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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer's status as a major figure in twentieth-century Christianity is well established. Few who are familiar with his legacy will deny its significance for theology, the church, the ecumenical movement, and the development of Christian spirituality along with the struggle for justice and peace in the world. Many would regard Bonhoeffer as a Protestant martyr and saint. Interest in his legacy has also spread well beyond the confines of Christianity. People of other faiths, secular humanists and scholars of various disciplines, musicians, dramatists, filmmakers and poets, along with people from all walks of life have found inspiration in Bonhoeffer's life and work. But of all his writings, now collected in the sixteen volumes of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (DBWE)*, none has contributed more to this wide-ranging and global interest or to establishing Bonhoeffer's stature than his *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Now, more than fifty years after its first publication as a slender volume of fewer than two hundred pages, it is widely hailed as a classic text of twentieth-century Christianity and literature. For that reason alone, this new English translation based on the critical German edition (*DBW8*) has long been anticipated.

There will be many readers, probably the majority as the years pass, who will be reading the prison writings for the first time. They will want to know why the text in their hands is regarded as a classic and worth reading. Their knowledge of Bonhoeffer's earlier life and writings, as well as their understanding of key terms and their significance both for him and

his later interpreters, may be limited. There will be other readers who have long been acquainted with the contents as found in earlier editions. They will be interested in discovering what is different about this edition, and how it contributes to our knowledge of Bonhoeffer's legacy and to its contemporary interpretation. Both types of readers have been kept in mind in preparing the introduction written especially for this new English edition.

Whereas the introduction has been written for this edition, the afterword is a translation of the German edition's *Nachwort*. The latter provides an extended reflection on the content of the letters and papers that enables the reader to discern the dominant threads running through the material and to identify the key ideas and issues. The introduction is complementary to the afterword, and as such it does not try to cover the same ground, though some repetition has become inevitable. The introduction is intended to provide information that may be of particular help and interest for the English reader. Indeed, *Letters and Papers from Prison* has had a somewhat different history and impact in the Anglo-Saxon world compared to that in the German-speaking world or elsewhere. But wherever its influence has been felt, there can be no doubt that it is widely acclaimed as a classic. What this means and why it may be so are questions we now need to address.

### *Letters and Papers from Prison as Classic*

Bonhoeffer did not plan or intend the publication of his letters and papers from prison. His close friend and confidant Eberhard Bethge undertook the task after Bonhoeffer's death in order to share with a wider public the exciting new thoughts about the future of Christianity that Bonhoeffer had shared with him. These thoughts were expressed in a series of letters from April 30, 1944, onward, which are usually referred to as the "theological letters." The decision to publish these letters determined the original structure and content of the first edition of *Letters and Papers from Prison* and has generally influenced the way in which the volume has been received and understood. These "theological letters" remain central to the prison writings, and many readers will regard them as the core of its contents. But it should be kept in mind that they represent but a handful of the letters in the book, and that they only begin toward the end of Bonhoeffer's imprisonment. There is, in other words, a great deal more in this volume than the reader might have anticipated, just as there is a range of genres other than letters: poetry, meditations, prayers, reports, a book outline, and some pithy, cryptic notes.

The correspondence in *DBWE* 8 recounts the remarkable story of a distinguished German family closely connected to the conspiracy against Hitler

during the months that culminated in the collapse of the Nazi regime and the fall of Berlin. It is a story about relationships, friendship and love, anxiety and hope, set in a city under virtual siege, in a military prison where Bonhoeffer and others awaited trial, and on the Italian war front, where Bethge was stationed. From the outset, the reader enters into the daily life of the extended Bonhoeffer family as its members try to cope with the increasingly immense challenges confronting them. Night after night they take shelter from the bombs raining down on their city. Yet daily life continues as they seek a semblance of normalcy by attending school, going to work, repairing bomb-damaged homes, planting gardens, and celebrating birthdays, weddings, and holy days. Yet there is always an ominous cloud hovering over everything else, defined by the increasing destruction around them and, above all, by the imprisonment of Dietrich, his brother-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi, and several conspirators in the plot against Hitler.

At the center of this unfolding drama, the reader, already aware of its tragic outcome, encounters Bonhoeffer himself—a man of faith, prayer, and probing intellect, hoping against hope that the plot to assassinate Hitler would succeed, struggling with his doubts, fears, and loneliness, aching to be reunited with his fiancée, his family, and his friend Eberhard Bethge. Day by day he is conscious of the suffering of his former students, many of them now on the battlefield, some of them already dead. He is mindful of the needs of his fellow prisoners and warders who seek his counsel. Above all, he is concerned about the welfare of his parents, his fiancée, Maria von Wedemeyer, and his extended family, trying to hide from them the worst of his experiences and the deepest of his fears. All of this is captured in his letters like images on a photograph. If in his other writings we encounter the student, pastor, theologian, and teacher, in *DBWE* 8 we meet Bonhoeffer also as the human being and become party to both his strengths and his weaknesses. Out of his experience of isolation, interrogation, and uncertainty come remarkable insights, then, into what it means to be human as well as Christian, as in his comments on friendship and music or his reflections on time. Memories of the past along with anticipations of the future connect his daily experience of prison life to the world he loved and the love he longed to experience more fully. Another sense of time, that of the passing seasons and the seasons of the Christian year, provide the markers that enable Bonhoeffer to give order to his life in prison as reflected in his daily reading from the Bible and the recalling of favorite hymns. And all the while, he looks forward in anticipation to the all too infrequent visits of his aging parents and his fiancée, the parcels of food and other provisions, of books and even some cigars left for him, and, of course, the letters that keep him in touch with his family, Maria, and his friend Eberhard.

The importance of Bonhoeffer's letters and papers has attracted the attention of many, not only in the aftermath of the Second World War but in many other contexts since then. Bonhoeffer's letters express the fears, hopes, and courage of someone who increasingly came to accept the inevitability of his own death. This was not a meek resignation to fate, however tempting, but a learning to trust more deeply in God despite his circumstances. Always affirming life in its fullness, his constant thought as his life drew to its untimely close was the meaning of hope. Bonhoeffer had reflected on death since childhood after his brother Walter died from wounds on the western front during the First World War.<sup>[1]</sup> He was acutely conscious of the death of his students on the battlefield, of the many civilians who had needlessly died, and of the Jews and others who were perishing in concentration camps. Now he had to face the likelihood of his own death. Yet despite the fear of being cut down in the prime of life, with love unfulfilled, friendship denied, and much yet to be done, he came to accept his destiny, whatever it might be, submitting to the God he had come to know in Jesus Christ. Nowhere is this more poignantly expressed than in his prison poetry, in which death becomes the last station on the road to freedom.<sup>[2]</sup>

The structure of *DBWE* 8, which will be examined in detail later in the introduction, hinges on the conspiracy against Hitler. Although this can never be openly stated in the letters because of the dangers involved, the reader can sense the expectation of success mingled with the fear of failure. But after July 20, 1944, the day the plot failed and reprisals began, the mood changes even though nothing as yet could be pinned on Bonhoeffer by the Gestapo. It is during this period, anticipated in the letter of April 30, that Bonhoeffer wrote his celebrated "theological letters," which describe the direction in which his thought was moving as he pondered, albeit tentatively, the contours of Christianity in a postwar Europe and, by extension, in our contemporary world. Bonhoeffer was not yet forty years of age, so how his life would have played itself out and his thought developed if he had survived is not an easy question to answer. But as we reflect on the totality of his legacy, we can discern how so many of the trajectories in the earlier phases of his life and theology found their final though still fragmentary expression in these letters.

As already intimated, the "theological letters" are only part of *DBWE* 8, and its status as a classic is not confined to them. But they remain in many ways the core and the main reason why the prison writings continue to attract so much attention, even though we can now appreciate more the

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[1.] See *DB-ER*, 28, and *DBWE* 10:600.

[2.] See "Stations on the Way to Freedom," 4/191.

volume in its entirety. So what is it about these particular letters that is so significant? Why is it that they have made such an impact on Christian theology and practice over the past decades since they were first published? Why are they so important, creative, and exciting for those who have responded to them with such enthusiasm? The short answer to these questions is that in them Bonhoeffer helps many who may have become disillusioned with Christianity as a creed, and dismayed by its failures in serving the world, to think in fresh ways about faith in Jesus Christ and what it means to be the church today. In doing so, Bonhoeffer does not propose trite or easy answers—no one who had previously written so powerfully about costly discipleship or the ethics of free responsibility could do that—but he does speak clearly and provocatively to people living fully in the modern world who are seeking to be truly Christian and fully human, people who are fully engaged in the life of the modern world but also open to the possibility of an authentic faith in the God of Jesus Christ.

But “who is Jesus Christ actually for us, today?” That is the question that Bonhoeffer eventually poses for the reader in these letters, a question that had previously informed much of his theological work, but which in prison takes on a new urgency for him as he turns to ponder anew “the future of Christianity” in today’s world. Bonhoeffer’s probing toward answers draws the reader into the text, for these are the very questions that prompt many to turn to the prison writings in the hope of finding answers. What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in what Bonhoeffer described as a “world come of age”? We will engage this question later in the introduction.

Enough has been said to establish why the prison writings have acquired the status of a “classic”—not one narrowly conceived as a “spiritual classic,” as if it were only a book of prayers and theological insights, but a classic that embraces life in its many dimensions, challenging and delighting us at the same time as we are invited to enter its world, share its pains and joys, and learn more about being human and Christian. With this in mind, we turn then to address especially those readers, but not only them, who have previous knowledge of *Letters and Papers*, but who wish to know what is different about this edition. In discussing this and providing comments on the structure of the volume, we can then return to the “theological letters” with a better appreciation of the context in which Bonhoeffer wrote them.

### **This Edition**

The first German edition was published in 1951 as *Widerstand und Ergebung* (Resistance and Submission), compiled and edited by Eberhard Bethge. It was translated into English by Reginald H. Fuller and published by SCM

(London) in 1953 with the title *Letters and Papers from Prison*. An American edition, published by Macmillan in New York, appeared the following year as *Prisoner for God: Letters and Papers from Prison*. These slim volumes were compiled by Bethge in order to make Bonhoeffer's prison reflections more widely available to those interested in his theology. For various personal reasons and publishing considerations, it was deemed inappropriate and unnecessary to publish all the material that Bethge had collected and preserved since the end of the Second World War. But he did include some of this material to provide the context within which these reflections developed. A second edition published by SCM in 1956 added a report on prison life by Bonhoeffer, Bethge's essay titled "The Last Days," and an index. But there was more material in Bethge's possession waiting to be published.

A "new, greatly enlarged edition" of *Letters and Papers from Prison* appeared in 1967, published jointly by SCM in London and Macmillan in New York. Commenting at the time, the American theologian John Godsey declared it "so superior" that in his judgment "all copies of previous editions should be gathered together and burned."<sup>[3]</sup> Godsey's severe judgment was also an implicit warning to all would-be translators to recognize the difficulties involved in such a task and to proceed with due modesty. Based on the work of Fuller, Frank Clark, and others, the 1967 edition provided the foundation for subsequent English versions, notably the fourth edition, published in 1971, which included additional material translated by John Bowden. Writing in his introduction to that edition, Bethge indicated that for the first time material from friends and family had been included in much greater quantity and detail, as well as previously inaccessible information regarding Bonhoeffer's trial.<sup>[4]</sup> That edition has been regularly reprinted and widely used since it first appeared, published by SCM and Macmillan, and then, in the United States, by Simon and Schuster since 1997. In this volume, all citations and cross-references to the previous translation of *Letters and Papers* refer to this fourth edition of the "new, greatly enlarged edition" of *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Except in a very few places, this edition (*DBWE* 8) is a completely fresh translation based on the new, thoroughly revised, enlarged, and critical German edition of *Widerstand und Ergebung* (*DBW* 8), first published in 1998. There are several good reasons to believe that the outcome is a significant improvement on previous editions.

First, this edition is roughly double the size of the 1971 edition of *LPP*, in part because it includes significant additional primary material discovered

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[3.] Godsey, "Reading Bonhoeffer in English Translation," 85.

[4.] *LPP*, viii.

in the intervening decades. It also includes other material now considered important because of more-recent scholarship and global developments in Bonhoeffer reception, and virtually all the correspondence that was previously excluded for personal reasons. Although the letters make up the bulk of the material in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, the “papers” are of equal importance and, as previously indicated, embrace several genres: sermons and meditations, poetry, notes, and prayers.

When he originally compiled *Widerstand und Ergebung*, Bethge modestly excluded much of his own correspondence. Understandable as this was at the time, it prevented the reader from discerning how much the letters between the two friends belong together, and how much Bethge, as partner in dialogue, contributed to the development of Bonhoeffer's theological explorations.<sup>[5]</sup> Bethge's role not only in the preservation and publication of *Letters and Papers* but also in the development of the correspondence itself was important. As Bonhoeffer himself indicated, Bethge was able to see things differently, and it was that gift that lay at the heart of their “intellectual-spiritual kinship.”<sup>[6]</sup> Equally important was Bethge's role as posthumous interpreter of Bonhoeffer's prison experience and theology, which has shaped much of its reception.

Apart from the correspondence with Bethge, this new edition also includes letters, some first published in *DBW* 8, from Bonhoeffer's aging parents, Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer; from his elder brother Karl-Friedrich, his niece Renate Bethge and his nephew Christoph von Dohnanyi, and from his brothers-in-law and fellow conspirators Rüdiger Schleicher and Hans von Dohnanyi. Undoubtedly there would have been many more letters written and received if not for the prison restrictions on the number of letters and on who was permitted to write and to receive letters. As the letters to his family were all sent legally through the censors, the correspondence between them was virtually confined to personal and family matters, with the occasional oblique and coded reference to more sensitive issues such as Bonhoeffer's trial. The correspondence with Bethge, by contrast, was “illegal,” smuggled in and out of prison by sympathetic guards, and so contains much more than could be included in the censored letters.

Readers familiar with earlier editions of *Letters and Papers* should note that some material originally found there has been published in other *DBWE* volumes. The messages that Bonhoeffer wrote his interrogator Manfred Roeder (published on pp. 56–70 in *LPP*) can now be found as document 1/288 and its subdocuments in *DBWE* 16:411–27. The fiction

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[5.] De Gruchy, *Daring, Trusting Spirit*, 112ff.

[6.] Bonhoeffer to Bethge, August 11, 1944, 4/189, p. 507.

fragment titled “Lance Corporal Berg” (published on pp. 253–60 in *LPP*) now appears in *DBWE* 7:183–94.

Second, the size and scope of this edition is chiefly due to the inclusion of extensive editorial notes, both those translated from *DBW* 8 and those deemed appropriate to add for a twenty-first-century English-speaking readership: bibliography, indexes, a chronology, an introduction, and an afterword. The bibliography, divided into three sections, includes all the books referred to by Bonhoeffer and his correspondents and an extensive list of books and articles that have been used in the preparation of this volume. When English translations of material originally published in German exist, these have been listed in the bibliography, referred to in the footnotes, and used, unless otherwise indicated, where quoted in the text. The footnotes also include additional information that might be of help to English readers. The index of names provides a brief note on all the persons mentioned in the letters and papers, many of whom will be unfamiliar to English readers. In addition to the three indexes (names, scriptural references, and subjects) and a chronology, which provides an overview of the events relevant to the narrative, there is also a list of relevant unpublished material not included in this volume and a synopsis of the texts previously published in an early collection of Bonhoeffer’s works, the *Gesammelte Schriften*, and in the 1972 edition of *LPP*.

Third, the publication of Bethge’s monumental biography of his friend, now revised and translated in full in English,<sup>[7]</sup> along with other material of biographical and historical relevance, has given us a much greater knowledge of Bonhoeffer’s life story than when the first edition of *LPP* appeared, including information about his family relationships and friendships, his engagement to Maria von Wedemeyer, and the circumstances that led to his imprisonment and death. We also know a great deal more than previously about the final days of the Third Reich and, in particular, about the Holocaust, the conspiracy against Hitler, the Allied landing and advance in Italy, as well as the war on the eastern and western fronts, the bombing of Berlin, and the collapse of the Nazi regime. All this formed the wider context in which Bonhoeffer wrote his letters and in which his family, fiancée, and friends lived in increasingly desperate and dangerous conditions beyond the walls of Berlin’s Tegel military interrogation prison.

Fourth, the remarkable florescence of Bonhoeffer research during the past forty years has found expression in numerous monographs, journal articles, and conference proceedings. Virtually every aspect of Bonhoeffer’s life and thought has been explored in considerable depth. As a result, Bon-

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[7.] *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography (DB-ER)*.

hoeffer's theology and the terms he used to express it have been clarified in relation to his own theological development, the wider theological environment of which he was a part, and the historical context within which he lived and worked. The footnotes in this volume include references to several key studies in English on Bonhoeffer's theology in general and on his prison theology in particular. There are, of course, many more English-language studies that are pertinent to these themes; in addition to those included in this volume and other volumes in the *DBWE* series, several bibliographies exist, both in print and online, that are essential resources for further study and research.<sup>[8]</sup> Also, some of the most seminal German and a few French studies on Bonhoeffer have become available in English translation. Equally important to note is that new studies on Bonhoeffer's theology continue to be published, indicating that interest in the subject has not diminished but has become the passion of a new generation of scholars.

Fifth, this edition is, as already indicated, part of a much larger project, namely, the new critical edition of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke* and their translation into English as well as other languages. Based on the wholly revised and expanded version of *Widerstand und Ergebung*, it has benefited immensely from the knowledge and scholarship of the German editors Christian Gremmels, Eberhard and Renate Bethge, and Ilse Tödt, and the extensive critical apparatus and related material they included in the new text. Work on *DBWE* 8 also benefited from the other volumes of the *Werke* that have already appeared in English translation. Among these, special note should be taken of *DBWE* 16, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment: 1940–1945*, which, as its title suggests, deals with the period of *DBWE* 8 and, as such, provides important background information. It clearly shows that the prison letters between Bonhoeffer and Bethge were part of an extensive correspondence that had begun much earlier during the time when they were first separated after the forced closure of the collective pastorates in Pomerania in 1940.

Not included in the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke* but equally significant collateral reading is the correspondence between Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Maria von Wedemeyer, which was published in 1992 in German and then in English translation in 1994 as *Love Letters from Cell 92*.<sup>[9]</sup> There are also ten letters from the early years of their courtship from Bonhoeffer to Wedemeyer,

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[8.] See esp. Floyd and Green, *Bonhoeffer Bibliography*, which is updated annually in the newsletter of the International Bonhoeffer Society and in the online Bonhoeffer bibliography at Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary, New York. See also the *International Bibliography on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, which is updated in the issues of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Yearbook*.

[9.] *Love Letters from Cell 92: Dietrich Bonhoeffer–Maria von Wedemeyer, 1943–1945* (London: HarperCollins, 1994). A slightly revised edition of this translation was published in

though not those from her to him, now published in *DBWE* 16.<sup>[10]</sup> Maria von Wedemeyer gave some intimation of what was contained in these letters in a lecture at Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1967, but it was already too late for this information to be included in the edition of the prison letters and papers published that year, though her lecture was added as an appendix to the 1971 edition. At the expressed wish of Wedemeyer, the entire extant correspondence was housed in Harvard's Houghton Library and kept inaccessible to the public until its publication in 1992.

A further volume in the series that provides important collateral reading is *DBWE* 7, *Fiction from Tegel Prison*. Although Bonhoeffer's attempt at writing fiction is often regarded as the least successful of his prison writings, the drama, novel fragments, and the unfinished story in *DBWE* 7 offer important insight into his thinking and experience. Bonhoeffer's attempt at writing poetry in prison, in contrast to his fiction, was much more successful. All ten of his poems are published for the first time together in this edition.<sup>[11]</sup> They give us a profound glimpse into his experience and reflections, especially as he became more aware of the fate that awaited him. Jürgen Henkys's *Geheimnis der Freiheit* (2005), the first major study focused entirely on Bonhoeffer's poetry from prison, postdates the new *DBW* edition of *Widerstand und Ergebung* but has been a great help in preparing this translation, thus adding further value.

Finally, this translation may claim some superiority over previous ones in that, as part of the much larger *DBWE* project, it has been subject to stringent measures that have been implemented to ensure more accurate and informed translations of Bonhoeffer's works in English. Whereas previous translations were largely the work of individuals on their own, in this case the translators have benefited from one another; the expertise of various consultants, notably Hans Pfeifer and Ilse Tödt; the monitoring input of the editor and general editor, as well as from the collective experience of everyone who has been engaged in the *DBWE* project to date. In accordance

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the United States by Abingdon Press in 1995. All quotations of the letters in this volume are from the 1994 London edition. See also Wedemeyer, "Other Letters from Prison."

[10.] The letters are nos. 206a, 208a, 209a, 209b, 214a, 215a, 215b, 215c, 220a, 220b in *DBWE* 16. See esp. pp. 20–22 of the editor's introduction to that volume for background on the provenance of the letters.

[11.] They were published previously in a separate volume edited by Edwin Robertson, *The Prison Poems of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* in the United Kingdom in 1998 and as *Voices in the Night: The Prison Poems of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* in the United States in 1999. The first German edition of the poems, *Auf dem Wege zur Freiheit: Gedichte aus Tegel* (On the Way to Freedom: Poems from Tegel), was published in 1946 (Berlin), thus predating the first publication of *Widerstand und Ergebung*.

with the policy adopted at the outset of the project, Tödt was designated the German reader of the translation as it progressed, a task she fulfilled with diligence, passion, and knowledge.

English, like all languages though probably more so than most, is always in the process of development and change. Inevitably, then, the language and style of editions of *Letters and Papers from Prison* become a little dated. This, we believe, has not given us a license to be trendy in our choice of words and idioms, but required that we strive for freshness as well as accuracy. We are mindful, of course, that previous translations often excelled in providing memorable passages and phrases of power and insight; we are also aware that sometimes translation blunders occurred. We hope we have avoided the latter, just as we have aspired to the former and sometimes made use of them. More will be said about translation issues later.

### Structure and Content

There are many fine biographies of Bonhoeffer, chief of which is undoubtedly that written by Eberhard Bethge, to which we have previously referred. There is also a biography of Bethge that tells the story of his friendship with Bonhoeffer and provides information about the period during which the letters and papers from prison were written.<sup>[12]</sup> These resources make it unnecessary to provide a detailed historical background to *DBWE* 8. Nonetheless, because many readers may not be sufficiently familiar with the story or have the opportunity to gain such knowledge before engaging the text, we have woven key threads of the story into this section to help the reader understand better both the historical context and the content.

#### *The Prologue, or "After Ten Years"*

Bonhoeffer's essay "After Ten Years," written to Bethge, Hans von Dohnanyi, and coconspirator Hans Oster at Christmas 1942, a few months before his imprisonment, was included in the first edition of *Letters and Papers from Prison* as one of several "papers." In subsequent editions, including this one, Bethge placed it at the beginning. Serving as a prologue, it bridged the gap between Bonhoeffer's final months of freedom, and his arrest and imprisonment. Written as a New Year's reflection on the events and issues of the past months as the conspiracy had gathered momentum, it revisits themes in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, quoting some passages from it, but it also prefigures much that became the substance of the "theological letters" written to Bethge, commencing with that of April 30, 1944.

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[12.] De Gruchy, *Daring, Trusting Spirit*.

In editing the 1971 edition of *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Bethge not only placed "After Ten Years" at the beginning, but he also restructured the volume into four chronological periods determined by the decisive points in Bonhoeffer's legal investigation, interrogation, and trial. These four parts provide the structure for this new edition.

*Part 1: The Interrogation Period: April–July 1943*

Bonhoeffer became engaged to Maria von Wedemeyer on January 17, 1943. On April 5, he was arrested, along with his sister Christine and brother-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi, charged with "subversion of the armed forces," and placed in the Tegel military interrogation prison, a section distinct from the civilian prison. From the time of his arrest until July, Bonhoeffer was permitted to correspond only with his parents and, on occasion, with his elder brother Karl-Friedrich. That month, Eberhard and Renate Bethge were married in Berlin. At the time Bethge was working for the Gossner Mission and the Abwehr (Military Intelligence). Bonhoeffer prepared a wedding sermon for the occasion that was sent to the bridal couple but only received by them much later. Published in *DBWE* 8, it provides insight into Bonhoeffer's conservative view of marriage and gender relations, something that is also evident in the letters to his fiancée, Maria, and to Bethge.

As would be expected, the themes that emerge in the letters throughout the volume vary considerably, but they all find their coherence in Bonhoeffer's experience of separation and loneliness, his anxiety and hope, and his determination that even under these extreme circumstances, he should continue to explore the meaning of his faith in Christ and its relevance for the future. Expressions of personal anguish, so clearly communicated to Bethge, were more subdued in his letters to his family and Maria von Wedemeyer, not least because he did not want to cause them further anxiety about his situation. In these letters he did much to encourage and support them in their own daily tribulations in a Berlin being bombed and destroyed by daily Allied air raids. But he did share with them also his developing thoughts, not on the same scale as he did with Bethge, but certainly in terms of the books he was reading, many of them brought to him by his parents, others found in the prison library. Also important for Bonhoeffer were his daily readings from the *Losungen*, the Moravian Bible *Daily Texts* published annually by the Moravian Brethren. These texts, frequently referred to in his letters, helped him to discern meaning and purpose in what was happening around him as well as to him.

Toward the end of this first period in prison, Bonhoeffer began to write the fiction now published as *Fiction from Tegel Prison* (*DBWE* 7). This was influenced by his prison reading but dealt with the past. It was also an

attempt to express through a different medium his theological concerns, not least the problem of power, the “theology of the cross,” and what he came to call “unconscious Christianity,” all of which found later expression in his more explicit theological explorations. By early 1944, Bonhoeffer felt that his “creative writing” was getting nowhere, and he brought it to a halt. Later it would burst into life again but in the form of poetry.

On July 30, Bonhoeffer was informed that the preliminary investigation into his case had been concluded. This marks the end of the first period of his imprisonment. After the initial expectations that he would be tried and released relatively soon, Bonhoeffer began to accept that perhaps things would not work out as he and his family and friends had hoped. He would have to submit to whatever happened. Thus began the second period of his imprisonment, extending from August 1943 to April 1944, as Bonhoeffer waited anxiously for the trial to begin.

*Part 2: Awaiting the Trial: August 1943–April 1944*

Bonhoeffer now had additional letter-writing privileges, including permission to correspond with Maria von Wedemeyer. Even so, all letters were censored and therefore had to be written with some care in order not to compromise either Bonhoeffer himself or other coconspirators in prison. This eventually led to the development of a code by which Bonhoeffer and his correspondents could refer to people, issues, and events without raising the suspicions of the censors. Messages were conveyed by placing a faint pencil dot beneath the letters of words, starting from the back, which when put together, would pass on the necessary information in cryptic form. Bonhoeffer’s correspondence with his family and Maria von Wedemeyer continued much as before, though as the war situation worsened, there was greater anxiety on his part for their safety and welfare.

In July 1943, Bethge’s deployment in the Military Intelligence (Abwehr) was terminated. He was then conscripted into the military and sent to a training camp in Lissa, Poland. But it was only on November 18 that Bonhoeffer wrote to Bethge for the first time from prison. This was illegal and dangerous, but he smuggled the letter out with the help of a friendly guard, Corporal Knobloch, who continued to act as a conduit for letters to Bethge over the ensuing months.<sup>[13]</sup> Fortuitously, Bethge was in Berlin visiting his wife, Renate, when the first letter from Bonhoeffer arrived.

In January 1944, Bethge was sent to the Italian front just when additional Allied troops landed at Anzio, south of Rome, to supplement the forces that

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[13.] *DB-ER*, 848.

had arrived six months earlier. As a result, the German army was becoming trapped between the invading Allied troops and Italian partisans. Bethge's ten months in Italy would coincide with the German army's move toward the north, away from the Allies but increasingly harassed by partisan fire. He was assigned to a small Military Intelligence unit of sixteen men in the Tenth Army under the command of General Heinrich von Vietinghoff. Together, the Tenth and the Fourteenth Armies constituted Army Group C, commanded by Field Marshal Albert Kesselring. Bethge's unit was charged with bringing intelligence to Kesselring, but most of the time he served as chauffeur, secretary, and night watch.

Despite the dangers involved, Bethge's assignment was a relief for Bonhoeffer, Renate Bethge, and the other members of the family; after all, he could have ended up on the Russian front. Moreover, his assignment to work as a clerk for the commanding officer of his unit also meant that he would be spared the dangers of frontline combat. And, of course, it would have been far more difficult for the two friends to correspond with each other if Bethge had been sent to the eastern front. Much of this good fortune came as a result of family intervention through contacts in Military Intelligence. As a clerk, Bethge also had access to a typewriter and regularly made typewritten copies of Bonhoeffer's letters, especially the passages that contained Bonhoeffer's theological reflections. He did this both to preserve them at Bonhoeffer's request and to make them available to some of Bonhoeffer's former students. For Bonhoeffer there was an added reason for his delight in Bethge's posting to Italy, for it renewed memories of their brief holiday there together in 1936. This, in turn, evoked many of Bonhoeffer's comments on art, history, and culture.

Bethge was first stationed at Rignano, which gave him an opportunity to journey south to Velletri, where he saw the Allied fleet in the distance near Nettuno and Anzio and heard their guns. He obviously enjoyed the beauty of the countryside and Italian culture and wrote to Bonhoeffer expressing his pleasure without reserve, but he also wrote about the horrors of war. His letters reveal his growing disgust at the events around him and the behavior of the German soldiers, and his own agonized thoughts on how he himself should behave. Bonhoeffer's letters to Bethge now began to reflect doubt about their future together, wondering whether they would have to be satisfied with the wonderful years they had had together. The delay in his trial, quite apart from his separation from family, fiancée, and Bethge, made Bonhoeffer despondent, something he tried to hide from his family and Maria von Wedemeyer, but not from Bethge. As the weeks passed, Bonhoeffer began to face the unlikelihood of his release and the possibility of death at the hands of the Gestapo.

Bonhoeffer deeply missed his family and friends, the familiar things that surrounded his life, and not least the family retreat in Friedrichsbrunn. The memories of these relationships, places, and events sustained him in his loneliness and anxiety. Time and again his letters bear testimony to his humanity both in its weakness and its courage, struggling to come to terms with his doubts and fears amid the confining circumstances of prison life. Yet he remained at heart a pastor whose primary concern was for others, whether family or friends, whether former students on distant battlefields or fellow prisoners and their guards fearful of Allied bombs.

As much as Bonhoeffer was interested in the ordinary things of life and experimenting with “creative writing,” he often remarked to his parents that his “real work” in prison was his theological explorations. In part, this was also continued reflection about some issues from *Ethics*, but it would soon find expression in his “theological letters” to Bethge as his circumstances in prison changed and he began to think seriously about the future of Christianity. But much of his theological reflection also concerned his own existential situation within the broader context of what was happening in Germany and Europe at the time. Both of these elements, the existential and the historical, are evident in what he writes, and often they are inseparable. Bonhoeffer refused either to submit to what increasingly seemed inevitable concerning his own future or to surrender to those who were in the process of destroying the very country—and the people—he loved so much.

*Part 3: Holding Out for the Coup Attempt: April–July 1944*

The third period in Bonhoeffer’s life in prison was particularly tense for the whole family as well as for Bethge. Paradoxically it was also the period during which Bonhoeffer’s theological reflections gathered fresh vigor as seen so markedly in his letter of April 30. This, the first explicitly “theological letter,” marked a milestone in Bonhoeffer’s life in prison. “We can see this,” writes Bethge, “from the change in his reading, his new manner of working, and the different tone of his letters.”<sup>[14]</sup> The other “theological letters” followed in relatively quick succession: May 5, May 29, June 8, July 16, July 18, July 21. Together with his “Thoughts on the Baptism of Dietrich Bethge” in May and the “Outline for a Book,” they embody Bonhoeffer’s “new” theology from prison.<sup>[15]</sup>

When Bethge returned to Berlin for the baptism of his son in May 1944, he took with him all the letters he had received until then, and he buried

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[14.] *Ibid.*, 855.

[15.] 4/187, pp. 499–504.

them in the garden of his parents-in-law's home at Marienburger Allee 42 so that they could be recovered later. They remained there until after the war, when Bethge retrieved them. Fortunately, those that had deteriorated had previously been transcribed.

With some difficulty due to the war situation, Bethge eventually made his way back to his unit in Italy, aware of the impending coup and the very dangerous situation facing them all. There was some discussion in the family as to whether the illegal correspondence between the two friends should now continue for fear of the consequences if it was uncovered. But the two friends resumed writing to each other through their trusted courier Knobloch. This was very fortunate, not least because Bonhoeffer's theological letters were, as we have noted, sent during this period. Some of these were taken back to Germany by a cousin of Bethge's who happened to be passing through the place where Bethge was billeted. These, together with a photograph of Bonhoeffer taken in the yard of Tegel prison, were kept by Bethge's mother in her home in Kade until after the war. At the same time, Bonhoeffer gave the letters Bethge had sent him to his parents during their prison visits. Nonetheless, several letters, both from Bonhoeffer and from others, were lost; some had never reached their destination in the first place, some were misplaced in the chaos of the times, and others, notably Bonhoeffer's letters to Bethge in September 1944, were destroyed for security reasons.

During his visit to Berlin for the baptism in May, Bethge also managed to arrange a visit to Bonhoeffer. This led to a flurry of letters between the two friends reflecting on the visit and what they had discussed. Bethge later wrote to Bonhoeffer to tell him that the new theological thoughts he had shared with him had struck him forcefully. He also confessed that the first few days spent back in Berlin had been difficult and depressing. But the baptism, the time he spent with Renate and his young son, together with his visit to Bonhoeffer in prison followed later by a telephone conversation, had made it worthwhile. On returning to his unit in Italy, Bethge found several of Bonhoeffer's letters awaiting him, continuing the conversation about Christianity in a "world come of age." Soon afterward, the first of Bonhoeffer's poems, "The Past," arrived, included in the letter of June 7. Three more poems followed during that summer expressing both Bonhoeffer's existential situation and some of the insights of his "new" theology.

#### *Part 4: After the Failure: July 1944–February 1945*

The failure of the coup attempt on July 20, 1944, ushered in the final period of Bonhoeffer's imprisonment. As the person responsible for dealing with army reports and dispatches, Bethge was the first in his unit to hear about

the failed assassination and, moreover, to report it to his superiors. That night he hardly slept. Then a letter dated July 21 arrived from Bonhoeffer, followed by one written for Bethge's birthday in which was enclosed the poem "Stations on the Road to Freedom." This was written immediately after Bonhoeffer heard the news of the failed coup attempt and realized that his fate was sealed. Despite this premonition of impending death, Bonhoeffer expressed the hope that one day he might be able to talk to Maria von Wedemeyer in the same way that he talked to Bethge. At this stage, correspondence with Wedemeyer began to dry up due to her deep depression, but not that with Bethge, his "daring, trusting spirit," as he called him in the poem "The Friend," which Bethge received on August 28, a second gift for his birthday.

On September 20, the Gestapo commissioner Sonderegger discovered the files kept by those involved in the coup attempt in an outpost of the Military Intelligence headquarters in Zossen. It was now only a matter of time before Bonhoeffer's role in the conspiracy would be uncovered. In early October, plans for his escape were prepared, but he decided against this for fear of reprisals against his family and fellow conspirators. Meanwhile, late in October, Bethge, as clerk in charge of the post, was amazed to open a telegram that ordered his own arrest and immediate deportation to Berlin. After anxious consideration, he decided to give it to his commanding officer, who, to Bethge's amazement, was not unduly worried about the instruction even though he was duty bound to send Bethge back to Berlin under guard. But Bethge had sufficient opportunity now to destroy the correspondence from Bonhoeffer that he had received during September, making the letter of August 23 the last to survive. This hasty action was, as it happened, unnecessary, much to Bethge's lasting regret. The September letters evidently contained further theological reflections that might have shed light on the way in which Bonhoeffer's thought was developing. Bethge wrote his last letter to his friend on September 30, 1944. It was now far too dangerous to continue the correspondence. As it happened, the illegal correspondence between the friends was never discovered by the Gestapo.

On October 8, Bonhoeffer was taken to the cellar of the Gestapo prison on Prinz-Albrecht-Straße, where he stayed until February 7, 1945. From then on, all correspondence came to an end, and contact between Bonhoeffer and the family and Bethge was broken. From there Bonhoeffer was taken first to Buchenwald and then, via the village of Schönberg in Bavaria, to the Flossenbürg concentration camp, where he arrived on April 8. That evening he was tried by a hastily rigged court and condemned to death. Early the next morning Bonhoeffer was executed along with several other

coconspirators.<sup>[16]</sup> On the same day, his brother-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi was executed in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, near Berlin. On April 22, his brother Klaus and his brother-in-law Rüdiger Schleicher, the father of Renate Bethge, were shot by the Gestapo near the Lehrter Straße prison in Berlin. The news of Bonhoeffer's death was received at the headquarters of the World Council of Churches in Geneva at the end of May; Maria von Wedemeyer, his fiancée, heard about it in June, but his parents and the Bethges only received the sad news late in July when they happened to hear a BBC broadcast from London of a memorial service in Holy Trinity Church, Kingsway, in honor of their son.

### Reception and Interpretation

Bonhoeffer's letters lay hidden in Bethge's desk for six years before he "dared to hand a selection of them to the publisher, without the slightest idea that they would produce such a wide and lasting effect."<sup>[17]</sup> Bethge had already circulated some of the "theological letters" to a few of Bonhoeffer's former students after receiving them in Italy, and he had spoken about them to others within the circle of German theologians and pastors who had been influenced by Bonhoeffer. But he felt obligated to share with a wider readership the direction that Bonhoeffer's theology had taken in prison. To do so, it was necessary to place these "theological letters" in the broader context of other letters and papers from prison, but only those that served his primary intention. The "theological letters" were paramount but not to be understood as standing on their own like a carefully crafted theological tract; they were provisional and fragmentary reflections awaiting further clarification and elaboration.

Bethge was understandably cautious about including passages that related to personal and family matters, but assumed, incorrectly as it happened, that readers would be interested only in theological matters. This anticipation was, in his words, "completely put in the shade by the reception that has actually been given to them throughout the world."<sup>[18]</sup> Not only did the book rapidly become a Christian classic, as the English publishers asserted, but the debate about Bonhoeffer's theological explorations in prison required that they be put in the broader framework of his life and his ongoing discussions with Bethge as well as his correspondence with his family—especially his elder brother—and Maria von Wedemeyer. As Bethge

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[16.] *DB-ER*, 926–27.

[17.] Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr*, 19.

[18.] *LPP*, vii.

observed in the introduction to the 1971 edition, after twenty-five years personal and family considerations had “retreated into the background” and Bonhoeffer’s life and thought had “long since left the private sphere.”<sup>[19]</sup>

The German response to the first edition of *Widerstand und Ergebung* was largely confined to theological circles in the academy and the church. Fortunately, at the time of its publication, theological debate was focused on hermeneutics, the interpretation of the Christian faith in the modern world. The parameters of the discussion were largely determined by the work of Rudolf Bultmann, whose program of demythologization was particularly influential; by Karl Barth’s “theology of the Word,” whose towering presence continued to shape much of Protestant theology; and, to a lesser extent, by Paul Tillich’s more apologetic philosophical theology. Bonhoeffer’s “prison theology” spoke directly to the issues. While acknowledging the importance of the contribution of both Bultmann and Barth, Bonhoeffer argued for an alternative approach that reaffirmed the Christian faith but did so in a nonreligious way. But this approach, partly because of the fragmentary character of Bonhoeffer’s reflections, did not attract as much attention from academic theologians as it did from those, in both East and West Germany, who were concerned about the renewal of the life of the church and its witness in society.

The reception of *LPP* in the Anglo-Saxon world was somewhat different. There were those academic theologians, especially in North America, who were engaged in the scholarly hermeneutical debates of the time as shaped by Bultmann and Barth. In Britain, Ronald Gregor Smith, editor at SCM, who was initially instrumental in publishing Bonhoeffer’s writings in English, was also influential in interpreting Bonhoeffer’s theology in relation to these hermeneutical debates through his writings and lectures.<sup>[20]</sup> But the more popular reception of the first edition of the letters and papers in the Anglo-Saxon world was most influenced by the publication in 1961 of Bishop John Robinson’s *Honest to God*, an event that made headline news, often sensational, in both the secular and the religious press.

Robinson’s account of Bonhoeffer’s theology caused considerable alarm among those who had come to know him through his earlier writings, especially those written during the Church Struggle in Germany, *Discipleship* and *Life Together*. But a significant outcome of the ensuing debate was that Bonhoeffer’s name and writings now attracted attention beyond what was

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[19.] *Ibid.*, viii.

[20.] See Smith, *New Man*; *idem.*, *Secular Christianity*; and *idem.*, *Free Man*, published as *The Whole Man: Studies in Christian Anthropology* in the United States. See also Clements, *Theology of Ronald Gregor Smith*, 168–97.

previously a narrow band of academics and pastors. In the process, the focus shifted from matters hermeneutical to those more directly related to Christian life in a secular world: questions of worship, liturgy, and prayer, of Christian community and social engagement. Perhaps inevitably, the English translation of Bonhoeffer's concepts, such as "nonreligious" Christianity, were not fully understood or appreciated, and some key terms such as "worldliness" were misinterpreted. We will examine these terms shortly.

As Bonhoeffer's biographer and interpreter, Bethge was increasingly drawn into debates about Bonhoeffer's legacy and the theology of the prison letters. After all, Bethge was, in Bonhoeffer's own estimation, the best interpreter of his thoughts.<sup>[21]</sup> And as Bethge straddled both the German and the Anglo-Saxon worlds, he was in a preeminent position to clarify the issues. In doing so, he was particularly concerned to show that while there was a certain discontinuity between Bonhoeffer's earlier theology and that of the prison fragments, there was also a deeper continuity stretching back to Bonhoeffer's earliest theological writings, to his proposed magnum opus *Ethics*, which he was writing at the time of his arrest (*DBWE* 6), and not least to his dissertations *Sanctorum Communio* (*DBWE* 1) and *Act and Being* (*DBWE* 2). Thus, in order to interpret Bonhoeffer's prison theology, it was necessary to have some grasp of the way in which his theology had developed, and why his turn, as he described it, "from the phraseological to the real,"<sup>[22]</sup> which had begun a decade earlier, eventually led to such a surprising turn in prison that Bethge labeled it the "new theology."<sup>[23]</sup>

### The "New Theology"

Despite earlier hints in his letters to Bethge, there can be little doubt that the theological reflections on Christianity in "a world come of age" that began with the letter of April 30, 1944, came as something of a surprise. Bethge was excited by this turn in Bonhoeffer's thinking, not least because his own thoughts, as he tells us, were moving in a similar direction though more "naively and primitively."<sup>[24]</sup> Bonhoeffer set the pace and direction with flashes of inspiration and brilliance; Bethge, whose different gifts complemented those of his friend, provided the critical sounding board.

There were earlier hints in his letters and papers that Bonhoeffer's thought was developing along fresh lines. Even before his imprisonment,

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[21.] Bonhoeffer to Bethge, June 5, 1944, 3/157, p. 417.

[22.] Bonhoeffer to Bethge, April 22, 1944, 3/135, p. 358.

[23.] *DB-ER*, 853–92.

[24.] Letter to Bonhoeffer, May 8, 1944, 3/138, p. 370.

there was a shift in emphasis from his Church Struggle writings, for example, in *Discipleship* (DBWE 4), where the church is “against the world,” to a more world-centered ethic of responsibility in his *Ethics*, where the focus is more on social responsibility, justice, peace, and the reconstruction of society after the war, even though the struggle against Nazism is evident throughout.<sup>[25]</sup> In “After Ten Years,” Bonhoeffer reflected further on ethical issues, pondering afresh the questions posed by the conspiracy, but in hindsight the reader can detect a rethinking of its theological underpinnings. Also in hindsight we now know that much of what was beginning to emerge in Bonhoeffer’s prison theology was already prefigured in his dissertation *Sanctorum Communio*, notably, his understanding of “the other,” which in his prison theology found fresh expression in Jesus as the human being who exists “for others.”<sup>[26]</sup>

What, then, precipitated Bonhoeffer’s new theological departure in prison marked by his later letters to Bethge as well as in his sermon for the baptism of Dietrich Bethge and, as we shall see, also his poetry? Undoubtedly the mere fact of his imprisonment was significant, for it provided the space and time to reflect both on his own life experience and especially on the issues that had become so important for him during the past few years. By April 1944, he had come to terms with the reality of imprisonment and the unlikelihood of his release and was in remarkably good spirits considering his perilous situation. This enabled him to think ahead and get on with his “real work” with new enthusiasm. In doing so he was stimulated by an intensive and extensive program of reading that included books on theology, philosophy, science, art, history, and literature,<sup>[27]</sup> much of it new to him. The extent of his reading in prison was obviously limited by the availability of the books he wanted to read. But the prison library and the help of family enabled him to obtain much of what he required.

Apart from his more general reading, especially nineteenth-century German literature, notably the novels of Adalbert Stifter and the poetry of Theodore Fontane, which stirred his creative writing interests, several books contributed more directly to his theological reflections. Among these was C. F. von Weizsäcker’s *Zum Weltbild der Physic* (*The World View of Physics*), which he read in May 1944, as a result of an exchange of letters with his brother Karl-Friedrich, himself a distinguished scientist.<sup>[28]</sup> This did more than awaken Bonhoeffer’s interest in science. As Bethge would later write,

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[25.] See the introduction to *Ethics*, DBWE 6:5.

[26.] Green, *Bonhoeffer*.

[27.] See the appendix “Bonhoeffer’s Readings in Prison,” in *DB-ER*, 943–46.

[28.] Bethge, “Nonreligious Scientist and the Confessing Theologian,” 39–56.

much of the motivation for Bonhoeffer's theological reflections in prison "came from Karl-Friedrich's reservations concerning Christian dogmatics and his ethical convictions and actions. They became creatively fruitful in Dietrich's mind."<sup>[29]</sup> Among the most significant of the other books Bonhoeffer read were Immanuel Kant's book on anthropology;<sup>[30]</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey's study of humanity and the emerging worldview in Europe since the Renaissance and the Reformation;<sup>[31]</sup> Walter Otto's work on Greek mythology;<sup>[32]</sup> his teacher Adolf von Harnack's history of the Royal Prussian Academy;<sup>[33]</sup> and the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset's work on the philosophy of history.<sup>[34]</sup> The most important theological work was volume 2/2 of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, which he read in manuscript form.

In developing his "new theology," Bonhoeffer drew deeply on his accumulated knowledge over the years. All the influences that had played an important role in his intellectual and theological development came to the fore as he processed his thought and began to reformulate his theology.<sup>[35]</sup> This is evident from his references, among many others, to such ancient church fathers as Irenaeus and Augustine; medieval philosophers such as Nicholas of Cusa; the ubiquitous Martin Luther and the post-Reformation Dutch jurist Grotius; the major philosophers of the modern world from Kant and G. W. F. Hegel through Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche to Martin Heidegger. Most of Bonhoeffer's theological sparring partners were his teachers and senior contemporaries—Paul Althaus and Karl Heim, Reinhold Seeberg, Ernst Troeltsch and Karl Holl, Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann, Emil Brunner and Reinhold Niebuhr, to name the most prominent, and, of course, his teacher, the esteemed church historian Harnack, and Barth, the theologian who influenced him most of all.

Bonhoeffer had long been influenced by Barth's theology.<sup>[36]</sup> But in prison, by contrast, he recognized afresh his indebtedness to the liberal Protestant legacy in which he had been nurtured at the University of Berlin, especially by Harnack.<sup>[37]</sup> In many respects Bonhoeffer's prison theology was an attempt to engage critically both neoorthodoxy as represented by Barth and liberal Protestantism as represented by Harnack, in an attempt

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[29.] Bethge, "Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life and Theology," 55.

[30.] Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*.

[31.] Dilthey, *Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen*.

[32.] Otto, *Homeric Gods*.

[33.] Harnack, *Geschichte der Königlich Preußischen Akademie*.

[34.] Ortega y Gasset, *History as a System and Other Essays*.

[35.] See Frick, *Bonhoeffer's Intellectual Formation*.

[36.] See Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*.

[37.] See Rumscheidt, "Significance of Adolf von Harnack and Reinhold Seeberg."

to restate the meaning of Christ for today.<sup>[38]</sup> With Barth he remains christological in focus, convinced that Barth's critique of religion from the perspective of the gospel remained fundamental even if it did not go far enough. But with Harnack, he took more seriously the questions raised by the Enlightenment and the challenges of modernity. Put differently, Bonhoeffer's concern now was how to speak of the God of Jesus Christ without the need for a religious worldview that was no longer credible, and to do so mindful of the immense changes that had taken place in human endeavor over the past few centuries. All of this prompted the question that came to dominate Bonhoeffer's theological reflections: "What is Christianity, or who is Christ actually for us today?"<sup>[39]</sup>

During August and September 1944, Bonhoeffer gave much of his time and energy to working on a book that would offer answers to this question. According to Bethge, Bonhoeffer had probably written a considerable amount before it became impossible to continue. But all that survived was the "Outline for a Book" sent to Bethge at the beginning of August 1944,<sup>[40]</sup> along with the lengthy though often cryptic comments in his letters in which Bonhoeffer was testing out his ideas and the concepts attached to them. What Bonhoeffer had in mind for his proposed book was an extended essay of no more than a hundred pages in which he would, first, take stock of the present situation of Christianity in "a world come of age"; second, consider the meaning of Christian faith within this new historical context (the "nonreligious interpretation of Christianity"); and third, draw out the consequences for the church. In his interpretation of Bonhoeffer's prison theology, Bethge shows how the "Outline" provided the framework within which the theological reflections in his letters could best be situated and understood.<sup>[41]</sup>

#### A "World Come of Age"

Bonhoeffer introduced the term "world come of age" (*Mündigkeit*) in a letter to Bethge on June 8, 1944. Borrowed from Dilthey, it referred to that "movement toward human autonomy that began around the thirteenth century," which has now, following the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, come to fruition.<sup>[42]</sup> This coming of age of humanity meant that human beings have

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[38.] See "Outline for a Book," 4/187, pp. 499–504.

[39.] Letter to Bethge, April 30, 1944, 3/137, p. 362.

[40.] 4/187.

[41.] *DB-ER*, 861ff.

[42.] 3/161, p. 425. See Green, *Bonhoeffer*, 248–58; Feil, *Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 178–85; Wüstenberg, *Theology of Life*, 104–12.

learned to live and manage their affairs without any reference to God. This is not only true in science, politics, law, and medicine, but more generally for daily life in its entirety. The term “world come of age” did not mean that the world or human beings were more moral. Nor did it mean that there was no residue of religion that attracted those who felt the need for such, or that there were no places in the world where religion still played a major role in the life of society. From his early travels, Bonhoeffer was fully aware of the role of Islam in North Africa and of Roman Catholicism in Italy and Spain. Rather, it meant that for vast numbers of people, especially in secularized Europe, the “God hypothesis” was no longer needed to explain reality and meet human need. Even failures and tragedies did not undermine such human self-confidence. Bonhoeffer anticipated that this process of secularization would continue unabated and spread more widely. Whether he has been proved wrong by the resurgence of religion in the past few decades has been widely debated by scholars, but current debates about God and the response to them have also demonstrated how much he has been proved correct on many of the issues.<sup>[43]</sup>

Despite this historical development, the church and theology, in a last-ditch attempt to shore up Christianity, resorted to an apologetic based on “ultimate questions,” such as despair, sin, and guilt, to which God alone was the answer. In doing so, God was reduced to a *deus ex machina* who is only needed when everything else has failed, thus in effect pushed out of the center of human affairs to become the God of individual piety, bourgeois privilege, and a ghetto church, that is, the God of religion. Such an apologetic assumed a “religious *a priori*,” that is, a religious longing and a sense of weakness in human beings that could be appealed to in preaching the gospel with that in mind as the point of contact. But it was precisely this that Bonhoeffer questioned. By contrast, he wanted to speak of God at the center of life and address men and women in their strength, that is, their maturity and autonomy as responsible human beings.<sup>[44]</sup>

These convictions were strengthened by Bonhoeffer’s daily meditation on passages from the Old Testament (notably the Psalms and the Song of Songs), which convinced him that biblical faith is focused not on redemption from the earth but on its sustainability, not on withdrawal from the world but on engagement with its life, not on asceticism but on a genuine

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[43.] See the papers of “Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Theology in Today’s World: A Way between Fundamentalism and Secularism?” Tenth Annual International Bonhoeffer Congress, held in Prague, Czech Republic, July 22–27, 2008.

[44.] Bonhoeffer to Bethge, April 30, 1944, 3/161, p. 427.

appreciation of the body and sexuality, not on private piety but on engagement with the world.<sup>[45]</sup> In fact, the more he read the Scriptures, the more he discovered that the God of religion was not the God of the Bible. God, Bonhoeffer provocatively insisted, wanted us to live “before God” yet as people who can live without God.<sup>[46]</sup> This, then, called for a “nonreligious” interpretation of Christian faith.

*“Nonreligious Interpretation of Christian Faith”*

For Bonhoeffer, the question of God concerned “who Jesus Christ actually is for us, today.” If we start with such ideas as God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, we will never arrive at a true knowledge of God. However, if we participate by faith in Jesus Christ as the one who “is there for others,” we are liberated from self and experience the transcendence that is truly the God of the Bible. Only then does the reality of God become meaningful. As Bonhoeffer writes in the “Outline”: “Our relationship to God is no ‘religious’ relationship to some highest, most powerful, and best being imaginable—that is no genuine transcendence. Instead, our relationship to God is a new life in ‘being there for others,’ through participation in the being of Jesus.”<sup>[47]</sup> This is the meaning of Christ becoming fully human and dying on the cross. In other words, by “nonreligious interpretation,” Bonhoeffer proposed not a return to the anthropocentric approach of liberal, mystical, pietistic, or ethical theology but a recovery of “the biblical sense of the creation and the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”<sup>[48]</sup> Only from this perspective is it possible to interpret key biblical concepts and the creed and engage in liturgical renewal in a non-religious way.

Bonhoeffer did not see his task as popular “apologetic” in the sense of adapting the gospel to the modern mind, that is, a “secular gospel.” Unfortunately, this was too often how his “new theology” was understood, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. Bonhoeffer countenanced not a reduction of the gospel but a recovery of its meaning in a new historical context. Whereas during the Church Struggle his emphasis was on Christ as Lord confronting Nazi ideology and calling the church to faithful obedience to Christ as the “One Word of God,” now Bonhoeffer’s emphasis was far more on Christ crucified (following Luther’s *theologia crucis*) for the sake of a world in which

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[45.] See, inter alia, 2/88 and 3/169.

[46.] Bonhoeffer to Bethge, July 18, 1944, 3/177, pp. 478–79.

[47.] P. 501.

[48.] Bonhoeffer to Bethge, May 5, 1944, 3/139, p. 373.

humanity had become responsible “before God” yet “without God.” This, Bonhoeffer believed, would enable secular people to believe again in the God of the Bible, whose power is discerned in weakness on the boundaries of human existence and yet is at the center of worldly existence. Such “this-worldliness” was not a shallow worldliness, but one in which we come to know Christ in the midst of our responsibilities, constantly aware of both the reality of death and the hope of resurrection.<sup>[49]</sup>

The paradox is that the God who is at the center of the world, who addresses human beings in their strength not just their weakness, is at the same time the God who, in Jesus Christ, “consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world and in precisely this way, and only so, is at our side and helps us.” The God of the Bible is not, as we have established, the god of religion, but the God of the Bible is, and this is a significant development, the “suffering God.” And it is precisely this that Bonhoeffer proposes as “the starting point for our ‘worldly interpretation.’”<sup>[50]</sup>

The consequences of this for the church and for Christian life in the world were, as Bonhoeffer recognized, far reaching. For what is at stake in Bonhoeffer’s “nonreligious” interpretation is not apologetics or even hermeneutics—that is, simply interpreting Christianity in a new historical context in a new linguistic and conceptual key—but a fundamental reorientation, or *metanoia*, that leads to an identification with Christ in his sufferings,<sup>[51]</sup> and therefore to a different way of being the church-community in the world. If Jesus exists only for others, then the church must not seek its own self-preservation but be “open to the world” and in solidarity with others, especially those who are oppressed and suffering. Undoubtedly Bonhoeffer had in mind here the persecution, incarceration, and death of the Jews and other “undesirables” in Nazi Germany, though for obvious reasons he could not mention this in his letters. In this way, Bonhoeffer’s “new theology” contributed to post-Holocaust theologies and fed into the development of theologies of liberation that were later to emerge in Latin America, South Africa, and elsewhere. As he wrote in “After Ten Years,” he and his coconspirators had learned “to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcasts, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed and reviled, in short from the perspective of the suffering.”<sup>[52]</sup>

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[49.] *Ethics*, DBWE 6:246ff.

[50.] Bonhoeffer to Bethge, July 16, 1944, 3/177, p. 480.

[51.] Bonhoeffer to Bethge, July 18, 1944, 3/177, p. 480.

[52.] P. 52.

*"The Church for Others"*

Bonhoeffer never ceased to believe in the church even when he was most disillusioned by its failures. Christian faith was never for him simply a matter of individual piety. Christology always implied an ecclesiology, which meant that Christian faith was invariably the faith of a community of disciples. This conviction was deeply embedded in *Sanctorum Communio* and was fundamental to his books *Discipleship* and *Life Together*, as it was to his involvement in the Church Struggle. All of this is reaffirmed in his "new theology" in prison. But whereas in *Discipleship* the emphasis was on the "church against the world," a church with clear-cut boundaries, in his *Ethics* the boundaries became more open, preparing the way for his conclusion that just as Christ is the "human being for others," so the church "exists only for others." From this perspective, Bonhoeffer's increasing disillusionment with the Protestant church in Germany, including the Confessing Church, to whose struggle he had invested so much of his time and energy, can be understood.

Bonhoeffer had more in mind in writing his "theological letters" and his new project than addressing latter-day "cultured despisers of religion," an educated elite disenchanted with Christianity and alienated from the church. Bonhoeffer's sights were set more widely. The failure of the church in Europe, so he tells us, was not just that educated elites had renounced or drifted away from Christian faith or claimed their autonomy as human beings who had no need of God, but that "Jesus" had disappeared from view, because the church was no longer "at the center of the village" in any meaningful way. "Heavily burdened by difficult, traditional ideas," the church was making "no impact on the broader masses." Instead of "being there for others," it was defending itself, afraid to take any risks.<sup>[53]</sup> Thus his call for theological renewal was primarily a call to *metanoia* in the church that would result in vicarious solidarity with the world in its need.

Bonhoeffer also had in mind future generations, a subject to which he frequently returned. In a letter he wrote to his nephew Hans-Walter Schleicher on June 2, 1944, Bonhoeffer asked Hans what he thought his generation believed, and what "the guideposts of their lives" were.<sup>[54]</sup> He then commented: "After all, the most important question for the future is how we are going to find a basis for living together with other people, what spiritual realities and rules we honor as the foundations for a meaningful human life."<sup>[55]</sup> Thus the future of Christianity, as he told Hans-Walter, was

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[53.] "Outline for a Book," 4/187, p. 500.

[54.] June 2, 1944, 3/153, p. 409.

[55.] Cf. *Fiction from Tegel Prison*, DBWE 7:60–62.

bound up with how, in relation to this “other,” we can do this. Would Christians and Christianity help provide a basis for living together with other people in a way that would bring healing and renewal to the world? Or, to put it differently, would the coming generation find within Christianity and the church the liberating and renewing power of Christ? This was Bonhoeffer’s hope and conviction, although he could not predict its fulfillment. As he declared in his sermon for the baptism of Dietrich Bethge, “The day will come . . . when people will once more be called to speak the word of God in such a way that the world is changed and renewed. It will be in a new language, perhaps quite nonreligious language, but liberating and redeeming like Jesus’s language, so that people will be alarmed, and yet overcome by its power—the language of a new righteousness and truth, a language proclaiming that God makes peace with humankind and that God’s kingdom is drawing near.”<sup>[56]</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s proposals are quite radical, especially when viewed from the perspective of the established Protestant church in Germany. For example, he proposed that as “a first step it must give away all its property to those in need” and that its ministers should not receive a state stipend.<sup>[57]</sup> The overall emphasis is on service, not domination, on demonstrating by example what new life in Christ means, of speaking with “moderation, authenticity, trust, faithfulness, steadfastness, patience, discipline, humility, modesty, contentment.”<sup>[58]</sup>

*“Worldly Transcendence”: Toward a New Humanism*

What is sometimes forgotten in considering Bonhoeffer’s “new theology” and the “church for others” is that some months earlier, he had written to Eberhard and Renate Bethge about the need for the church also to become a zone or sphere of freedom. Interestingly, Bonhoeffer suggested that in this way the church could recover the role it fulfilled during the Middle Ages, one that it subsequently lost as it was relegated to the sidelines of public life. It is, Bonhoeffer wrote, “only from the concept of the church that we can regain the understanding of the open space of freedom (art, education, friendship, play),” all of which means, he insisted, that what Kierkegaard meant by “aesthetic existence,” rather than being “banished from the church’s sphere,” is founded anew within its life.<sup>[59]</sup> This was

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[56.] 3/145, p. 390.

[57.] “Outline for a Book,” 4/187, p. 503.

[58.] Ibid.

[59.] Bonhoeffer to Eberhard and Renate Bethge. January 23, 1944, 2/102, p. 268. See de Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 147–58.

part of the true “worldliness,” or what Ronald Gregor Smith referred to as “worldly transcendence,”<sup>[60]</sup> which the church needed to regain in contrast to the religious privatization of piety as a purely inner reality.

The Bonhoeffer who emerges in the prison letters embraced within himself both a genuine Christian commitment and a humanist interest in and knowledge of life in the world in all its complex richness. In fact, as is now increasingly acknowledged among Bonhoeffer scholars, his prison letters strongly point toward a new form of Christian humanism.<sup>[61]</sup> This becomes possible because of his Christology, and especially the “becoming human” (*Menschwerdung*) of God. Just as Christ became “fully human,” so Bonhoeffer sees the Christian life no longer in terms of becoming a religious person but in those of becoming more truly human. By this he means not the superficial worldliness of the enlightened “but the profound this-worldliness that shows discipline and includes the ever-present knowledge of death and resurrection.” It is in the context of this discussion that Bonhoeffer confesses that whereas years before he wanted to become a saint, now he wanted to learn faith.<sup>[62]</sup> For him this meant learning to live fully in the world by throwing “oneself completely into the arms of God,” for this, he says, “is how one becomes a human being, a Christian.”<sup>[63]</sup>

Just as Bonhoeffer’s “this-worldliness” is not banal or superficial, so he insists that the need for the church to be “open to the world” by existing for others does not imply surrendering either its identity or the profound mystery of its faith in Christ, for that would simply be another example of “cheap grace,” or a confusion of the penultimate and the ultimate as he distinguished them in his *Ethics*.<sup>[64]</sup> For this reason, it was necessary that the church recover the “arcane discipline” (*disciplina arcani*) of the ancient church, whereby the mysteries of the faith are protected from profanation.<sup>[65]</sup> In this way, prayer, worship, the sacraments, and the creed would remain hidden at the heart of the life of the church, not thrust upon the world in some triumphalist manner. In the world the church would be known by its service and its work for justice and peace rather than by the disciplines that sustained its life of faith, hope, and love. In sum, as Bonhoeffer wrote on the occasion of Dietrich Bethge’s baptism, “we can be Christians today in

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[60.] See Smith, *Free Man*, 79ff and 97ff.

[61.] This was the theme of the Ninth International Bonhoeffer Congress held in Rome in 2004. See also Zimmermann and Gregor, *Being Human, Becoming Human*.

[62.] Bonhoeffer to Bethge, July 21, 1944, 4/178, p. 485.

[63.] *Ibid.*, p. 486.

[64.] *DBWE* 6:146–70.

[65.] Bonhoeffer to Bethge, May 5, 1944, 3/139, p. 373. On the translation of this term, see p. 32.

only two ways, through prayer and in doing justice among human beings. All Christian thinking, talking, and organizing must be born anew, out of that prayer and action.”<sup>[66]</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s “new theology” in prison was not the only development that took Bethge by surprise. So, too, was Bonhoeffer’s rather sudden experiment in writing poetry during the final few months of his life. This occurred at the same time that he was developing his ideas on being Christian and being the church in a world come of age. But whereas his theological explorations were focused on the future of Christianity, his poetry centered more existentially on his own experience in prison, his struggle with faith and doubt, his hopes and fears, and his sense of approaching death. Yet a close reading of his poetry reveals that what is expressed there complements what is found in his theological reflections. If the latter reflects his vision for the future of Christian faith, the poetry reveals his own inner sense of who he was and how he grappled with his personal circumstances after the failure of the attempt on Hitler’s life.

### **Poetry from Prison**

Bonhoeffer’s prison poetry has received scant critical attention in the English-speaking world despite the numerous scattered translations and partial translations over six decades and the even more numerous musical settings of some of these. It is certainly hoped that this first complete critical edition of the poems with its extensive apparatus will encourage such work.

As far as we know, Bonhoeffer had no intention of reaching a wider audience with his poems, and he modestly disclaimed any talent as a poet. But this does not prohibit us six decades later from discovering in his poetry the beauty, pathos, and depth of insight we surely would have heard if he had had the chance to continue to develop as a pianist, or if he had survived to contribute to the political and intellectual life of Germany and Europe after 1945. The ten poems, then, are not disparate pieces written by Bonhoeffer as if he were simply trying his hand at something different, but need to be taken as a whole, as an integral part of the rest of the letters and papers, and as the most mature of his reflections arising out of his prison experience. Moreover, their formal mastery reflects Bonhoeffer’s classical education, his love of the sounds and cadences of language, including his daily discipline of Bible study and singing and reciting familiar hymns.

The poems, all written with the consciousness of imminent death at the hands of the Nazis, address many of the themes prevalent in the later let-

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[66.] 3/145, p. 389.

ters as well as the fiction fragments (*DBWE* 7): human happiness, suffering and loss, success and failure ("Fortune and Calamity"); questions of guilt, complicity, and betrayal ("Night Voices," "The Death of Moses"); friendship, faithfulness, freedom ("The Friend," "The Death of Moses," "Stations on the Way to Freedom"); vicarious responsible action on behalf of others ("Night Voices," "Jonah," "The Death of Moses"); the universality of God's mercy and forgiveness and the call to "stand by God in God's own pain" at the suffering of the world ("Christians and Heathens"); and facing death ("Night Voices," "The Death of Moses," "Stations on the Way to Freedom"). These existential expressions of Bonhoeffer's struggle to keep faith when hoping against hope was all that was left to sustain him are the complementary counterpoint to what we find in the "theological letters," penned as they were around the same later stage of his imprisonment. In this respect, as previously intimated, the poems express at a deeply personal level the struggles that lie behind Bonhoeffer's prison theology. They express not only his loves and fears, his hopes and crises, and his profound awareness of events beyond his cell and the suffering of others, but also his leaps of theological imagination.

There have been many previous translations of Bonhoeffer's poems, both those included in previous editions of *Letters and Papers* and those published in journals and magazines and as volumes of poetry. As a result, some of the most memorable lines in Bonhoeffer's poems in English have become familiar to a wide circle of people, often quoted, embodied in prayers and liturgies, and in numerous cases set to music and included in hymnbooks. In retranslating them, we have been sensitive to this issue. Where the original justifies the way in which certain phrases or lines have previously been translated, we have sought to satisfy those who have found them meaningful. We have included references to collections of Bonhoeffer's poetry in the bibliography by way of acknowledgment. That said, what is contained in *DBWE* 8 is a completely fresh translation, which brings us to the broader issues involved in the task of translating this volume.

### Issues in Translation

The translation of Bonhoeffer's *Werke* into English has been an enormous task involving a large team of translators. At the best of times, translation from one language into another is difficult. This becomes more problematic when the material contains a variety of genres, originates in a cultural setting and historical context that is increasingly distant from our own and, as in this instance, from contemporary Germany and German language usage, and is also the product of multiple authors. Compounding the problem is

that much of what Bonhoeffer wrote in prison was censored, and that those who wrote to him were not only mindful of the sensitivity of his situation but were also under considerable duress themselves. Thus the translator must ponder the choice of words, the nuances, the allusions, the code words, and what was written “between the lines.” Also, Bonhoeffer’s letters to Bethge, which make up the bulk of the material, were part of an ongoing conversation that predated Bonhoeffer’s imprisonment; so much that is not self-evident to the translators could be taken for granted by the two friends. To make it more difficult, these letters and papers also contained theological explorations in a new key expressed in words and phrases that require interpretation before they can be captured—even if not entirely satisfactorily—in appropriate English terms.

There are also words, such as the Latin *hilaritas* (normally translated as “cheerfulness” or “gaiety”), that are important for Bonhoeffer but difficult to translate in a way that captures the deeper, more nuanced meaning that he implies. For that reason the word has been kept in its original form. Also problematic is the Latin phrase *disciplina arcani*, which Bonhoeffer translates into German as *Arkandisziplin*. In previous editions of *Letters and Papers*, it has been translated as “secret discipline,” and in *Discipleship (DWBE 4)* as “discipline of the secret.” We have decided, however, to follow Bonhoeffer’s example in order to avoid any misunderstanding of the phrase and especially of the word “secret,” and have translated it simply as “arcane discipline.” Bonhoeffer is referring not to something done in secret but to the mysteries of the Christian faith, which have been revealed in Christ and are made known and preserved in the life of the church.<sup>[67]</sup> These are “hidden” (the literal meaning of “arcane”), as it were, in the church’s liturgical life (sacraments, prayer, and creed), rather than thrust upon the world in a “take it or leave it” way that profanes them. The preservation of the mysteries is essential to the life of the church as it engages in “worldly” action and seeks to be the “church for others.”<sup>[68]</sup>

Earlier we mentioned the various genres embedded in the text of *DBWE 8*, ranging from straightforward letters written by Bonhoeffer to his family and by them in return to the poems that Bonhoeffer wrote in the final months of his imprisonment as his fate became increasingly clear. But even the family letters, straightforward as they appear, require translating acumen, for the vocabulary employed by aged parents is not that used by a brother, a godson, a lover, or a friend. Just the simple matter of how to trans-

[67.] Cf. Eph. 3:3–4; 6:19; Col. 1:26–27; 4:3.

[68.] See also Bonhoeffer to Bethge, April 30, 1944, 3/137, ed. note 19, p. 365; and May 5, 1944, 3/139, p. 373.

late the greetings at the beginning of the letters and the words of farewell at their end is problematic. Then there are the terms used to describe the various state functionaries ranging from prison guards to those involved in Bonhoeffer's trial along with a variety of state institutions, the words used to describe the air raids and the steps taken to escape their deadly blows, the allusions to the wider family, circle of friends, acquaintances, and former students, and the inevitable "shorthand" that demanded deciphering.

The team of translators, Martin Rumscheidt and the late Barbara Rumscheidt ("After Ten Years"), Reinhard Krauss (part 1), Lisa E. Dahill (part 2), Isabel Best (parts 2 and 3 except for the five poems), Nancy Lukens (part 4 and all the poetry), and Douglas Stott (the afterword), were exemplary in pursuing their task, often going far beyond what was required of them in tracking information, making helpful suggestions, and spending hours pondering words and concepts. Their commitment to the process and to keeping to schedule (sometimes amid personal difficulties) and their desire to achieve the best possible outcome made the task of the volume editor much easier than it might have been. In this regard it must be noted that in the interests of conformity to other volumes and to simplicity, all the additional notes in this volume, that is, those not contained in the German original, are, with the consent of the translators, attributed to the volume editor (JDG). But many were either prompted by comments made by translators, or by Ilse Tödt, or were based on their research and formulation. It is impossible now to untangle the various strands woven into such notes, but credit is due to everyone involved. In the case of the poems, we have, however, made an exception given the nature of the interventions. The notes, in this case, are attributed to both the translator and the editor (NL/JDG).

Nothing demonstrates the teamwork of the translators better than the consultation held in San Diego, California, in November 2007, where many of the outstanding issues in translation were discussed, clarified, and decided. Here I should add a special note of gratitude to Pastor Wilbert S. Miller of First Lutheran Church, San Diego, who graciously provided room in his church for the translation team and editors to meet. But perhaps the most memorable part of that consultation was the day devoted to Bonhoeffer's poetry. Through the day we listened to drafts of Nancy Lukens's translation in tandem with reading the German text, debated turns of phrase and meaning, and were profoundly moved by what we heard as we listened carefully to Bonhoeffer's experience and thought finding expression in his poems. All the material in *DBWE* 8 required considerable knowledge and skill, both linguistic and historical, both theological and cultural. But perhaps the poetry has been the most demanding simply because that is the nature of the genre. How does one translate German poetry not just into

English but into English that conveys its rhythm and meter, its cadences and rhymes, in short, its poetic character? Special mention must be made, then, to the work of Nancy Lukens, the input of Ilse Tödt, the expertise of Jürgen Henkys—undoubtedly the leading exponent of Bonhoeffer's poetry—as well as contributions to the process by Michael Ferber, Isabel Best, and Martin Rumscheidt.

Editing this volume has at times been quite demanding. One of the most difficult tasks has been ensuring that the translation achieves the necessary coherence that should mark Bonhoeffer's writing as well as the writing of the other correspondents. Each of the translators has naturally brought to his or her work particular skills and knowledge, understandings of German idioms and English (or, I should say, North American) equivalents, familiarity with Bonhoeffer's life and legacy and, not least, writing style. Whether I have been successful in achieving coherence without losing vitality is something readers will have to judge. Equally important has been the challenge of maintaining consistency in changing circumstances, so that the voice of Bonhoeffer, together with those of the other correspondents, remains reasonably constant while also reflecting changes of mood and circumstance. But perhaps the greatest challenge has been that of walking the fine line between faithfulness to the German text and the creation of a lively, idiomatic English translation. Not to pursue the former would result in inaccuracies and perpetuate errors in translation; not to strive for the latter would inevitably lead to a text without soul. Neither course would have done justice to Bonhoeffer, nor would it have provided a readable and reliable result.

The challenge of editing this remarkable volume fell to me at a time when, having recently retired from full-time academic work, I was least expecting such a task or feeling adequately equipped to undertake it. It was, nonetheless, an honor to be asked to do so and a privilege to bring it to conclusion. Moreover, as I have often read and drawn inspiration from *Letters and Papers from Prison* since first reading it in 1962, it has been a remarkably rewarding project to be engaged in at this stage of life. And not least so because it was my great pleasure to work with such a splendid team of translators, such diligent and informed German colleagues, together with longtime friends Clifford Green, chair of the *DBWE* editorial board, and Victoria Barnett, general editor of the *DBWE* series. Green showed a keen interest and gave support at every stage and was often able to shed light on a particular problem. Barnett's dedication, language and editorial skills, work capacity, and historical knowledge made my task far more enjoyable and far less onerous than it might have been.

John W. de Gruchy  
March 2009