

Poetry

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Martin Niemöller (1892-1984) was a German Protestant pastor. During World War II, he opposed Hitler's religious policies and was sent to concentration camps, but he was saved at the end. After the war, he joined the World Peace Movement. This poem is his response to the question "How could it happen?"

First They Came for the Communists

by Martin Niemöller

When the Nazis came for the communists,
I remained silent;
I was not a communist.

When they locked up the social democrats,
I remained silent;
I was not a social democrat.

When they came for the trade unionists,
I did not speak out;
I was not a trade unionist.

When they came for the Jews,
I did not speak out;
I was not a Jew.

When they came for me,
there was no one left to speak out.

Quickwrite: How does the author use stanzas to communicate meaning?

WORD CONNECTIONS

The Latin root *-commun-* in *communist* means "common." In communism, land and factories are owned by the community.

This root occurs in *communal*, *communicate*, *communion*.

The word *democrat* contains the Greek root *demo-*, which means "people," and the Greek suffix *-crat*, which means "rule." Democracy is a government run by the people.

The root *demo-* appears in *demographic* and *epidemic*.

The suffix *-crat* occurs in words like *aristocrat*, *autocrat*, and *bureaucrat*.

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