

brothers and the rest of the family, but also, as we reflect on it, it is perhaps a mystery to be pondered that our lives do indeed manifest a calling in them that cannot be accounted for solely by our family.

Bonhoeffer started his theological training in the usual places of German education and was schooled by the names that have become connected with Protestant liberalism, Reinhold Seeberg, Karl Holl and most famously, Adolf von Harnack. Sometime around the end of 1924 and the beginning of 1925, Bonhoeffer discovered Karl Barth, a theologian that fired his intellectual neurons. It was here he would be introduced to dialectical theology. This would be a relationship that would grow and develop over the years as the two became involved in very different ways with what was happening in Germany.

In 1927, he completed his initial dissertation, which was later hailed by Karl Barth as a theological miracle. This work, *Sanctorum Communio*, would deal with themes that would continue throughout Bonhoeffer's life. It is here where he works out his initial ideas of 'person' and the ethical relation to the 'other'. He investigates the social intention of Christian concepts and seeks to develop his ecclesiology in a profoundly christocentric way, centring everything on the form that Jesus Christ assumes in the concrete moment. These early theological concepts would find expression throughout the rest of his life, impacting Bonhoeffer's thoughts and ideas about the relation of the divine and the human and the social expression of God and humankind.

Though it would have seemed that he was well on his way to becoming a quintessential German theologian of the early twentieth century, following in the steps of Harnack, Bonhoeffer decided to take a pastoral appointment in Barcelona where some of his formative ideas and concepts found concrete expression in pastoral formation. He was able to experience a great deal of Spain and its people from his base in Barcelona, but he was committed to his pastoral duties as well.<sup>33</sup> More interestingly, he was exploring the themes that would mark his theological work later on. Central among these were the role of Christ's church as a manifestation of religion, the 'provincialism' to which Christ's church had succumbed, and who the 'real' Jesus was.<sup>34</sup>

This narrowing down of Jesus into one who has been totally captivated by culture usually ends with Christ serving the parochial interests

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98–105.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 113–20. He was not entirely able to overcome that provincialism himself though as is evident from some of his writings from this time.

## Chapter 2

### A LIFE AMONG THE FRAGMENTS

There was nothing that would have indicated early in his life that Dietrich Bonhoeffer would become one of the world's most famous theologians. His was a family of successful and accomplished people in German society that offered him all the privileges afforded to someone of his social position. Born 4 February 1906, with his twin sister Sabine, he would grow up surrounded by family and haunted by the death of his brother. Christianity was of a conventional sort in his house, something to be acknowledged and invited in at special occasions and cultural holidays, but not a vital part of the family. The Bonhoeffer family moved to Berlin in 1912 when Dietrich's father, Karl, accepted the leading professorship for psychiatry and neurology in Germany.

From here the family would experience the horrors of World War I, where Dietrich lost one of his brothers, and its aftermath, which even to a well-off family was a dreadful trial. Bonhoeffer recounted the impact of this in an address to an American audience where he tried to describe the reality of what hunger and deprivation did to many in Germany and how this helped in no small way to prepare the way for what was to follow.<sup>31</sup>

It is difficult to know for sure what made Bonhoeffer choose the path he did in life.<sup>32</sup> It was a way of marking independence from his

<sup>31</sup> This address is found in the book *No Rusty Swords: Swords, Letters, Lectures, and Notes, 1928–1936*, from the *Collected Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, vol. 1, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. Edwin H. Robinson and John Bowden (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 76–85. Hereafter cited as *NRS*.

<sup>32</sup> Bethge in recounting Bonhoeffer's career decisions says that even this was hidden in some respects because of Bonhoeffer's concern that one's innermost vocation should remain hidden. Bethge, p. 34.

of a particular society, but not the larger interest of God's reign. Even at this point in his life, though, Bonhoeffer was seeking ways to unmask what he understood as religion so that faith may find its correct expression.

In 1929, he returned to Berlin to take up academic work once more, finishing his second dissertation, *Act and Being*. During this time, groups that were highly nationalistic and who had suffered and chafed under the restrictions imposed on Germany in the aftermath of World War I were beginning to assert themselves in German society. They appealed to a felt and perceived injustice that had positioned Germany in difficult circumstances. As part of their agenda, they denounced any attempts at the type of international co-operation that might have aided Germany as foreign efforts to enslave the German people.<sup>35</sup> This nascent political movement sought to isolate Germany, arguing that no one should be allowed to tell Germany what to do and above all, no national sovereignty should be conceded to any international forces. Anyone who disagreed with this perspective was charged as 'unpatriotic'.<sup>36</sup>

As this was taking place, the world experienced economic difficulties brought about by the Great Depression. This only exacerbated the tensions within Germany as the right wing bourgeoisie's clamour for a more authoritarian hand began to grow louder. As in most of these moments, the forces of authoritarianism found plenty of enemies to aim at in their desire to find a scapegoat for their difficulties. It came as little surprise that the Jewish people would end up on the receiving end of this hatred.

Though Bonhoeffer was not totally oblivious to these rising strains of fascism, he was absorbed in the academic demands of *Act and Being*. This work, which would mark his academic career in significant ways, was dealing with the issue of how God's being was God's action. He was exercised by theological and epistemological questions in this text and wrote it in conversation with both philosophy and theology. Some of the ideas expressed in this text would find their way into Bonhoeffer's 'nonreligious' interpretation later on.

In the second half of 1929, another idea emerged which would have a profound impact on Bonhoeffer's life, the suggestion that he go to America as an exchange student. In preparation for this trip, he

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 125–26.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

reviewed the history of Germany and the aftermath of the war. Some of these studies would find their way into remarks he made to American audiences about the deprivation that Germany faced after the war.<sup>37</sup>

Bonhoeffer's visit to the United States and his stay at Union Theological Seminary in New York City would open up new worlds to him that would have lasting impact on the rest of his life. Some of this influence was to be found in the friends he made. One of the most important was Erwin Sutz from Switzerland who helped Bonhoeffer adjust to his environment, but also served as the conduit for bringing Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth together. Sutz and Bonhoeffer had the natural rapport of serious theological students who spoke the same language.

Another European who would also become influential in Bonhoeffer's life was Jean Lasserre, a Frenchman, who Bonhoeffer had a difficult time connecting with in the beginning.<sup>38</sup> Lasserre, at least, was serious about theology and knew more of Bonhoeffer's world than the Americans did. It was Lasserre who confronted Bonhoeffer with the peace commandment of Jesus and pushed Bonhoeffer on the issue of pacifism. Bethge writes about this impact:

Not that Bonhoeffer immediately became a convinced pacifist – in fact he never did so – but after meeting Lasserre the question of the concrete reply to the biblical injunction of peace and of the concrete steps to be taken against warlike impulses never left him again.<sup>39</sup>

Out of these challenges, Bonhoeffer looked more closely at the Sermon on the Mount and its impact on Christian discipleship, thoughts which ultimately found expression in *Discipleship*.

Bonhoeffer also made friends with Americans as well, most notably the African American student, Frank Fisher. Through his relationship with Fisher, Bonhoeffer came into contact with the racism of the country, but he also came into contact with a vital part of American church life represented by the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem.

<sup>37</sup> *NBS*, pp. 78–83. Bonhoeffer says some profound things about what war can do to a country's psyche and the impact upon society. There are sobering words in this address for anyone who has suffered the results of war, or anybody who unleashes it upon a population.

<sup>38</sup> Bethge, pp. 153–54. Bethge attributes this to the fact that Germans still had lingering feelings of resentment towards the French in the aftermath of the war.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

Bonhoeffer committed to worship at Abyssinian and in turn learned much about the problem of race in America.

Finally, Bonhoeffer would find a home away from home in the house of Paul and Marion Lehmann. Paul Lehmann understood Europe and could understand why Bonhoeffer found the theological situation at Union so exasperating. In Bonhoeffer's opinion, American students just didn't take theology seriously and when they laughed at some of Luther's comments in *De servo arbitrio* Bonhoeffer was thoroughly disgusted.<sup>40</sup> Still, Bonhoeffer tried to find the positive aspects of his life among the students at Union and did take some things away from his first visit to America. In the meantime, the shadows were growing larger in Germany as the National Socialists were making headway in their quest for the levers of power in German political circles.

#### SHATTERING THE ALREADY BROKEN

When Bonhoeffer returned to Germany in 1931, the political situation had indeed changed. The nationalists were making their voices heard, even to the point of violence on the streets and universities, and fissures were developing that would soon plunge the world into chaos. Bonhoeffer took up his duties as a lecturer at the University of Berlin, but not before a trip to Bonn to meet Karl Barth. This would begin a relationship that would contain tensions and support for them both.<sup>41</sup> Of prime importance to Bonhoeffer was the concrete form the church took in the world. What should it say in the present situation?

It was also during this time that Bonhoeffer entered the orbit of the ecumenical movement by his participation in a conference in Cambridge. This would mark the beginning of a significant interest

<sup>40</sup> *NRS*, p. 91. Bonhoeffer's observations on American Christianity are fascinating to read today in light of subsequent history. His perspective can show that freedom as a free-floating concept can become idolatrous in the current circumstances. We are only free where the Gospel makes room and space for itself precisely where no such freedom exists. As an institutional possession, freedom, is not even an essential mark of the church, pp. 104-05.

<sup>41</sup> One of the most interesting aspects of this relationship is that Barth never really read the first two major works of Bonhoeffer until after his death. It was upon reading *Sanctorum Communio* after Bonhoeffer's death that Barth declared it a theological miracle, not least because it was written in the heart of Protestant liberalism, Berlin. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/4* (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1958), p. 641.

for Bonhoeffer, an interest that would make him suspect to those who were fearful of any positive relationships with the world that had imposed such hardships on Germany. This led to a backlash against ecumenical work that would weaken the church's response to the National Socialists.<sup>42</sup> The right wing forces of Germany at the time sought to isolate Germany and its citizens, the better to feed their resentment.

It was about this time that we also encounter in Bonhoeffer's life the conversionary moment referred to earlier in Chapter 1. This event had profound implications for how Bonhoeffer understood the Sermon on the Mount. Speaking of his own sense of self-righteousness he wrote: 'Then the Bible, and in particular the Sermon on the Mount freed me from that. Since then everything has changed.'<sup>43</sup> Of some interest in this is the fact that Bonhoeffer came to a new understanding about pacifism. The pacifism he had so opposed he now saw as self-evident, though it is an open question as to whether or not Bonhoeffer himself was ever a pacifist.<sup>44</sup> Though we still have no definitive explanation of what this moment was in Bonhoeffer's life, it appeared to mean that Bonhoeffer's orientation was shifted slightly with the personal appropriation of faith.

Of particular note was a letter he wrote to his brother, Karl-Friedrich, in January of 1935 quoted earlier in the first chapter. In this letter Bonhoeffer considers a renewed interest in the Sermon on the Mount as the only source of power to stand against the Nazi illusion. He says he realizes he may seem fanatical, but theology itself had become different for him, something more personal.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See, Bethge, pp. 193-202.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205. Bonhoeffer writes that what he had been freed from was making the doctrine of Jesus Christ 'into something of personal advantage for myself . . .'

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* The relationship of Bonhoeffer to pacifism is one of the most complex aspects of his life. Bethge maintains that he never was a pacifist. Larry Rasmussen in his book, *Reality and Resistance*, argues that Bonhoeffer's commitment to pacifism was situational and provisional. Thus, the issue of whether Bonhoeffer ever advocated a rigorous pacifism is up for question. Rasmussen believes that Bonhoeffer was so deeply concerned about any absolutization of a theological perspective, even pacifism must be always provisional to the moment. Regardless, Rasmussen does point to something profoundly important and that is that whatever attraction pacifism may have had for Bonhoeffer emerged from a theology of the cross and not naïveté about what human-kind is capable of. See his discussion, pp. 94-126.

<sup>45</sup> Bethge, p. 205.



When Bonhoeffer began his duties at the University of Berlin, most of the students were attracted to the Nazi ideology. This made for no small challenge in some respects, but Bonhoeffer continued his theological growth through the lectures he gave these students in the context of the political changes that were taking place around him. In these months there were indications that Bonhoeffer was developing the initial formulations of later themes by his continuing attention to the connection between Christology and the church. This would constitute the high point of his academic life in the accepted corridors of German education.

In the background of his life, the momentum for the Nazis was growing in Germany as swastikas were entering the churches and the 'German Christians' were gaining power in Berlin church elections. Bonhoeffer was not unaware of all this, but he was not as yet in the thick of it. When Franz von Papen became Reich chancellor, many people believed that the new Christian conservative government would restore some measure of stability to the situation in Germany. This government invoked God's name in defence of its legitimacy, a move that Bonhoeffer addressed in a sermon on 12 June 1932 when he preached, 'Or is there not concealed behind our religious trends our ungovernable urge toward . . . power – in the name of God to do what we want, and in the name of the Christian worldview to stir up and play off one people against another?'<sup>46</sup>

But this government was to pale in comparison to what lay on the horizon. At noon on 30 January 1933, Hitler took over the reins of power from Hindenburg and the shadows extended themselves. The life of a professor or country pastor was forever closed to Bonhoeffer as the situation he and his country found themselves in would, for Bonhoeffer and very few others, demand action and resistance. That the resistance was not more widespread is one of history's tragedies.

Bonhoeffer's resistance took almost immediate form on 1 February as he found himself in front of a microphone on a Berlin radio station to deliver an address on the concept of the *Führer*. It is not exactly clear, how the invitation to give this address occurred, but he was responding from a position of social and cultural conservatism in this speech that nonetheless warned of the dangers of elevating leaders to the place of idols.<sup>47</sup> His speech was cut off before he could finish in what was a foreshadowing of the great propaganda machine to come.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>47</sup> Bethge, p. 260.

This rise to power on the part of Hitler was welcomed in many parts of the country in no small part because the Nazis knew how to stoke the resentments and injuries of millions of Germans. Hitler also knew how to appeal to the religious sentiments of his country:

The national government will maintain and defend the foundations on which the power of our nation rests. It will offer strong protection to Christianity as the very basis of our collective morality. Today Christians stand at the very heart of our country. We want to fill our culture again with the Christian spirit. We want to burn out all the recent immoral developments in literature, in the theater, and in the press – in short, we want to burn out the poison of immorality which has entered our whole life and culture as a result of liberal excess during the past years.<sup>48</sup>

The resulting chaos from Hitler's ascension spilled into the streets of Germany, resulting in ever more repressive measures to keep order. This ferment reached its nadir with the Reichstag fire, setting in motion an overwhelming series of laws passed to help Hitler cement power. The tinder for the fire had been growing given the resentment of many in Germany amid the continuing financial hardships of the global market and the aftermath of the Treaty of Versailles, but now the fire was burning brightly with the rekindled dreams of people who believed, falsely, they were on the verge of a new national era of freedom.

The laws which were passed in such quick succession set the stage for the loss of all personal rights protected by the constitution, established the basis for the construction of concentration camps for the enemies of the state, and initiated a vast network of spying and censorship. It was the initial act of the 'Reichstag Fire Edict' that would provide the political means for the Confessing Church seminary at Hinkenwalde to be closed four and a half years later.<sup>49</sup> These laws created the conditions in Germany which made open resistance a crime against the state and, with the Enabling Act, meant that Hitler was not accountable to any legal or constitutional requirement. Soon the laws against the Jews would be passed and the slide into darkness would accelerate. And, in all of this, Hitler faced a compliant church. Large segments of the German Christians began to make their peace

<sup>48</sup> This comes from a radio address that Hitler gave on July 22, 1933. This can be found in *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, 1922–1939*, vol. 1, Norman H. Baynes, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), pp. 871–72.

<sup>49</sup> Bethge, p. 265.



with this government and in turn sell their soul for the hope that they would be able to have influence in society.

#### RESISTANCE?

In effect the Protestant Church in Germany became a Reich church, and in this situation the 'Jewish question' emerged to take centre stage. The war on the Jews had begun, and the Christian church in Germany had no real level of resistance to it, and such resistance as was mounted was ineffective. Bonhoeffer himself addressed this issue with an address entitled 'The Jewish Question'. In this address, Bonhoeffer argued that the state is an order of God's preservation in a godless world and thus the state's actions remain free from the church's intervention, but this does not mean that the church lets political action slip by disinterestedly either.<sup>50</sup>

In fact, Bonhoeffer laid out different responses that the church can take vis-à-vis the state, when it acts. One of these is to question the state, another is to aid the victims of state action and the third contains a phrase that became strongly connected with Bonhoeffer: 'The third possibility is not just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but to put a spoke in the wheel itself.'<sup>51</sup> This image of sticking a log in the wheels of the state, of engaging in action that would cause damage to the state's ongoing assault of people in a society, has been invoked several times, most notably by those who resisted the practice of apartheid in South Africa.<sup>52</sup>

Bonhoeffer goes on in this address to say some remarkable things about the relationship of Jews and Christians, things read today with a sense of dismay. He argues on behalf of the Jews not as Jews, but for the Jew who has been baptized. His main concern in this was Christianized Jews like his friend Franz Hildebrandt and brother-in-law Gerhard Leibholz. His remarks on Jews as Jews in this address appear far more ambivalent and in some places offensive to contemporary ears, especially the remarks about the Jews being responsible for the death of Christ and receiving the curse of God in return for their

<sup>50</sup> NRS, pp. 224–25.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, John W. de Gruchy, *Bonhoeffer and South Africa: Theology in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1984).

refusal of Jesus.<sup>53</sup> This address has led to no little interest in how effective the resistance to Hitler was on the part of the church if they could not fight for those who were not Christian and were persecuted by the regime.<sup>54</sup>

Thus was to begin a long struggle with the Nazis on many fronts, a struggle that was as ineffective as it was well intentioned. The purge of the universities was proceeding apace with professors attacked for their 'liberal' views and any new chair was filled with those who would do the regime's business. In the churches, the German Christians were adroitly moving to consolidate political power from within the church. This led to the formation of groups that tried to mount a resistance such as the Young Reformation Movement, of which Bonhoeffer became a part. The precariousness of the situation though continued to be made manifest by such declarations as this from Ludwig Müller: 'All those who are concerned for the safe structure of our church in the great revolution of these times, must . . . feel deeply thankful that the state should have assumed, in addition to all its tremendous tasks, the great load and burden of reorganizing the church.'<sup>55</sup> In the face of such sentiments, the opposition faced no small obstacle.

In July of 1933, the German Christians took over control of Bonhoeffer's church, the Old Prussian Union, and proposed that the Aryan Paragraph, removing Jews from all positions of leadership, become church law. Bonhoeffer opposed this move by means of circulating

<sup>53</sup> NRS, p. 226.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, the book *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust* edited by Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999). This contains a series of essays which question the role of the church in the Hitler regime. There is one essay on Bonhoeffer written by Kenneth C. Barnes entitled, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hitler's Persecution of the Jews' that is of particular interest. His main argument is that Bonhoeffer contradicts himself even within the essay 'The Church and the Jewish Question.' Barnes argues that for each argument that Bonhoeffer offers for church resistance he presented a counter-argument that negated the first call to action. More recently Stephan R. Haynes has followed up his initial book on Bonhoeffer's reception in the West with another look at Bonhoeffer from a post-Holocaust perspective placing Bonhoeffer carefully in his context and arguing that the legacy Bonhoeffer leaves is complicated. Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Legacy: Post-Holocaust Perspectives* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006). Bonhoeffer himself had a moment of personal weakness concerning this issue when Leibholz asked him to conduct the funeral services of his father. His superiors advised him against conducting a funeral for a Jew and he heeded the advice. This was a decision that he deeply regretted and asked Leibholz for forgiveness. Bethge, pp. 275–76.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

writing in opposition to this, which led in turn to he and Hermann Sasse being given the task of drafting a statement in response to these affairs. They met in August that year at Bethel and wrote a statement that sought to distinguish the authentic tradition of the church from the insipid theology of someone like Müller who reduced Christianity to trust in God and being good.

In the confession written at Bethel, the authors (Bonhoeffer and Sasse were joined by others) sought not only to address the Jewish question, but to offer a robust theology that would rebut all the heresies under which the church was being smothered. There may have been too many heresies to adequately treat, because when the Bethel Confession came before the delegating body the document was watered down significantly, to the point where Bonhoeffer refused to sign it. This signalled Bonhoeffer's slow departure from a church that compromised itself with the state and slighted the racial oppressions that the state was beginning to place on the society.

Bonhoeffer's worst fears were realized when following the take over of the church in July, the Brown synod met in Berlin in September to implement the Aryan Paragraph. Franz Hildebrandt, newly ordained in July, would lose his job under the new law and others would suffer deeply. Bonhoeffer wondered whether to stay in the church or leave and Barth advised him to wait. A statement was drafted that set the situation in the starkest possible terms and most people understood that schism was the only response at this point. From these events was born the Pastors' Emergency League, the first organized dissent against the Nazis' increasing control of the church.<sup>56</sup>

The picture of events in Germany was being portrayed by state supporters differently outside the country thus ensuring that there were conflicting interpretations offered to the outside world. Bonhoeffer attended an ecumenical conference in Sofia, Bulgaria in September of 1933 and gave quite another account of events in Germany. He was able to meet privately with many of the key figures of this conference and alert them to the situation in Germany from his perspective. The Sofia conference produced a resolution that was stinging in its

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 293–311. The reader is encouraged to read Bethge's account of this because his detail of what was taking place behind the scenes can be instructive for understanding how the levers of state power can operate in a coercive fashion. In these months, the Gestapo was very active in this struggle threatening Bonhoeffer and those who aided him. Bonhoeffer himself was told that a concentration camp visit was not outside the realm of possibility, p. 296.

assessment of the implementation of the Aryan clause, which would have ramifications in Germany.

Returning from Sofia, Bonhoeffer arrived in time to attend the national synod in Wittenberg to which he brought a number of pamphlets to be distributed. This synod would also be a disaster for those like Bonhoeffer. This debacle was complete when over Luther's tomb in the church of Wittenberg Castle Joachim Hossenfelder, an impulsive young pastor who would become the German Christian's national leader in 1933, proclaimed: 'I greet thee my Reich Bishop!'<sup>57</sup> This pretty much describes the prospects of a church that sought to find a place of faithfulness to Jesus Christ. After distributing his pamphlets that sought to call into question the direction the church was taking, Bonhoeffer left feeling defeated. In October, he wrote to Barth from London: 'I felt that I was incomprehensibly in radical opposition to all my friends, that my views of matters were taking me more and more into isolation, although I was and remained in the closest personal relationship with these men — and all that made me anxious, made me uncertain.'<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps these words give some clue to Bonhoeffer's inner state and the reasons why he took his next step, leaving Germany to serve parishes in London. His exchange with Barth on this is revelatory of his state of mind, even to the point of not letting Barth know about this until he had left. Barth's response to Bonhoeffer was unsettling in that he did not let Bonhoeffer off easily for leaving Germany and going to London.<sup>59</sup>

Bonhoeffer's stay in London would bring him into contact with a host of figures that would play a role later in his life, including the Anglican bishop of Chichester, George Kennedy Allen Bell, whom he knew from his earlier work in the ecumenical movement and who would become Bonhoeffer's advocate later in helping him interpret to the outside world what was taking place in Germany. Bonhoeffer was in constant contact with the situation back home during his time in London and had to fight the efforts of the Nazi party in London to win adherents to their side. German Christian leaders sought speaking engagements in London and the rest of the United Kingdom, but these were not particularly successful in persuading their audiences that they represented an authentic Christian witness in Germany.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

<sup>58</sup> *NKS*, p. 235.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 229–40.

In the meantime, the church in Germany was experiencing its own moments of enlightenment as to the true nature of what they had allowed to capture their souls.<sup>60</sup> The Pastors' Emergency League was not as effective dealing with the situation as some had hoped, leading to events that would culminate in the assembling of several church groups in Barmen and the beginnings of the Confessing Church. The centrepiece of this event would be the drafting of the Barmen Declaration, written by Karl Barth. In this document, the call was for those who would work to renounce the 'false doctrines' of the German Christian church government and confess the one true word of Jesus Christ.<sup>61</sup> While the Barmen Declaration was a strong call to resistance, it also failed to protest against the anti-Semitic racism of the time.

In this moment, Bonhoeffer found himself in a rather peculiar situation. Bethge reports that both the Confessing Church and the ecumenical movement, Bonhoeffer's only two communities of possible support, held him in suspicion. The Confessing Church was suspicious of Bonhoeffer's constant concern with the Sermon on the Mount, which they viewed as odd. The ecumenical movement was wary of his insistence on confession and the repudiation of heresy in the German church: 'He believed that the confessionally based opposition could be saved from sterility by the Sermon on the Mount, while that segment of the opposition with its roots in the Sermon on the Mount could be rescued from mere enthusiasm by the confession.'<sup>62</sup>

In the midst of all this, Hitler was tightening his hold on the hearts, minds and souls of the German people. Events were unfolding in Germany which were not advantageous to the strong resistance of opponents of the regime in either secular or ecclesiastical circles. Upon the death of Hindenburg, Hitler combined the two highest offices in Germany into his own person and was designated as *Führer*

<sup>60</sup> One such moment, the Sports Palace Demonstration of November 1933, put matters into bold relief for those who may have been deceived about the totalitarian and anti-Semitic claims of the Nazis. The language used by Dr Reinhard Krause, a leading party leader, in which he called for 'liberation from the Old Testament with its Jewish money morality and from these stories of cattle dealers and pimps,' particularly caught the attention of the press and those in the German Christian movement who preferred their anti-Semitism a little less vulgar.

<sup>61</sup> For the complete text of the Barmen Declaration in English translation, the reader can consult Arthur C. Cochrane's *The Church's Confession Under Hitler* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 237-42.

<sup>62</sup> Bethge, p. 372.

and Reich chancellor of the German people. Soon would follow oaths of allegiance to Hitler that would mean the loss of his position at Bonn for Karl Barth and an exile from Germany into Switzerland. Most Christians in Germany were overwhelmingly thrilled to have law and order reign. Hitler was, for them, their savior.

With this ferment as the backdrop, the ecumenical movement was preparing for an upcoming youth conference in Fanø, off the coast of Denmark, in August of 1934. Both sides of the church struggle expended no small effort to designate who should attend this conference as the official church representatives from Germany. The resolution of the issue would be profound, for the ecumenical council threw its weight on the side of the Confessing Church. This, of course, just caused more vitriol to be visited upon the ecumenical movement by those aligned with the German Christians.

Bonhoeffer was to deliver an address at Fanø that would draw much interest, even down to the present day. The document, entitled 'The Universal Church and the World of Nations', became known as Bonhoeffer's 'peace speech'. In a densely packed homily Bonhoeffer lays out the argument that peace on earth is a commandment given at Christ's coming. We can respond to this call by being obedient, or we can start the hypocritical questioning of the serpent in the garden, who asks, 'Has God really said . . .?' In powerful language, Bonhoeffer lays out the wisdom of the world in response to the command of God. He puts sentiments into the mouth of the forces that keep us from keeping the command of God: 'Must God not really have said that we should work for peace, of course, but also make ready tanks and poison gas for security?' Even more telling, the voice of the tempter, according to Bonhoeffer asks us, 'Did God say you should not protect your own people? Did God say you should leave your own a prey to the enemy?'<sup>63</sup>

Bonhoeffer goes on to contend that the church transgresses the boundaries that are set for it in nation or race, it is a universal church with members throughout all peoples. Peace will not come from the political order because peace means giving yourself to God and the political order does not behave in this fashion. Peace does not come from individual witness, or even individual churches, rather peace comes from the ecumenical church of Christ, which offers a place

<sup>63</sup> This speech can be found in *NKS*, pp. 289-92. It is remarkable how much can be said in such a short period of time.



upon which to confront the claims and universal pretensions of the political realm. The political order is choked with its weapons and mistrust of others, this realm is unable to respond to the call of God, but the worldwide church of God can respond to the command of God by not taking up weapons against one another, because to do so is to take up weapons against Christ himself.<sup>64</sup>

As this conference ended, Bonhoeffer made his way back to London, but the ensuing events in Germany were following the usual course. The Confessing Church continued to struggle not only with the Reich church, but with elements within its own ranks that sought compromise with the Nazis in order to ensure the survival of their church. Events would soon move to accent the necessity of beginning a seminary for training pastors from the Confessing Church movement, in no small part because candidates for theological examinations in the official state church had to prove they were of 'Aryan' descent.

Bonhoeffer was still in his parish in England, but the call came to him to consider taking on the responsibility of heading a new seminary for training the pastors nurtured by the Confessing Church. He accepted this invitation and began preparations for a trip to India, but this was not to be.<sup>65</sup> On 26 April 1934, Dietrich Bonhoeffer made his way to Zingst on the Baltic Sea where a new chapter would begin in his life and work.

<sup>64</sup> In an interesting sentence, Bonhoeffer mentions the people of the West being put to shame by non-Christians in the East. At this time, he had expressed an interest in going to visit Gandhi. The issue of Bonhoeffer's attraction to pacifism is not quite settled, because many see him as a pacifist given his statements about this in his speeches and writings, but others, most notably Bethge himself, argue that Bonhoeffer never was a pacifist. For now it is at least the case that it is immensely difficult being a solitary pacifist because this form of resistance is too difficult without the support and discipline of the community of Christ.

<sup>65</sup> This trip was to be undertaken in order that Bonhoeffer might join the ashram of his favourite prophet of the early 1930s, Mahatma Gandhi. Bonhoeffer's interest in India was actually long-standing and he had obtained permission to join Gandhi's ashram in a trip that was to take place in 1935. Bonhoeffer actually wrote Reinhold Niebuhr asking for his advice about this visit, and Niebuhr responded with opposition, in no small part because he believed that Gandhi was effective against the British because of their political liberalism. The Nazis, Niebuhr contended, would have no paings of conscience about crushing resistance to their agendas. Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*, pp. 213–17.

### A COSTLY GRACE

It was the work with the students of the new seminary that would particularly mark Bonhoeffer's impact on the Christian church, especially through his two writings from this period, *Discipleship* and *Life Together*. The students under Bonhoeffer's charge soon moved from Zingst to Finkenwalde where they would study, worship and prepare for life in the church. Ironically, many of them would end up serving the needs of the Nazi war machine and several would lose their lives to Hitler's ambitions. The state for its part had not left its pretensions for control of events alone and abandoned, and so maneuvered things legally that the Confessing Church soon fell apart because of irreparable schisms.<sup>66</sup> This would also impact the seminary at Finkenwalde as the Gestapo would come to close it.

The days at Finkenwalde began and ended with worship, and the discipline of the community was developed as they went along. They lived in close quarters and so were together more intensely than would have been the case at a university. Even so, the students were not themselves radicals and many were ready to serve the German government through the military. This desire arose from the cultural conditioning occasioned by life in Germany, but the desire to serve the government also emerged because many in the Confessing Church wanted to show that they were, at heart, a patriotic and loyal citizenry. There was no real embrace of pacifism among the students even though their theological leader may have over the course of several evenings raised the question for discussion.<sup>67</sup>

The experiment at Finkenwalde attracted its own share of notoriety and visits from interested parties, but the students continued on in their preparations. The usual subjects were taught: church history, liturgies, pastoral care, biblical exegesis and the like, but there was one novel aspect of this community and that was Bonhoeffer's own lectures on discipleship. This was reflective of the centre of everything that took place there and would be the heart and soul of how the

<sup>66</sup> This was done mostly through an act that appeared in September of 1935, the *Law for the Protection of the German Evangelical Church*. This law effectively brought the church totally under state control which made active resistance to the government itself difficult for those raised to accept the tenets of Romans 13 that government is given by God for good. Bethge, p. 421.

<sup>67</sup> Bethge, p. 431.

community formed. Though the theological training was rigorous and fully academic, there was still Bonhoeffer's unique desire to offer serious reflection on how the life of faith is lived in concrete ways. In some ways the concerns that were academic for him in the ecclesiology he explored in *Sanctorum Communio* now had become living reality. How does the church that incarnates Jesus Christ take concrete form in the world?

Bonhoeffer realized that with the events taking place around him theology must be done very carefully and with full discernment. Theology would be important for the role it played in legitimating certain positions of the German Christians. One such idea on the theological agenda was the doctrine of creation, or more specifically, in what way do the orders of society reflect God's ordering of human existence? Under this rubric a number of theological perspectives were being brought forth that essentially argued for the inherent sanctity of the state as 'order of creation'. Given the designs of Hitler, however, this type of theology just became justification for an idolatry of power, the baptizing of the state and its agenda with a Christian veneer.<sup>68</sup>

In these concerns, Bonhoeffer was still struggling with a theme that had challenged him for quite some time – how does the Sermon on the Mount inform the disciple of Christ? What is one to make of its revolutionary demands to extend grace in ways that seem impossible to maintain in the world? In what way does grace become costly as opposed to 'cheap'? Bonhoeffer wrote his lectures on discipleship in the midst of daily life within this community and it would be the last time in his life he would be surrounded by an ecclesial community that could nourish and stimulate his thinking about the distinct form that Christianity must take in order to respond to the world. This world

<sup>68</sup> Bethge writes concerning this: 'To show any interest, however genuine and earnest, in this particular subject at this particular time would come dangerously close to making an offer on the altar of Hitler.' *Ibid.*, p. 459. Hence theologues of order would have to be met with theologies of breakthrough, which in some ways is what Bonhoeffer was working through at Finkenwalde. This was not done to isolate the church or constitute withdrawal of the church from the world; on the contrary, Bonhoeffer understood that the world needed something new:

*Discipleship* is a call to battle, it is concentration and hence restriction, so that the entire earth may be reconquered by the infinite message . . . when the penultimate in its lust for glory and its thirst for adulation and sacrifice, thrust itself forward – and even in the church those who bowed before them were legion – Bonhoeffer turned towards the ultimate for the sake of penultimate.

would soon become one in which his colleagues and students would be arrested in growing numbers.

The themes that emerged in *Discipleship* were oriented to Bonhoeffer's struggle for an authentic expression of Christ's church on earth. One aspect of this struggle was that the emphasis in the Christian faith is definitely not on the individual *qua* individual, but on the person as they exist within the community of faith. Although the individual does not disappear, they are still to be formed by the graces present within the community through its worship and life. This call to the community of Christ was done in recognition that all life is lived in the realm of the real and thus the community of faith would have to have a certain provisional and *ad hoc* quality about it.

There was a certain intensity in the particular community at Finkenwalde that led to searches for ways that the faithful might find expression for the teaching they were receiving. One such expression was the creation of a 'house of the brethren' in the preachers' seminary. This would be a community of persons committed to a more rigorous life than the seminary at large, a life together.<sup>69</sup> This community would incorporate the disciplines of confession, prayer, the care of souls, and other aspects of Christian formation that would mark a new way of being in the world. The first community was formed in September of 1935, consisting of six students who stayed behind in Finkenwalde while the other seminarians took vacations or breaks. This community would exist at Finkenwalde until the Gestapo closed the seminary itself in the autumn of 1937.<sup>70</sup>

This action on the part of the Gestapo actually hastened the appearance of the book *Life Together*; for Bonhoeffer was reluctant to publicize the experiment in community too soon. In Protestant Germany, this seemed far too Catholic, too exotic. In truth, however, Finkenwalde and its common life had revealed that the Protestant faith had

<sup>69</sup> It is interesting to think about this in relationship to Luther's exploration of this in his notion of *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*, the small church within the church. The idea of the church within the church attracted him as well, but upon further reflection Luther could not actually carry through on this because of his theology of *simul justus et peccator*, that we are simultaneously justified and sinner. This provided Luther with the realization that since we are simultaneously justified and sinner we cannot make claim to the type of purity that the committed community engendered by its very presence.

<sup>70</sup> Bethge himself was one of the initial members of this community. Bethge, p. 408.

suffered a type of impoverishment of spiritual formation that neglect of the larger Christian tradition offers. The larger tradition contained the resources that could lead to one's allowing oneself to be formed by adherence to disciplines that change one's orientation to life in the world. This constitutes one of the most enduring legacies of Bonhoeffer as we shall later see.

As always in Bonhoeffer's life, matters outside of Finkenwalde were proceeding as the regime dictated. Hitler in September of 1935 had announced the Nuremberg Laws, which were another phase of Jewish persecution. This was to be expected from Hitler, but more distressing was the report from Franz Hildebrandt to Bonhoeffer that the Confessing synod that was meeting was considering approving the Nuremberg Laws through conceding the state's right to legislate all questions concerning the Jews. The very fact that these were on the table stands as an embarrassment for the Confessing Church, but their tepid response signalled even bigger problems to come. Not the least of these were the attempts of the church to derive its legitimacy through its legal status and not its legal status through its legitimacy.<sup>71</sup>

The schools that were started outside the usual state institutions, such as Finkenwalde, were always suspect by those who remained within the official church's orbit. Ludwig Müller had already declared Finkenwalde illegal. But a ratcheting up of pressure was to be applied by laws passed by the Nazi bureaucracy that also declared such schools to be illegal in the eyes of the state. This made it pretty much impossible for students who were preparing for parish work to find positions in the church. Those who came to Finkenwalde did so in the realization that they were paying a price by attending.<sup>72</sup> For some that price was too dear and so they departed to attend schools that were approved

<sup>71</sup> Shelley Baranowski covers part of this story in her contribution to the aforementioned book, *Betrayal*. Her chapter, entitled, 'The Confessing Church and Antisemitism: Protestant Identity, German Nationhood, and the Exclusion of the Jews' portrays many of the difficulties and ambiguities that marked the Confessing church, pp. 90–109.

<sup>72</sup> For example, the passage of the Fifth Implementation Decree which was the means whereby the state assumed absolute power over the church was devastating in its implications and showed what the church was up against. Bethge, pp. 496–97. Another manifestation of this price can be seen in Bishop Heckel's statement to the Prussian church committee calling Bonhoeffer an enemy of the state and even worse, a pacifist. For these crimes, he should not be allowed to train German theologians. In this condemnation of Bonhoeffer's purported pacifism, Heckel stood in common with almost all Christians in Germany, even those of Finkenwalde. Bethge, pp. 511–12.

by the state church. This took its toll on the rest of the community and especially Bonhoeffer. These conflicts only mirrored the internal erosion that was taking place in the Confessing church as the pressures being exerted within and without caused their own fissures.

For Bonhoeffer, matters came to a head when he returned from an unauthorized (by the state) visit to Sweden, which created quite the stir in Germany. His right to teach at the University of Berlin was revoked. But this was merely one in a series of actions the state was taking against those who had put themselves in resistance to the official church organization. Life at Finkenwalde continued despite these disruptions and the students not only continued in their studies, but in their sense of mission as well.

As 1936 drew to a close, changes were occurring that would turn out ominous for the community. The Gestapo continued its work of harassing and arresting people who it deemed enemies of the state and this included pastors. By the end of 1937, 804 members of the Confessing Church had been imprisoned for various durations.<sup>73</sup> In effect this took place through the means of onerous regulations meant to squeeze those elements of the church that still organized outside of state purview. Communications between parties were made impossible and even collections were forbidden during Confessing Church services. On July 1, the Gestapo would arrest Martin Niemöller, a leader in the Confessing Church. Bonhoeffer became involved with this because he was visiting Niemöller later that day unaware that he had been arrested. He encountered the Gestapo at the house where he was questioned and detained.

Events escalated as the authorities stepped up the arrests and the repression as former Finkenwaldians were arrested and removed from their positions. It was only a matter of time before the final blow, which came in September when the Gestapo showed up in Finkenwalde with orders to shut it down. Similar scenes were playing out all over Germany and the light of these schools grew dimmer and dimmer, finally to be extinguished.

#### ON A LONG DISTANT SHORE

For most of the years between 1938 and 1941, Bonhoeffer lived in the rather remote reaches of outer Pomerania where he sought to sustain

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 577.



pastoral leadership and remain in the fight. This was discouraging because he watched with disappointment as the Confessing Church continued to be more concerned with its own survival than the larger picture of what was taking place among the nations. Among the most heartbreaking moments must have been when Bonhoeffer heard that over 85 per cent of Confessing Church pastors had signed the oath of loyalty to Hitler in 1938. This only contributed to Bonhoeffer's sense of isolation, as the community that he had placed great hope in became dissipated by the Nazi machinery. Even worse, many took the loyalty oath knowing that there was an impending order that non-Aryans must have a large 'J' stamped on their identity cards.<sup>74</sup>

But this was becoming business as usual for a country that had slipped under the totalitarian thumb of the National Socialists. The types of repression that took place in Germany led to a situation where people who were active, who might have wanted to know what was going on, soon found that life goes easier if one ignores the construction taking place behind the trees, outside the village. A psychology of repression serves as a dark cloud that descends upon a people, and the questions formerly asked no longer find willing expression. It was this that Bonhoeffer faced and the church could not provide a community strong enough to meet this challenge. He would find people who would take up the challenge of his time, but they would not do so because of commitment to Christ.

One such person was Hans von Dohnanyi, his brother-in-law, who was working with others in the military and the political order to form some type of resistance within Germany. It was to this circle that von Dohnanyi introduced Bonhoeffer. Some of these were persons in the military intelligence which is where Bonhoeffer would eventually find himself. It is within this circle that Bonhoeffer learned more than he previously knew about the political situation within the Reich. Meanwhile, events orchestrated by Hitler were, from his perspective, going extremely well, including the march into Austria in March of 1938. After this, it became obvious that former measures to try and blunt Hitler were not going to have an effect. The resistance must be a military one, which itself was difficult because Hitler was skillful at turning the levers of power of state in an ever more suffocating way around his desires and oversight.

As the country went on war footing, Bonhoeffer found himself subject to call up in the military, but before that could take place he found

himself in a familiar place, Union Theological Seminary in New York City. He had been considering a visit to America during his time in London during March and April of 1939. As events unfolded, he landed in America in June of 1939 and was immediately beset by inner doubts about the course of action he had taken. It was an excruciating time for him. In a famous letter to Reinhold Niebuhr, he wrote:

I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people . . . Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization.<sup>75</sup>

On 7 July, he was on a boat as it made its way out of New York to head back to Germany and the last stage of Bonhoeffer's life. His brother, Karl-Friedrich, was returning to Germany from America as well.

Now Bonhoeffer was to enter a new phase of his life, marked by his more active, though still peripheral work with the *Abwehr*, the military intelligence wing that housed several of the conspirators against the regime. This was not an immediate consideration upon his return to Germany, but would slowly come into focus for Bonhoeffer as the succeeding months unfolded. At first he went back to his collective parish work, overseeing his former students in the countryside of Germany, and writing. Though he had several places around Germany where he worked, he really had no settled home other than his parents' house in Berlin. Hitler was wildly successful during this time with France being the big victory that solidified his power and made opposition to him that much more difficult.

Under these conditions, Bonhoeffer kept as much contact as he could with former students and others in the Confessing Church movement. These contacts were difficult due to restrictions of the regime and also because so many former students were scattered over the war zones. The collective pastorates of his former students were dissolved in March of 1940 and Bonhoeffer found himself without a job. It did not help that later that year he would be forbidden to speak in public

<sup>74</sup> See *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, revised edition, Edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson. (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 504.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 603.

on the grounds that this would constitute 'subversive activity'.<sup>76</sup> Along with this prohibition came the order to report regularly on his movements to the police.

Bonhoeffer fought these restrictions, but to little relief. In the meantime, he continued his work on what would come to constitute *Ethics*. His other choice at this time was to join the conspirators more closely by taking a position with military intelligence. This put Bonhoeffer in a particularly isolated position because many of his colleagues in the church and the ecumenical movement had no idea what to do with this information. To all outside eyes, it looked like Bonhoeffer had betrayed his deepest beliefs. There was a great deal of suspicion, especially about his motives in all this. This created no small agony for him.<sup>77</sup>

It was in these circumstances that Bonhoeffer was able to steal some time to work on the ethics material at Ettal monastery in the south of Germany. He had periods of uninterrupted time here to work, but surely all the events in his life were deeply on his mind as he sought to fashion *Ethics*. It should not go unnoticed that his work on this text was done basically alone and not within the community that formed the background for *Discipleship*.

The letters that he was reading from Finkenwaldians must have been heart-breaking as well, some of which reflected the ways in which war causes one to lose almost all morality, save the morality of the tribe.<sup>78</sup> By the end of the war over 75 former students at Finkenwalde would have lost their lives to this war. The needless destruction of this war was being felt by Bonhoeffer more deeply every day. For a theologian who was so concerned about the real and the concrete, this reality was a suffering all of its own.

This reality was the arena in which Bonhoeffer had to serve the rest of his life. After the fall of France in June of 1940 Hitler, like

<sup>76</sup> Bethge, p. 698. At this point in anticipation of what I want to raise later it must be observed that perhaps every Christian voice should be in danger of being silenced because it is subversive to business as usual and the way that society is being arranged by the powerful elites.

<sup>77</sup> Paradigmatic of this suspicion is surely the attitude of Karl Barth to this turn of events. Barth himself thought that Bonhoeffer must have finally given in and gone to the other side of the struggle. It was only with great effort that Bonhoeffer was able to convince Barth otherwise.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 704.

Napoleon, turned his attention to Russia. This would not begin officially until June of 1941. Bonhoeffer in the meantime entered into full service of the resisters by taking his first trip to Switzerland to meet with ecumenical leaders to apprise them of the situation in Germany. He also was able to meet with Karl Barth and tell him the truth about what he was up to with his new work. Other trips would follow, all with the intention of relating to the outside world what the situation in Germany looked like from the resister's point of view. Bonhoeffer and his contacts in church circles became useful to the resistance because he could help gauge how other Europe would respond when Hitler was overthrown. These efforts in some senses were helpful for explanations, but in other ways they were tragic defeats, especially regarding Bonhoeffer's mission to the British, through his contacts with Bell.<sup>79</sup>

In Germany in 1943 matters were coming to a head and events were rapidly moving. Hitler had overextended his army, which would sow the seeds of Germany's ultimate defeat and the conspirators felt it was time to move. The various intrigues among bureaucratic offices meant that the Gestapo was increasingly suspicious of what von Dohnanyi and others in the *Abwehr* were up to. There were two attempts on Hitler's life in March of 1943 that failed and, on 5 April 1943 the Gestapo came to Bonhoeffer's house in Berlin and arrested him. He was taken to the Tegel military interrogation prison. He was not the only one taken that day, as von Dohnanyi and his wife were also among those arrested.

From this point Bonhoeffer would be held a prisoner in Tegel and was to pen the fragments that made their way into the consciousness of the world under the title *Letters and Papers from Prison*. The words he wrote would find an audience who would interpret those words in various ways. We will have occasion to consider the reception of Bonhoeffer and his call for what a religionless Christianity might look like, but he reminds us that the lives we live are hidden in some ways that we cannot discern, even as we live in the midst of them.

His time in Tegel would be spent writing fiction, letters and theological reflections to his friends and family. As the war continued,

<sup>79</sup> The account of this is found in Bethge, pp. 757-75. This mission was undertaken on behalf of the resistance within the state that Bonhoeffer found himself within. Essentially those in places of political power were putting out feelers to the British government about what would happen to Germany if Hitler were overthrown. While Bell trusted Bonhoeffer, he was opposed by others in England who did not share Bell's view of what to do with Germany at the end of hostilities.

Bonhoeffer would experience great difficulties in his captivity, but his fate was sealed when Claus von Stauffenberg's attempt to assassinate Hitler failed on 20 July 1944. Two months later, evidence would be uncovered that linked Bonhoeffer to various members of the conspiracy and other members of his family would be arrested: Klaus, his brother and Rüdiger Schleicher, his brother-in-law. In October of that year, Bonhoeffer was transferred to the Gestapo prison at Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse, Berlin. This would start a series of moves that would culminate in Bonhoeffer being executed on 9 April 1945 at Flossenbürg with other key members of the conspiracy. On 30 April, Hitler would commit suicide in his bunker.

In a letter dated 23 February 1944, Bonhoeffer was reflecting on the ways our lives are shaped by all those forces that construct us and he wrote to Bethge that, 'The important thing today is that we should be able to discern for the fragment of our life how the whole was arranged and planned, and what material it consists of. For really there are some fragments that are only worth throwing into the dustbin . . . and others whose importance lasts for centuries, because their completion can only be a matter for God, and so they are fragments that must be fragments.'<sup>80</sup>

As we live among the fragments ourselves, we cannot know with certainty which ones will last. It becomes our task, even within our fractured world, to respond to our times. But, even so, we can certainly recognize that Bonhoeffer, for all his faults and weaknesses, constitutes a claim on us that is still compelling in these difficult times. In reflection on Bonhoeffer's struggles, we may find which of those fragments that constitute our lives will last for centuries.

### Chapter 3

## LIVING IN THE WORLD COME OF AGE

There is a scene in the movie *Schindler's List* that opens the film. The scene shows tables being set up on a railway platform, pens and paper being arranged so carefully as to suggest an overwhelming attention to order and propriety. Everything is in precise form, clean, neat and orderly. And then the trains come. As the human cargo spills out of the trains, we are confronted with the fact that all this efficiency has been put in the service of one of humanity's most soulless moments, the Holocaust. It serves as a compelling example of what Bonhoeffer called the 'world come of age' for the way that bureaucracy and technique functioned in the Nazi regime points to something significant for our day.

In this chapter, I wish to sketch out the contours of what Bonhoeffer was exploring in his captivity when he was reflecting on the metaphor of the 'world come of age'. I will trace out his thoughts on how the world developed intellectually and explore some of the ideas that emerged from his reflections in prison. In the second part, I want to point to places where I see Bonhoeffer's concept of a 'world come of age' having a significant impact on our time. By reflecting on the political and economic orders as they impact the West presently, I hope to lay out a marker for thinking through how faith responds to the 'world come of age' in the rest of the book.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his prison writings put forth the idea that humankind is living increasingly in a 'world come of age'. By this Bonhoeffer had in mind a world of increasing maturity that was able to arrange itself very well without the tutelage of religion or God. This maturation had actually been a theme in Bonhoeffer's writings since

<sup>80</sup> LPP, p. 219. My first impression to use the notion of fragments in regards to Bonhoeffer's life came from Stanley Hauerwas in *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2004), p. 33.