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Kirsten Busch Nielsen, Ralf Karolus Wüstenberg,
Jens Zimmermann (Hg./Eds.)

Dem Rad in die Speichen fallen

Das Politische in der Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers

A Spoke in the Wheel

The Political in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Gütersloher Verlagshaus

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Inhalt / Table of Contents

II. Christliche Anthropologie und das Politische / Christian Anthropology and the Political

III. Kirche und Zivilgesellschaft / Church and Civil Society

Vorwort

Dietrich Bonhoeffers Verständnis des Politischen ist eine der zentralen Fragen in der jüngeren Bonhoeffer-Forschung. Ist Bonhoeffers Theologie überhaupt eine »politische Theologie«? Und wenn ja, was würde das im Einzelnen bedeuten? Wie versteht der lutherisch geprägte Theologe Bonhoeffer zentrale Fragen politischer Ethik wie die nach der Begründung von Widerstand, nach dem Staat, nach der Demokratie und überhaupt politischem Handeln? Wie sind theologische Fragen wie die nach Kirche, Religion oder christlicher Ethik bei ihm mit den genannten politischen Fragen in Beziehung zu denken? Welche Perspektiven eröffnen sich über Bonhoeffers Theologie für gegenwärtige gesellschaftliche Diskurse zur politischen Theologie?

Der XI. Internationale Bonhoeffer Kongress, der vom 27. Juni bis zum 1. Juli 2012 in Sigtuna, Schweden tagte, stellte sich diesen Fragen. Der Kongress wurde von der deutsch- und englischsprachigen sowie der holländischen und polnischen Sektion der Internationalen Bonhoeffer-Gesellschaft vorbereitet. Gastgeber war die *Sigtuna Foundation;* in den Jahren 1936 und 1942 besuchte Dietrich Bonhoeffer selbst diesen Ort. Die historische Dimension des Konferenzortes wirkte inspirierend auf die 140 internationalen Tagungsteilnehmer. Finanziell wurde der Kongress unterstützt von der *Svenska Riksbankens Jubileumsfond* sowie der *Internationalen Bonhoeffer Gesellschaft* (deutschsprachige Sektion).

Dieser Band dokumentiert eine Auswahl der Haupt- und Seminarvorträge des Kongresses. Der Band ist in drei Teile gegliedert. Im ersten Teil werden unter der Überschrift *Politischer Widerstand* verschiedene Aspekte von Bonhoeffers Verständnis von Widerstand einer Analyse unterzogen. Der Teil behandelt die theologischen Dimensionen des Politischen im Leben und in den Werken Dietrich Bonhoeffers. Der zweite Teil, *Christliche Anthropologie und das Politische*, beleuchtet zentrale Themen in Bonhoeffers Schriften, die die Grundlage der Interpretation von Bonhoeffers politischer Theologie bilden, wie u. a. Gnade, Schuld, Nachfolge, Gebet. Die Beiträge im dritten Hauptteil des Bandes, *Kirche und Zivilgesellschaft*, haben im Besonderen Bonhoeffers Verständnis von der Kirche zum Gegenstand; und dies in einem doppelten Sinn. Zum einen wie es sich im historischen Kontext der 1930er und 40er Jahre entwickelte; zum anderen in der Gegenwartsbedeutung seines ekklesiologischen Entwurfs für Diskurse über Kirche, Gesellschaft, Religion und Politik.

Die Kongresssprache war sowohl Englisch als auch Deutsch. Der große Teil der Hauptvorträge wurde in englischer Sprache gehalten. Von den 30 Beiträgen dieses Bandes ist nur ein kleiner Teil in deutscher Sprache abgefasst. Es finden sich hier a*bstracts* auf Englisch. Am Ende des Bandes sind die Autoren sämtlich aufgelistet.

Die Herausgeber danken dem Gütersloher Verlagshaus, namentlich Herrn Diedrich Steen, für die sofortige Bereitschaft, auch diesen Kongressband zu drucken. Dank geht auch an *Joshua und Sarah Harris* für ihre Hilfe bei der Manuskripterstellung sowie *Jelena Beljin* für die Mitarbeit an der Endredaktion. Finanzielle Unterstützung kam von Jens Zimmermanns *Canada Research Chair für Interpretation, Religion and Culture (TWU)*.

Kirsten Busch Nielsen — Copenhagen, Denmark

Ralf Karolus Wüstenberg — Berlin/Flensburg, Germany

Jens Zimmermann — Vancouver, Canada

Preface

Some of the crucial questions in recent Dietrich Bonhoeffer research deal with Bonhoeffer's understanding of the political. Is Bonhoeffer's theology a »political theology« at all? If so, what are the actual contours of this political theology? How does the Lutheran theologian Bonhoeffer understand key political issues like resistance, state, democracy and political action? How does he relate theological issues, such as church, religion and Christian ethics to the political themes? What perspectives does Bonhoeffer's theology open up for discussions about political theology in the context of today's societies?

The XI International Bonhoeffer Congress, which was held in Sigtuna, Sweden, from 27 June to 1 July 2012, focused on these questions. The congress was organized by the German, the English speaking, the Dutch and the Polish sections of the International Bonhoeffer Society. It was hosted by the *Sigtuna Foundation*, which Dietrich Bonhoeffer himself visited twice, in 1936 and in 1942. The work of the 140 international participants during the congress benefitted highly from the historical dimension of the venue and from the foundation's inspiring and relaxing atmosphere. Financially, the congress was supported by *Svenska Riksbankens Jubileumsfond* and *The International Bonhoeffer Society* (German Section).

This volume presents a selection of the plenary lectures and papers from the congress. It is structured in three parts. Under the heading *Political Resistance* different aspects of Bonhoeffer's understanding of resistance are scrutinized in part I, which explores the theological foundation of politics in Bonhoeffer's life and works. Section II, *Christian Anthropology and the Political*, throws light on specific theological issues in Bonhoeffer's writings such as grace, guilt, discipleship and prayer as the basis of the interpretation of his political theology. The articles in part III, *Church and Civil Society*, analyze specifically Bonhoeffer's understanding of church as it developed in the historical context of the 1930s and 40s and also assesses the relevance of his ecclesiology for contemporary discussions about church, society, religion and politics.

The working languages of the Sigtuna-congress were English and German. The majority of the key note lectures and papers, however, were given in English. Of the 30 articles, only a minor part is in German. Each of the articles is followed by a short abstract in English. The book closes with a list of authors.

The editors wish to thank Gütersloher Verlagshaus, which has also issued previous International Bonhoeffer Congress volumes, for its willingness to publish this volume and for the smooth cooperation in the process of editing. Thanks also to *Joshua and Sarah Harris* and *Jelena Beljin* for their valuable help with the preparation of the manuscripts for print and to the *Canada Research Chair for Interpretation, Religon and Culture (Jens Zimmermann, TWU)* for supporting this work financially.

Kirsten Busch Nielsen — Copenhagen, Denmark

Ralf Karolus Wüstenberg — Berlin/Flensburg, Germany

Jens Zimmermann — Vancouver, Canada

I.

Politischer Widerstand
Political Resistance

Wolfgang Huber

The Theological Profile of Bonhoeffer's Political Resistance

1.

There are different reasons why it is rather difficult to talk about »the theological profile of Bonhoeffer's political resistance«. I will concentrate on three major objections: Bonhoeffer had no central role in the political resistance of the Nazi era; he did not presume a theological consensus on what he did; and it is hard to expect that he wrote down what he thought theologically about his involvement in the conspiracy.

1.1

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was not one of the central political figures of the German Resistance under the Nazi regime. His role in the conspiracy against Hitler was rather marginal. He assisted Hans von Dohnanyi and Hans Oster, who used their position in the Military Intelligence Office strategically to plan for the overthrow of Hitler's dictatorship. He encouraged them, and in certain situations, he interpreted them. Hans von Dohnanyi was rightly called the »intellectual head of the 20th of July«.[1] That was not Dietrich's role.[2] Hans von Dohnanyi described Bonhoeffer's role as that of a »kind

1. M. Smid, Hans von Dohnanyi – Christine Bonhoeffer: eine Ehe im Widerstand gegen Hitler, Gütersloh 2002, 450. This outstanding biography is important because of the role of Hans von Dohnanyi and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the conspiracy.
2. It was therefore appropriate that Heinz-Eduard Tödt initiated a research project on the »Bonhoeffer-Dohnanyi circle« and not only on Bonhoeffer's resistance (Cf. H. E. Tödt, Der Bonhoeffer-Dohnanyi-Kreis in der Opposition und im Widerstand gegen das Gewaltregime Hitlers. Zwischenbilanz eines Forschungsprojekts, in: Heinz Eduard Tödt, Theologische Perspektiven nach Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gütersloh 1993, 170-216). This perspective is – independently from Tödt – renewed by E. Sifton and F. Stern, No Ordinary Men: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hans von Dohnanyi, Resisters against Hitler in Church and State, MS 2012.

helper«, and Dohnanyi had a guilty conscience for drawing Bonhoeffer into a situation which he would never have entered on his own.[3] Eberhard Bethge clearly stated that Bonhoeffer's role in the resistance was of »no great political importance«. And he added: »He did not overrate his place and his professional competence in that regard. […] Political ambition was not one of his characteristics.«[4]

Parallel to his activity in the Military Intelligence Office that helped him to avoid military service, he was working on the manuscripts for his *Ethics*. The importance of this literary work for him becomes clear when he states, even six months after his detention: »Personally I reproach myself for not having finished the *Ethics*.«[5] Even from the years 1940 to 1943, Bonhoeffer's thinking was not concentrated totally on the issue of resistance; the same is true for the time in the Tegel cell. No one would dare to call the prison theology simply a theology of resistance. The famous passage from which the German title for the letters and papers from prison – »Widerstand und Ergebung – resistance and submission« – is taken does not discuss »resistance« in the political sense of the word at all. The theme is the inner revolt against the fate that perpetuated his time in prison. Bonhoeffer takes the literary examples of Don Quixote and Michael Kohlhaas to illustrate that this kind of resistance to fate can become meaningless or even absurd. And therefore he concludes: »We must stand up to ›fate‹ […] as resolutely as we must submit to it at a given time. […] So the boundaries between resistance and submission can't be determined as a matter of principle, but both must be there and both must be seized resolutely.«[6] »Resistance and Submission« in the sense of this text is something quite different from political resistance or political adaptation.

Perhaps Bonhoeffer's most important contribution to the political resistance in the proper sense of the word had to do with the two days in Sigtuna and Stockholm on May 31 and June 1, 1942.[7] His double effort to

3. »Dietrich wäre niemals in den Strudel hineingerissen worden, wenn er [sc. Dohnanyi] nicht ihn aktiv dazu bewegt hätte. Dietrich sei kein Politiker gewesen, sondern ein gütiger Helfer, der von der Richtigkeit der antihitlerischen Strömung durchdrungen gewesen sei« (M. Smid, Widerstand gegen Hitler, 450).
4. E. Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A Biography, rev. ed. Minneapolis 2000, 795.
5. Letter to Eberhard Bethge, November 18, 1943, in: DBWE 8, 181.
6. Letter to Eberhard Bethge, February 21, 1944, in: DBWE 8, 303 f.
7. For the relevance of Bonhoeffer's ecumenical commitment to his conspiratory activities see: W. Krötke, Nur das ganze Wort ist mutig. Ökumene als Ernstfall theologischer Existenz, Das Beispiel Dietrich Bonhoeffers, in: DBJ / DBY (2/2005), Gütersloh, 125-145.

move the British government to give an open description of its peace aims, and a secret signal to the conspirators that it would not destroy the chance for a new beginning after a successful attempt on Hitler's life, could have been of strategic importance for the further development of the conspiracy. Bonhoeffer convinced Bishop George Bell, but the Bishop, notwithstanding all his efforts, could not change the attitude of the British government. The situation in Sigtuna seventy years ago was shaky, but the spirit in which Bell and Bonhoeffer met was unshakable: »We pledged one another again in unfailing Christian brotherhood. I shall never forget him«, wrote George Bell fourteen years after the encounter of Sigtuna.[8] Bonhoeffer had already written on June 1, 1942 before he returned from Stockholm to Berlin: »I think these days will remain in my memory as some of the greatest of my life. This spirit of fellowship and of Christian brotherliness will carry me through the darkest hours, and even if things go worse than we hope and expect, the light of these few days will never extinguish in my heart.«[9]

Bonhoeffer's role in the conspiracy gained its unforgettable meaning by the fact that he went through the darkest hours and that things turned out worse than he had hoped and expected. He knew that he was risking his life by his involvement in the conspiracy, however marginal this role may have been. Therefore there is a theological profile. It is not characterized by a theological theory of resistance but by the martyrdom of someone who understood as a new beginning what would have been for others the end: to risk his life for his conviction.

1.2

We have much more reason to hesitate about whether the church officials in German Protestantism had a theological understanding of political resistance than to call into question the theological profile of Bonhoeffer's resistance. Bonhoeffer himself described the weakness of the church of his time, namely its church-centeredness. The activities of the so-called »intact churches« as well as of the »confessing church« were in his view concentrated on the attempt »to save the church as an institution of salvation« or to »stand up for the cause of the church« and therefore, to sum up: »Church defending itself. No risk taking for others.«[10] Yet the ambiguity of the

8. DBW 16, 305, note 2.
9. Letter to George Bell, June 1, 1942, in: DBW 16, 305.
10. DBWE 8, 500.

churches' positions refers not only to their role during the Nazi regime, but evidently also to their evaluation of the »twelve years« after Germany's defeat.

It was not by accident that the first theological statements about Bonhoeffer's political resistance came from outside of Germany. Early in 1946 Eberhard Bethge quotes Reinhold Niebuhr and – not at all surprisingly – George Bell.[11] Bell described Bonhoeffer's role from two angles: »the resistance of the faithful soul in the name of God against the offence of the evil« and »the moral and political revolt of the human conscience against injustice and cruelty.«[12] Bell distinguishes, so to speak, the vertical and the horizontal dimension of Bonhoeffer's resistance: the spiritual resistance against evil in God's name and the revolt against political injustice and cruelty belong together. Reinhold Niebuhr, for his part, is quoted with the sentence that Bonhoeffer's death as a martyr would lead to new faith in Germany and would help to overcome the fateful error of separation between the religious and the mundane realms. Clearly Niebuhr had the political conspiracy in mind when he spoke about Bonhoeffer's death as a martyr.[13]

The leaders of German Protestantism differed to a great extent from that judgment. For them it was impossible to see the political conspiracy in continuity with the Christian witness as founded in the Barmen declaration.[14] So the board of the church in Berlin-Brandenburg, presided over by Bishop Otto Dibelius (whose personal assistant was in this time no less than Eberhard Bethge) noted in 1946 a difference between »martyrs in the full sense of the word«, like Paul Schneider who proclaimed the word of God until his death, and those »who tried to give the German people another government before the last German city would fall into ruins« (there is no word about the motive to stop the mass murder of European Jews in Auschwitz and elsewhere!). And the statement adds: »The church of Jesus Christ never can approve the assault on the life of a human person, irrespective of

11. E. Bethge, Leben ohne Ausflucht, in: Neue Zeit (29/1946). Quoted in: M. Klein, Märtyrer im vollen Sinn dieses Wortes. Das Bild Dietrich Bonhoeffers im frühen Gedenken der kirchlichen und politischen Öffentlichkeit, in: EvTheol (67/2007), 419-432, 421.
12. Sermon of Bishop George Bell in the service of commemoration on July 27, 1945 in the Holy Trinity Church in London, quoted by Eberhard Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A Biography, rev. ed. by Victoria J. Barnett, Minneapolis 1999, 931.
13. Reinhold Niebuhr, The Death of a Martyr, in: Christianity and Crisis Vol. 5, No. 11, 25.06.1945, 6 f.
14. E. Bethge, Fünfzig Jahre sind zu wenig, in: Mut in böser Zeit. Gedenken an Dietrich Bonhoeffer und seine Freunde, ed. by W. Huber, Berlin 1995, 72.

the intention in which it was executed.«[15] Hans Meiser, then Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Bavaria, openly showed his satisfaction with the fact that »we did not participate in efforts of tyrannicide«.[16] What a strange »we«! What an astonishing understanding of the church – excluding not only pastors like Bonhoeffer or Gerstenmaier, who where involved in the conspiracy, but also excluding all those »ordinary« church members who followed their Christian conscience in their effort to stop the killing of human beings, the images of God.

However ambiguous or even dangerous for the church leaders a step further into the risk taken for others would have been, the idea of a moral superiority on theological grounds for those who concentrated their efforts on the sphere of the church itself and tried to keep the church »intact« in those times of horror is difficult to understand and impossible to accept. But are those of us who have some experience of our own in church leadership – are »we« sure that we would act and judge in a really different manner in comparable situations? Hopefully Dietrich Bonhoeffer's example would help us to make this difference. Because his conviction was that the church is only the church if it is – at least in such situations – a »church for others«.[17]

Is Bonhoeffer's step into the conspiracy a part of and an example of a »church for others«? Or is it only an individual »boundary situation«,[18] a personal risk that has to be taken in the solitude of the conspirative incognito? Bonhoeffer himself realized that the church had failed to achieve clarity about the situation of resistance; therefore he considered the possibility that his step into the conspiracy »may possibly endanger the exercise of my profession in the future.«[19] We cannot ignore the tone of disappointment in Bonhoeffer's remarks: In his church, the theological basis for his modest contribution to political resistance was lacking. He had no other choice than to move forward at his personal risk. He had to take an individual decision that distanced him from the ministry he was ordained for and for which he had prepared the young brethren in Finkenwalde. The solitude of a Christian conscience is the specific theological profile of Bonhoeffer's political resistance.

15. M. Klein, Märtyrer, 422.
16. M. Klein, Märtyrer, 422.
17. DBWE 8, 499-504, 503.
18. Letter to Eberhard Bethge, November 18, 1943, in: DBWE 8, 180. Translation in previous editions: »Borderline situation« (cf. E. Bethge, Bonhoeffer Biography, 791-797).
19. Letter to Eberhard Bethge, December 15, 1943, in: DBWE 8, 221.

1.3

To write about the theological reasons for political resistance is difficult, dangerous or even impossible for the resister himself. Eberhard Bethge distinguished five stages of resistance in the Nazi period: passive resistance, open ideological stance, access to information about a possible coup, active preparation for a post-revolt period, and active conspiracy. Three of those five stages should not be reflected in any written text that possibly could fall into the wrong hands. When, for instance, Bonhoeffer was working on his *Ethics* during his conspiratory time, he had to separate the two parts of his double existence very carefully. Any direct connection between his political activities and his theological reflections had to be avoided. He had to take into account that some of his manuscripts could be found one day by the Gestapo – and that really happened![20] For these reasons, we cannot expect to find direct theological reflections on political resistance in writings accessible to the public or – given the risk of being found by the police – only on the first two stages of resistance: passive resistance and open ideological conflict. The documentation of theological reflections on preparations for a possible coup, on preparations for a post-revolt order or on active conspiracy can only take a clandestine form. Therefore it is hard to expect Bonhoeffer to develop a »theology of resistance« in a proper sense. We have rather to expect that the theological profile of Bonhoeffer's political resistance remains in an »arcane discipline«.

2.

Taking into account those obvious restrictions, we have good reasons to be surprised and even astonished by the amount of material in Bonhoeffer's writings that reflects directly or indirectly his resistance and even his involvement in the conspiracy. Documents for that kind of reflection go back to 1933 and go on until the letters of 1944. I will restrict myself to few central texts and decisive aspects of what we can – notwithstanding all critical reservations – call Bonhoeffer's »theology of resistance« by concentrating on four aspects: resistance as a part of the churches' public task, confession of guilt as the context for the decision to resistance, resistance as a boundary

20. Bonhoeffer was aware of this even six months after his detention (Letter to Eberhard Bethge of November 18, 1943, in: DBWE 8, 181).

case within an ethics of responsibility, and finally: trust in God's guidance as the basis for the risk of resistance.

2.1

Bonhoeffer's early reflections on the challenges with which the church is confronted by the Nazi regime begin with nothing less than an ecclesiological theory of resistance. In his often discussed article on *The Church and the Jewish Question*[21], he presents highly controversial positions on the »Jewish question« – a terminology that has brought some interpreters to the opinion that Bonhoeffer perpetuates anti-Jewish stereotypes instead of overcoming them. And he uses a political language that sounds rather strange in our ears. »Law and order« are his decisive criteria for the task of the state. How much more would we like to read here the language of the Barmen Declaration of 1934 whose fifth thesis says that »the state has by divine appointment the task of providing for justice and peace«[22]! But Bonhoeffer uses the language of »law and order« to clarify that there is not only a state that does not perform its duties sufficiently enough and creates a lack of law and order – a defective state, so to speak. There is also the possibility that a state performs its duties in an exaggerated manner, imposing too much »law and order« – an excessive state, so to speak.[23] A chaotic lack of law and order, or an oppressive excess of law and order may lead to comparable results: that the rights of people are violated and that peace in society is destroyed.

With regard to this double possibility of the state's failure to meet its elementary duty – namely to protect the rights of the citizens and to preserve the order of a peaceful life together – Bonhoeffer distinguishes three tasks of the church. The first task is to remind the state of its basic obligation; that includes clear opposition in cases in which the state neglects its responsibility by being a defective state or an excessive state. The second task is to assist the victims of the wrongdoing of the state; that means to save and to protect those who suffer under the state's violation of its ele-

21. DBWE 12, 361-370.
22. Translation cited by R. Ahlers, The Barmen Theological Declaration of 1934. The Archeology of a Confessional Text, Toronto Studies in Theology 24, Lewiston / Queenston 1986, 41.
23. Karl Barth speaks occasionally about the two dangers of the church to become either a defective or an excessive church (K. Barth, Das christliche Leben, in: Die Kirchliche Dogmatik IV/4: Fragmente aus dem Nachlass, Zürich 1976, 223-235).

mentary duties. The third task is on the agenda when this kind of violation takes on a systemic form and becomes a continuous shape of the state. In this situation, Bonhoeffer argues, it is no longer sufficient »to bind up the wounds of the victims beneath the wheel but to seize the wheel itself«[24] – that means »to bring the apparatus of the unjust and illegitimate state to a halt.«[25]

The first task refers to the ideological conflict about the state's responsibility. In this respect, it is the testimonial task of the church to emphasize the proper function of the state in public. The church is seen in this respect as a witness. The second task refers to the humane conflict about the fate of those who become victims of the state's failure. In this respect, it is the diaconal task of the church to assist those who are deprived of their rights and lost the opportunity to stand and to speak for themselves. The emphasis is now on the »vicarious representative action« (Stellvertretung)[26] of the church that Bonhoeffer described already in *Sanctorum Communio* in its different dimensions, including the dimensions of intercession and intervention. In his doctoral dissertation, Bonhoeffer calls that intervention a »vicarious advocacy« which may even include the necessity »to give up possessions, honor, even our whole lives«.[27] Obviously, he uses the insights developed after *Sanctorum Communio* for his ecclesiology of resistance in *The Church and the Jewish Question.*

There is no doubt about the political aspect of all three tasks of the church distinguished in the essay of 1933. It is clearly a political witness that is meant in the first of the three tasks of the church. And with the second task he has in mind a political diakonia. But the third task is, without any doubt, political in the most immediate sense of the word. Bonhoeffer does not use the term »resistance«, but he clearly describes the task of hindering those in power from continuing their unlawful deeds. The subject of these three tasks remains identical: the church.

During his time in prison, Bonhoeffer describes this third task in a comparable way, also using an image taken from the field of mobility. Gaetano Latmiral remembers Bonhoeffer's simile: »When a crazy person on the Kurfürstendamm [a crowded street in Berlin] drives his car over the sidewalk, I cannot restrict myself as a pastor to burying the dead and to consol-

24. DBWE 12, 365. The German text speaks about putting hands on the spokes or falling within the spokes of the wheel (Cf. DBWE 12, 365, note 10).
25. The interpretation of the editors: DBWE 12, 365 f., note 12.
26. For the translation of the term »Stellvertretung« see DBWE 1, 120, note 29.
27. DBWE 1, 184.

ing the relatives; moreover when I am nearby I have to jump on the driver and to tear him from the wheel.«[28] Bonhoeffer refers to the condition that »I am nearby«, that means that I have the opportunity to intervene. So he does not exaggerate the duty to resist. But he applies this duty clearly to the »pastor«, to the minister of the church if he is »nearby« and has therefore a possibility of active resistance. Under such a condition, he violates his obligation as an ordained minister when he restricts his activity to the funeral for the victims and lets pass the opportunity to stop the driver. It means letting violence against human lives happen by passivity, and in this way becoming responsible for the deaths of other human beings. Whenever an attack on human life is concerned, whenever crimes against humanity are at stake, the necessity of active intervention refers not only to the individual believer. The church as a community of believers is asked for a response. It is asked for an active, not only a passive response.

In both cases – *The Church and the Jewish Question* and the statement reported by Gaetano Latmiral – Bonhoeffer describes the necessary reaction only metaphorically, but it is an activity that he has in mind. He does not address the question of a violent response, the problem of tyrannicide, in this context. But the church as a community of believers cannot stay neutral when solidarity with those who suffer under the misdeeds of the state is at stake. His theology of resistance forms a part of his ecclesiology. Therefore it is not only a personal disappointment but also a theological conflict when Bonhoeffer has reason to doubt whether he can continue in ordained ministry after being involved in the preparation of an assault on the life of the dictator.

2.2

The ecclesiological aspect of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology of resistance reappears in a very consistent form in the manuscripts for Bonhoeffer's *Ethics.* Bonhoeffer is already informed about the activities to overcome Hitler's dictatorship. He knows the material that Hans von Dohnanyi collected about the crimes of the Nazi Regime. He knows the extent to which the church has ignored these crimes, with only a few exceptions. In this situation, he formulates a confession of guilt already in the first period of

28. G. Latmiral, Letter to Gerhard Leibholz, March 6, 1946, in: DBJ / DBY (1/2003), Gütersloh, 30. Cf. C. Gremmels, Theologie und Lebenswelt. Beiträge zur Theologie der Gegenwart, Gütersloh 2012, 117.

working on *Ethics*, in the winter of 1940/41. What he has in mind is not only a confession of guilt for the individual believer, but also for the church as a community of believers. He follows the sequence of the Ten Commandments and uses them in the sense of a confession manual. It is not difficult to realize the allusions to the realities of his own time in the way in which he explains the Decalogue. On the first commandment, Bonhoeffer says: »The church confesses that it has not professed openly and clearly enough its message of the one God, revealed for all times in Jesus Christ and tolerating no other gods besides. […] Through this it has often withheld the compassion that it owes to the despised and rejected. The church was mute when it should have cried out, because the blood of the innocent cried out to heaven. The church did not find the right word in the right way at the right time.«[29] And on the fifth commandment he comments:

> »The church confesses that it has witnessed the arbitrary use of brutal force, the suffering in body and soul of countless innocent people, that it has witnessed oppression, hatred, and murder without raising its voice for the victims and without finding ways of rushing to help them. It has become guilty of the lives of the weakest and most defenseless brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.«[30]

The words »brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ« are added to the manuscript and include a clear reference to the Jews. At an earlier place of the manuscript Bonhoeffer had already stated »Jesus Christ was a Jew«.[31] Summarizing, Bonhoeffer says:

> »The church […] has not so proclaimed the righteousness of God that all human justice must see there its own source and essence. […] By falling silent the church became guilty for the loss of responsible action in society, courageous intervention, and the readiness to suffer for what is acknowledged as right. It is guilty of the government's falling away from Christ.«[32]

Bonhoeffer here makes use of the understanding of the church as a collective person developed already in *Sanctorum Communio*, where he says: In the church »people repent both for their own sin and for that of the collective person of the community.«[33] The confession of guilt is a necessary step

29. DBWE 6, 138.
30. DBWE 6, 139.
31. DBWE 6, 150. Cf. 139 f., note 25.
32. DBWE 6, 141.
33. DBWE 1, 214. See C. J. Green, Freiheit zur Mitmenschlichkeit. Dietrich Bonhoeffers Theologie der Sozialität, Gütersloh 2004, 40-56; cf. also J. von Soosten, Die Sozialität der Kirche. Theologie und Theorie der Kirche in Dietrich Bonhoeffers »Sanctorum Communio«, München 1992.

for the church as a collective person to prepare for a new beginning in which its faith, its love and its hope are renewed in praying, in doing what is just and in waiting for God's own time.[34] The confession of guilt is a necessary step in preparing for a new way in being a »church for others«.[35]

That Bonhoeffer refers in his confession of guilt to the Ten Commandments is of great significance. Already in *Life Together*, he emphasizes the importance of the Ten Commandments as a confession manual.[36] We can assume that Bonhoeffer is involved when they play an important role in the Freiburg Memorandum of 1943, drafted on Bonhoeffer's initiative by professors of Freiburg University who belonged to the Confessing Church and were involved in plans for a future order of society and the state after the end of Hitler's dictatorship. The Freiburg Memorandum emphasizes that God's commandments not only address the individual person but also the communities of life and action and are therefore relevant for the inner structure of those communities. From the churches' duty to proclaim those commandments follows therefore the duty to interpret them in their relevance for the political and economic order.[37]

We can summarize: The church as a collective person has to confess its guilt using the Ten Commandments as a confession manual. In the mirror of the commandments, the church acknowledges its guilt for the distortion of government and therefore also its responsibility for a new beginning. God's forgiveness includes the strength for that new beginning. Resistance is closely related to the acknowledgment of guilt. The confession of guilt is the context for the decision to resist.

2.3

But resistance is not the way out of guilt; it leads anew into guilt. We find two major forms in which Bonhoeffer describes this process. One of these forms – the essay *After Ten Years*, written at the end of 1942 – is a very personal document, addressed to his friends and partners in the conspiracy.

34. DBWE 8, 390. This is the fuller formula than the often quoted wording »prayer and doing justice« on p. 389.
35. DBWE 8, 503.
36. DBWE 5, 113.
37. Die protestantischen Wurzeln der Sozialen Marktwirtschaft. Ein Quellenband, ed. by G. Brakelmann and T. Jähnichen, Gütersloh 1994, 342-344.

The other form is the way of theological reflection, included in the manuscripts for the planned book on *Ethics*.

The confession of guilt in *After Ten Years* takes on a seemingly very secular form, namely the form of the question: »Are we still of any use?«[38] The self-doubt Bonhoeffer expresses, also in the name of his friends Eberhard Bethge, Hans von Dohnanyi and Hans Oster, has two dimensions. One is the confession to be »silent witnesses« of the evil deeds of the Nazi Regime. The other dimension is the unavoidable mendacity of those involved in the conspiracy that made them cunning and experienced in »the arts of obfuscation and equivocal speech«. Bonhoeffer asks for the inner strength to find the way back to »simplicity and honesty«. But he knows that there will be no way out of this ambiguity as long as the unlawful regime continues and the conspiracy does not come to an end.

We find this kind of reflection in the central part of the manuscripts on *Ethics*, namely in the theory of the responsible life. Hans-Richard Reuter has presented the place of resistance in this theory in an exemplary manner.[39]

Bonhoeffer leaves the concept of an ethics of commandment behind and reflects on the responsorial structure of human life. He distinguishes four dimensions of this structure.[40] The first dimension is »vicarious representative action« *(Stellvertretung)*. This vicarious action is not exclusively bound to the obligations of a person related to her roles in family, society or the state. Beyond those ascribed roles there is the possibility of a *free* acceptance of responsibility only bound to the human person and God. In the case of resistance, this free acceptance of responsibility is a matter of course. The ascribed roles are used as camouflage for the freely accepted responsibility of the conspirators.

The second dimension is »accordance with reality«. This accordance cannot be defined in advance, but it depends on what is necessary in a given situation. Under certain conditions this necessity can be found outside the legal boundaries of a given order: »There are occasions when, in the course of historical life, the strict observance of the explicit law of a state […] en-

38. DBWE 8, 52.
39. H. R. Reuter, Vom christlichen Pazifismus zum aktiven Widerstand. Dietrich Bonhoeffers (Denk-)Weg zwischen 1930 und 1943, in: Frieden – Einsichten für das 21. Jahrhundert. 12. Dietrich-Bonhoeffer-Vorlesung Juni 2008, ed. by H. R. Reuter, Münster / Berlin 2009, 15-42; cf. also W. Krötke, Freies Wagnis und Schuld. Dietrich Bonhoeffers Verständnis seines Widerstands, in: Barmen – Barth – Bonhoeffer. Beiträge zu einer zeitgemäßen christozentrischen Theologie, Bielefeld 2009, 423-435.
40. DBWE 6, 257-289.

tails a clash with the basic necessities of human life *(Lebensnotwendigkeiten)*. In such cases, appropriate responsible action departs from the domain governed by laws and principles, from the normal and regular, and instead is confronted with the extraordinary situation of ultimate necessities that are beyond any possible regulation by law. […] There can be no doubt that such necessities actually exist.«[41] Bonhoeffer discusses the political concept of last resort *(ultima ratio)*. He not only mentions the case of war, but also deception and the breaking of a treaty. But it is evident that he has also the case of resistance as *ultima ratio* in mind for which there is no law and which cannot be made a law. The only way is the free acceptance of responsibility.

An important background for this concept of accordance with reality has to be seen in the basic conviction that there are not two realities but only one: »God's reality revealed in Christ in the reality of the world.«[42] Therefore not the world in itself but the presence of God in Christ in the world is the criterion for the free acceptance of responsibility. That can even include the breaking of the law not to kill.

In his *Ethics* Bonhoeffer develops a theological theory of natural rights, a fragmentary theory of natural law, so to speak, from the perspective of Reformation theology.[43] He anticipates to a certain extent a theology of human rights.[44] He distinguishes the rights of the »bodily life« from the rights of spiritual life«, and reflects on the exception from the commandment not to kill in cases in which the preservation of bodily life is endangered. He discusses the problem of euthanasia with a clear statement: »Where there is even the smallest responsible possibility of allowing the other to stay alive, then the destruction of this life would be arbitrary killing – murder.«[45] But he adds: »Life may claim all grounds to validate itself, while for killing there is only one single valid ground.«[46] But what is this »one single valid ground«? Bonhoeffer answers: »The killing of another's life can only take place on the basis of unconditional necessity.«[47] Bonhoeffer sees such an »unconditional necessity« in »the encroaching on another life.«[48] He does

41. DBWE 6, 272 f.
42. DBWE 6, 58.
43. H. R. Reuter, Vom christlichen Pazifismus zum aktiven Widerstand, 32-35.
44. W. Huber, Gerechtigkeit und Recht. Grundlinien christlicher Rechtsethik, 3rd edition, Gütersloh 2006, 298-301.
45. DBWE 6, 190.
46. DBWE 6, 191.
47. DBWE 6, 190.
48. DBWE 6, 189.

not explain sufficiently that even in this case there is a priority to hinder the criminal from »encroaching« on another life by means other than an assault on his life. And he does not reflect carefully enough about the possible implications of his statement for the problem of the death penalty. Obviously, he puts these questions aside because he is clearly concentrating on the problem of tyrannicide. And his intention is to show the legitimacy of tyrannicide without speaking about it.

Already in 1939/1940, Hans von Dohnanyi had confronted his brother-in-law with the question of whether tyrannicide could be legitimized on Christian grounds.[49] The answer to this question seems to be summarized in the sentence of *Ethics:* »The killing of a criminal who has encroached on another life is, of course, not arbitrary.« On this basis, Bonhoeffer was not at all doubtful with respect to the plan to kill Adolf Hitler.[50]

Bonhoeffer is bound to his concept of the togetherness of God's reality and the reality of the world in Christ. Therefore the possibility of self-justification is excluded. The third element of the structure of responsible life is the preparedness to accept guilt.[51] Bonhoeffer's explanation of this dimension is rather opaque; but it includes a well-known sentence that indicates the direction: »Those who act out of free responsibility are justified before others by dire necessity; before themselves they are acquitted by their conscience, but before God they hope only for grace.«[52] Hans-Richard Reuter explains the systematic structure of this argument as follows: »The privilege of self-defense justifies the responsible person juridically, that means before the *forum* of other people; the suspension of the specific prescriptions of the law by Jesus frees the responsible person morally, that means before the

49. See M. Heimbucher, Christusfriede – Weltfrieden. Dietrich Bonhoeffers kirchlicher und politischer Kampf gegen den Krieg Hitlers und seine theologische Begründung, Gütersloh 1997, 298; H. R. Reuter, Vom christlichen Pazifismus zum aktiven Widerstand, 34.
50. C. Gremmels, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Versuch über die Kraft zum Widerstehen, in: Dietrich Bonhoeffer – Stationen auf dem Weg in den politischen Widerstand, ed. by G. Brakelmann and T. Jähnichen, Münster 2005, 13-34; cf. H. R. Reuter, Vom christlichen Pazifismus zum aktiven Widerstand, 34.
51. In DBWE 6, 275 and elsewhere »Schuldübernahme« is translated by »willingness to become guilty«. I see this as a misleading translation. For good reasons, Christine Schliesser speaks about »Bonhoeffer's concept of accepting guilt«; cf. C. Schliesser, Everyone Who Acts Responsibly Becomes Guilty: Bonhoeffer's Concept of Accepting Guilt, Louisville / London 2008. In this book Schliesser follows this motive through Bonhoeffer's writings from »Sanctorum Communio« till »Letters and Papers from Prison«.
52. DBWE 6, 282 f.

forum internum of his own conscience; but that does not change the ›objective guilt to have broken the law‹[53] in the religious dimension, that means before the *forum* of God.«[54] Only the inclusion of the religious dimension makes clear why a responsible person can resolve the moral and the legal problem of tyrannicide, but still has to take the step of accepting guilt.

The fourth dimension in the structure of responsible life is freedom, understood in the sense of a person's »accountability of (her) living and acting, and in the venture *(Wagnis)* of concrete decision.«[55] It is not self-determination or knowing of good and evil but surrendering to God that constitutes freedom as a dimension of responsible life.[56] Although Bonhoeffer formulates the parallel between Jesus' surrendering to God in Gethsemane and the human surrendering to God only in the prison letters,[57] a comparable parallel between Jesus accepting the guilt of the world and his follower accepting either the guilt of others or his own guilt before God occurs already in *Ethics.* This union between Christ and the believer[58] is one of the crucial theological problems in Bonhoeffer, because it underestimates the difference of Christ's acceptance of guilt that is always directed towards the guilt of others and our human acceptance of guilt that always includes our own guilt. The lack of differentiation in this respect has consequences even for the theology of resistance. There is a lack of final clarity insofar as Bonhoeffer does not explain whether his emphasis is on the acceptance of our own guilt or of the guilt of others.

The risk of a free act out of faith belongs to the individual believer. It is not an option for the church as a collective person. Bonhoeffer's experience that his participation in the conspiracy had led him into solitude or even isolation may explain his strong emphasis on the risk, the venture of the free action of the individual person.[59] The tension between his conviction that

53. DBWE 6, 297.
54. H. R. Reuter, Vom christlichen Pazifismus zum aktiven Widerstand, 38, translation by Wolfgang Huber.
55. DBWE 6, 257.
56. DBWE 6, 284.
57. DBWE 8, 480. 486.
58. H. R. Reuter, Vom christlichen Pazifismus zum aktiven Widerstand, 40, speaks about a *unio hominis cum Christo.*
59. DBWE 16, 502-528, 518: »The refusal to obey within a specific historical political decision of the government, as well as the decision itself, can only be a venture of one's own responsibility. A historical decision cannot be completely incorporated into ethical concepts. There is one thing left: the venture of action. That holds true for government as well as for subjects.« Wolf Krötke in quoting this passage

resistance is a duty of the church as a collective person and his insight that the act of freedom is possible only on the basis of personal risk reflects his concrete experience as a participant in the conspiracy.

2.4

That experience calls for another kind of theological interpretation than the theory of responsible life alone. The confrontation with the immediate danger for the life of the conspirators demands a new framework of theological reflection. As Wolf Krötke has pointed out, Bonhoeffer finds this framework in the concept of God's guidance.[60] He refers to the old doctrine of the *gubernatio Dei* that describes the kind of certitude of faith in the uncertainties of individual decisions and their consequences, which are opaque for our human anticipation. Bonhoeffer's theological reflections in Tegel do not only center on the topic of the end of religion and the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts.[61] They have their epicenter in the elaboration of a deeper understanding of God's guidance. Jesus' struggle in Gethsemane is the common focus of these two themes. Jesus' struggle in Gethsemane is the epitome of resistance against fate and of submission to God's guidance. But the struggle in Gethsemane and Jesus' powerlessness on the cross is at the same time the epitome of the insight that God's power takes on the form of a mundane powerlessness »in which God refrains from making almighty interventions in the world.«[62] But this divine self-restraint does not mean that God is absent. He guides us with the means of his powerless presence, with the presence of his love.

That is the light in which Bonhoeffer also interprets his involvement in the conspiracy. Therefore, he does not regret his decision to return from

(W. Krötke, Barmen – Barth – Bonhoeffer, 426) does not mention that Bonhoeffer includes not only the resistance against the decisions of the government but also those decisions themselves in the judgment that they are only possible as decisions of the individual person.

60. W. Krötke, Gottes Hand und Führung. Zu einem unübersehbaren Merkmal der Rede Dietrich Bonhoeffers von Gott in der Zeit des Widerstands, in: W. Krötke, Barmen – Barth – Bonhoeffer, 381-402.
61. Cf. W. Huber, Kein Ende der Religion. Zu Bonhoeffers Unterscheidung zwischen Christentum und Religion, in: Dietrich Bonhoeffers Christentum. Festschrift für Christian Gremmels, ed. by F. Schmitz and C. Tietz, Gütersloh 2011, 114-133.
62. W. Krötke, Barmen – Barth – Bonhoeffer, 513.

New York to Germany in 1939 in order to participate in the destiny of his people and to prepare for the time after the end of the dictatorship.[63] This is also the light in which he accepts the unexpected joy and proof that are included in his love relationship with Maria von Wedemeyer.[64] God's guidance in this sense gives him hope for his friends[65] and consolation for their death as war victims.[66] He knows that God's guidance does not prevent the experience of suffering and death, but even this experience changes when we take it from God's hands – as we read in Bonhoeffer's poem *By Powers of Good:* »And should you offer us the cup of suffering, / though heavy, brimming full and bitter brand, / we'll thankfully accept it, never flinching, from your good heart and your beloved hand.«[67]

The summary of this theological reflection is that God's guidance is mainly guidance to Himself. In this sense Bonhoeffer's letter to Eberhard Bethge of July 21, 1944 – the day after the failed attempt to kill Adolf Hitler – that was always seen by the recipient as the most important of Bonhoeffer's letters to him, includes a summary of this aspect of his theology of resistance. Bonhoeffer writes near the end of this letter: »May God lead us kindly through these times, but above all, may God lead us to himself.«[68]

3.

Bonhoeffer did not use the confidence in God's guidance as a rationale for passivity or adaptation, as many members of the »inner emigration« or »inner exile« did in Germany in those years[69] – such as the rightly admired poet Reinhold Schneider, who wrote in 1937 in a sonnet that »only those who pray can stop the sword above our heads«, whereas »those who act never

63. DBWE 8, 352.
64. Brautbriefe Zelle 92. Dietrich Bonhoeffer – Maria von Wedemeyer 1943-1945, München 1992, 38.
65. DBWE 8, 83.
66. DBWE 16, 206.
67. DBWE 8, 550.
68. DBWE 8, 486.
69. For an overview see H. D. Zimmermann, Innere Emigration. Ein historischer Begriff und seine Problematik, in: Schriftsteller und Widerstand. Facetten und Probleme der Inneren Emigration, ed. by F. L. Kroll and R. von Voss, Göttingen 2012, 45-62.

will force the heaven.«[70] Instead of such a separation of prayer and deed Bonhoeffer insisted in the unity of praying and doing what is just – and in combining both to wait for God's time.[71]

We can read the famous sentence just mentioned as summarizing the theological profile of Bonhoeffer's political resistance. This becomes even more evident when we do not restrict the relevance of Bonhoeffer's resistance to its political dimension alone. Richard Löwenthal and others distinguish between three dimensions of resistance: political resistance, resistance in society and ideological or, as I prefer to say, intellectual resistance.[72] Bonhoeffer is exemplary in all three dimensions. Not only was he a part of a political conspiracy, he also trained his future pastors to stand clearly on the side of the confessing church and to form congregations in which the daily civil courage of practical and concrete resistance had its place. Using contemporary terminology, we could call that a contribution to resistance within civil society. Taking into account that, since 1940, Bonhoeffer was not allowed to speak in public gatherings or to publish, the extent to which he contributed to the intellectual resistance is remarkable. In this respect, he did more than most or even all the other theologians, writers, scientists and »intellectuals« who later claimed that they were a part of the »inner emigration« or »inner exile« of this time.

Bonhoeffer did not emigrate, but returned in 1939 to Germany in order to actively participate in the fate of his people that became his personal fate. He remigrated into the reality of the political conflicts of his time and became a model of resistance that inspires us today, and will also continue to inspire people all over the world in the future. He resisted politically, socially and intellectually. This is exactly what we have to do today.

70. R. Schneider, Allein den Betern kann es noch gelingen, in: Reinhold Schneider, Gesammelte Werke, Bd. 5, Lyrik, Frankfurt/M. 1991, 54. Cf. G. Ringshausen, Der christliche Protest. Konfessionelle Dichtung und nonkonformes Schreiben im Dritten Reich, in: Schriftsteller und Widerstand. Facetten und Probleme der Inneren Emigration, ed. by F. L. Kroll and R. von Voss, Göttingen 2012, 267-296, 292 f.
71. DBWE 8, 390.
72. R. Löwenthal, Widerstand im totalen Staat, in: Widerstand und Verweigerung in Deutschland 1933-1945, ed. by Richard Löwenthal and Patrick zur Mühlen, 3rd edition, Bonn 1997, 11-24.

Abstract

This contribution to the theological profile of Bonhoeffer's political resistance addresses in its first section three major objections, leading to first conclusions: Bonhoeffer's even marginal involvement in the conspiracy has a theological profile, defined by a theory of martyrdom; the solitude of a Christian conscience is the specific profile of Bonhoeffer's political resistance; due to given circumstances, the theological profile of Bonhoeffer's political resistance had to take a clandestine form. In the second section of this paper, taking those restrictions into account, the author takes a closer look at a few central texts that offer four aspects of a possible theology of resistance: Active Resistance as part of the churches' public task, confession of guilt as the context for the decision to resistance, resistance as a boundary case within an ethics of responsibility and trust in God's guidance as the basis for the risk of resistance.

Josef Außermair

Wichtige Ressourcen für Dietrich Bonhoeffers politische Widerstandskraft

Wie konnte Bonhoeffer so gut vorbereitet sein, dem »Rad in die Speichen zu fallen«?

1. Bonhoeffers Familie und Verwandtschaft als Geborgenheit und Stütze für die persönliche und politische Reifung

Es gibt bei Bonhoeffer keinen besseren Zugang zu seiner Theologie als durch die konsequente Bezugnahme auf die Einheit von »Denkart« und »Lebensart«, auf den lebens- und zeitgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang, in den sie eingebettet ist. So sollen einige dieser Verschränkungen von Biographie und Theologie im Bezug auf das Resistenzpotential Bonhoeffers gezeigt werden.

1.1 Die frühen Lebensjahre bis zu Hitlers Machtergreifung

Der ungewöhnliche Zusammenhalt der großen Familie Bonhoeffer führte bei Dietrich Bonhoeffer dazu, dass das große Haus seiner Eltern ein bestimmendes Zentrum nicht nur für den engeren Familienkreis, sondern auch für die weitere Verwandtschaft und die zahlreichen Freunde blieb. Bonhoeffers Leben ist im hohen Maße familienbestimmt. So entsprach es der Familientradition, das Studium an der Universität Tübingen, der Alma Mater des Vaters, zu beginnen. Dasselbe zeigt sich z. B. auch bei der Auswahl seines Doktorvaters – ungeachtet der religiösen Distanziertheit seines Vaters und der kirchlich autonomen Einstellung seiner Mutter. *Förderung und Forderung* waren Pole des familiären Spannungsfeldes, dem Bonhoeffer sich zu stellen hatte. Den von der Familie gesetzten »Standards« hatte man nachzukommen. Bonhoeffers Brüder und ihre Freunde, von denen einige zu Schwägern werden, bringen wichtige politische Erkenntnisse in die Familientradition ein. Es war eine Grundüberzeugung der Bonhoeffers, dass man die Verantwortung für die politische Entwicklung in Deutschland nicht den antidemokratischen Kräften überlassen dürfe.[1] So haben Aus-

1. Vgl. R. Wind, Dem Rad in die Speichen fallen, Weinheim / Basel 1990, 9-27.

einandersetzungen über politische Entwicklungen im Familienverband stattgefunden, so dass es nicht verwunderlich war, dass er stets wusste, wo er zu stehen habe.

1.2 Familie und Verwandtschaft am Beginn seines Widerstands am Beispiel seines Schwagers Hans von Dohnanyi

Von Anbeginn der nationalsozialistischen Zeit wusste Bonhoeffer, dass er sein Fundament, »seinen Boden unter den Füßen«, dem großen Familienkreis verdankt.[2] Es ist leicht nachzuweisen, dass er von der familiären politischen Gesprächskultur profitierte, wobei Geschwätzigkeit bei den Bonhoeffers verpönt war. So ahnte er bereits in seinem Radiovortrag über den Führer als Zeichen des enthemmten Menschen die Gefahren der kommenden Ereignisse.

Nachdem nun das Predigerseminar geschlossen werden musste und die theologische Arbeit in den Sammelvikariaten unmöglich geworden war, wurde sein Schwager Hans von Dohnanyi zunehmend sein Gesprächspartner. Der Staatsrechtler Dohnanyi arbeitete in den letzten Jahren der Weimarer Republik im Reichsjustizministerium als persönlicher Referent unter mehreren Justizministern. 1933 wurde er übernommen, obwohl er kein Parteimitglied war. Schon 1933 legte er eine geheime Kartei über die Verbrechen der Nazis an, um einerseits die deutschen Militärs für einen Putsch zu gewinnen, andererseits nach der Beseitigung des Führers dem Volk den wahren Charakter des Regimes aufzudecken. 1940 arbeitete Dohnanyi im Amt für Spionage und Gegenspionage im Oberkommando der Wehrmacht.

Als sich die Gelegenheit ergab, stellte sich Bonhoeffer auf die Seite des kompromisslosen Widerstands gegen Hitler. Hier leistete ihm seine Familie in der Gestalt seines Schwagers die entscheidenden Dienste. Dohnany sorgte dafür, dass Bonhoeffer seiner eigenen Dienststelle als sogenannter V-Mann zugewiesen wurde. Damit war eine »u.k.-Stellung« verbunden, die ihn vom Kriegsdienst befreite. Den Kreisen des Widerstands war er wegen seiner Kontakte zum Ausland unerlässlich. Er stellte seine ökumenischen Beziehungen in den Dienst des Widerstands, um dem westlichen Ausland geheime Informationen über Pläne der deutschen Widerstands-

2. Vgl. den mehrmaligen Anklang an die Antäus-Sage, in: DBW 8, 431; vgl. auch DBW 10, 304 und DBW 7, 69 f.

bewegung zuzuspielen. Dabei versuchte er vor allem, die Anerkennung der Widerstandsbewegung im Ausland zu erreichen.[3]

Daraus ist unschwer seine familiäre Vorbereitung und sein verwandtschaftlicher Stützpunkt zu erkennen, um dem »Rad in die Speichen zu fallen«.

2. »Finkenwalde« als entscheidende Quelle seines Resistenzpotentials

2.1 Kurze Skizzierung des Predigerseminars in Finkenwalde

Als Bonhoeffer die Leitung eines Predigerseminars, dem er selbst einst mit Vergnügen entkommen war, übernahm, hatte er nun eine Arbeit vor sich, der er sich ungeteilt hingeben konnte. Die bisher unerwünschten Predigerseminare waren aus einem Stief- zu einem Lieblingskind geworden. Es war verblüffend, dass sich die Predigerseminare zu »unvergleichlichen Kraftzentren evangelischer Theologie«[4] entwickeln konnten.

Eine noch einmal vom Predigerseminar zu unterscheidende Lebensgemeinschaft war das Bruderhaus. Im Antrag zur Errichtung dieses Bruderhauses wird aus der Aufzählung der Aufgaben dieses Hauses deutlich, dass es Bonhoeffer sowohl um die Stärkung und geistliche Zurüstung des Einzelnen als auch um die Befähigung zur Teilnahme am Kampf der Bekennenden Kirche geht. Wenn er im Antrag an den Bruderrat die Devise »[n]icht klösterliche Abgeschiedenheit, sondern innerste Konzentration für den Dienst nach außen ist das Ziel«[5] ausgibt, wird aus dieser erklärten Zielsetzung klar, dass es sich nur um ein Missverständnis handeln kann, wenn man »Finkenwalde« als Rückzug in eine klösterlich-weltabgewandte Existenz interpretiert.

3. Vgl. C. Gremmels / H. Pfeifer, Theologie und Biographie. Zum Beispiel Dietrich Bonhoeffer, München 1983, 75.
4. E. Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Theologe – Christ – Zeitgenosse, 3. Auflage, München 1970, 482.
5. »An den Rat der Evangelischen Kirche der Altpreussischen Union«, in: DBW 14, 77.

2.2 Arkandisziplin

Der Begriff *Arkandisziplin* ist vor der Finkenwalder Zeit nicht nachzuweisen. Obwohl dieser Begriff in der Finkenwalder Zeit nur zweimal[6] vorkommt, ist er für das von Bonhoeffer damit Gemeinte sicherlich nicht peripher. Mit Recht ist immer wieder darauf hingewiesen worden, dass Arkandisziplin als wichtiges Mittel zum Schutz vor dem Spott der Welt diente und mit dem massiven Eingriff des nationalsozialistischen Staates in den Raum der Kirche eine mit der Alten Kirche vergleichbare Situation gegeben war, in der mit abgestuften Zulassungen zur Gemeinde die der Kirche anvertrauten Geheimnisse bewahrt werden sollten. Eine exklusive Bindung an Christus und die Trennung von allem, was diese Bindung behindert, soll zur Heiligung führen, die Bonhoeffer als einen mehrstufigen Wachstumsprozess ansieht.[7]

Konzentration auf das Innerste und die Abgrenzung gegenüber der Welt ist die Voraussetzung, der Nährboden und der Keim für eine umso größere Öffnung für die Welt. Das unter dem Kreuz Stehen lässt erfahren, dass das Kreuz nicht außerhalb, sondern mitten in der Welt steht. Das unter dem Kreuz Stehen und das aus der Welt Gerufenwerden führen direkt in die Welt, wie dies der weitere Lebensweg Bonhoeffers zeigte.

2.3 Arkandisziplin und Schweigen

Die Dialektik von Schweigen und Reden kommt in einem Brief vom 15. 8. 1941[8] durch, in dem Bonhoeffer den Tod von insgesamt 11 jungen Männern bekannt gibt. Nach der Würdigung jedes einzelnen wurden die Frage nach dem Sinn des Todes und weitere grundsätzliche theologische Überlegungen angestellt. Im folgenden Zitat eines Briefabschnitts werden unverzichtbare Elemente ausgemacht, die eine erfahrungs- und denkorientierte Christusbezogenheit und das Schweigen in Beziehung setzen.

»Liebe Brüder, es mag sein, daß Ihr jetzt für solche Gedanken wenig Zeit und Sinn habt. Es gibt Zeiten, in denen uns alles Wirkliche so rätselhaft ist und so bedrängt, daß uns jedes direkte Wort das Geheimnis Gottes zu zer-

6. »Arkandisziplin wegen des Spottes der Welt«, Homiletikvorlesung, in: DBW 14, 526, und Katechetikvorlesung, in: DBW 14, 549 ff.
7. In »Widerstand und Ergebung« spricht Bonhoeffer von den »Stufen der Erkenntnis« und von »Stufen der Bedeutsamkeit«, in: DBW 8, 415.
8. Vgl. DBW 16, 191-195.

stören scheint, daß wir nur noch andeutend von letzten Dingen sprechen und sprechen hören wollen. Alles, was wir über unseren Glauben zu sagen vermögen, scheint dann so matt und leer gegenüber dem Wirklichen, das wir erleben und hinter dem wir ein unaussprechliches Geheimnis glauben. Das geht Euch draußen kaum anders als uns zu Hause, alles Ausgesprochene ist wie im Nu verweht, alles Formulierte trifft das Wirkliche nicht mehr. Darin kann etwas sehr Echtes liegen, wenn nur in uns ein Wort, nämlich der Name Jesus Christus, nicht erlischt.«[9]

Eine bestimmte Situation macht es notwendig, von Gott zu schweigen, was nicht als mangelnder Glaube oder als Unglaube verstanden werden darf. Vielmehr kann es eine Chance sein, angesichts einer unerklärlichen Welt das Geheimnis Gottes zu wahren.

Bonhoeffer will aber nicht aus Prinzip schweigen. Er spricht von Christus, aber er weiß um die notwendige Dialektik von Schweigen und Reden. Hier hilft seine Unterscheidung aus *Sanctorum Communio* zwischen *actus directus* und *actus reflexus* weiter. Der Glaube selbst ist actus directus, ist Erleben der Wirklichkeit und des dahinter liegenden Geheimnisses. Reden über den Glauben ist *actus reflexus,* auf dessen Verzicht Schweigen die Folge ist. Dieses Schweigen ist aber nur sinnvoll, wenn der Name Jesus Christus »in uns« bleibt. Solange dieser Name nicht erlischt, garantiert er die rechte Wahrnehmung der Wirklichkeit und die Wahrnehmung des Geheimnisses.

2.4 Die Wiederentdeckung der Bedeutung des Schweigens für den christlichen Glauben

Das Schweigen steht somit in einer dialektischen Beziehung und in einer dienenden Funktion zum Reden. Bonhoeffer spricht vom qualifizierten Schweigen im Gegensatz zum unqualifizierten Reden. Die einzig mögliche Alternative lautet dann »entweder das Konkrete oder das Schweigen«.[10] Die Kirche wartet noch auf das richtige Wort zur richtigen Zeit.[11] Dieses

9. DBW 16, 194 f.
10. »Emil Brunner: Das Gebot und die Ordnungen. Versuch einer protestantischen Ethik«, in: DBW 12, 176, Anm. 112. In der Mitschrift von Hanns Rüppell heißt es: »Meist bleiben alle sozialen Gebote der Kirche und dergleichen im Prinzipiellen! Entweder das Konkrete oder das Schweigen. Nur immer vom Prinzipiellen reden ist verlogen!« Eine ähnliche Formulierung ist in der Mitschrift von Klara Hunsche zu finden (DBW 12, 176).
11. Vgl. Vortrag in Čiernohorské Kúpele: »Zur theologischen Begründung der Weltbundarbeit vom 26. 7. 1932«, in: DBW 11, 330. 333 f.

Schweigen ist keineswegs Arkandisziplin, sondern das Eingeständnis, um den konkreten Willen Gottes nicht – vielleicht auch noch nicht – zu wissen.

»Qualifiziertes Schweigen ist besser als Reden in Prinzipien. Entweder konkretes Gebot geben oder schweigen. Vergleiche Psalm 11,19: ›Verbirg deine Gebote nicht!‹ und (II Chron. 20,12); Wir wissen nicht, was wir tun sollen, aber unsere Augen sehen auf den Herrn«.[12] Durchgängig geht Bonhoeffer davon aus, dass ein Schweigen als zeitweiliges Moratorium dem vollmächtigen Reden dienen kann.

»Erstes Bekenntnis der christlichen Gemeinde vor der Welt ist die Tat!«[13] In Zeiten der Koinzidenz von Wort und Tat besteht keine Veranlassung zum Schweigen. »Wo Menschen Anstoß genommen haben an der Diskrepanz zwischen Wort und Tat der Kirche […] ist der stumme Dienst der Liebe die beste Seelsorge.«[14]

Hat die Kirche einer Gesellschaft gegenüber versagt, indem sie anders redete als sie handelte, soll sie zu allererst nur schweigend, aber überzeugend handeln. Das aus dem Schweigen kommende Hören auf die Schrift, die exklusive Bindung an Christus, der geforderte unbedingte und einfältige Gehorsam ist Zurüstung des Einzelnen zum Kampf der Bekennenden Kirche.

2.5 Das Schweigen als Ermöglichung einer »Verwesentlichung« des Glaubens

Mit der notwendigen Dialektik von Schweigen und Reden hat sich Bonhoeffer in *Gemeinsames Leben* beschäftigt: »Das rechte Wort kommt aus dem Schweigen, und das rechte Schweigen kommt aus dem Wort. Schweigen heißt nicht Stummsein, wie Wort nicht Gerede heißt. […] Das Wort kommt nicht zu den Lärmenden, sondern zu den Schweigenden.«.[15]

12. »Das Wort und Bekenntnis Altonaer Pastoren (Hans Asmussen: im ›Vormarsch‹ 1933)«, in: DBW 12, 178.
13. »Das Wesen der Kirche«, in: DBW 11, 285, Wortlaut nach der Hörermitschrift von Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann. In der Hörermitschrift von Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann heißt es: »Sie interpretiert sich selbst. Wenn die Tat Macht geworden (ist), dann wird die Welt auch das Wortbekenntnis verlangen. Erst dann soll sie im Gottesdienst eingeweiht werden« (DBW 11, 285, Anm. 320).
14. »Seelsorge«, in: GS V, 386; Vgl. Vorlesung über Seelsorge, in: DBW 14, 578: »Der Grund ist sehr häufig: ein Mißverhältnis von Wort und Tat im Leben des Pfarrers oder im Leben der Kirche.«
15. DBW 5, 67.

Das Schweigen hat als Ziel das Reden Gottes. Schweigen wird verstanden als »von Gottes Wort gesegnet herkommen«[16] und »als das schlichte Stillwerden des Einzelnen unter dem Worte Gottes. Wir schweigen vor dem Hören des Wortes, weil unsere Gedanken schon auf das Wort gerichtet sind.«[17] Bonhoeffer warnt: »keiner erwarte vom Schweigen etwas anderes als die schlichte Begegnung mit dem Worte Gottes.«[18]

In einem Brief an Ruth Roberta Stahlberg, wohl auf 23. 3. 1940 datierbar[19], heißt es:

> »Das Wort, das aus einem langen Schweigen heraus ans Licht tritt, wiegt schwerer als dasselbe Wort im Munde des Geschwätzigen. […] Aber wir wissen doch, daß wir reden müssen und oftmals nicht schweigen dürfen, wo wir es gern täten.«[20]

Nicht aus dem Schweigen alleine schon entsteht Qualität, »sondern ganz einfach aus dem täglichen persönlichen Umgang mit dem gekreuzigten Jesus Christus. […]. Das ist die Tiefe, aus der ein Wort kommen muß, wenn es wiegen will. Man kann auch sagen, es kommt darauf an, ob wir uns täglich an dem Bild des gekreuzigten Christus selber richten und zur Umkehr rufen lassen. Wo das Wort sozusagen unmittelbar vom Kreuz Jesu Christi selbst herkommt, wo Christus uns so gegenwärtig ist, daß geradezu er selbst unser Wort spricht, dort allein kann die furchtbare Gefahr der geistlichen Geschwätzigkeit gebannt werden.«[21]

Tiefe bedeutet hier der gekreuzigte Jesus Christus. Nur derjenige hat etwas zu sagen, der sich selbst unter das Kreuz Christi gestellt hat. Das Kreuz Christi ermöglicht eine Kritik am eigenen Selbst. Diese kreuzestheologische Christuszentrierung hat eine theologisch tief verstandene Selbstkritik zur Folge, die dem Wort Gewicht verleiht und es aus der Oberflächlichkeit befreit.

2.6 »Verwesentlichung« als Potential für einen geforderten Widerstand

Als kritischer Verteidiger der Bekennenden Kirche schreibt Bonhoeffer 1936 in Finkenwalde:

16. DBW 5, 68.
17. DBW 5, 67.
18. DBW 5, 69.
19. DBW 16, 18-25.
20. DBW 16, 23 f.
21. DBW 16, 25.

»Es geht mir in allem kirchlichen Reden und Handeln um den Primat, die alleinige Ehre und Wahrheit des Wortes Gottes«[22]. Die »alleinige Ehre« des Wortes Gottes entspricht der alleinigen Ehre Christi und damit der alleinigen Ehre Gottes selber.[23] »Es geht uns ja doch in allem, was wir sagen und was wir tun, um nichts als um Christus und seine Ehre unter den Menschen.«[24] »Gott allein die Ehre geben«, »Gott Gott sein lassen« korrespondiert mit dem reformatorischen Grundanliegen, das Bonhoeffer wiederholt ausspricht.[25]

Mit besonderem prophetischen Eifer tut er es in seiner Predigt zum Semesterschlussgottesdienst nach Hitlers Machtergreifung: »Wir haben in der Kirche nur *einen* Altar, und das ist der Altar des Allerhöchsten, des Einzigen, des Allgewaltigen, des Herrn, dem allein Ehre und Anbetung gebührt, des Schöpfers vor dem alle Kreatur auf die Knie muß, vor dem der Gewaltigste nichts ist als Staub.«[26] J. W. Mödlhammer hat in seinem Werk »Anbetung und Freiheit« diesen Zusammenhang von vollmenschlicher Anerkennung Gottes als Gott und der daraus gewonnenen Freiheit, die menschlicher Widerstandskraft ihr Fundament gibt und erstarken lässt, klar analysiert.

Anerkennung der Herrschaft Gottes bedeutet Freiheit des Menschen und bildet ein kritisches Potential gegen alle den Menschen versklavenden Vergötzungen. Diese Anerkennung des Gottseins Gottes befähigt zu Widerstand, wofür Bonhoeffer selbst ein beeindruckendes Beispiel ist. Diese ideologiekritische Funktion des Glaubens, die meines Erachtens für Finkenwalde virulent war, hat der amerikanische lutherische Theologe Graig Slane in seinem Werk *Bonhoeffer as Martyr. Social Responsibility and Modern Christian Commitment*[27] überzeugend herausgearbeitet. Er bezeichnet Finken-

22. Brief von Bonhoeffer vom 25. 1. 1936, geschrieben in Finkenwalde an Friedrich Schauer, in: DBW 14, 110.
23. Vgl. J. W. Mödlhammer, Anbetung und Freiheit. Theologisch-anthropologische Reflexionen zur Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers, Salzburg 1976, 39.
24. Ansprache auf der internationalen Jugendkonferenz in Gland vom 29. 08. 1932, in: DBW 11, 352.
25. Vgl. »Glaubst du, so hast du. Versuch eines Lutherischen Katechismus von Dietrich Bonhoeffer und Franz Hildebrandt«, in: DBW 11, 236; Vgl. Predigt zu Ps 63,4: Deine Güte ist besser denn Leben, Berlin, Erntedankfest am 4. 10. 1931, Abendgottesdienst, in: DBW 11, 384; »Predigt in der Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche, Exaudi, am 28. Mai 1933, Exodus 32, 1-8.15 f. 18-20. 30-35«, in: DBW 12, 464 f.
26. Semesterschlussgottesdienst in der Dreifaltigkeitskirche am 26. 2. 1933, Predigt zu Richter 6, 15 f. 7, 2. 8.23, in: DBW 12, 448 f.
27. G. Slane, Bonhoeffer as Martyr. Social Responsibility and Modern Christian Commitment, Grand Rapids 2004.