

PART 1
Letters and Documents, Diary

**1. From the Office of the Gestapo, Berlin,
to Reich Church Minister Hanns Kerrl^[1]**

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Berlin, November 30, 1937

To the Reich and Prussian Minister for Church Affairs, Berlin W 8, Leipziger
Strasse 3

Re: Preachers' seminary in Finkenwalde

Dossier: none

In accordance with the decree of August 29, 1937, from the SS Reichführer and head of the German Police^[2]—S—PP (II B) 4431/37—the preachers' seminary in Finkenwalde, under the leadership of Director of Studies *D. Bonhoeffer* has been closed.^[3] Decisive for my decision was the fact that the entire teaching staff of the seminary^[4] belonged to the confessional front and the purpose of this teaching institution clearly was to educate the vicars in the spirit of the confessional front and to equip them with the tools to complete the second theological exam before the examination offices of the confessional front.

In order to prevent the influence of the Confessing Church on theological education, I find it necessary that above all the preachers' seminaries that are under the direction of the confessional front and guided by its spirit should be closed.

May I request notification as to whether you consent to my position on this matter and, in particular, support the closing of the Finkenwalde preachers' seminary.

[1.] BA Potsdam, file 51.01, vol. 22522; typewritten with handwritten signature and stamp: "German Secret State Police, Office of the Gestapo"; return address "Berlin SW 11, Prince-Albrecht-Strasse 8"; stamped with date received: "Reich Minister Kerrl Berlin, Central Office, received: December 3, 1937"; previously unpublished.

[2.] Heinrich Himmler.

[3.] This announces the closing of the Finkenwalde preachers' seminary on September 28, 1937, based on the Himmler Decree of August 29, 1937 (see Beckmann, *Kirchliches Jahrbuch 1933–1944*, 205–6); see *DB-ER*, 584, and *DBW* 14:298–99. [After the October 1934 Dahlem synod, the Confessing Church established its own seminaries (Finkenwalde was one of five) and examination committees for candidates for the ministry, largely because most of the German theological faculties and regional church theological examination committees were under the leadership of the German Christians. These new preachers' seminaries were considered "illegal" by the official church authorities. In August 1937, the Himmler Decree banned most activities of the Confessing Church, thereby making Finkenwalde and the four other preachers' seminaries illegal under state law.—VB]

[4.] The other teacher besides Bonhoeffer was inspector of studies Wilhelm Rott.

I refer to the written notification of November 11, 1937—B.S. 18.36—of your decision regarding the preachers' seminary in Elberfeld.^[5]

I would appreciate rapid enforcement.

Signed: Heydrich^[6]

Notarized: [illegible signature]

Chancellery staff member

14 2. To the Finkenwalde Brothers^[1]

December 20, 1937

Dear Brothers,

In these days my thoughts go out especially to you all. At the very least, a Christmas letter should be the sign of our fellowship. It will reach you amid the fullness and joy of your work. Most of you are in parish work, and it is a great joy to me that letters from the various regions of our church in which you work have continued to reach us. Others are in the final phase of tranquil scholarly work, which they undoubtedly will relish to the utmost. Four brothers are in prison.^[2] We remember them daily.

The balance sheet for this year is rather clear and unambiguous. Twenty-seven from your circle have been in prison; for some it lasted several months. Some are still detained at present and have spent the entire Advent in prison.^[3] Among the others there won't be a single person who has not experienced the impact, in his work and his personal life, of the increas-

[5.] The police also closed the Confessing Church preachers' seminary in Wuppertal-Elberfeld on the basis of the Himmler Decree (*DB-ER*, 589).

[6.] Reinhard Heydrich.

[1.] *NL*, A 48,3 (2); mimeographed with handwritten signature; no address is given, but probably written in Groß-Schlönwitz. Previously published in *GS* 2:524–30; cf. also *PAM* 2:81–88. After Reich propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels declared that all newsletters and mimeographed materials fell under the [1933—VB] editorial laws, Bonhoeffer's circular letters to the former Finkenwalde seminarians had to be labeled as "personal letters" and personally signed by Bonhoeffer (cf. *DB-ER*, 593) to avoid censorship. The letter exhibits a fair number of minor spelling and other errors, which were corrected in *DBW* 15 without being noted in each case.

[2.] [It is unclear which four students Bonhoeffer meant; as the following passage makes clear, twenty-seven seminarians who had studied under him in Finkenwalde had been arrested since the Himmler Decree, including Fritz Onnasch, Erich Klapproth, and Wilhelm Rott.—VB]

[3.] Regarding the wave of arrests by state authorities that affected the Confessing Church during 1937, see *DB-ER*, 577–86, and Niesel, *Kirche unter dem Wort*, 137–59.

ingly impatient attacks of the anti-Christian forces.^[4] Now, even the place where we could gather for quiet work and brotherly help and reinforcement has been taken from us.^[5] This has made it more difficult to maintain our community, and some work can no longer be done. Perhaps this should teach us to ground our community even more strongly by listening together to the Word and by prayer. This is a time of testing for us all. Particularly now, the great task is to ensure that those among us who are isolated are not left alone. More than ever, the responsibility for this falls upon each of you. Please don't neglect it. We have said farewell to Finkenwalde in great thankfulness for everything that God gave us in the two and a half years of seminar work, and we are prepared to fulfill the new tasks we face. What we have learned will stay with us; what was ineffectual will fall aside. And already today we can say that the new paths along which we are being led will also give us reason for deep gratitude. Pray that the service to our young brothers will be done properly; lend a hand wherever you can.

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I would have liked to give each of you a copy of my book^[6] for Christmas. When it was published I often dedicated it in spirit to you all. I did not do this on the title page, because I did not want to claim you for my thinking and theology. Our fellowship is grounded in something else. The thought of giving the book to each of you for Christmas unfortunately had to be dropped due to finances. Anyway, you know what is in the book.

What we now want to say to one another on the occasion of Christmas and the end of the year I will attempt to say for us all, following the Daily Text^[7] for the last week of the year:

Christmas Eve: Ps. 41:5 [4] "O Lord, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you." This is a text of confession. The manger of the son of God who became flesh is the proper place for our confession. The

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[4.] After the resignation of the Reich Church Committee on February 12, 1937, the radical anti-Christian forces in the state and the party around Joseph Goebbels, Alfred Rosenberg, and Martin Bormann intensified their ideological and administrative pressure on the churches, under the slogan of "deconfessionalization of public life." Cf. Scholder, "Politics and Church Politics," in *Requiem for Hitler*, 155.

[5.] See 1/1. During the two months between the closing of Finkenwalde and the beginning of the collective pastorates in Köslin and Groß-Schlönwitz on December 5, 1937, Bonhoeffer and Eberhard Bethge lived with Bonhoeffer's parents in Berlin (see E. Bethge, "Marienburger Alle 43," in *Friendship and Resistance*, 73). In October they left Berlin for a vacation trip to southern Germany (see Bethge's letter of October 26, 1937, to their friends, in Andersen et al., *So ist es gewesen*, 316–18).

[6.] Bonhoeffer's book *Discipleship* (DBWE 4) had appeared in November 1937.

[7.] These were the daily devotions (*Losungen*) published by the Moravian (Herrnhut) brotherhood.

one who bore our flesh and blood knows our heart. We are all wounded and torn by our manifold sin.

Where else should we seek grace for all disloyalty, all lack of faith, all failure, but in God's lowliness in the manger? Where else would we seek salvation for our souls, for our lives, but in the one who has appeared for our salvation? Despite all the work and unrest, may no one enter the Christmas season without seeking time to make his confession to our Lord Jesus. So will he make us partake of both his humility and his innocence. Whoever is alone and must do without the grace of brotherly fellowship and reinforcement, may God reveal to him all the more gloriously what true fellowship is. Wherever we may be, we speak in one spirit, as we did often at the same table of the Lord's Supper: Heal my soul, for I have sinned against you. Thus on Christmas Eve we will become grateful anew for the great mercy of God, our savior.^[8]

Christmas day: Mal. 3:1 "See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will soon^[9] come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming." The fact that this Advent text encounters us today teaches us that even the fulfillment of all promise and all proper expectation has only begun. Even the time of fulfillment is a long time of waiting. Thank God for this—so we say, regarding our sin. May this waiting soon end, and the time be shortened—so we pray, regarding the cross that burdens Christendom throughout the world. May the work of the messenger, who is coming to prepare us to stand before Christ, be done soon. May Christ come to his temple, to his church in the hour when it is ready and awaits him as the adorned bride awaits her bridegroom.^[10] May the divine "soon" be fulfilled at the hour of mercy.

- 17 Second day of Christmas: Ps. 104:13 and 14 "From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use." God, who has given us the savior, is also willing to provide for our bodily life, as long as we are on this earth. Indeed, it is his earth. It must serve his purposes. The father will give his dear children in Jesus Christ what they need.^[11] Whoever has placed belief in Christ must not worry about the

[8.] Regarding Bonhoeffer's understanding and practice of confession, see the section on confession in the 1936 Finkenwalde lectures on pastoral care (*DBW* 14:589–91), the 1936/37 Finkenwalde session on confession (*DBW* 14:749–55), and *DBWE* 5:108–18); cf. also *DB-ER*, 465–66.

[9.] [NRSV here reads "suddenly."—VB]

[10.] Cf. Rev. 21:2.

[11.] Cf. Matt. 6:8.

coming day.^[12] In the middle of the cold winter, we are to see God's earth already full of fruits, grass, and seed. This should not be too difficult for us, should it, since we saw the eternal light enter the deep night, since we know of the blossom that in the middle of the winter night bloomed? "I know a rose-tree springing." Through God's power and love the heavenly spring has already dawned—"Amid the cold of winter, when half-spent was the night."^[13]

December 27, 1937: Ezek. 16:6 "I passed by you, and saw you flailing about in your blood. As you lay in your blood, I said to you, 'Live!'" Have we truly understood the greatness of the miracle that happened to us? Resurrection of the dead has occurred. We lay in our blood, struck and cast down by our own sin. We could not raise ourselves again. Then God had mercy and spoke in the authority of his love: Live! And we stood up, held and strengthened through God's mercy. Live!—God has begun a new life in us; he commands us now really to live this life, the life of his grace and help. Let us not disobey this command of God. God wants not dead Christians but Christians who live to their Lord.^[14] If we do not hear this Word, Christmas has passed us by.

December 28, 1937: Zech. 2:8 "For thus said the Lord of hosts . . . : Truly, one who touches you touches the apple of my eye." Just as the innocent children of Bethlehem, whom the church remembers today,^[15] were the first who had to give their lives for Jesus's sake, so in all ages the church-18community of Jesus has suffered persecution and death for the sake of its Lord. But the same Lord for whose sake we suffer disgrace, hatred, and imprisonment has promised to protect us like the apple of his eye. It is not we who protect him through our sacrifice; it is he who protects us. He stands up for us—this is the Christmas message. Whoever touches us for Christ's sake will be dealt with by our Lord himself. Nothing can befall us if we suffer injustice for Christ's sake. Thus we want to leave those who do us injustice in his hand alone—his hand of judgment and of mercy. This is the lesson of the murder of the children of Bethlehem, namely, that Christ is not in the hand of his enemies, but that the enemy is in the hand of God.

December 29, 1937: Ps. 25:10 "All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees." Are

[12.] Cf. Matt. 6:25–34.

[13.] From the first stanza of the pre-Reformation Advent hymn, "I know a rose-tree springing" (*Es ist ein Reis [Ros] entsprungen*). [The English is taken from *The Hymnal of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America*, 17.—VB]

[14.] Cf. Rom. 14:8.

[15.] In the church calendar, December 28 is traditionally the Feast of the Holy Innocents (see Matt. 2:16–18).

you, who have experienced hardship in this year, able to speak today with all your heart that the paths of the Lord are pure goodness and truth? Did you know that God was good to you when he sent you misery and imprisonment? Has God made himself known to you as the true and faithful one when he took so much from you? No one who says No to God's promises and commandments is able to say Yes to his paths. Agreement with God's will occurs in daily submission to his word. Something may appear to us as minor disobedience, and yet it will take from our hearts the gratefulness and praise for God's paths. It is painful and difficult to walk under Christ's yoke when we do it against our will. It is easy and gentle,^[16] when God at Christmas has overcome and won our hearts for it.

December 30, 1937: Ps. 20:5^[17] "May we shout for joy over your help,^[18] and in the name of our God set up our banners." In the past times of crisis for the church, we have received several offers of human help.^[19] Yet they have only brought us into temptation, particularly when they were well intentioned. For how should even the best human intentions help the church in a struggle with the devil? We have celebrated Christmas. Jesus is born. He is our help. He alone. Here is God's help for human beings in temptation and crisis. Do we think this help insufficient? Are we becoming impatient? Let us meet all temptations with the joyful confession: May we shout for joy over your help. We unfold our banner for the struggle. Upon it is inscribed: Jesus, the helper.

December 31, 1937, New Year's Eve: Ps. 71:18 "So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come." With astonishment we stand at the end of the year. For some time now we have grown accustomed to the fact that we cannot count on having long periods of time. We neither could nor should do so. Learning obedience on each new day is enough for us. But time moves on, and our text today speaks to us about growing old. Thus, despite everything, it

[16.] Cf. Matt. 11:30.

[17.] [In the German Bible this is verse 6.—VB]

[18.] [NRSV has "victory."—VB]

[19.] [Bonhoeffer is clearly referring here to the legalization procedure presented by official church leaders, which offered those trained at the illegal Confessing Church seminaries a "legal" route to ordination and ministry. Legalization, however, required that they take their theological and ordination examinations under the official church committees, which were dominated by German Christians. In the wake of the Himmler Decree and the arrests of many illegal pastors, this was even more tempting for Bonhoeffer's students. Bonhoeffer was bitterly opposed, and in fact this letter marks the beginning of a new, intense phase of his efforts to convince his students to withstand the temptation. See esp. *DB-ER*, 607–20, and Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 94–98.—VB]

is good to turn our eyes, for once, to the prospect that perhaps a long life still lies before us, that the day of judgment perhaps will not arrive tomorrow or the day after. "Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land" (Jer. 32:15). So perhaps we will become gray during this time of struggle for the church, and new generations will bear new burdens on their shoulders. Therefore we pray to God, for whom a thousand years are as one day,^[20] for the grace that he may let us, throughout the years, remain proclaimers of his might. Years and generations pass away, but God's word does not.^[21] Indeed, we are merely one link in the chain. Yet the question, anxious and joyful, remains: which generation will live to see the day of judgment? Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!^[22]

The meditation texts for the coming weeks are^[23]

December 26–January 1, 1938:	John 1:1–18	
January 2–January 8:	Luke 2:21–40	
January 9–January 15:	Eccles. 50:24–26 or Ps. 1	
January 16–January 22:	Hag. 1	
January 23–January 29:	Hag. 2	20
January 30–February 5:	Mal. 1	
February 6–February 12:	Mal. 2	
February 13–February 19:	Mal. 3	

Eberhard's^[24] address is Groß-Schlönwitz via Schlawe/East Pomerania. In the event of any changes, please also let us know your addresses. Albrecht Schönherr is pastor in Brüssow, at the estate of General Field Marshall von Mackensen.^[25] We are currently seeing more of Brother Maechler.^[26] Are the brothers in Berlin keeping up their monthly meetings?

[20.] Ps. 90:4.

[21.] Isa. 40:8.

[22.] Rev. 22:20.

[23.] Regarding the sense and significance of the daily practice of meditation that was observed in the seminary for the brothers' life together, with its elements of personal contemplation of Scripture, prayer, and intercession, see *DBWE* 5: 85–91, and the 1936 "Introduction to Daily Meditation," *DBW* 14:945–50.

[24.] The reference is to Eberhard Bethge, who was inspector of studies for the collective pastorate in Groß-Schlönwitz after December 1937.

[25.] For an account of Schönherr's time as a pastor in Brüssow under the patronage of August von Mackensen, see Schönherr, . . . *Aber die Zeit war nicht verloren*, 115–27.

[26.] Since 1936 Winfried Maechler had been assistant pastor of the Confessing Church in Schlawe, under Superintendent Eduard Block; see Maechler, *Ein Christ in den Wirren des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 32–33.

God bless your work in the congregations, and may God fill you with joy. Heartfelt greetings to you and your households from all the brothers, Fritz^[27] in prison, Eberhard from his work, and your ever-faithful

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

3. To Paula Bonhoeffer^[1]

December 21, 1937

Dear Mama,

Many thanks for your letter^[2] and the package for me to open on Christmas Eve! Unfortunately, I received the wrong delivery from Chr. Kaiser,^[3] so I would like to ask you to send Franz^[4] the book from Berlin. I am going to
 21 send it to Karl-Friedrich^[5] myself. Fritz O.^[6] was released yesterday. That is a very great joy. Christmas otherwise would have been difficult indeed. Could you send me several white shirts for the holidays? I'm very sorry to trouble you even more. Here we're doing splendidly. From Iwand, unfortunately, we hear otherwise.^[7] The good weather will surely hold until New

[27.] Friedrich (Fritz) Onnasch had been arrested during the state measures against the Confessing Church in November 1937, and spent four weeks in prison in Stettin. After December 1937 he became inspector of studies for the collective pastorate in Köslin.

[1.] *NL*, A 44,1 (6); handwritten postcard, postmarked Stolp. Partially reproduced in *GS* 6:433.

[2.] Letter not extant.

[3.] Chr. Kaiser Publishers in Munich, which published Bonhoeffer's book *Discipleship* in 1937.

[4.] Bonhoeffer's friend Franz Hildebrandt, who was considered "non-Aryan" under National Socialist law. In August 1937, he emigrated to England after three weeks' imprisonment for "collection misdemeanors" (he had repeatedly forwarded the collections from Confessing Church services not to the regional church consistory but to the Council of Brethren [the governing body for the Confessing Church—VB], defying a law forbidding this, "Law regarding the administration of wealth in the Protestant regional churches," passed on March 11, 1935. With this law the church authorities sought to destroy the Confessing Church's financial autonomy. For more information on this, see Kersting, *Kirchenordnung und Widerstand*, 242–49. Until the fall of 1938, Hildebrandt lived as a refugee in the parsonage of Julius Rieger in London-Sydenham.

[5.] Bonhoeffer's eldest brother, Karl-Friedrich.

[6.] Fritz Onnasch.

[7.] The Confessing Church preachers' seminary in Bloestau (East Prussia), led by Hans Joachim Iwand, had been closed by the police. Iwand provisionally continued to

Year's Day. Here, of course, some Christmas preparations are going on. We treated ourselves to real beeswax candles as a present for the entire group. Many greetings to Papa and you, dear Mama, from your grateful
Dietrich

4. Inscription in the Copy of *Discipleship* for Martin Niemöller^[1]

To Pastor Martin Niemöller at Advent 1937
in brotherly thanks.
A book that he himself could have written better than
the author.

5. To Paula Bonhoeffer^[1]

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Dear Mama,

On your birthday I am thinking a great deal about you all.^[2] I wish you a good new year. Once more I am traveling, and so only today am I getting around to this greeting. After New Year's, hopefully it will be quieter, so that I can write in more detail. Thank all of you very much for the lovely Christmas things! Here all is going well. Greetings to you from your grateful
Dietrich

train seminarians for three months in Jordan (Neumark). See H. J. Iwand, *Von der Gemeinschaft christlichen Lebens*, 3 and 17. Under the auspices of Superintendent Fritz Heuner, Iwand then attempted to found a new preachers' seminary in Dortmund. On December 18, 1937, Iwand, Heuner, and the candidates were arrested (see Iwand, *Theologie in der Zeit*, 118, and *DB-ER*, 589).

[1.] *NL*, A 45 (42); later typewritten copy; according to information received from Jan Niemöller, the original has been lost (letter to the German editor, October 22, 1994). The inscription gives no date or address, but the book was probably sent from Groß-Schlönwitz. Previously published in *GS* 2:307. Martin Niemöller had been arrested on July 1, 1937, by the Gestapo at his home in Berlin-Dahlem (see *DB-ER*, 654–57) and was in pretrial confinement in Berlin-Moabit prison until his trial began on February 7, 1938. Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship* reached him there.

[1.] *NL*, A 44,1 (7); handwritten postcard; no date or address given. It was probably sent en route from Köslin to Groß-Schlönwitz. Partially reproduced in *GS* 6:433–34.

[2.] Bonhoeffer's mother's birthday was December 30.

6. To Franz Hildebrandt^[1]

January 3, 1938

Dear Franz,

Heartfelt thanks for your letter.^[2] I was pleased in equal measure by the agreement with and critique of my book.^[3] I am very willing to admit that Asmussen's commentary on Galatians^[4] doesn't fit with my exegesis of Matt. 5:17f.^[5] With Luther's commentary on Galatians,^[6] though, things stand very differently. Just don't end up establishing a law of humanity, you anti-nomist!^[7] I eagerly await your work and meet it by reciprocating your agreement with and critique of mine.^[8] Now for the *third* attempt: Julius^[9] should please obtain for me there (with Cromwell's^[10] help): *The Way of Holiness*, by Father Benson (Oxford).^[11] I need it for an exegesis of Psalm 119.^[12] Many thanks for the effort. Gustav^[13] is still in my debt. I'll pass that on to you and Julius!

Affectionate greetings to both of you from your
Dietrich

[1.] In the personal possession of Gottfried Rieger; handwritten postcard; stamped in Groß-Schlönwitz/Schlawe. Cf. *NL*, Anh. D 1,1 (2); cf. also *NL*, A 45 (43); a later type-written copy, partially reproduced in *GS* 6:434. The postcard (to London) has been stamped: "Reichsparteitag [Reich Party Day—VB] commemorative postcard. Price 25 R[eich]p[ennies] including cultural donation" and portrays a parade of SA troops carrying swastika flags.

[2.] Letter not extant.

[3.] Bonhoeffer is referring to *Discipleship*.

[4.] Asmussen, *Theologisch-kirchliche Erwägungen zum Galaterbrief* (1935).

[5.] Cf. *DBWE* 4:115–20.

[6.] Martin Luther, *In epistolam sancti Pauli ad Galatas commentarius*, 1531/1535 (WA 40/1 and 40/2).

[7.] This is an allusion to the first and fundamental theological dispute between Bonhoeffer and Hildebrandt about Marcion and the relative importance of the Hebrew Bible for Christian proclamation and theology (see *DB-ER*, 138).

[8.] After 1937 Hildebrandt worked on a study, "The Gospel and Humanity," for which he received his doctorate from Cambridge in 1941; except for brief excerpts, it remained unpublished. In it he attempted a new evaluation of humanity, human rights, and pacifism on the foundation of Luther's distinction between law and gospel. He took natural law, reason, and freedom to be necessary components of a state order that would preserve community for the sake of the weakness of the flesh. See Hildebrandt, "Kirche und Recht," 502–3.

[9.] Julius Rieger.

[10.] Philipp Cromwell, a lawyer in London.

[11.] This is the title of a book that appeared in 1901, by R. M. Benson, who founded the Anglican community "Society of St. John the Evangelist" in Oxford in 1865. See Rieger, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer in London*, 29.

7. To the Young Brothers in Pomerania^[1]

Dear Brother,

In recent weeks, I have received letters and personal messages that make it clear that our church and our young theologians, particularly in Pomerania, are encountering an hour of severe temptation.^[2] Because here it is no longer about one individual's crisis but rather about one and the same temptation that is threatening many, you will permit me, dear brother, to attempt an answer to all concerned. Nonetheless, this letter is meant for you very personally. It should address everything you have written or said to me.

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We must go way back. We will agree that when we declared ourselves one with the cause of the Confessing Church, it was a step of the most certain faith and, because of that, a venture that was incomprehensible in human terms. There was a joy, a certainty of victory, a readiness for sacrifice that gave our entire personal and official life a new direction. I don't mean that there were not all kinds of secondary human considerations that played a role—who knows even his own heart?—but what made us so joyful and ready to fight and, perhaps, even prepared to suffer was one thing, namely, that we knew again that a life with Jesus Christ and his church is worth the whole effort. We believed that in the Confessing Church we not only had found the church of Jesus Christ but through God's great goodness had actually experienced it. A new life under God's joy-giving word began for individuals, for pastors and congregations. If only God's word was among us, then we no longer wanted to be afraid and worried about the future.

[12.] See 3/9.

[13.] Pastor Gustav Schönberger in London.

[1.] *NL*, A 56 (6); typewritten mimeograph with handwritten signature; no date or address given, probably sent from Groß-Schlönwitz, definitely around the end of January 1938. Previously published in *GS* 2:297–306. Bonhoeffer wrote this letter immediately before a convention of the Brotherhood of Young Theologians in Pomerania, in Stettin on January 24–25, 1938, that was to attempt to establish a common position of the “illegals” against the regional church consistory's offer to legalize them. See Ludwig, *Die “Illegalen” im Kirchenkampf*, and Klän, *An der Wegscheide*, 142–43. [After 1935 candidates for the ministry who studied and were ordained within the Confessing Church were considered “illegal” and denied jobs, salaries, and pensions by the official German Evangelical Church. After 1937 official church authorities offered “legalization” proceedings to these candidates; this meant a de facto repudiation of their examinations and ordinations by the Confessing Church.—VB]

[2.] For more on the course of the Church Struggle in Pomerania and its consequences for the illegal vicars of the Confessing Church, see *DB-ER*, 606–20, and Klän, *An der Wegscheide*.

With this word we were willing to pass through struggle, through suffering, through poverty, through sin, and through death to finally reach God's eternal kingdom. Young people and fathers of large families stood here side by side. What was it at the time that united and fortified us with such gladness? It was the one and ancient realization, given to us once more by God himself, that among us Jesus Christ wishes to build his church, which lives solely from the preaching of the pure, unadulterated gospel and by the grace of his sacraments, and which in its actions is obedient solely to him.^[3] Christ wishes to hold fast to such a church; he wants to protect and lead such a church. Only such a church is permitted to be free of all fear. The confessional synods of Barmen and Dahlem bore witness to this and to nothing else.^[4] Was this an illusion? Was it perhaps stated under the impression of external circumstances that appeared to favor a "realization" of this belief? No, it was the most certain faith, it was the biblical truth itself, that was then made known before the entire world. It was the witness to Christ that overcame hearts, created joy, and called to the obedient deed. Dear brother, are we not at least still in agreement that this was the case? Or do we want today to revile God's grace, which was so generously given to us?

So, then, the struggle for the true church of Christ erupted. Or do you possibly believe that the devil would take such trouble to annihilate a small band of idealists who were carried away? No, the storm arose because Christ was in the boat.^[5] The struggle demanded sacrifice from the very beginning. Perhaps it has not always been clear to everyone how much personal sacrifice, how much sacrifice, too, on the part of the congregations was required for the members of the Councils of Brethren to fulfill their duty to the church. But it was a sacrifice joyfully given for the sake of the cause of Jesus Christ. Who was permitted to retreat as long as the call still came from Jesus to be the church, the church that serves him alone? Who was allowed to disengage himself, as long as *no one* had relieved him of the task of caring for the pure proclamation of the gospel and the building up of congregations in conformity with Scripture and the confessions of our church?

If we are still agreed on this, then let us ask ourselves, in all candor, what has happened between those beginnings and our present situation, or, as one might also say, what has happened between the church provinces in

[3.] Cf. Augsburg Confession, Article 7 (*Book of Concord*, 42).

[4.] The first confessional synod of the German Evangelical Church was held in Wuppertal-Barmen on May 29–31, 1934. The second confessional synod was held in Berlin-Dahlem on October 19–20, 1934. Cf. the texts of the synodal resolutions in Schmidt, *Bekenntnisse*, 2:91–98 and 157–62.

[5.] Cf. Matt. 8:23–27.

which even today they live and act and struggle on the very basis of these beginnings, and our church province? Why have voices in Pomerania complained for months that our church lies paralyzed, as if in a spell, that an internal narrowness and stubbornness diverts us from fruitful work? How has it come about that brothers who were in the Confessing Church with full certainty say today that their gladness has been lost, that they no longer know why they could not do their work just as well under the consistory as under the Council of Brethren? And can we deny that the witness of our Pomeranian church recently has become ever weaker? That the word of the Confessing Church has to a great extent lost its faith-wakening and with that its discerning^[6] power? That the true theological-ecclesiastical decisions grow more obscure behind the strategic considerations? And has all of this not had its effect upon our own preaching? We ask about the reason for all this.

26

I believe the answer is not as difficult as one would like it to be. The so-called paralysis in the Confessing Church, the lack of gladness, the weakness of the witness, all come from our very own disobedience. Let us think now not about the others but about ourselves and our work. What has become of the first, clear insights of the Confessing Church in our congregations? Have our congregations been truly and vividly interested in them? Is there a c[ongregation]-c[hurch]-council or a local Council of Brethren that stands in unshakable fellowship with the cause of the Confessing Church and with those of us who are confessional pastors? That carries us and helps us to take new paths in the parish? Or why do we not have it? Should the congregations alone, once again, be to blame for this? There are parish members who have the opposite opinion. Are the parishes too “immature”? As if a parish could be too immature to hear God’s word and obediently act according to it, but for unchurchlike action they are “mature” enough! Who taught us to think of our congregations with such disdain? Who, then, made the cause of the Confessing Church into a matter of “maturity”? As if the maturity of a parish did not consist precisely of its plight before God! Where are the district Councils of Brethren, formed from the parish Councils of Brethren, which could help the district pastors bear their great responsibility? Where is the Pomeranian confessional synod, which could only genuinely emerge through the congregation, and which should have shown the way for the Pomeranian church? In other words: why did we in Pomerania not seriously implement the insights

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[6.] [The German here is *scheiden* (literally, “to divide” or “to distinguish between”). —VB]

[Erkenntnisse] of the Dahlem synod?^[7] And if we did not do this, did we ever take Barmen entirely seriously? Other, far more unchurched provinces fought the promising struggle for the church of the gospel, based upon clear ecclesiastical-theological decisions and, in all their suffering, rejoiced in this from their hearts. Why, so often, did we stand by? Why is the theological discussion among us so strangely quiet? In this hour it is truly not a question of one accusing the other, but rather that each person confesses that through disobedience we have often thoughtlessly scorned God's grace, which we received in the beginnings of the Confessing Church. Our word and our deed often broke apart. Now that we reap the fruits of this, however, we begin to blame one another; indeed, we grumble about the path that has been ruined by our own disobedience and thus no longer gives us gladness.

Let me try, once more, to say this differently: there is a Church Struggle as law and a Church Struggle as gospel. At present the Church Struggle, to a great extent, has become a law for us against which we rebel, an ominous, wrathful law that beats us down. No person can bear and fight the Church Struggle as law without perishing and utterly failing. Church Struggle as law means Church Struggle without gladness, without certainty, without full authority [Vollmacht]; it means Church Struggle without promise. How does this come about? It doesn't happen any differently than in personal life. The merciful word of God, from which we withdraw in disobedience, becomes a hard law for us. That which, done in obedience, is a gentle and light yoke, becomes an unbearable burden for the disobedient.^[8] The more we became stubborn in disobedience against the merciful Word, the more difficult it becomes to turn around, the more willfully we rebel against God's claim. But just as there is only the one way in personal life, that of
28 turning around, of repentance under God's word, in which God again grants us the lost community, so it goes in the struggle of the church as well. We do not receive back the lost gift of a Church Struggle as gospel without repentance, that is, unless the Church Struggle itself becomes repentance for us. Even if the obedience of repentance may be harder today than it was

[7.] [The October 1934 Dahlem synod was torn by divisions between the more radical members of the Confessing Church and the more moderate leaders. The two most contentious resolutions passed at Dahlem were Article 3, which declared the Confessing Church to be the one true church in Germany, sharing no common confession with the German Christians; and the declaration of church *Notrecht*, or emergency law. Under *Notrecht*, the Confessing Church could establish its own governance structures, training, examinations of candidates for the ministry, etc.—VB]

[8.] Cf. Matt. 11:30.

previously when we failed to be obedient—only in this way does God wish to help us back to the right path.

Dear brother, if I speak in this way to you who are not yet firmly installed in ministry in the church, I know that perhaps you bear the smallest amount of guilt for all this. Indeed, you have been affected by some practices that a pastor in office could evade. But must not this very fact fill you with particular joy and gratitude, namely, the fact that the church expects you to walk the very clear path? That precisely you today have been given a responsibility that perhaps has never rested upon a young generation of theologians in our church? The Confessing Church in Pomerania must first come into being. Put in human terms, it will depend on you, too, whether it can emerge or not. Last week we were connected through our meditation text from Haggai 1.^[9] There it is stated: “These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord’s house. Then the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai, saying: Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?”^[10] It cannot at all be my concern to “stand you back up,” to talk you into something. But it does matter above all to reawaken in you, through God’s word, courage, gladness, faith in Jesus Christ, who is and will remain with his Confessing Church, *whether you go along with it or not*. You should know that the faith that threatens to be extinguished in you still lives, as in the beginning, in many congregations and parsonages, that inside Pomerania and outside, at posts of forlorn hope, lonely brothers witness to this faith with the greatest gladness. The church of Jesus Christ that lives by his word alone and wants to be obedient in all things to him alone still lives, and will live, and calls you back out of temptation and tribulation. It calls you to repentance and warns you against the disloyalty that must end in despair. It prays for you that your faith not waver.

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But now, back once more to your own questions: you say that the situation today is different from that in the beginning; because of that we should act differently. I can think of only one change in the situation that could also change our action, namely, if the consistories, the EOK,^[11] etc. were to relieve us of the responsibility for a church leadership in accordance with the confessions. Since, given the current makeup of church administrators, it is out of the question that this would ever happen, only those who throw sand

[9.] Cf. the list of meditation texts at the conclusion of Bonhoeffer’s letter of December 12, 1937, letter to the Finkenwalde brothers, 1/2. Haggai 1 was proposed as the meditation text for the week of January 16–22, 1938.

[10.] Hag. 1:2–4.

[11.] [Evangelischer Oberkirchenrat, the governing council of the Old Prussian Union church.—VB]

in their own eyes can be in doubt. But since the situation looks more threatening from outside than before, as the nonchurch powers lay claim to the church, this can only give us more reason to close ranks even more strongly there where this intrusion [Einbruch] has not yet succeeded, namely, in the Confessing Church.

You say that the Confessing Church would surrender the possibility of finding an entry into the congregations, that is, the possibilities for proclaiming the gospel. Do you recall that the G[erman] C[hristians] made precisely the same argument and that evil fruit grew from that? Don't you see that by subordinating yourself to the consistory, you make yourself the henchman of the secular powers that intend to win the parishes not at all for the gospel but for a very different doctrine?

You say that, under the consistory, you would hold on only to the Scripture and confession. Do you recall all those who have already declared this before you? And given the case that this would be possible—which is not possible—do you forget that the church is greater than your parish? Do you forget your brothers and their parishes? Do you realize that with your step to the consistory, you give the struggle against the Confessing Church its most effective weapon? Is it clear to you that a Council of Brethren that would only practice a so-called spiritual leadership, as you wished, would be leading an illusory existence, which can be swept away in a moment? You yourself will be made responsible if the Confessing Church is crushed in this manner. Your step to the consistory is the strongest imaginable confirmation of the judgment of the anti-Christians against the Confessing Christians.

30 You complain about the Council of Brethren. Do so, if you must, to it directly as well! But please also ask yourself whether you joined the Confessing Church for the sake of a good or a miserable Council of Brethren. Ask yourself whether you would be willing to stand up for the cause of the Confessing Church even if there were no longer any Council of Brethren whatsoever, indeed, whether you are willing, isolated from any kind of church leadership or brotherly fellowship, to witness and to suffer for the Confessing Church wholly alone, before God and human beings? No, you do not simply have a choice between two church governments. You can't suddenly now reaffirm that from which you have separated yourself in faith because of some completely different reasons, without being at odds with yourself and your faith. God's word calls you to loyal participation in the Confessing Church under the leadership of the Council of Brethren, as weak as both may be.

You no longer hope for any success for the Confessing Church; you no longer see any way out. Indeed, who among us would see a way out? God alone sees it and will certainly show it to those who humbly wait for it. Per-

haps we hoped once that the Confessing Church would achieve public recognition in Germany. But was this hope of promise? Certainly not. Now we have learned to believe a church that follows its Lord under the cross.^[12] That holds more promise. Finally, you say that you would be prepared for any personal and professional sacrifice if you only knew why they were necessary. Why, dear brother? Not for any humanly apparent reason, not for a flourishing church nor for a convincing church leadership, but simply because the path of the Confessing Church must be traveled, even through barren stretches of drought and desert, and because you are not meant to stay behind in the desert. That is, for the sake of the poor church, which will of course continue even without you under the leadership of its Lord, that is, for the sake of your faith and your certainty you should stay with the Confessing Church.

What should happen now? There are so many reasons, and theologians can prove everything. Everything will depend on whether God will give his witness anew into our hearts. Jesus Christ alone can break the spell. Yet we want to face several tasks clearly. We will not achieve a renewal of our Confessing Church unless we first intercede with God on its behalf in fervent prayer. An hour of prayer for our church and its leadership should unite us and cleanse and clarify our thoughts. God will then lead us again to the true path. But then we want to tackle what has been neglected. We want to struggle for full theological clarity about the insights of the Confessing Church. We are not willing to let go before we have reached firm ground. We tend to move from questions of truth to the order of the day all too easily. Yet how should a clear leadership for a parish or a church be possible without a clear theology? The false front lines in the Church Struggle arise whenever the question of truth is bypassed. Let us resume the discussion also with those who confront us with questions! But it should be a discussion in ultimate truth! The discipline in theological work, preaching, and catechism that pastors undergo in other regional churches is truly no dishonor to these churches and their pastors. Shouldn't such discipline be possible at least among the young brothers of our church, for mutual help and reinforcement? All this takes place only for better ministry to our congregations. What is finally at stake here is to prepare for the establishment of a Pomeranian confessional synod. For this we need local and district Councils of Brethren. And once we have come that far, only then will the inexhaustible field of work that is the Confessing Church's specific task

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[12.] Cf. Bonhoeffer's interpretation of discipleship under the cross in *Discipleship* (*DBWE* 4), esp. 84–91 and 225–52.

begin: the ordering of church life with respect to the practice of baptism, the office of godparents, instruction, confirmation, confession and communion, visitation, etc. There are already church districts in the Confessing Church that tackle these questions seriously. But there is no authority except for the bodies of the Confessing Church that could do this work under the sole direction of the word of God. There is enough work. We must only tackle it at long last.

32 Before I close, one more word about the brochure by P. Schütz, *Warum ich noch ein Christ bin*.^[13] This is a splendid attempt to review things again and again, with new words and in great openness for the questions, from an outside perspective. Nonetheless, for some it has brought only tribulation [Anfechtung] instead of help. Why? Because ultimately it proceeds from an impossible premise. Schütz looks for the church in the attitude, in the countenance of the Christians. We, however, look for the church in God's word alone. Schütz's book has an incredibly debilitating effect, for it leaves human beings to themselves. But "it is a precious thing for the heart to become firm, which occurs through grace."^[14] Our heart becomes firm solely by God's word and sacrament.

Let me hear from you again. Greetings from your stalwart
Dietrich Bonhoeffer

8. To His Parents^[1]

Köslin, train station

My dear Parents,

Many thanks for your suggestion to meet in Stettin.^[2] February 4 is not so good here, since there's work in the morning and the time is too short afterward. But I was thinking of Sunday or Saturday (February 6 or 5). Would

[13.] Schütz, *Warum ich noch ein Christ bin* (1937). [Bonhoeffer mentions his critique of Schütz later in one of his theological letters from prison (*DBWE* 8:430) and a 1944 letter to Maria von Wedemeyer (*Love Letters from Cell* 92, 154). Cf. also *DB-ER*, 844.—VB]

[14.] Heb. 13:9. [Italics are Bonhoeffer's. The German translation differs from the NRSV wording, which reads: "for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace."—VB]

[1.] *NL*, A 44,1 (8); handwritten postcard; postmarked Köslin, January 27, 1938. Previously published in *GS* 6:435.

[2.] On January 11, 1938, Bonhoeffer was arrested in Berlin-Dahlem at a meeting of the directors of theological education and leaders of the vicars' groups in the Confessing Church in the Old Prussian Union and banished from Berlin and Brandenburg. See