



On January 19, 1942, Nazi secret police arrested Titus Brandsma, a Dutch Carmelite priest. After extensive interrogation, they labeled him a "most dangerous man." He was sentenced to the infamous concentration camp at Dachau, where he was executed on July 26, 1942.

His ashes were buried in Dachau's "Grave of Unknown Thousands."

Today he is remembered and honored throughout the world. On November 3, 1985 Pope John Paul II proclaimed Titus Brandsma Blessed and Martyr at St. Peter's in Rome. This is the story of his resistance against the Nazis.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is said that the qualities which one attributes to a Dutchman are doubly true of a Frisian: independence, stubbornness and seriousness. Titus Brandsma was very much a Frisian . Even people who knew him only casually remembered him as a hard worker, a tireless organizer and a wonderfully cheerful person.

As a university scholar and teacher, Titus was seen as a true individualist, but always one with the heart of a child. He certainly did not appear, at first, to be the sort to confront the Dutch Fascists over human rights or patriotism. Yet that is what he did. His death in Dachau made him a symbol of national resistance for the Dutch people.

The cause for his beatification has advanced because he exemplifies what one individual can accomplish with personal determination and fidelity to Christian principles, but especially because his personal holiness was deepened and enhanced by his sufferings.

This article will treat the points of opposition between Titus Brandsma and the Nazis, especially insofar as he felt it necessary to block attempts to draw Dutch society into a Fascist way of thinking.

## PART I

Born Anno Sjoerd Brandsma (February 23, 1881), he grew up in a loving Frisian farm family as one of six children . Attracted to religious life from his earliest years, he found his way to the Carmelite Novitiate at Boxmeer where he professed his first vows in October, 1899, with the religious name of Titus.

He was an enthusiastic student, especially in such areas as Carmelite spirituality; however his body did not always keep pace with his mind. Titus was thin and frail, subject to frequent illness, especially stomach ulcers. What might have been a promising academic career was threatened by frequent periods of illness. Even so, he was sent to Rome to study for a doctorate in philosophy after his ordination to the priesthood at s'Hertogenbosch (June, 1905). [\[1\]](#)

Between 1909 and 1923, he lived happily at Oss, teaching philosophy to clerics and involving himself in projects which would continue for the rest of his active life. He wrote for religious periodicals and newspapers. He began translating writings of Teresa of Avila into Dutch . He cofounded the Catholic Frisian Union, a religious and cultural society. He helped prepare missionaries being sent to Java, and supported efforts of others hoping to re-establish suppressed Carmelite Houses in Germany and Brazil. [\[2\]](#)

A major milestone in his work was his appointment as professor, in 1923, at the newly-founded Catholic University of the Netherlands at Nijmegen. With characteristic enthusiasm, he taught excellent courses in natural philosophy, natural theology, history of recent philosophy, history of Dutch mysticism, and the philosophy of history. One project very dear to the heart of Titus was the inauguration of a special chair of Frisian Studies. During the 1932-33 academic year, he served as rector of the University.

The Nijmegen period of his life was highly productive . In addition to his university activities, he was elected vice-president of the Apostolate for the Reunification of Eastern Churches. He organized both a Congress on Dutch Medieval Mysticism, and a national Marian Congress. He became editor and censor of the Dutch Catholic Encyclopedia. He contributed to a national pilgrimage to honor St. Boniface, patron of both Frisia and Germany, and worked to make such Frisian saints as Willibrord and Radboud better known . His travels took him on a study-tour to Spain (1929), a visit to Teresa Neumann in Bavaria (1931), a trip to the University of Milan and to Rome, where he spoke with Pius XI and Cardinal Pacelli (1932), and a lecture tour of Ireland, the United States and Canada (1935).

Throughout this very active period, his health was always somewhat uncertain. He required hospitalization for stomach troubles in 1908, 1921, 1937 and 1939, this final time with the added complication of a chronic bladder infection. Yet his energy and happiness seemed to admit no limits whatever. [\[3\]](#)

As a future opponent of the Nazis, Titus Brandsma would exert wide influence largely because he was a product of the small but dynamic Dutch Catholic Church . Both agricultural and traditional, Dutch Catholics had long represented a sort of economic backwater in a prosperous commercial state. The southern provinces, like Limburg and North Brabant, had remained largely Catholic since the Reformation (95%) while the central area, like Utrecht and Gelderland, was only 30% Catholic, and the northernmost provinces like Frisia, a mere 5%. The hierarchy had only been restored in 1853: an archbishop at

Utrecht and bishops at Haarlem, Breda, s'Hertogenbosch and Roermond. The earliest concern of these bishops was to protect their religious liberty and freedom of action.

With the gradual industrialization of Dutch cities, many Catholics found employment in factories, effectively mixing them with the Protestant mainstream as never before. The Church, however, remained relatively poor and isolated, since the various Calvinist Churches still represented established religion in Dutch society. A strong sense of community and a good esprit de corps supported the formation of a Catholic party in Parliament. The party was religiously conservative, but gained a reputation for good social legislation at the expense of the Liberals, as well as the Socialists, who were then Marxist and revolutionary.[\[4\]](#)

Catholic labor unions existed as alternatives to the secularist or Marxist-dominated unions, but concerted action was possible on individual "bread and butter" issues.

The Dutch Church also boasted a network of excellent schools, a flourishing press, and an impressive foreign mission effort which would eventually contribute over 5000 missionaries (including 70 bishops) working outside the country. But the time World War II broke out, the Catholic Church was the largest single church in the Netherlands, with a slight majority of all Dutch church-goers.[\[5\]](#)

Even before the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands, the tightly organized Dutch Church, backed by its newspapers and schools, had resisted Fascist ideas and programs at the intellectual level. The "Dutch Nazis" were the N.S.B. or Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging der Nederlanden (National Socialist Movement of the Netherlands).

Founded in 1931 by Anton Adriaan Mussert, the party still held only 4 seats in parliament by 1939, representing a mere 4.2% of the votes cast. The early N.S.B. followed the ideology of the Italian Fascists more closely than the nihilistic attitude of the Nazis. Their optimistic view of Dutch history, especially the "golden age" of the seventeenth century, evoked a sort of "restorative patriotism" based on strong leadership and the eventual annexation of Belgian Flanders. In theory, the N.S.B. favored religious freedom, as long as the churches made no attempts to influence social or political policy. The party was not anti-Semitic at first, but the Nazi invasion changed that policy.[\[6\]](#)

When the invasion took place, Mussert could count no more than 33,000 followers. Even at its peak, it is unlikely that the N.S.B. had more than 100,000 members - a very weak base from which to govern even a small country . Although it always claimed to be more pro-Dutch, the very weakness in the party's numbers meant that in the long run, Nazi policies would probably have to be followed . Auxiliary organizations included the Defense Troop (similar to the German S.A.), Netherlands S.S., Home Guard and Landstorm.[\[7\]](#)

Within the ranks of the N.S.B. were several sub-groups not always under Mussert's control. One of these was a pro-Nazi element, led by Meinoud M. Rost van Tonningen, who hoped to supplant Mussert with Himmler's help . The Nazis suppressed other small rightist factions in 1941. Only Dr. van Rappard's N.S.N.A.P. (National Socialist Dutch Workers' Party) escaped disbanding, probably because of its similarity to Hitler's own party. Even though the two parties had almost no common doctrine or practice, it was allowed to "join" the N.S.B.[\[8\]](#)

In spite of its relative lack of popularity, the N.S.B.'s position was considerably enhanced following the Nazi occupation. Hitler's High Commissioner for the Netherlands was Arthur Seyss-Inquart, the Austrian who had eased the Nazi occupation and annexation of his

homeland. He was now sent to the Hague with much the same objective in view for the Netherlands. For practical reasons, he planned to leave much of the existing Dutch administration intact. Nazi supervision of all operations would certainly be the rule, but with a very low profile. The High Commissioner's administration would be regulated through four German deputies (called Commissioners-General), whose positions were designated as "Administration and Justice" (including education, arts and sciences), "Security", "Finance and Economy", and "Without Portfolio", actually a political adviser. The long-range objective of this team was to prepare the Dutch people for gradual absorption into the German Reich with as little fuss as possible.[\[9\]](#)

On one hand, Seyss-Inquart assumed that retaining the efficient Dutch civil service would ease the problems of rationing, security, communication, and the transfer of Dutch resources to Germany. On the other hand, he was quick to change those features of Dutch society which might oppose the authoritarian nature of a fascist regime . This was especially true of whatever could mold public opinion: radio, the press, the schools.[\[10\]](#)

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#### FOOTNOTES TO PART I

1. Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, Summarium super dubio: An sit signanda Commissio Introductionis Causae in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur? (Roma, 1965), pp. xviii-xx.
2. Summarium '65, pp. xx-xxi
3. Summarium '65, pp. xx-xxiii.
4. Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, Informatio super dubio: An sit signanda Commissio Introductionis Causae in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur? (Roma, 1968), pp.7-10.
5. Informatio. pp.7-13 /and/ Adrian Staring [Carmelite Vice-Postulator], private letter (Rome, November 2, 1983).
6. Werner Warmbrunn, The Dutch under German Occupation (Stanford, 1963), pp.83-9.
7. Warmbrunn, pp.89-91
8. Louis de Jong and Joseph W.F. Stoppelman, The Lion Rampant (New York, 1943), p.34.
9. Warmbrunn, pp. 27f.
10. Warmbrunn, p.35.

## PART II

Even before the invasion of 1940, Brandsma had followed the bishops' initiative in his criticism of Nazi policies. The bishops had issued a warning against the N.S.B. as early as 1934, and had excluded party members from the sacraments in 1936.[\[11\]](#)

Shortly after the promulgation of the Nuremberg Laws, a book was published in Amsterdam entitled *Dutch Voices on the Treatment of Jews in Germany* (December, 1935). Professor Brandsma contributed an essay to this work, "The Fallacy of Weakness". In it, he attributes the discriminatory policy to envy which has evolved into hatred, supported by the theories of Nietzsche and Stirner. He suggests that a better alternative to knocking down others who have done well would be to use their success as a stimulus and a motive to better oneself. True strength is found only in accomplishment, especially for a people whose culture and talents lead them to call themselves *Uebermensch*.[\[12\]](#)

The reaction was not long in coming. The Berlin newspaper *Fredericus* answered with the article "A Crafty Professor", in which Titus was called a learned protector of Jewish brigands. He was advised to encourage law-abiding Jews to upgrade their cultural status and to concentrate on taking advantage of the opportunities offered them in Germany - this at a time when the concentration camps were already in operation.[\[13\]](#) *De Volksche Wacht* went to great lengths to ridicule him. *De Knuppel* (The Bludgeon) accused Titus and some of his colleagues of being Communist sympathizers.[\[14\]](#)

During the scholastic term just before the war, Dr Brandsma had given a series of lectures in which he exposed the root principles of National Socialism: the Volk was superior to everything else; the "race" was a godlike norm; "good" was whatever helped the Volk; Hitler was the prophet and guarantor of the people's unity, and everyone else, by contrast, was relatively unimportant.[\[15\]](#) Many of the details of these lectures have been lost, either because Titus himself destroyed some of his more compromising notes in 1941 after a colleague was arrested, or because the remaining papers were seized by the police after his arrest.

On July 16, 1939 he delivered a sermon honoring saints Willibrord and Boniface at Leeuwarden (Frisia). He attacked modern neo-paganism as a bigger threat than the primitive paganism faced by the earliest Christian missionaries. The newer version masquerades as a highly developed form of civilized life. Love is condemned and called a weakness; only personal effort and physical force will prevail. "It is said that Christianity with its profession of love has had its day, that it must be replaced by the old Germanic powerfulness." Yet the lessons of history teach that love prevails over all other human forces. "Nature is stronger than doctrine . . . . The new heathens will have to say 'See how they love one another' about us. Only then will we overcome the world."[\[16\]](#)

*De Knuppel* responded with an article, "King Radboud or Professor Brandsma?" The ancient King Radboud was presented as a personification of the Teutonic violence and the primitive forces of the blond Frisians, forces too much domesticated by the Christian doctrine introduced by Willibrord (who was Anglo-Saxon). "O Frisian, how alienated you have become from the ideas of your ancestors!"[\[17\]](#)

In December, 1939, Brandsma wrote a letter to the president of the Theological faculty at the University, saying that he felt National Socialism represented the strongest challenge to

Catholicism . The only answer he saw was to stress the value of the human person enthusiastically, in both the natural and supernatural orders.[\[18\]](#)

Titus never responded to hostile attacks - he felt that polemics were useless, and only confused the issues. In one sense he might be considered a pacifist. He simply preferred to hold up his own values in plain view, without hatred, and allow them to be seen clearly. He continued to show sympathy and patience for those who had fallen under Hitler's spell.[\[19\]](#) This method would be tested further.

The Wehrmacht invaded the Netherlands on May 10, 1940 and crushed the Dutch army after only 5 days of fighting. The new Nazi regime began its rule by giving controlling positions in most key offices to local N.S.B. members, yet at first, very little seemed to have changed. Fr. Brandsma wrote that he had been left alone, personally, but that he had been asked to sign a document saying that he was of pure Aryan stock, with no Jewish ancestors. He also noted that two men had been watching his students and taking copious notes during his lectures.[\[20\]](#) He appeared to take these conditions in stride, even though he was forced to scale back his activities.

Pius XI had described Nazism as a "doctrine of animosity in principle against God and his Church" which used any and all means to promote its ends. As that doctrine began to spread, Titus wrote that the mass of lies was actually worse than the military invasion had been, since it was not content to merely oppress people's liberty, but sought to pollute their consciences as well.[\[21\]](#)

In a small, flat country without mountains or forests, military resistance to the Nazis was almost hopeless. There were no places to hide, no sanctuaries or safe areas in which to organize resistance . If there were to be a Dutch resistance at all, it would need an intellectual base, rather than a military one. The leaders would have to be academics or mystics - such leaders would necessarily be highly visible, and therefore in great danger. Titus realized that his best weapons were purely spiritual, since his resistance was not directed against men and women, but against their errors.[\[22\]](#)

The "honeymoon" between the Nazi forces and the Dutch public came to an end in early 1941. Both the Catholic schools and the Catholic press came under strong pressure from the government. For Titus, these were "indispensable things", since he was simultaneously president of the Union of Directors of Catholic Schools (hitherto a rather unimportant post), and since 1935, the ecclesiastical advisor to the Dutch Catholic Journalists.[\[23\]](#) The schools were the first to feel the pressure.

The Ministry of Education, Sciences and Cultural Protection had already demanded lists of Jewish pupils in Catholic schools. It had also banned several books in common use and stated that Catholic schools seemed to have too many teachers.[\[24\]](#) On February 21, the Ministry published a decree stating that all teachers living in religious communities would henceforth receive only 60% of their normal salaries: an attempt to separate teaching orders from their schools. Four days later, another decree announced that clergy and religious were unsuitable to be rectors, principals or heads of scholastic institutions. They were ordered to hand over their powers by the first of May.[\[25\]](#)

In anticipation of such decrees, Titus had already called for a united front of school directors. With Archbishop de Jong's consent, he now wrote to the Ministry defending the teachers' rights and pointing out the unjust and unjustifiable aspects of the new decrees. When his objections met with little effective response, he went to the Hague in person to

defend his cause. He told the Secretary-General that many religious teachers had devoted their lives to the schools and could not survive on reduced salaries. Would such a change help the State? The only response was that the Ministry wanted to see that no state money was wasted or given to the Church. The Secretary-General promised to support a written, documented report, if only Titus would submit one to the German Commissar.[\[26\]](#) Even when this was done, few changes were ever made in the decrees.

Toward the end of August, 1941, another edict demanded the expulsion of all Jewish students, including converts to Christianity. On September 12, Titus sent circulars to members of the Union, followed by a formal letter, asking that this not be done. "The Church makes no distinction of sex, race or people in carrying out her mission. We can not refuse admission to anyone who wants a Catholic education." A week later, the Ministry telephoned to tell him that an exception had been made for Jewish children enrolled before May 1940 (the month of the invasion) . But by the end of September, the Secretary-General "forgot" and demanded full enforcement of the expulsion.[\[27\]](#) It seems, however, that the Carmelite schools ignored the ruling entirely, and continued to teach their Jewish students until the mass deportations began [\[28\]](#)

Although many of Fr. Brandsma's personal papers were seized by the S.D. (Sicherheits Dienst, the party intelligence service) after his arrest, there is still evidence that he devised a plan to smuggle Jewish refugees to Brazil . One undated document speaks of specific Carmelite houses there (houses founded or re-established by Dutch Carmelites.[\[29\]](#) The moving force behind this scheme seems to have been a Miss Sophie van Berckel of the Hague, special advisor to the Archbishop on Jewish affairs. Whatever the details, the plan seems to have failed. Miss van Berckel was arrested, and died on Christmas day, 1944, in the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen . The Apostolate for the Reunion of Eastern Churches may also have been involved. Their agenda for a meeting on November 27 at Utrecht included "Help for Jewish Catholics". Unfortunately, few details survived.[\[30\]](#)

Meanwhile, the Dutch bishops had increased sanctions against N.S.B. members. In January 1941, they declared that "No Holy Sacraments are to be given to any Catholic who supports the National Socialist idea to any important degree."[\[31\]](#) This action caused Goering's own newspaper, the Essener National Zeitung, to complain that without any reason, the bishops had excommunicated (which they did not) the entire N.S.B. "This means that the Catholic Church in Holland has declared open war on the entire National Socialist movement."[\[32\]](#)

On July 25, another pastoral letter fired a stinging rebuke against the Nazi restriction of the Catholic radio, schools, youth organizations and charitable works. The bishops now declared that since the Catholic trade unions had all but lost their freedom of action, all union members who followed the new leaders would also be denied the sacraments. This action was similar to the action of the German bishops of July 6. The letter was signed by Archbishop Johannes de Jong of Utrecht, and Bishops Hopmans of Breda, Diepen of s'Hertogenbosch, Lemmens of Roermond and Huibers of Haarlem.[\[33\]](#)

Finally, on September 8, the same bishops protested that their actions were not motivated by politics, but by the very existence or non-existence of Christianity as a way of life.[\[34\]](#)

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## FOOTNOTES TO PART II

11. Summarium '65, p. xxiv.
12. Hendrik W.F. Aukes, *Het Leven van Titus Brandsma* (Utrecht, 1961), pp. 191f.
13. Fausto Vallainc, *Un Giornalista Martire* (Milano, 1963), p.154.
14. Hedwig Klein, *Liebender ohne Mass: Titus Brandsma* (Trier, 1967), p.85.
15. Aukes,p.191
16. "Titus Brandsma: Carmelite 1881-1942", *Carmelin the World* (1967), VII, 100
17. Vallainc, pp. 154f.
18. *Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, Summarium super dubio: An constet de Martyrio Servi Dei, necnon de ejus Causa et de Signis seu Miraculis, in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur?* (Roma, 1979), p.410
19. Josse Alzin, *A Dangerous Little Friar* (Dublin. 1957), p.78 /and/ Klein, pp. 8Sf.
20. Alzin, p.79.
21. Vallainc, pp. 152f.
22. Alzin,p.155.
23. Vallainc, p.155.
24. Alzin, p.80.
25. Vallainc, pp. 155f.
26. Vallainc, pp. 156f.
27. Vallainc, pp. 157f.
28. Aukes,p.198.
29. Joseph Rees, *Titus Brandsma, a Modern Martyr* (London, 1971), pp. 98f.
30. Aukes,p.199.
31. Jong,p.193.
32. *Netherlands Information Bureau, Mein Kampf in Holland* (New York, 1943), p.13.
33. Summarium '79, pp.422-S.
34. Summarium '79, p.437.

### PART III

At the time of the Nazi occupation, the Dutch Catholic press was among the world's best, especially for a nominally Protestant country. Many daily and weekly publications had only local circulation, but there were a few larger ones like *De Tijd* and *De Volkskrant* of Amsterdam and *De Gelderlander* of Nijmegen. Titus had hoped to see a large, national Catholic paper and had worked to establish one. He had written to his family that "outside of the Churches themselves, the press is the first pulpit of Catholic thought; it not only responds to those who cry out against us, but proclaims the truth day after day". [35]

Until this point, the Catholic papers had successfully ignored all attempts on the part of the N.S.B. to have articles or advertisements printed. The pressure on the editors had steadily increased, however, and Titus told Archbishop de Jong of their plight as early as September 1940. Rost van Tonningen, now head of the Netherlands Information Department, soothingly promised the editors that there would be no attack on liberty of conscience, but they remained suspicious. [36] Dr. Bodewes, director of *De Gelderlander*, was rebuked for refusing an N.S.B. advertisement. In response, he went to the Hague in person and offered to resign immediately -- the government quickly backed down when it appeared that the incident might cause too much excitement. [37]

Then on December 18, 1941, the Ministry informed the press by Telex (and therefore unofficially) that it was forbidden to refuse N.S.B. announcements on grounds of principle. But while the ministry thought of "principal" as ideology, the Catholic journalists understood it more in terms of faith and morals". Titus saw this development as the point at which he had to take a personal stand. [38]

Two large papers, *De Moasbode* and *Ons Noorden*, had already been banned at the end of 1940 for printing the bishops' pastoral letter. *De Tijd* was able to continue, but under restrictions. Brandsma was convinced by these events that the clergy had to help the laymen carry their increasingly difficult burden, regardless of the consequences. [39]

On the morning of December 30, he consulted the Archbishop and was warned against rash action, "They'll find it easier to arrest you than me." But Titus insisted, "I can act more easily than you: I can travel, advise, and evoke a kind of fidelity that may astound everyone." [40]

He met with the editors of *De Gelderlander* and the suppressed *Maasbode*, who held the same position as he did. Surprisingly, they were not discouraged. Yet because they mistrusted some of the other editors, they doubted that a united front was possible. [41]

After this meeting, Titus wrote a circular letter to all Catholic journalists. As one of the pivotal documents of his life, this circular of December 31, 1941 shows much of his innermost character.

He grants the rights of the occupation forces according to Dutch and international law. But he quickly adds that the N.S.B. has attacked Catholic dogmas, and has proclaimed ideas contrary to religion itself. The pressure on the press was such that readers are no longer sure whether they are reading Catholic papers or not. It is often difficult to know at what point one must resist. [42]

The hour is past when there can't be any turning back by the Catholic press. They would be disobedient to their archbishop and to their conscience, should they give their support to these ideas and to this movement. This instruction [the Telex message] is not yet official. Perhaps it will not become so . . . But if that order is given, even under the threat of grave penalties such as the suspension or the suppression of a paper, the publishers and editors must categorically refuse the articles imposed . It is not possible to act otherwise . The bounds have been passed . . . The more we are united in this refusal, the stronger we shall be. ( . . . ) I only write this declaration after mature reflection, after discussion with various people in authority, and with his excellency the Archbishop . . . It will be very hard for many of you who will be losing your daily bread . Only those who try and force your consciences will bear the responsibility . . . I do not yet dare to think that they will go as far as that, but if they do, God will have the last word, and will reward the faithful servant .

[\[43\]](#)

Titus had volunteered to assure support for the editors and publishers by both writing and visiting them, listening to their reactions. He spent the first ten days of 1942 travelling from one end of the Kingdom to the other. He visited the other 4 bishops, and 14 newspapers in 15 cities.[\[44\]](#) He was able to report to the Archbishop that not one of the editors was afraid to resist on principle, although some had requested clear and uncompromising orders from the bishops as a sort of protective shield . De Jong agreed to issue such directives, and again urged caution. Titus replied that it simply would not be right to send his friends into the front lines while he moved safely to the rear. [\[45\]](#)

Not surprisingly, the police noticed this flurry of activity, although they were not sure exactly what was happening at first. The S.D. eventually reported to Berlin that the Catholic press was fighting back, and specifically mentioned Brandsma's action as "sabotage." [\[46\]](#)

The bishops had decided that their letter condemning the order of December 18 would not be published unless necessary. But on January 15, de Jong received word from the Utrechtsche Courant that the N.S.B. had demanded publication of a particularly striking ad in three editions of the Neerlandia Pers. Deciding that the crisis point had been reached, the bishops ordered that their letter be released to 17 papers and published the following day. [\[47\]](#) The letter ended, "To reach a united front, the Episcopate will be happy to receive, by means of Fr. Titus Brandsma, a written declaration from publishers and chief editors stating their willingness to follow these guidelines of ours." A flood of letters to Nijmegen followed, although Titus was not there to see them. [\[48\]](#)

On Monday, January 19, an S.D. official named Steffen arrested Titus and took him by train to the police prison at Scheveningen, the so-called "Oranje Hotel" because of the number of Dutch patriots being kept there. His interrogation began on January 20, the day of the Wannsee Conference, at which the "Final Solution" of the Jewish question would be decided . His interrogator was S.S. Hauptscharfuehrer Hardegen. Significantly, Hardegen belonged to Gruppe IV (Churches), rather than Gruppe III A 3 (Press), and had been ordered to take exclusive charge of the case. [\[49\]](#) Brandsma was very co-operative with the police, frequently telling them exactly what they wanted to hear. The Archbishop has told him to blame the bishops for everything; Titus did indeed state that he had acted as the bishops' agent, but added that his opinions were identical to theirs. He admitted promoting resistance to the press authorities and obedience to the bishops. "The Church remains strong because of sacrifices and martyrs." He insisted that the Church never wanted to force the conscience of anyone, but was simply remaining faithful to its basic principles. Any conflict was caused by government encroachment into the religious sphere, and not the opposite.

Following the formal interrogation, Hardegen asked him to put in writing a clear statement why the Dutch people, particularly the Catholics, opposed the N.S.B. Titus wrote a clearly reasoned essay, stating why National Socialism is foreign, anti-religious, inhuman, and ultimately doomed to failure.

In both origin and development, the N.S.B. is depicted as an anti-national force. Even if one grants that Hitler's own movement was molded by German forces which had never existed in the Netherlands, the Nazis ignore the best elements of German culture, as had been pointed out by Cardinal Faulhaber and Bishop Hugo of Mainz. "Nazism is based above all on philosophers and sociologists with neoHegelian ideas. It is a strongly idealistic system in which the race must gradually evolve in a biological and increasingly materialistic way." Therefore the N.S.B. is following the Germans in a superficial way, with no reference to the genuine historical character of the Dutch. Titus pointed out a few differences: higher Dutch birth rate and lower death rate, better housing and social insurance, greater agricultural yield, and the much higher productivity of Dutch industry, with little of the "negative" munitions manufacture common in Germany. (Although he had no study materials, Titus supports his argument by citing an article by Wolfgang B. von Lengercke in the latest issue of Zeitschrift fur Geopolitik.) He quotes an old Dutch proverb, "Not every change is an improvement", and ends with the 3 key reasons why the N.S.B. has no influence:

"People feel that the elimination of religious influence is not only an affront to God in his dealings with his creatures, but also a violation of the glorious traditions of the Dutch people."

The extreme arrogance and gross incompetence of the N.S.B. members assures their unpopularity, especially since they represent only 0.5% of the people.

The N.S.B. has put itself at the mercy of the Germans in order to survive . Whatever autonomy they once had exists no longer. [\[50\]](#)

In conclusion, he offers a short prayer. "God bless Holland, God bless Germany! God grant that these two people may soon stand again side by side in full liberty and peace, in full recognition of His glory for the good of two nations so closely related to one another." [\[51\]](#)

Based on both oral and written statements, Hardegen drew several conclusions:

- Brandsma is genuinely a man of character with firm convictions.
- He wants to "protect Christianity" against National Socialism.
- He has written against our policy toward the Jews.
- He is anti-Nazi in principle and shows it everywhere.
- He does not deny any of these things, but openly admits them.
- Thus he is to be considered a "dangerous man" and confined accordingly.

Hardegen decided to delay further action, pending more investigation of Brandsma's activity. [\[52\]](#)

One of the Dutch prisoners at Scheveningen was a man named van Nieuwenhoven, who was entrusted with cleaning work in the corridors. He had known Fr. Brandsma in Nijmegen, and now looked after the physical needs of his old friend as far as he was able . He later reported hearing from S.D. agents Woysky and Horac that Titus could easily have been released if he had decided to surrender to Hardegen in principle. [\[53\]](#)

The remainder of Titus Brandsma's life was marked by deteriorating health, but unflagging cheerfulness. He was moved to the transit labor camp at Amersfoort on March 12, then briefly returned to Scheveningen in May to be "evaluated" one final time by Hardegen. He was asked to sign a promise not to preach or resist the occupation forces, but his only response was to re-state the reasons why the Church opposed National Socialism . Thus his fate was sealed. [\[54\]](#)

At this point, Himmler's headquarters in Berlin communicated the decision to send him to a camp in Germany. Ironically, the dysentery and cramps he had experienced at Amersfoort had caused his chronic bladder infection to disappear. The chaplain at his next stop, the "clearing house" prison at Kleve, was so alarmed at the state of his health that he suggested a request for better treatment. As a result, Titus wrote a letter on June 12, asking to be sent to the German Carmelite house at Bamberg. The request was never acted upon . He was sent to Dachau the following day. [\[55\]](#)

Even at his final destination, Titus seems to have kept his courage and optimism. He was assigned to one of the 3 "clergy blocks" and received especially severe treatment. He met several Polish Carmelites there, as well as another Dutch Carmelite, Brother Raphael Tijhuis, who tried to protect him. In spite of repeated beatings, he never stopped trying to speak to the attendants and guards, to influence them or soften their attitudes. After one particularly cruel beating, he was taken to the infirmary. Since there was little chance that he could ever work again, he was considered an inconvenience to the medical staff. After suffering several days as a victim of "medical experiments", he was given a lethal injection and died July 26, 1942. [\[56\]](#)

In the context of millions upon millions of deaths during World War II, whether on battlefields or in concentration camps, one may very well ask if the life and death of one individual really "meant" anything at all.

For Titus Brandsma, resistance to injustice on principle was an easy development of his earlier life. A nation of individualists, like his own, could always resist a tyrant, but did so most effectively with good leadership. Both Protestant and Catholic Churches had provided such leadership from the very beginning. [\[57\]](#) Even today, Brandsma is considered one of the heroes of the national resistance at all levels of society. In his protest to Seyss-Inquart about discrimination in the schools, he proudly invoked the Dutch principle of equality before the law. As he refused to accept N.S.B. propaganda for the papers, he defended the principle of freedom of conscience which the Dutch have always valued so highly. By making such a refusal illegal on grounds of principle, the Nazis themselves had made the question one of a universal principle, as Titus was quick to point out in his letter. Journalists both in the Netherlands and in Italy revere his memory today for his courageous stand. [\[58\]](#)

According to the N.S.B.'s own records, Titus was considered one of the most dangerous men in the country because of his work for the Catholic schools, his defense of the Jews, and his activity at the university. [\[59\]](#) Cardinal Alfrink referred to these records in a homily delivered 40 years later in Rome, (October 24, 1982): "" . . . the occupation forces were afraid of the authority, the firm character, and the power of persuasion of Fr. Brandsma, traits which were really in contrast with his poor and fragile physique." [\[60\]](#)

For Titus, the issue was not so much one of political philosophy as it was of religion itself. Dutch Catholicism could never be a docile "state church". Free exercise of religion and its practical consequences brought him to direct conflict with the N.S.B., mainly because he felt that true Dutch and Frisian patriotism assured those things, things they wanted to curtail.

He was impossible to control or manage. He was opposed to Nazi ideology in principle . Although he could deal very charitably with individual Nazis, he would make no compromises, no tradeoffs with their doctrine. And if it came to a question of life or death, he was quite willing to die.

His death, among so many others, seems a clear triumph of human fidelity to timeless principles. If there is to be "meaning" seen in any of these deaths, it must certainly be found in this sphere.

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### FOOTNOTES TO PART III

35. Vallainc, pp.160-4.
36. Alzin, p.81.
37. Aukes,p.205.
38. Vallainc, p.166.
39. Aukes,p.206.
40. Vallainc, p.167.
41. Aukes, p.207.
42. Summarium'79, pp.446-8.
43. Alzin, pp. 82f.
44. Brocardus Maijer, Titus Brandsma (Bossum, 1951). p. 385.
45. Alzin, p.84.
46. Vallainc, p.170.
47. Aukes, p.217
48. Manuel Maria Wermers, Prof Dr. Tito Brandsma: O Primeiro Martir da Nova Era (Fatima, 1959), pp. 24f.
49. Aukes, pp. 223f.
50. Alzin, pp.86-93.
51. Titus Brandsma, Het Laatste Geschrift van Prof Dr. Titus Brandsma (Tilburg, 1944).
52. Vallainc, p.182.
53. Aukes,p.270
54. Aquinus Houle, ""Father Titus Brandsma, O. Carm.",The Sword (1956), XIX,2Sf.
55. Alzin, pp.95-102.
56. Aukes, p.292
57. Jong, p.186.
58. Adrian Staring, ""The Beatification Process of TitusBrandsma", Carmel in the World (1964), IV, 190-4.
59. Houle, p.26.
60. Redemptus M. Valabek, ""40th Anniversary of the Death of Fr. Titus Brandsma, O. Carm.",Carmel in the World (1983), XXII,78f.