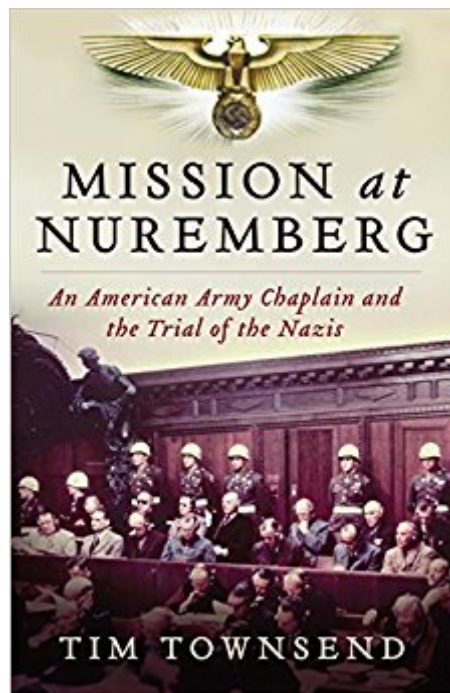




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# Mission At Nuremberg: An American Army Chaplain And The Trial Of The Nazis



## Synopsis

Mission at Nuremberg is Tim Townsend's gripping story of the American Army chaplain sent to save the souls of the Nazis incarcerated at Nuremberg, a compelling and thought-provoking tale that raises questions of faith, guilt, morality, vengeance, forgiveness, salvation, and the essence of humanity. Lutheran minister Henry Gerecke was fifty years old when he enlisted as an Army chaplain during World War II. As two of his three sons faced danger and death on the battlefield, Gerecke tended to the battered bodies and souls of wounded and dying GIs outside London. At the war's end, when other soldiers were coming home, Gerecke was recruited for the most difficult engagement of his life: ministering to the twenty-one Nazis leaders awaiting trial at Nuremberg. Based on scrupulous research and first-hand accounts, including interviews with still-living participants and featuring sixteen pages of black-and-white photos, Mission at Nuremberg takes us inside the Nuremberg Palace of Justice, into the cells of the accused and the courtroom where they faced their crimes. As the drama leading to the court's final judgments unfolds, Tim Townsend brings to life the developing relationship between Gerecke and Hermann Goering, Albert Speer, Wilhelm Keitel, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and other imprisoned Nazis as they awaited trial. Powerful and harrowing, Mission at Nuremberg offers a fresh look at one most horrifying times in human history, probing difficult spiritual and ethical issues that continue to hold meaning, forcing us to confront the ultimate moral question: Are some men so evil they are beyond redemption?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1945, as the Allies readied the complicated plans for the Nuremberg trials, religion was a

consideration, per the Geneva Convention's regulations. As award-winning religion reporter and first-time book author Townsend puts it, they had to determine "whether to supply the architects of the Holocaust with a Christian minister to comfort their spirits as they explained to the world the murder of six million Jews." The Lutheran minister the Allies provided was Henry Gerecke, a middle-aged U.S. Army chaplain from south St. Louis. Along with Father Sixtus O'Connor, a Catholic, Chaplain Gerecke spent months ministering to the top tier of Nazi criminals. In a clear, gripping, and extensively researched narrative, Townsend raises the hard questions of good and evil, forgiveness and retribution; and, also, whether these killers, obeying orders and ignoring morality, deserved spiritual succor in what were, for many of them, their final days. There is much to ponder and bemoan in this detailed report of the trials and of a brave, kindly pastor moving through the "most frightening experience of his life." --Eloise Kinney

"Townsend's account is full of surreal moments Gerecke witnessed during his time in Nuremberg." (Publishers Weekly) "Rich, potentially explosive. ... Townsend authoritatively addresses the excruciating moral and religious issues confronting wartime chaplains." (Kirkus Reviews) "Gripping." (Daily Mail (London)) "Engagingly told" [Townsend illuminates a hidden gem of World War II history and brings to light the life and career of a truly heroic Christian man] an important book. It deserves a wide audience." (Christianity Today) "A gripping story... puts the reader inside the cells of various Hitler henchmen." (Wichita Eagle) "Sheds light on a little-known player in an iconic episode of world history. ... A well-written study about a subject matter that can't help but hold a reader's attention." (America in WWII Magazine) "A dramatic story." (Lutheran Quarterly)

I must admit I was skeptical as I began to read this book. I did not expect to find what I did. This book powerfully captures the ministry of Pastor Gerecke and, for me, most importantly, repeatedly gets the good news about Jesus Christ precisely correctly. Along the way, the book does a very fine job presenting each of the "cast of characters" in an objective light, showing the faults and failings of each of the Nazi war criminals. At no point are any of the Nazis presented sympathetically, in fact, the horrendous moral failings of each man are presented and analyzed very thoughtfully. What many readers may not understand is precisely how and why an American pastor could deal kindly with these men. It is the very scandal of the Gospel itself that will confound and perhaps even anger the

reader as they read Townsend's well researched and well written account of precisely what Pastor Gerecke kept telling these men. The "good news" is precisely good news because all humanity deserves only "bad news" and there can be no more greater proof of this than the horrors of WWII. I appreciated how Gerecke presents the full life history of Gerecke and his passion for the poor and hopeless in the Saint Louis area. I also appreciated the insights into the whole process of the Nuremberg trials and all the fascinating details of what went on behind the scenes in the cells and little chapel. This is a MUST READ for anyone who wants to know the real story of the men on trial at Nuremberg and how they were dealt with justly, fairly and compassionately, and how a St. Louis, Missouri pastor took his place on a world stage and was determined "to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified" ... yes, even for these great and public sinful men, for all men in fact.

I grew up in Germany as an "Army Brat" and served there twice as an Army chaplain, yet in all that time I never heard this story. The multi-volume history of the US Army chaplaincy doesn't even mention Chaplain Gerecke. What a gift to have this amazing story of a man of God who faced pure evil with grace. Tim Townsend presents the origins and mission of the military chaplaincy, gives extensive background on Nuremberg and the Third Reich, and offers an detailed biography of the tireless and talented Missouri Synod Lutheran minister Henry Gerecke. We learn of his civilian pastorate (including prison ministry), his combat ministry in an Army hospital, his visit to Dachau, his devotionals on AFN, and finally his assignment to the high-ranking Nazi defendants during the Nuremberg trial. Gerecke was so effective and needed that the Nazi prisoners wrote his wife Alma, pleading with her to allow him to stay longer to provide pastoral care for them and their families. The letter, with each of their signatures, has to be one of the most remarkable documents of WWII. We could easily disregard the Nazi prisoners' warm reception to the American chaplains as a ploy to be seen in a better light, yet even after the sentencing they continued to meet for worship, read Scripture, and have long daily talks with the chaplains. Only five refused any pastoral care. After the verdict, several admitted their guilt and expressed remorse. Townsend offers a brief bio of each of the Nazi defendants. Other chaplains served at the Nuremberg trial, and it would have been helpful to know more about the rest of the team. Townsend mentions that the Catholic chaplain Fr. Connor smuggled Speer's manuscript of *Inside the Third Reich* to a publisher (but not why). Were there no UCMJ repercussions? The brief section on theodicy opens a can of worms, poses questions, and offers few answers. What's the point? To cast doubt on God's person and plan? Townsend suggests that by

giving us free will, God is culpable for our choices. Also, the section on the JEDP theory of the Torah was not necessary and is not universally accepted. The identity of the NCO in charge of the executions was kept secret by the military. Townsend gives the person's name, while implying the secrecy was to avoid shaming the executioner. He describes the executions as if they were a disgraceful event. Note: the Nazis complained about the dishonor of hanging, wanting a military firing squad instead, and were told they were being executed as criminals, not soldiers. For O'Connor insisted, "You absolve them of their sins, but you don't absolve them of their actions." Minor objections aside, Mission at Nuremberg chronicles a significant event of military/church history that has until now been overlooked. There was never a question of whether to provide pastoral care to these heinous Nazis, but how. That the victors should care about the spiritual condition of some of the most evil men in history shows their great compassion. This is indeed a moving story of grace-in-action.

I was only 6 when my grandfather died and Tim has succeeded in bringing him back to me and the rest of my family. Tim spent 6 years researching this book and many hours with my dad to get the personal side, I learned many things about grandpa's early life but it also showed me his compassion and strength. Contrary to what Mystery Reviewer thinks he was not manipulated by the Nazis, if he had been he would have given Goring communion as Hermann Goring asked "just in case

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