparative studies involving Lutheran and other denominational (or, for that matter, nondenominational) ministries to students in other countries which were subjugated by the Third Reich, and within Germany itself, could shed additional light on the subject at hand.<sup>38</sup>

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