NIELSEN RETURNS: YEAR WAS PROFITABLE

By FRANK DENT

A sabbatical leave for scholarly study in Europe need not be as cut and dried as it sounds. Dr. Niels Nielsen, returning from a year in Germany and Europe, has proved that quite well. He returned from his studies with a collection of trunks, insights into the present European moods in philosophy and history, and an extra import from Austria: the new Mrs. Nielsen.

Dr. Nielsen, professor of philosophy here at Rice for six years, met his wife in Vienna during this trip. She has a Ph.D. in Literature from the University of Vienna and speaks six languages. We’d like to welcome Mrs. Nielsen to the campus and hope to see her frequently.

Students and Scholars

Although Dr. Nielsen visited Austria and many other European countries where he talked to students and scholars, he spent most of his time in Heidelberg and Tubingen in Germany, Munich, Hamburg, and Berlin were also among the many other cities which he visited to observe the modern German attitude toward religion.

“Religion is real and vital here,” says Dr. Nielsen. The new divided Germany is about one-half Protestant and one-half Catholic. Before the war the German Protestant church was identified with the monarchy and dominated by the pastor. Now, however, there are Protestant evangelical academies where the German laymen are discussing the relation of religion to everyday life.

“Church Days”
The Roman Catholic Church is also sponsoring a similar movement. Indicative of the vitality of this new religious movement is the number of Germans who took part in the various “Church Days” of both the Protestant and Catholic Churches. On the Catholic day in Berlin, 20,000 attended from West Germany in addition to 30,000 from East Germany.

Despite this fact Dr. Nielsen could not consider this new religious movement in Europe as a major revival such as has swept the US under Norman Vincent Peale and Billy Graham. Still, within the universities, which the Russians are trying to convert into communist institutions, the religious movement is very strong.

A Form Of Resistance

Since organized religion within the church is a form of resistance, the movement is not being met with passivity by the Communists. A Communist atheistic directs the satanic persecution of Protestants and Catholics alike in East Germany. This has resulted in new cooperation of these two sects just as they cooperated against the Nazis. Part of the

Communist method of harassing the religious movement is devoted to creating antagonism between the two sects by aiding first one, then the other. However, the Germans here continue to cooperate and go to church though in many cases they are liable to personal danger and imprisonment.

Young people in Germany attend church in large numbers, although they too are subject to persecution. One student pastor in an East German university was given a five year prison term. All pastors live under constant threats of imprisonment.

Interesting Sidelight

An interesting sidelight about the German youth is that they lack a sense of history. They, as well as the man in the street, want to bury the past, commencing with the era of the Kaiser up to the present. Only in the German Churches does one find a sense of the real tragedy of the last two wars.

Dr. Nielsen will be a guest on various radio and TV programs throughout the year. He will be giving more of his interpretations of the role of religion in modern European Society.