AWARDS AND RECOGNITION FOR *BONHOEFFER: PASTOR, MARTYR, PROPHET, SPY*

The Canterbury Medal by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty

The Christopher Award

Kirkus Reviews—Top 25 Non-Fiction Books of the Year

Kirkus Reviews—Pleasant Surprise of the Year

Barnes & Noble—Top 10 Non-Fiction Books of the Year

Evangelical Christian Publishing Association's
2011 Christian Book of the Year

Evangelical Christian Publishing Association's
2011 Non-Fiction Book of the Year

Preaching Today—Feeding
the Preacher's Soul Book of the Year Award

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Christian Retailing—2011 Readers Choice Award

PRAISE FOR *BONHOEFFER: PASTOR, MARTYR, PROPHET, SPY*

"This is an important book and I hope many people will read it."

—President George W. Bush

"[A] beautifully constructed biography. . . . Throughout his book, but especially toward the end, Metaxas turns this erudite and at times abstruse theologian into a living and tragic human being."

—Alan Wolfe, *The New Republic*

"Eric Metaxas clears up many misconceptions, giving priority to Bonhoeffer's own words and actions, in a massive and masterful new biography, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*. During a harrowing time when many churches adopted Nazi ideology and others buckled under government pressure, Bonhoeffer stood strong, if sometimes alone. Metaxas presents Bonhoeffer as a clear-headed, deeply convicted Christian who submitted to no one and nothing except God and his Word."

—*Christianity Today*

"In *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, Eric Metaxas tells Bonhoeffer's story with passion and theological sophistication, often challenging revisionist accounts that make Bonhoeffer out to be a 'humanist' or ethicist for whom religious doctrine was easily disposable. . . . His was a radical obedience to God, a frame of mind widely viewed today with fear and loathing, even among the faithful. In *Bonhoeffer*, Mr. Metaxas reminds us that there are forms of religion—respectable, domesticated, timid—that may end up doing the devil's work for him."

—*Wall Street Journal*

"In the finest treatment of the man since Eberhard Bethge's *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Man of Vision, Man of Courage* (1970), Metaxas presents a complete, accessible picture of this important figure, whose story is inspiring, instructive and international in scope. Metaxas . . . bring[s] Bonhoeffer and other characters to vivid life. A definitive Bonhoeffer biography for the 21st century."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"[U]ntil now, American readers have lacked an account of Bonhoeffer's life that is both thorough *and* engagingly readable, a book that captures the full sweep of his remarkable story and highlights its meaning for us today. In *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, Eric Metaxas has given us just such a book. . . . [T]his new biography is a welcome and significant contribution. Metaxas keeps a firm grasp on the scholarly consensus while holding the reader's attention from the first page to the last, and his book will serve as a gateway for many people to a much fuller understanding of Bonhoeffer."

—*Books & Culture*

"In this weighty, riveting analysis of the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Metaxas . . . offers a comprehensive review of one of history's darkest eras, along with a fascinating exploration of the familial, cultural, and religious influences that formed one of the world's greatest contemporary theologians. A passionate narrative voice combines with meticulous research to unpack the confluence of circumstances and personalities that led Germany from the defeat of WWI to the atrocities of WWII. . . . Insightful and illuminating, this tome makes a powerful contribution to biography, history and theology."

—*Publisher's Weekly*

"Eric Metaxas has created a biography of uncommon power—intelligent, moving, well researched, vividly written, and rich in implication for our own lives. Or to put it another way: Buy this book. Read it. Then buy another copy and give it to a person you love. It's that good. . . . Eric Metaxas has written the kind of extraordinary book that not only brings Dietrich Bonhoeffer, his times and his witness vividly alive, but also leaves us yearning to find the same moral character in ourselves. No biographer can achieve anything higher."

—Archbishop Charles Chaput, *First Things*

"For anyone whose faith has been strengthened by the life and witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, this is the biography you have always wanted. Eric Metaxas has written a rich, detailed, and beautiful account of the great pastor and theologian who gave us *The Cost of Discipleship* and sacrificed his life for opposing Hitler. Metaxas' Bonhoeffer is a monumental achievement and a deeply important work."

—Greg Thornbury, Ph.D.

"Dietrich Bonhoeffer's great gift is that his understanding of faith in times of conflict speaks to generation after generation. Eric Metaxas' *Bonhoeffer* is the biography for this generation—a masterpiece that reads like a great novel and weaves together in one opus an understanding of Bonhoeffer's theology, the complex and tragic history of twentieth-century Germany, and the human struggle of a true Christian hero. Eric Metaxas is claiming his place as the preeminent biographer of Christianity's most courageous figures."

—Martin Doblmeier, filmmaker, *Bonhoeffer*

"With great skill, energy, and warmth, Eric Metaxas reminds us why the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer stands as a rebuke both to believers and skeptics. Rarely has the story of a Christian martyr been told with such realism and depth. It's a gem of a book."

—Joseph Loconte, lecturer in politics, The King's College, New York City; editor, *The End of Illusions: Religious Leaders Confront Hitler's Gathering Storm*

"Moving, comprehensive, and engaging . . . Metaxas tells a compelling story . . . Recommended."

—*Library Journal*

"The first major biography of Bonhoeffer in more than 40 years, bringing together newly available documents and a fresh outlook into the many facets of Bonhoeffer's life. Both theologian and spy, Bonhoeffer's life is brilliantly documented and aspects of his faith in the light of great struggle are examined. An invigorating and informative book, Eric Metaxas writes an incredible biography of a massively influential character that is sure to impress and enlighten readers."

—*The Church of England Newspaper*

"Metaxas examines the life of a man caught in a heart-rending dilemma: stand up to the Nazis and Hitler himself, necessitating deceit and complicity in an assassination; or remain silent, allowing the murder of thousands. . . . Christians interested in Bonhoeffer's theology will find it illuminated in the fuller context of his life. Believers seeking inspiration for living a bold life of faith will receive it in abundance. Readers fascinated with this era in history will discover revealing glimpses behind the scenes of the anti-Hitler movement. . . . [H]istorians will find this a solid academic work."

—Diane Gardner, *Foreword Reviews*

"A stunning achievement recounting Bonhoeffer's life with lucidity, historical detail, and a concretely contextualized handling of [his] often misunderstood theological legacy. . . . Metaxas masterfully distills Bonhoeffer's eventful and complex life into a true narrative biography that is comprehensive and vivid without being overwhelming."

—ChristianBook.com

"Dietrich Bonhoeffer has at last found the writer he deserves. Eric Metaxas has written a book that adds a new dimension to World War II, a new understanding of how evil can seize the soul of a nation and a man of faith can confront it—and transform defeat into victory, lies into transcendent truth. No one who cares about the history of the modern world can afford to ignore this book."

—Thomas Fleming, author, *The New Dealers' War: FDR and the War Within World War II*

"A powerful story beautifully told about a man who didn't just write about the cost of discipleship but lived it. Deeply moving."

—Merold Westphal, Ph.D., distinguished profess or of philosophy, Fordham University

"Clearly the definitive work [on Bonhoeffer] . . . One of the great biographies I've ever read."

—Charles Colson, founder, Prison Fellowship;
author, *Born Again* and *Loving God*

"One of the finest and most moving biographies I have ever read. Eric Metaxas responds to a great life with a great book."

—Cal Thomas, America's No. 1 nationally syndicated columnist

"Riveting. . . ."

—John Ortberg Jr., senior pastor, Menlo Park Presbyterian Church

"[M]onumental, authoritative, humbling and inspirational . . . "

—Kathryn Jean Lopez, *National Review Online*

"Crammed with insight, outrage, and urgency, this book positions Bonhoeffer where he belongs, in the ranks of the great Christian humanists who have struggled against the prevailing winds of culture to faithfully and bravely interpret Christianity for their historical moment.

"This is also a deeply humanizing book, full of vignettes that reveal Bonhoeffer as a son, as a lover, a pastor, a friend, all in the context of the deadly work for which he is most remembered: resistance to the growing menace of Nazism."

—Caleb J. D. Maskell, associate director, Jonathan Edwards Center, Yale University (2004-2007); Department of Religion, Princeton University

"As in his previous biography, *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery*, Metaxas in *Bonhoeffer* brings to life the extraordinary and selfless accomplishments of a true hero. Metaxas has the rare skill of taking the mundane but crucial details of life and weaving them into a history that flows like a novel. For anyone interested in what the strength of belief and conviction can accomplish, *Bonhoeffer* is an essential read.

—Gerald Schroeder, Ph.D., Israeli physicist and teacher at the Aish Ha Torah College of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem; author, *Genesis and the Big Bang* and *The Science of God*.

"Metaxas' *Bonhoeffer* will be regarded as one of the best books of the year. There are a few books that, years after I have read them, I realize have had a great influence on me. This is sure to be one of them. You can't go wrong with this book; I give it my highest recommendation."

—WhileWeSojourn.com

"Metaxas is a graceful writer with a sure grasp of his subject matter."

—*The Internet Review of Books*

"Metaxas's *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* is a modern-day classic that should be on 'best of' lists for the decade. . . ."

—*Relevant*

"[A]n electrifying account of one man's stand against tyranny."

—*Human Events*

"Who is Dietrich Bonhoeffer? He's a guy that you should know. This is a book that you should read."

—Glenn Beck

"If ever there was an "Evil Empire" it was Hitler's Germany. If ever there were a reluctant hero it was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Eric Metaxas has written a splendid biography in a gripping story of a man who took God seriously."

—Haddon Robinson, Harold John Ockenga Professor of Preaching, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (1991–2017)

"As a faithful, reformist Muslim, I'm inspired by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Now more than ever. This is a gloriously humanizing biography of a hero for people of conscience—in all faiths, for all times."

—Prof. Irshad Manji, Muslim feminist author and senior fellow at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism

BONHOEFFER

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PASTOR, MARTYR, PROPHET, SPY

ERIC METAXAS

An Imprint of Thomas Nelson

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from THE KING JAMES VERSION.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2010922204

ISBN: 978-1-59555-138-2
ISBN: 978-1-59555-318-8 (IE)
ISBN: 978-1-59555-246-4 (TP)
ISBN: 978-0-529-12131-8 (CU)
ISBN: 978-1-4002-2464-7 (TP)
ISBN: 978-1-4002-2646-7 (HC)

Printed in the United States of America
20 21 22 23 24 LSC 5 4 3 2 1

Zum Andenken an meinen Großvater

Erich Kraegen (1912 – 1944)

"Denn das ist der Wille des, der mich gesandt hat, daß,
wer den Sohn sieht und glaubt an ihn, habe das ewige Leben;
und ich werde ihn auferwecken am Jüngsten Tage."

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PROLOGUE

27 JULY 1945, LONDON

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

—2 Corinthians 4:8–12

Peace had at last returned to Europe. Her familiar face—once evilly contorted and frightening—was again at rest, noble and fresh. What she had been through would take years to understand. It was as though she had undergone a terribly protracted exorcism, one that had extracted from her the last farthing. But in the very end, protesting with shrieks as they went, the legions of demons were driven out.

The war had been over for two months. The tyrant took his own life in a gray bunker beneath his shattered capital, and the Allies declared victory.

Slowly, slowly, life in Britain turned to the task of restoring itself. Then, as if on cue, summer arrived. It was the first summer of peace in six years. But as if to prove that the whole thing hadn't been a dream or a nightmare,

there were constant fresh reminders of what had happened. And they were as awful as anything that had gone before. Often they were worse. In the early part of this summer, the ghastly news of the death camps emerged along with the unfathomable atrocities that the Nazis had visited upon their victims in the hellish outposts of their short-lived empire.

Rumors of such things circulated throughout the war, but now the reality was confirmed by photographs, newsreel footage, and eyewitness accounts from the soldiers who liberated the camps in April during the last days of the war. The depth of these horrors had not been known or imagined, and it was almost too much for the war-fatigued British public to absorb. Their hatred of the Germans was confirmed and reconfirmed afresh with every nauseating detail. The public reeled at the very evilness of the evil.

At the beginning of the war, it was possible to separate the Nazis from the Germans and recognize that not all Germans were Nazis. As the clash between the two nations wore on, and as more and more English fathers and sons and brothers died, distinguishing the difference became more difficult. Eventually the difference vanished altogether. Realizing he needed to fuel the British war effort, Prime Minister Winston Churchill fused the Germans and the Nazis into a single hated enemy, the better to defeat it swiftly and end the unrelenting nightmare.

When Germans working to defeat Hitler and the Nazis contacted Churchill and the British government, hoping for assistance to defeat their common enemy from the inside—hoping to tell the world that some Germans trapped inside the Reich felt much as they did—they were rebuffed. No one was interested in their overtures. It was too late. They couldn't participate in such evils and, when it was convenient, try to settle for a separate peace. For the purposes of the war effort, Churchill maintained the fiction that there were no good Germans. It would even be said that the only good German—if one needed to use the phrase—was a dead German. That lack of nuance was also part of the hellishness of war.

But now the war was over. And even as the full, unspeakable evil of the Third Reich was coming to light, the other side of things had to be seen too. Part of the restoration to peacetime thinking was the ability to again see beyond the blacks and whites of the war, to again discern nuance and shades, shadows and colors.

And so today in Holy Trinity Church—just off the Brompton Road in

London—a service was taking place that was incomprehensible to some. To many others it was distasteful and disturbing, especially to those who had lost loved ones during the war. The memorial service being held today on British soil and being broadcast on the BBC was for a German who had died three months earlier. The word of his demise so slowly staggered out of the war's fog and rubble that only recently had any of his friends and family learned of it. Most of them still knew nothing about it. But here in London were gathered those few who did.

In the pews were the man's thirty-nine-year-old twin sister, her half-Jewish husband, and their two girls. They had slipped out of Germany before the war, driving at night across the border into Switzerland. The dead man took part in arranging their illegal flight—although that was among the most negligible of his departures from National Socialist orthodoxy—and he helped establish them in London, where they settled.

The man counted among his friends a number of prominent persons, including George Bell, the bishop of Chichester. Bell arranged the service, for he had known and loved the man being honored. The bishop met him years before the war when the two were engaged in ecumenical efforts, trying to warn Europe against the designs of the Nazis, then trying to rescue Jews, and finally trying to bring news of the German resistance to the attention of the British government. Just hours before his execution in Flossenbürg concentration camp, the man directed his last words to this bishop. That Sunday he spoke them to a British officer, who was imprisoned with him, after he performed his last service and preached his last sermon. This officer was liberated and brought those last words and the news of the man's death across Europe with him.

Across the English Channel, across France, and across Germany, in the Charlottenburg district of Berlin, in a three-story house at 43 Marienburger Allee, an elderly couple sat by their radio. In her time the wife had given birth to eight children, four boys and four girls. The second son had been killed in the First War, and for a whole year his young mother had been unable to function. Twenty-seven years later, a second war would take two more boys from her. The husband was the most prominent psychiatrist in Germany. They had both opposed Hitler from the beginning and were proud of their sons and sons-in-law who had been involved in the conspiracy against him. They all knew the dangers. But when the war at last ended, news of their two

sons was slow to arrive in Berlin. A month earlier they had finally heard of the death of their third son, Klaus. But about their youngest son, Dietrich, they had heard nothing. Someone claimed to have seen him alive. Then a neighbor told them that the BBC would the next day broadcast a memorial service in London. It was for Dietrich.

At the appointed hour, the old couple turned on their radio. Soon enough the service was announced for their son. That was how they came to know of his death.

As the couple took in the hard news that the good man who was their son was now dead, so too, many English took in the hard news that the dead man who was a German was good. Thus did the world again begin to reconcile itself to itself.

The man who died was engaged to be married. He was a pastor and a theologian. And he was executed for his role in the plot to assassinate Hitler.

This is his story.

CHAPTER 1

FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD

The rich world of his ancestors set the standards for Dietrich Bonhoeffer's own life. It gave him a certainty of judgment and manner that cannot be acquired in a single generation. He grew up in a family that believed the essence of learning lay not in a formal education but in the deeply rooted obligation to be guardians of a great historical heritage and intellectual tradition.

—Eberhard Bethge

In the winter of 1896, before the aforementioned older couple had met, they were invited to attend an "open evening" at the house of the physicist Oscar Meyer. "There," wrote Karl Bonhoeffer years later, "I met a young, fair, blue-eyed girl whose bearing was so free and natural, and whose expression was so open and confident, that as soon as she entered the room she took me captive. This moment when I first laid eyes upon my future wife remains in my memory with an almost mystical force."

Karl Bonhoeffer had come to Breslau—today Wroclaw in Poland—three years earlier, to work as the assistant to Karl Wernicke, the internationally renowned professor of psychiatry. Life consisted of working at the clinic and socializing with a few friends from Tübingen, the charming university town where he had grown up. But after that memorable winter evening, his life would change dramatically: for one thing, he immediately began ice-skating on the canals in the mornings, hoping to meet—and often meeting—the captivating blue-eyed girl he had first beheld that evening. She was a teacher,

and her name was Paula von Hase. They married on March 5, 1898, three weeks shy of the groom's thirtieth birthday. The bride was twenty-two.

Both of them—doctor and teacher—came from fabulously illustrious backgrounds. Paula Bonhoeffer's parents and family were closely connected to the emperor's court at Potsdam. Her aunt Pauline became a lady-in-waiting to Crown Princess Victoria, wife of Frederick III. Her father, Karl Alfred von Hase, had been a military chaplain, and in 1889 he became chaplain to Kaiser Wilhelm II but resigned after criticizing the kaiser's description of the proletariat as a "pack of dogs."

Paula's grandfather, Karl August von Hase, loomed large in the family and had been a famous theologian in Jena, where he taught for sixty years and where his statue still stands today. He had been called to his post by Goethe himself—then a minister under the Duke of Weimar—and met privately with the eighty-year-old national treasure, who was composing his *Faust, Part Two*. Karl August's textbook on the history of dogma was still used by theological students in the twentieth century. Toward the end of his life, he was awarded a hereditary peerage by the Grand Duke of Weimar and a personal peerage by the king of Württemberg.

The maternal side of Paula's family included artists and musicians. Her mother, Clara von Hase, née Countess Kalkreuth (1851–1903), took piano lessons from Franz Liszt and Clara Schumann, wife of the composer. She bequeathed her love of music and singing to her daughter, and these would play a vital role in the Bonhoeffers' lives. Clara's father, Count Stanislaus Kalkreuth (1820–94), was a painter known for his large Alpine landscapes. Although from a family of military aristocrats and landed gentry, this count married into the Cauer family of sculptors and became director of the Grand Duke's School of Arts in Weimar. His son, Count Leopold Kalkreuth, improved upon his father's success as a painter; his works of poetical realism today hang in museums throughout Germany. The von Hases were also related to the socially and intellectually prominent Yorck von Wartenburgs, and they spent much time in their society. Count Hans Ludwig Yorck von Wartenburg* was a philosopher whose famous correspondence with Wilhelm Dilthey developed a hermeneutical philosophy of history, which influenced Martin Heidegger.

* His grandson Peter Yorck von Wartenburg (1904–44) was a cousin of Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg and played a key role in the July 20, 1944, assassination plot against Hitler.

The lineage of Karl Bonhoeffer was no less impressive. The family traced itself to 1403 in the annals of Nymwegen on the Waal River in the Netherlands, near the German border. In 1513, Caspar van den Boenhoff left the Netherlands to settle in the German city of Schwäbisch Hall. The family was afterward called Bonhöffer, retaining the umlaut until about 1800. *Bonhöffer* means "bean farmer," and the Bonhöffer coat of arms, still prominent on buildings around Schwäbisch Hall,* pictures a lion holding a beanstalk on a blue background. Eberhard Bethge tells us that Dietrich Bonhoeffer sometimes wore a signet ring bearing this family crest.

The Bonhoeffers were among the first families of Schwäbisch Hall for three centuries. The earliest generations were goldsmiths; later generations included doctors, pastors, judges, professors, and lawyers. Through the centuries, seventy-eight council members and three mayors in Schwäbisch Hall were Bonhöffers. Their importance and influence may also be seen in the *Michaelskirche* (St. Michael's Church), where Bonhöffers are marmoreally and otherwise memorialized in baroque and rococo sculptures and epitaphs. In 1797, Karl's grandfather, Sophonias Bonhöffer, was the last of the family born there. Napoleon's invasion in 1806 ended the free city status of Schwäbisch Hall and scattered the family, though it remained a shrine to which subsequent umlautless generations repaired. Karl Bonhoeffer's father took his son to the medieval town many times and schooled his son in the details of their patrician history, down to the "famous black oak staircase in the Bonhoeffer house in the Herrengasse" and the portrait of the "lovely Bonhoeffer woman" that hung in the church, with a copy in the Bonhoeffers' home during Dietrich's childhood. Karl Bonhoeffer did the same for his own sons.

Karl Bonhoeffer's father, Friedrich Ernst Philipp Tobias Bonhoeffer (1828–1907), was a high-ranking judiciary official throughout Württemberg, and he ended his career as president of the Provincial Court in Ulm. When he retired to Tübingen, the king awarded him a personal peerage. *His* father had been "a fine hearty parson, who drove about the district in his own carriage." Karl Bonhoeffer's mother, Julie Bonhoeffer, neé Tafel (1842–1936), came from a Swabian family that played a lead role in the democratic movement of the nineteenth century and was devotedly liberal. Of his mother's father, Karl Bonhoeffer later wrote, "My grandfather and his three brothers

* One may be seen on 7 Klosterstrasse there.

were plainly no average men. Each had his special trait, but common to them all was an idealistic streak, with a fearless readiness to act on their convictions." Two of them were temporarily banished from Württemberg for their democratic leanings, and in a telling coincidence, one of them, Karl's great-uncle Gottlob Tafel, was imprisoned in the Hohenasperg fortress. He was there at the same time as Dietrich's great-grandfather Karl August von Hase, who before embarking on his theological career went through a period of youthful political activity. These two forebears of Dietrich Bonhoeffer came to know each other during their mutual imprisonment. Karl Bonhoeffer's mother lived to be ninety-three, and had a close relationship with her grandson Dietrich, who spoke the eulogy at her funeral in 1936 and treasured her as a living link to the greatness of her generation.

The family trees of Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer are everywhere so laden with figures of accomplishment that one might expect future generations to be burdened by it all. But the welter of wonderfulness that was their heritage seems to have been a boon, one that buoyed them up so that each child seems not only to have stood on the shoulders of giants but also to have danced on them.

And so in 1898 these two extraordinary lines intermingled in the marriage of Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer, who brought eight children into the world within a decade. Their first two sons came into the world in the space of a year: Karl-Friedrich was born on January 13, 1899, and Walter—two months premature—on December 10. Their third son, Klaus, was born in 1901, followed by two daughters, Ursula in 1902 and Christine in 1903. On February 4, 1906, their fourth and youngest son, Dietrich, was born ten minutes before his twin sister, Sabine, and he teased her about this advantage throughout their lives. The twins were baptized by the kaiser's former chaplain, their grandfather Karl Alfred von Hase, who lived a seven-minute walk away. Susanne, the last child, was born in 1909.

All of the Bonhoeffer children were born in Breslau, where Karl Bonhoeffer held the chair in psychiatry and neurology at the university, and was director of the hospital for nervous diseases. On New Year's Eve the year Susanne was born, he wrote in his diary, "Despite having eight children—which seems an enormous number in times like these—we have the impression that there are

not too many of them! The house is big, the children develop normally, we parents are not too old, and so we endeavor not to spoil them, and to make their young years enjoyable."

Their house—at 7 Birkenwäldchen—was near the clinic. It was a gigantic, rambling three-story affair with gabled roofs, numerous chimneys, a screened porch, and a large balcony overlooking the spacious garden where the children played. They dug caves and climbed trees and put up tents. There was much visiting between the Bonhoeffer children and Grandfather Hase, who lived across the river, a branch of the Oder. His wife died in 1903, after which his other daughter, Elisabeth, looked after him. She, too, became an important part of the children's lives.

Despite his busy schedule, Karl Bonhoeffer took much joy in his children. "In winter," he wrote, "we poured water on an old tennis court with an asphalt surface, so that the two oldest children could try skating for the first time. We had a big outbuilding meant to hold a carriage. We didn't have a carriage or horses, but we did use this outbuilding to keep all kinds of animals." There were animals in the house proper as well. One room in the house became a zoo for the children's pets, which included rabbits, guinea pigs, turtledoves, squirrels, lizards, and snakes, and a natural history museum for their collections of birds' eggs and mounted beetles and butterflies. The two eldest girls had another room set up as a dolls' house, and on the first floor the three eldest boys had a workshop, complete with carpenter's bench.

Their mother presided over the well-appointed home; the staff included a governess, a nursemaid, a housemaid, a parlor maid, and a cook. Upstairs was the schoolroom, with desks where Paula taught the children their lessons. It was somewhat shocking when Paula Bonhoeffer chose to take the teacher's examination as a single woman,* but as a married woman, she used what she learned to great effect. She was openly distrustful of the German public schools and their Prussian educational methods. She subscribed to the maxim that Germans had their backs broken twice, once at school and once in the military; she wasn't about to entrust her children to the care of others less sensitive than she during their earliest years. When they were a bit older, she sent them to the local public schools, where they invariably excelled. But until each was seven or eight, she was the sole educator.

* She received her diploma in April 1896 from the Royal Provincial School College in Breslau.

Paula Bonhoeffer had memorized an impressive repertoire of poems, hymns, and folk songs, which she taught her children, who remembered them into their old age. The children enjoyed dressing up and performing plays for each other and for the adults. There was also a family puppet theater, and every year on December 30—her birthday—Paula Bonhoeffer put on a performance of "Little Red Riding Hood." This continued into her old age, when she did it for her grandchildren. One of them, Renate Bethge, said, "She was the soul and spirit of the house."

In 1910 the Bonhoeffers decided to look for a place to spend their holidays and chose a remote idyll in the woods of the Glatz Mountains near the Bohemian border. It was a two-hour train ride south of Breslau. Karl Bonhoeffer described it as being "in a little valley at the foot of Mount Urnitz, right at the edge of the wood, with a meadow, a little brook, an old barn, and a fruit-tree which had a raised seat with a little bench for the children built into its wide branches." The name of this rustic paradise was Wolfesgründ. It was so far off the beaten track that the family never saw another soul, save for a single odd character: a "bigoted forestry official" who wandered through now and again. Bonhoeffer later memorialized him in a fictionalized account as the character *Gelbstiefel* (Yellow Boots).

We get our first glimpses of Dietrich during this time, when he was four and five years old. They come to us from his twin, Sabine:

> My first memories go back to 1910. I see Dietrich in his party frock, stroking with his small hand the blue silk underskirt; later I see him beside our grandfather, who is sitting by the window with our baby sister Susanne on his knee, while the afternoon sun pours in in the golden light. Here the outlines blur, and only one more scene will form in my mind: first games in the garden in 1911, Dietrich with a mass of ash-blond hair around his sunburnt face, hot from romping, driving away the midges and looking for a shady corner, and yet only obeying very unwillingly the nursemaid's call to come in, because the immensely energetic game is not yet finished. Heat and thirst were forgotten in the intensity of his play.

Dietrich was the only child to inherit his mother's fair complexion and flaxen-colored hair. The three elder brothers were dark like their father. Klaus, the youngest of Dietrich's brothers, was five years older than Dietrich. So his three brothers and two older sisters formed a natural quintet, while Dietrich found himself grouped with Sabine and their little sister, Susi, as the "three little ones." In this trio, Dietrich enjoyed his role as the strong and chivalrous protector. "I shall never forget Dietrich's sweetness of character," Sabine later wrote, "which showed when we gathered berries on the hot summer slopes. He would fill my little pitcher with the raspberries he had toiled to collect, so that I would not have less than he, or share his drink with me." When they read together, "he pushed the book in front of me . . . though this made his own reading difficult, and was always kind and helpful if asked for anything."

His chivalrous bent went beyond his sisters. He adored Fräulein Käthe van Horn, their governess from infancy, and "of his own free will he assumed the role of her good spirit who helped and served her, and when her favourite dish was on the table he cried: 'I have had enough,' and forced her to eat his portion too. He told her: 'When I am grown up I shall marry you, then you will always be with us.'"

Sabine also remembered when, at about age six, her brother marveled at the sight of a dragonfly hovering above a stream. Wide-eyed, he whispered to his mother: "Look! There is a creature over the water! But don't be afraid, I will protect you!"

When Dietrich and Sabine were old enough to be schooled, their mother turned the duty over to Fräulein Käthe, though she still presided over the children's religious instruction. Dietrich's earliest recorded theological inquiries occurred when he was about four. He asked his mother: "Does the good God love the chimney sweep too?" and "Does God, too, sit down to lunch?"

Sisters Käthe and Maria van Horn came to the Bonhoeffers six months after the twins were born, and for two decades they formed a vital part of the family's life. Fräulein Käthe was usually in charge of the three little ones. Both van Horn sisters were devout Christians schooled at the community of Herrnhut, which means "the Lord's watch tower," and they had a decided spiritual influence on the Bonhoeffer children. Founded by Count

Zinzendorf in the eighteenth century, Herrnhut continued in the pietist tradition of the Moravian Brethren. As a girl, Paula Bonhoeffer had attended Herrnhut for a time.

Count Zinzendorf advocated the idea of a personal relationship with God, rather than the formal churchgoing Lutheranism of the day. Zinzendorf used the term *living faith*, which he contrasted unfavorably with the prevailing nominalism of dull Protestant orthodoxy. For him, faith was less about an intellectual assent to doctrines than about a personal, transforming encounter with God, so the Herrnhüter emphasized Bible reading and home devotions. His ideas influenced John Wesley, who visited Herrnhut in 1738, the year of his famous conversion.

The place of religion in the Bonhoeffer home was far from pietist, but followed some Herrnhut traditions. For one thing, the Bonhoeffers rarely went to church; for baptisms and funerals, they usually turned to Paula's father or brother. The family was not anticlerical—indeed, the children loved to "play" at baptizing each other—but their Christianity was mostly of the homegrown variety. Daily life was filled with Bible reading and hymn singing, all of it led by Frau Bonhoeffer. Her reverence for the Scriptures was such that she read Bible stories to her children from the actual Bible text and not from a children's retelling. Still, she sometimes used an illustrated Bible, explaining the pictures as she went.*

Paula Bonhoeffer's faith was most evident in the values that she and her husband taught their children. Exhibiting selflessness, expressing generosity, and helping others were central to the family culture. Fräulein Käthe remembered that the three children liked to surprise her by doing nice things for her: "For instance they would lay the table for supper, before I could do it. Whether Dietrich encouraged his sisters to do this I don't know, but I should suspect it." The van Horn sisters described all the children as "high-spirited" but as absolutely never "rude or ill-mannered." Still, their good behavior did not always come naturally. Fräulein Käthe remembered:

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* Bonhoeffer well knew the dangers of pietism, but he drew on the conservative theological tradition of the Herrnhüter throughout his life, always using the Moravian's daily Bible texts for private devotions. Each day there was a verse from the Old Testament and a verse from the New Testament. Published yearly since Zinzendorf's time, they were known to Bonhoeffer as *Losungen* (watch words), although he sometimes just called them "the texts." These *Losungen* figured prominently in his decision to return to Germany in 1939. He continued these devotions to the end of his life and introduced the practice to his fiancée and many others.

> Dietrich was often mischievous and got up to various pranks, not always at the appropriate time. I remember that Dietrich specially liked to do this when the children were supposed to get washed and dressed quickly because we had been invited to go out. So one such day he was dancing round the room, singing and being a thorough nuisance. Suddenly the door opened, his mother descended upon him, boxed his ears right and left, and was gone. Then the nonsense was over. Without shedding a tear, he now did what he ought.

The Move to Berlin, 1912

In 1912, Dietrich's father accepted an appointment to the chair of psychiatry and neurology in Berlin. This put him at the head of his field in Germany, a position he retained until his death in 1948. It's hard to overstate Karl Bonhoeffer's influence. Bethge said that his mere presence in Berlin "turned the city into a bastion against the invasion of Freud's and Jung's psycho-analysis. Not that he had a closed mind to unorthodox theories, or denied on principle the validity of efforts to investigate unexplored areas of the mind." Karl Bonhoeffer never publicly dismissed Freud, Jung, or Adler and their theories, but he held them at arm's length with a measured skepticism borne of his devotion to empirical science. As a medical doctor and scientist, he took a dim view of excessive speculation into the unknown realm of the so-called psyche. Bethge quoted Karl Bonhoeffer's friend, Robert Gaupp, a Heidelberg psychiatrist:

> In intuitive psychology and scrupulous observation Bonhoeffer had no superior. But he came from the school of Wernicke, which was solely concerned with the brain, and permitted no departure from thinking in terms of cerebral pathology. . . . [He] had no urge to advance into the realm of dark, undemonstrable, bold and imaginative interpretation, where so much has to be assumed and so little can be proved. . . . [He] remained within the borders of the empirical world that was accessible to him.

Karl Bonhoeffer was wary of anything beyond what one might observe with one's senses or deduce from those observations. Concerning both psychoanalysis and religion, he might be termed an agnostic.

There was a strong atmosphere in his home against fuzzy thinking, which included a prejudice against certain kinds of religious expressions. But there was no conflict between the father's realm and the mother's. By all accounts, the two complemented each other beautifully. That these two people loved and respected each other was evident to all. Eberhard Bethge described theirs as "a happy relationship in which each partner adroitly supplemented the strength of the other. At their golden wedding anniversary it was said that they had not spent a total of one month apart during their fifty years of marriage, even counting single days."

Karl Bonhoeffer would not have called himself a Christian, but he respected his wife's tutelage of the children in this and lent his tacit approval to it, even if only by participating as an observer. He was not the sort of scientist who ruled out the existence of a realm beyond the physical and seemed to have had a genuine respect for the limits of reason. With the values that his wife taught the children, he was entirely in agreement. Among those values was a serious respect for the feelings and opinions of others, including his wife's. She was the granddaughter, daughter, and sister of men whose lives were given to theology, and he knew she was serious about her faith and had hired governesses who were serious about it. He was present at family religious activities and at the holiday celebrations his wife orchestrated, which invariably included hymns, Bible readings, and prayers. "In all that pertained to our education," Sabine remembered, "our parents stood united as a wall. There was no question of one saying one thing and the other something else." It was an excellent environment for the budding theologian in their midst.

The faith that Paula Bonhoeffer evinced spoke for itself; it lived in actions and was evident in the way that she put others before herself and taught her children to do the same. "There was no place for false piety or any kind of bogus religiosity in our home," Sabine said. "Mama expected us to show great resolution." Mere churchgoing held little charm for her. The concept of cheap grace that Dietrich would later make so famous might have had its origins in his mother; perhaps not the term, but the idea behind it, that faith without works is not faith at all, but a simple lack of obedience to God. During the rise of the Nazis, she respectfully but firmly prodded her son to make the church live out what it claimed to believe by speaking publicly against Hitler and the Nazis, and taking actions against them.

The family seemed to have the best of what we today might think of as

conservative and liberal values, of traditional and progressive ones. Emmi Bonhoeffer, who had known the family long before she married Dietrich's brother, Klaus, recalled, "Without any doubt the mother ruled the house, its spirit and its affairs, but she would never have arranged or organized anything which the father would not have wanted her to do, and which would not have pleased him. According to Kierkegaard, man belongs either to the moral or the artistic type. He did not know this house which formed a harmony of both."

Sabine observed that her father possessed

> great tolerance that left no room for narrow-mindedness and broadened the horizons of our home. He took it for granted that we would try to do what was right and expected much from us, but we could always count on his kindness and the fairness of his judgement. He had a great sense of humour and often helped us to overcome inhibitions with a timely joke. He had too firm a grip upon his own emotions to allow himself ever to speak a word to us which was not wholly suitable. His dislike of clichés did at times make some of us inarticulate and uncertain of ourselves. But it has the effect that as adults we no longer had any taste for catchwords, gossip, commonplaces or loquacity. He, himself, would never have used a catchword or a "trendy" phrase.

Karl Bonhoeffer taught his children to speak only when they had something to say. He did not tolerate sloppiness of expression any more than he tolerated self-pity or selfishness or boastful pride. His children loved and respected him in a way that made them eager to gain his approval; he hardly had to say anything to communicate his feelings on a subject. Often a cocked eyebrow was all it took.

Professor Scheller, a colleague, once said, "Just as he utterly disliked all that is immoderate, exaggerated or undisciplined, so too, in his own person everything was completely controlled." The Bonhoeffer children were taught to be in firm control of their emotions. Emotionalism, like sloppy communication, was thought to be self-indulgent. When his father died, Karl Bonhoeffer wrote, "Of his qualities, I would wish that our children inherit his simplicity and truthfulness. I never heard a cliché from him, he spoke little and was a firm enemy of everything faddish and unnatural."

The family's move from Breslau to Berlin must have felt like a leap. For many, Berlin was the center of the universe. Its university was one of the best in the world, the city was an intellectual and cultural center, and it was the seat of an empire.

Their new house—on the Brückenallee, near the northwest part of the Tiergarten—was less spacious than their Breslau house and situated on smaller grounds. But it had the special distinction of sharing a wall with Bellevue Park, where the royal children played. One of the Bonhoeffers' governesses—probably Fräulein Lenchen—was something of a monarchist, who ran excitedly with her charges to catch a glimpse of the kaiser or crown prince as they drove past. The Bonhoeffers valued humility and simplicity, and would not abide anything like gawking at royals. When Sabine boasted that one of the little princes had come close to her and tried to poke her with a stick, the response was disapproving silence.

In Berlin the older children were no longer taught at home, but went to the school nearby. Breakfasts were on the veranda: rye bread, butter and jam, with hot milk and sometimes cocoa. Classes began at eight. Lunch was small sandwiches—butter and cheese or sausage—wrapped in grease-proof paper, which they carried to school in their satchels. There was no such thing as lunch in Germany in those days, so this meal was called a second breakfast.

In 1913, seven-year-old Dietrich began school outside the home. For the next six years he attended the Friedrich-Werder Gymnasium. Sabine said he was expected to walk to school by himself:

> He feared walking there alone, which involved crossing a long bridge. So he had to be taken at first, and his companion walked on the other side of the street so that he need not be ashamed in front of the other children. He eventually overcame this fear. He was also very frightened of Santa Claus, and showed a certain fear of the water when we twins learned to swim. The first few times he raised a terrific outcry. . . . Later he was an excellent swimmer.

Dietrich did well in school, but was not beyond needing discipline, which his parents didn't hesitate to provide. When he was eight, his father wrote, "Dietrich does his work naturally and tidily. He likes fighting, and does a great deal of it." Once he attacked a schoolmate, whose mother sus-

pected an atmosphere of anti-Semitism at home. Paula Bonhoeffer was horrified at the thought and made sure the woman knew that nothing of the kind was tolerated in her house.

Friedrichsbrunn

With the move to Berlin their Wölfesgrund house was too far away, so they sold it and found a country home in Friedrichsbrunn in the Harz Mountains. It had once been a forester's lodge, and they retained its feeling of simplicity. They didn't install electricity for thirty years. Sabine described traveling there:

> The journey, in two specially reserved compartments under the supervision of Fräulein Horn, was a joy in itself. At Thale two carriages and pairs would already be waiting for us, one for the smallest members of the party and the adults and one for the luggage. Most of the heavy luggage would have been sent on ahead and two housemaids would have travelled on in advance a few days earlier to clean and warm the house.

Sometimes the boys sent the carriage ahead at Thale and walked the remaining four miles through the woods. The caretakers, Herr and Frau Sanderhoff, lived in a cottage on the property. Herr Sanderhoff kept the meadow scythed, and Frau Sanderhoff made sure there were vegetables from the garden and firewood.

The van Horn sisters usually went to Friedrichsbrunn ahead of the Bonhoeffer parents, taking the children with them. There was always great excitement over the parents' arrival. Sabine and Dietrich sometimes rode in the carriage down to the train station at Thale to greet them. "In the meantime . . . we would have lit up the house with little cup candles which we used to place in all the windows," Sabine recalled. "Thus even from afar the house would be aglow to greet the new arrivals."

In the thirtysomething years they visited Friedrichsbrunn, Dietrich had only one nightmarish memory. It happened in 1913, their first summer. One sweltering July day Fräulein Maria decided to take the three little ones and Ursula to a nearby mountain lake. Fräulein Lenchen went along too. Fräulein Maria warned them to cool off before they went in, but Fräulein Lenchen

ignored the warning and quickly swam toward the middle of the lake, where she promptly sank. Sabine remembered:

> Dietrich was the first to notice it and uttered a piercing cry. At one glance Fräulein Horn took in what had happened. I can still see her throw her watch-chain aside and, in her long woollen skirt, swim out with strong, swift strokes, shouting back to us over her shoulder, "Stay on the shore everyone!"
>
> We were seven years old and could not yet swim. We cried and trembled and held on very firmly to little Susie. We could hear our dear Fräulein Horn crying out to the drowning woman, "Keep swimming! Keep swimming!" We saw how difficult it was for Fräulein Horn to save Lenchen and bring her back. At first Lenchen hung onto her neck, but soon became unconscious, and we heard Fräulein Horn exclaiming, "Help me dear God, help me!" as she swam back with Fräulein Lenchen on her back. Fräulein Lenchen, still unconscious, was laid down on her side. Fräulein Horn put her finger down her throat so as to let out the water. Dietrich gently patted her on the back and we all crouched round Fräulein Lenchen. Soon she recovered consciousness and Fräulein Horn said a long prayer of thanksgiving.

The Bonhoeffer children brought friends to Friedrichsbrunn, although throughout Dietrich's childhood, his circle of friends was limited to family. His cousin Hans-Christoph von Hase visited for long stretches, and together they dug trenches and went for hikes in the vast pine woods to search for wild strawberries, onions, and mushrooms.

Dietrich spent much time reading too.

> Under the rowan-trees on our meadow Dietrich loved to sit and read his favourite books, like *Rulamann*,* the story of a man of the stone age, and *Pinocchio* which made him roar with laughter and whose funniest passages he read out to us again and again. He was about ten years old at that time, but he retained his sense of high-spirited comedy. The

* A popular book for boys that purported to relate the prehistoric adventures of a caveman in the Schwabian Alps.

book *Heroes of Everyday*[*] moved him very much. They were stories of young people who by their courage, presence of mind and selflessness saved others' lives, and these stories often ended sadly. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* kept him busy for a long time. Here in Friedrichsbrunn he also read the great classic poets for the first time, and in the evenings we did play-reading with different parts.

Sometimes in the evenings they played ball games with the village children in the meadow. Inside they played guessing games and sang folk songs. They "watched the mists from the meadows waft and rise along the fir-trees," Sabine noted, and they watched dusk fall. When the moon appeared, they sang "Der Mond ist Aufgegangen":

Der Mond ist aufgegangen,
die goldnen Sternlein prangen
am Himmel hell und klar!
Der Wald steht schwarz und schweiget
und aus den Wiesen steiget
der weiße Nebel wunderbar.[**]

The worlds of folklore and religion were so mingled in early twentieth-century German culture that even families who didn't go to church were often deeply Christian. This folk song is typical, beginning as a paean to the beauty of the natural world, but soon turning into a meditation on mankind's need for God and finally into a prayer, asking God to help us "poor and prideful sinners" to see his salvation when we die—and in the meantime here on earth to help us to be "like little children, cheerful and faithful."

German culture was inescapably Christian. This was a result of the legacy of Martin Luther, the Catholic monk who invented Protestantism. Looming over the German culture and nation like both a father and a mother, Luther was to Germany something like what Moses was to Israel; in his lusty, cranky person were the German nation and the Lutheran faith wonderfully and

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* One of the last books he read was *Plutarch's Lives*. He parted with it hours before his execution. (See page 526)

** The moon has climbed into the sky, where golden stars shine bright and clear. The woods are dark and silent; and from the meadows like a dream, the white fog rises in the air.

terribly combined. Luther's influence cannot be overestimated. His translation of the Bible into German was cataclysmic. Like a medieval John Bunyan, Luther in a single blow shattered the edifice of European Catholicism and in the bargain created the modern German language, which in turn effectively created the German people. Christendom was cleft in twain, and out of the earth beside it sprang the *Deutsche Volk*.

The Luther Bible was to the modern German language what the works of Shakespeare and the King James Bible were to the modern English language. Before Luther's Bible, there was no unified German language. It existed only in a hodgepodge of dialects. And Germany as a nation was an idea far in the future, a gleam in Luther's eye. But when Luther translated the Bible into German, he created a single language in a single book that everyone could read and did read. Indeed, there was nothing else *to* read. Soon everyone spoke German the way Luther's translation did. As television has had a homogenizing effect on the accents and dialects of Americans, watering down accents and sanding down sharp twangs, Luther's Bible created a single German tongue. Suddenly millers from München could communicate with bakers from Bremen. Out of this grew a sense of a common heritage and culture.

But Luther brought Germans to a fuller engagement with their faith through singing too. He wrote many hymns—the most well-known being "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"—and introduced the idea of congregational singing. Before Luther, no one outside the choir sang in church.

"Hurrah, There's a War!"

The Bonhoeffers spent the summer of 1914 at Friedrichsbrunn. But on the first day of August, while the three younger children and their governess were in the village enjoying themselves, the world changed. Flitting here and there through the crowd, until it reached them, was the stunning news that Germany had declared war on Russia. Dietrich and Sabine were eight and a half, and she recalled the scene:

> The village was celebrating its local shooting festival. Our governess suddenly dragged us away from the pretty, enticing market stalls and the merry-go-round which was being pulled by a poor white horse, so

> as to bring us back as quickly as possible to our parents in Berlin. Sadly I looked at the now emptying scene of the festivities, where the stall-holders were hastily pulling down their tents. In the late evening we could hear through the window the songs and shouts of the soldiers in their farewell celebrations. Next day, after the adults had hastily done the packing, we found ourselves sitting in the train to Berlin.

When they arrived back home, one of the girls ran into the house and exclaimed, "Hurrah! There's a war!" She was promptly slapped. The Bonhoeffers were not opposed to war, but neither would they celebrate it.

They were in the minority on that point, however, and a general tone of giddiness prevailed in those first days. But on August 4, the first discordant note was sounded: Britain declared war on Germany. Suddenly what lay ahead might not be as wonderful as everyone thought. That day, Karl Bonhoeffer was walking along Unter den Linden with the three eldest boys:

> The elation of the crowds outside the palace and the government buildings which has been mounting during the last days had now given place to a dreary silence, which had an extraordinarily oppressive effect. The severity of the conflict which lay ahead was now evidently manifest even to the masses, and the hope for a speedy end to the war was extinguished for those who had insight, by Britain's entry into the ranks of our enemies.

For the most part, however, the boys were thrilled and remained so for some time, though they were careful in expressing it. War, as a concept, had not yet fallen out of favor across Europe; that would take the next four years. At this early stage of the conflict, the schoolboy's motto "Dulce Et Decorum Est Pro Patria Mori!"* had not yet been spoken with bitterness or irony. To inhabit the world of one's lead soldiers—to put on a uniform and march off to war as the heroes of the past had done—was a romantic thrill.

Dietrich's brothers wouldn't be eligible to enlist until 1917, and no one dreamed the war could last that long. But they could at least get caught up in the whole thing and talk about it knowledgeably, as the grown-ups did.

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* It is a sweet and noble thing to die for one's country.

Dietrich often played at soldiers with his cousin Hans-Christoph, and the next summer at Friedrichsbrunn, he wrote his parents asking them to send newspaper articles about events at the front. Like many boys, he made a map and stuck colored pins into it, marking the Germans' advancement.

The Bonhoeffers were sincerely patriotic, but they never exhibited the nationalistic passion of most other Germans. They maintained a sense of perspective and a coolness, which they taught their children to cultivate. Once, Fräulein Lenchen bought Sabine a small brooch that had on it "Now We'll Thrash Them!" "I was very proud to have it glittering on my white collar," Sabine recalled, "but at midday when I showed myself to my parents with it on my father said, 'Hallo, what have you got there? just give it to me,' and it disappeared into his pocket." Her mother asked where she'd gotten it and promised to find her a prettier brooch to replace it.

In time the realities of war came home. A cousin was killed. Then another. Another cousin lost a leg. Their cousin Lothar had an eye shot out and a leg severely crushed. Another cousin died. Until they were ten, the twins slept in the same bedroom. After their prayers and hymns, they lay in the dark, and their conversation turned to death and eternity. They wondered what it would be like to be dead and to live in eternity; somehow they got the idea that they could touch eternity by focusing exclusively on the word itself, *Ewigkeit*. The key was banishing all other thoughts. "After concentrating intensely for a long time," Sabine said, "our heads often used to swim. We staunchly kept up this self-imposed exercise for a long time."

Food grew scarce too. Even for the relatively well-to-do Bonhoeffers, hunger became an issue. Dietrich distinguished himself as especially resourceful in procuring food. He got very involved in tracking down food supplies, so much so that his father praised him for his skill as a "messenger and food scout." He even saved his own money to buy a hen. He was eager to do his part. Some of that had to do with his sense of competition with his older brothers. They were five, six, and seven years older than he, and brilliant, as were his sisters. But the one area in which he would outstrip them all was in musical ability.

When Dietrich turned eight, he began piano lessons. All the children had music lessons, but none showed such promise. His ability to sight-read was remarkable. He became so accomplished that he seriously thought of taking it up as a career. At ten he was playing Mozart's sonatas. The opportunities

for exposure to great music in Berlin were endless. When he was eleven, he heard Beethoven's Ninth Symphony performed by the Berlin Philharmonic, under the direction of Arthur Nikisch, and he wrote to his grandmother about it. Eventually, he even arranged and composed. He loved the Schubert song "Gute Ruh"* and, when he was about fourteen, arranged it as a trio. That same year he composed a cantata on the sixth verse of Psalm 42, "My soul is cast down within me." Although he eventually chose theology over music, music remained a deep passion throughout his life. It became a vital part of his expression of faith, and he taught his students to appreciate it and make it a central aspect of their expressions of faith.

The Bonhoeffers were a deeply musical family, so most of Dietrich's earliest musical experiences came in the context of the family's musical evenings each Saturday night. His sister Susanne remembered,

> We had supper at half-past seven and then we went into the drawing room. Usually, the boys began with a trio: Karl-Friedrich played the piano, Walter the violin, and Klaus the cello. Then "Hörnchen"** accompanied my mother as she sang. Each one who had had teaching that week had to present something that evening. Sabine learned the violin, and the two big sisters sang duets as well as Lieder by Schubert, Brahms, and Beethoven. Dietrich was far better at the piano than Karl-Friedrich.

According to Sabine, Dietrich was especially sensitive and generous as an accompanist, "always anxious to cover over the mistakes of the other players and to spare them any embarrassment." His future sister-in-law Emmi Delbrück was often there too:

> While we were playing, Dietrich at the piano kept us all in order. I do not remember a moment when he did not know where each of us was. He never just played his own part: from the beginning he heard the whole of it. If the cello took a long time tuning beforehand, or between movements, he sank his head and didn't betray the slightest impatience. He was courteous by nature.

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* "Lullabye of the Stream" from *Die Schöne Müllerin*.

** It was the term they sometimes used for their governess, Maria van Horn.

Dietrich particularly enjoyed accompanying his mother when she sang the Gellert-Beethoven psalms, and every Christmas Eve he accompanied her singing of the Cornelius *Lieder*. The family's Saturday musical evenings were held for many years and continued to include new friends. Their circle always seemed to be expanding. They also gave special performances and concerts for birthdays and other special occasions, culminating in their last performance together in late March 1943, for Karl Bonhoeffer's seventy-fifth birthday, when the much-increased family performed Walcha's cantata "Lobe den Herrn" ("Praise the Lord"), which Dietrich directed and in which he played piano.

Grunewald

In March 1916, while the war raged on, the family moved from the Brückenallee to a house in Berlin's Grunewald district. It was another prestigious neighborhood, where many of Berlin's distinguished professors lived. The Bonhoeffers became close to many of them, and their children spent so much time together that they eventually began marrying each other.

Like most homes in Grunewald, the Bonhoeffer home at 14 Wangenheimstrasse was huge, with a full acre of gardens and grounds. It's quite likely their choice had to do with its large yard; during wartime, with a brood of eight children, including three teenage boys, they never had enough food. So they planted considerable vegetable gardens and even kept chickens and goats.

Their home was filled with artistic treasures and family heirlooms. In the parlor were oil portraits of Bonhoeffer ancestors, side by side with etchings by the eighteenth-century Italian artist Piranesi. Huge landscapes by their great-grandfather, Count Stanislaus von Kalkreuth, were displayed as well. He had designed the imposing sideboard that commanded the dining room. It stood eight feet tall and evoked a Greek temple, with friezes and other carvings, and two pillars supporting a crenellated pediment. Dietrich would somehow scale this heirloom and from its lonely ramparts spy upon the comings and goings in the large dining room far below, whose table could seat twenty, and whose parquet floors were polished daily. In one corner—supported by an intricately carved pedestal that opened to reveal the cruet—was a bust of their illustrious forebear, the theologian Karl August

von Hase. Since he was their mother's grandfather, the pedestal cabinet was called *Grossvater*.

Bonhoeffer's childhood seems something from a turn-of-the-century illustration by the Swedish artist Carl Larsson or from Ingmar Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*, without the undertones of angst and foreboding. The Bonhoeffers were that terribly rare thing: a genuinely happy family, and their ordered life continued along through the weeks and months and years as it always had, with musical evenings every Saturday, and with many birthday and holiday celebrations too. In 1917 Dietrich suffered appendicitis and a subsequent appendectomy, but the interruption was slight and not unwelcome. As always, Paula Bonhoeffer's annual orchestrations of the Christmas holidays were especially beautiful, incorporating Bible reading and hymns in such a way that even those who were not particularly religious felt included. Sabine remembered,

> On the Sundays of Advent we all assembled with her round the long dinner table to sing Christmas carols; Papa joined us too and read from the fairy tales of Andersen. . . . Christmas Eve began with the Christmas story. The whole family sat in a circle, including the maids in their white aprons, all solemn and full of expectation, till our mother began to read. . . . She read the Christmas story with a firm, full voice, and after that she always intoned the hymn, "This is the day that God has made." . . . The lights were now extinguished and we sang Christmas carols in the dark, until our father, who had slipped out unnoticed, had lit the candles at the manger and the tree. Now the bell sounded, and we three small ones were allowed to go first into the Christmas room, to the candles at the tree, and there we stood and sang happily: "The Christmas tree is the loveliest tree." Only then did we look at our Christmas presents.

The War Comes Home

As the war continued, the Bonhoeffers heard of more deaths and injuries among their wide circle. In 1917 their two eldest, Karl-Friedrich and Walter, would be called up. Both were born in 1899; now they would go to war. Though they might easily have done so, their parents didn't pull any strings

to help them avoid serving on the front lines. Germany's greatest need was in the infantry, and there both boys enlisted. In a way their bravery foreshadowed what lay twenty years ahead in the next war. The Bonhoeffers raised their children to do the right thing, so when they behaved selflessly and bravely, it was difficult to argue. The extraordinary words that Karl Bonhoeffer would write to a colleague in 1945 after learning of the deaths of his sons Dietrich and Klaus—as well as the deaths of two sons-in-law—capture the Bonhoeffers' attitude during both wars: "We are sad, but also proud."

Following basic training, the two young Bonhoeffers would be sent to the front. Karl-Friedrich actually took along his physics textbook. Walter had been preparing for this moment since the war broke out, strengthening himself by taking long hikes with extra weights in his backpack. Things were still looking very well for Germany that year. In fact, the Germans were so confident that on March 24, 1918, the kaiser declared a national holiday.

In April 1918 it was Walter's turn to go. As they had always done and would do for their grandchildren's generation twenty-five years hence, they gave Walter a festive send-off dinner. The large family gathered around the large table, gave handmade presents, and recited poems and sang songs composed for the occasion. Dietrich, then twelve, composed an arrangement for "Now, at the last, we say Godspeed on your journey" and, accompanying himself on the piano, sang it to his brother. They took Walter to the station the next morning, and as the train was pulling away, Paula Bonhoeffer ran alongside it, telling her fresh-faced boy: "It's only space that separates us." Two weeks later, in France, he died of a shrapnel wound. Walter's death changed everything.

"I can still remember that bright morning in May," Sabine wrote,

> and the terrible shadow which suddenly blotted it out for us. My father was just in the act of leaving the house to drive to his clinic, and I was on the point of going through the door on my way to school. But when a messenger brought us two telegrams I remained standing in the hall. I saw my father hastily open the envelopes, turn terribly white, go into his study and sink into the chair at his desk where he sat bowed over it with his head resting on both his arms, his face hidden in his hands. . . . A few moments later I saw my father through the half-open door holding onto the banisters as he went up the broad easy stairway which

at other times he mounted so lightly to go to the bedroom where my mother was. There he remained for many hours.

Walter was injured by an exploding shell on April 23. The doctors hadn't thought the wounds serious and wrote the family, assuaging their concerns. But an inflammation developed, and his condition worsened. Three hours before his death, Walter dictated a letter to his parents:

My dears,
Today I had the second operation, and I must admit that it went far less pleasantly than the first because the splinters that were removed were deeper. Afterwards I had to have two camphor injections with an interval between them, but I hope that this is the end of the matter. I am using my technique of thinking of other things so as not to think of the pain. There are more interesting things in the world just now than my wounds. Mount Kemmel and its possible consequences, and today's news of the taking of Ypres, give us great cause for hope. I dare not think about my poor regiment, so severely did it suffer in the last few days. How are things going with the other officer cadets? I think of you with longing, my dears, every minute of the long days and nights.

From so far away,
your Walter.

Later, the family received other letters that Walter had written in the few days before his death, indicating how he had hoped they might visit. "Even today," his father wrote many years later, "I cannot think of this without reproaching myself for not going to him straightaway in spite of previous reassuring telegrams which explicitly stated it was unnecessary." They later learned that Walter's commanding officer was very inexperienced and had foolishly taken all of his soldiers to the front lines together.

In early May a cousin on the general staff escorted Walter's body home. Sabine recalled the spring funeral, and "the hearse with the horses decked out in black and all the wreaths, my mother deathly pale and shrouded in a great black mourning veil . . . my father, my relatives, and all the many silent people dressed in black on the way to the chapel." Dietrich's cousin

Hans-Christoph von Hase remembered "the young boys and girls weeping, weeping. His mother, I had never seen her weep so much."

Walter's death was a turning point for Dietrich. The first hymn at the service was "Jerusalem, du Hochgebaute Stadt."* Dietrich sang loudly and clearly, as his mother always wished the family to do. And she did, too, drawing strength from its words, which spoke of the heart's longing for the heavenly city, where God waited for us and would comfort us and "wipe away every tear." For Dietrich, it had to seem heroic and filled with meaning:

> The patriarchs' and prophets' noble train,
> With all Christ's followers true,
> Who bore the cross and could the worst disdain
> That tyrants dared to do,
> I see them shine forever,
> All-glorious as the sun,
> Midst light that fadeth never,
> Their perfect freedom won.

Dietrich's uncle Hans von Hase preached the sermon. Recalling a Paul Erhardt hymn, he spoke of how this world of pain and sorrow was but a moment when compared with the joyous eternity with God. At the end of the service, Walter's comrades bore the coffin down the aisle as trumpeters played the hymn that Paula Bonhoeffer had chosen: "Was Gott tut, das ist Wohlgetan." Sabine remembered the trumpets playing the familiar cantata and later marveled at the lyrics her mother had chosen:

> What God has done, it is well done.
> His will is always just.
> Whatever He will do to me,
> In Him I'll ever place my trust.

Paula Bonhoeffer took such sentiments seriously. Yet the death of her dear Walter was devastating. During this bitter season, Karl-Friedrich remained in the infantry, and the unspeakable but real possibility that

* "Jerusalem, Thou City Fair and High."

they might lose him too compounded her agony. Then seventeen-year-old Klaus was called up. It was too much. She collapsed. For several weeks, unable to get out of bed, she stayed with close neighbors, the Schönes. Even when she returned home, this extremely capable and strong woman could not resume her normal duties for a year. It was several years before she seemed herself again. Throughout this time, Karl Bonhoeffer was the strength of the family, but it was ten years before he could write his annual new year's diary again.

The earliest recorded words we have from Dietrich Bonhoeffer appeared in a letter he wrote a few months before Walter's death. It was a few days before his—and Sabine's—twelfth birthday. Walter had not yet gone to the front, but was away at military training.

> Dear Grandmama,
> Please come on February 1, so you'll already be here on our birthday. It would really be a lot nicer if you were here. Please decide at once and come on the 1st. . . . Karl-Friedrich is writing to us more often. Recently he wrote that he won the first prize in a race in which all of the junior officers of his company competed. The prize is 5 marks. Walter will return on Sunday. Today we were given seventeen fine flounder from Boltenhagen on the Baltic Sea, which we will eat this evening.

Boltenhagen is a seaside resort on the Baltic Sea. Dietrich, Sabine, and Susanne sometimes went there with the van Horn sisters. Their neighbors, the Schönes, had a holiday home there.

Dietrich was sent there with the van Horn sisters in June 1918, a few weeks after Walter's death. There he could escape the heaviness of Wangenheimstrasse for a little while; he could play and be a boy. Our second letter from him was written to his elder sister Ursula during this time:

> On Sunday, we got up at 7:30. First we ate breakfast. . . . After this we ran to the beach and built our own wonderful sand castle. Next, we made a rampart around the wicker beach chair. Then we worked on the fortress. While we left it alone for 4–5 hours for dinner and tea, it was

> completely washed away by the sea. But we had taken our flag with us. After tea we went back down and dug canals. . . . Then it began to rain, and we watched Mr. Qualmann's cows being milked.

In another letter to his grandmother (postmarked July 3) he chattered excitedly in a similar vein, but even in this childhood world of sand castles and imaginary battles, the outside world of death intruded. He described two seaplanes performing maneuvers until one of them suddenly went into a dive:

> Soon we saw a thick black pillar of smoke rising above the ground, and we knew this meant that the plane had crashed! . . . [S]omebody said that the pilot had completely burned up but the other had jumped out and had sustained only a hand injury. Afterwards he came over and we saw that his entire eyebrows were singed. . . . In the afternoon a few days ago (Sunday), we slept in our sand castle and all got very sunburned. . . . We have to take a nap every afternoon. Two other boys are also here. One is 10 years old and the other 14. A little Jewish boy is also here. . . . Everything was lit up with spotlights again yesterday evening, certainly because of the pilots. . . . Tomorrow, the last day, we also plan to make a garland out of oak leaves for Walter's grave.

In September Dietrich joined his von Hase cousins in Waldau, about forty miles east of Breslau. Uncle Hans, Paula Bonhoeffer's brother, was the superintendent of the Liegnitz church district there and lived in a parsonage. Dietrich's visits formed part of his connection with his mother's side of the family, for whom being a pastor or theologian was as normal as being a scientist was for the Bonhoeffer side. Dietrich spent many vacations with his cousin Hans-Christoph, who was called Hänschen and was a year younger than Dietrich. They remained close into adulthood, and Hans-Christoph would follow in his cousin's footsteps as a Sloane Fellow at Union Theological Seminary in 1933, three years after Dietrich. That September in Waldau the boys took Latin lessons together. But in a letter to his siblings, Dietrich was more excited about other things:

> I don't know if I already wrote you that we found partridge eggs, and that four have already hatched. We had to help two because they couldn't get out. The hen under which we placed them is not showing them how they should eat, and we don't know how to teach them. I now help Hänschen more often when he brings in the animals. I always go first. That means I steer the animals to the hay bales that need to be loaded, and recently I even drove the wagon a good piece around quite a few turns. Yesterday Klärchen and I rode horses. It was very nice. We glean here often and successfully, and so gather quite a lot. Today I want to thresh again and let it go through the separator. . . . Regrettably the fruit harvest is not particularly good. . . . This afternoon we want to go boating on the lake.

His boyish zeal for fun was never far away—not even as an adult when the threat of danger was great—but he always had a noticeably intense and serious side. Walter's death and the increasing possibility that Germany would lose the war brought that out now. It was around this time that he began to think about studying theology. And at the end of the war, as Germany staggered under the weight of a devastated economy, he continued to take the lead in procuring food. At the end of the month he wrote his parents:

> Yesterday we took my gleanings to be ground up. There will even be 10–15 pounds more than I had thought, depending on how fine it will be ground. . . . The weather here is magnificent, with sunshine almost the whole time. In the next few days we will harvest the potatoes. . . . I work every day here with Hänschen and Uncle Hans translating Latin. Will you come to Breslau, this time, dear mama, since Karl-Friedrich is not on active duty?

Germany Loses the War

If 1918 can be seen as the year that Dietrich Bonhoeffer left childhood, it can be seen as the year that Germany did too. Sabine called the era before the war a time "in which a different order prevailed, an order which seemed to us then firmly established enough to last for ever, an order imbued with Christian meaning, in which we could pass a sheltered and secure child-

hood." In 1918 all that changed. The kaiser, who represented the authority of both church and state, and who, as a figurehead, represented Germany and the German way of life, would abdicate. It was devastating.

Things began to unravel in August when the final German offensive failed. After this, things began to fall apart in ways no one could imagine. Many German soldiers grew disaffected and turned against their leaders. Weary, hungry, and increasingly angry at the powers that be who had led them to their miserable state, they began to warm to ideas that had been whispered among them. Communism was still bright and brand-new—the horrors of Stalin and the Gulag Archipelago were decades in the future—and it gave them hope again and someone to blame. Copies of Rosa Luxemburg's *Spartacus Letters** were circulated, further stirring discontent among the soldiers, who thought that if anything could be salvaged from the chaos, perhaps they must take the lead. Hadn't the Russian troops revolted against their commanders? Before long, German soldiers elected their own councils and spoke openly of their mistrust of the old regime and the kaiser.

Finally, in November, the nightmare came true: Germany lost the war. The turmoil that followed was unprecedented. Just a few months earlier they had been on the bright verge of victory. What had happened? Many blamed the Communists for sowing seeds of discontent among the troops at a crucial time. This was where the famous *Dolchstoss* (stab-in-the-back) legend came about. It maintained that the real enemy in the war was not the Allied powers, but those pro-Communist, pro-Bolshevist Germans who had destroyed Germany's chances of victory from within, who had "stabbed it in the back." Their treachery was far worse than any enemies Germany had faced across the battlefields, and they were the ones who must be punished. This *Dolchstoss* idea grew after the war, and was especially beloved by the rising National Socialists and their leader, Hitler, who lived to rail against the Communist traitors who had done this. With great success he fanned the flames of this idea, and increasingly harped on the idea that Bolshevism was really international Jewry, that the Jews and the Communists had destroyed Germany.

The threat of a Communist coup was palpable at the end of 1918. The events in Russia the previous year were fresh in every German's mind. The government leaders must prevent the same horror from overtaking Germany,

* An illegal, pro-Communist newspaper.

at all costs, and firmly believed that by throwing the old kaiser to the wolves, Germany could survive, albeit in another form, as a democratic government. It was a high price to pay, but there was no alternative: the kaiser must abdicate. The people clamored for it, and the Allied powers demanded it.

So in November it fell to the beloved Field Marshal von Hindenburg to do the dirtiest work of all. He must go to Supreme Headquarters and persuade Kaiser Wilhelm that monarchy in Germany had come to an end.

It was a grotesque and painful task, since Hindenburg was a monarchist. But for the sake of the nation, he went to the Belgian city Spa and delivered the epochal ultimatum to his kaiser. When Hindenburg left the conference room after that meeting, a seventeen-year-old orderly from Grunewald was standing in the hallway. Klaus Bonhoeffer never forgot the moment when the stout Hindenburg brushed past him. After the death of Walter, with Karl-Friedrich still in the infantry, it's no wonder the Bonhoeffer parents wanted to find their youngest soldier a position out of harm's way. As a result, he was stationed at Spa, and that day witnessed history. He later described the exiting Hindenburg as being "rigid as a statue both in countenance and bearing."

On November 9 the kaiser saw no alternative and abdicated the throne. In a moment, the Germany of the last fifty years vanished. But the mobs milling around Berlin weren't satisfied. Revolution was in the air. The ultraleft Spartacists, led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, had taken over the kaiser's palace and were on the verge of declaring a Soviet republic. The Social Democrats had a majority in the Reichstag, but any moment it could all vanish. Just outside the window on the Koenigsplatz the angry crowds clamored for change, demanding something, *anything*—and that's precisely what they got. Throwing political caution to the winds and a cheap sop to the crowd below, Philipp Scheidemann* opened the gigantic window, and without any particular authority to do so, he declared a German republic! That was that.

But it was not that simple. This impetuous declaration of the Weimar Republic was as imperfect a beginning of a democratic regime as one could imagine. It was a compromise to which no one had really agreed. Rather than pull together the deep fissures in the German body politic, it papered over them, inviting future troubles. The right-wing monarchists and the military

* Philipp Scheidemann (1865–1939) was a German politician.

pledged to support the new government, but never did. Instead they would distance themselves from it and blame the loss of the war on it, and on all other leftist elements, especially Communists and Jews.

Meanwhile, less than a mile down the street, the Communists, having taken over the kaiser's *Stadtschloss* (palace), were not ready to surrender. They still wanted a full-blown Soviet republic, and two hours after Scheidemann had declared "the German republic" from the Reichstag window, Liebknecht followed suit, throwing open a window in the *Stadtschloss* and declaring a "free Socialist republic"! It was in this childish way, with two windows flung open in two historic buildings, that the great troubles began. The four-month-long civil war, called the German Revolution, now started.

The army eventually restored order by defeating the Communists and murdering Luxemburg and Liebknecht. In January 1919 an election was held, but no one gained a majority and there was no consensus. These forces would keep fighting for years, and Germany would remain divided and confused until 1933, when a wild-eyed vagabond from Austria would end the confusion by outlawing all dissent, and then the real troubles would begin.

But as the spring of 1919 wore on, just as everyone thought things were being restored to something they could live with, the most humiliating and crushing blow of all came. That May, the Allies published the full terms of peace that they demanded and that they had signed in the fabled Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. The Germans were astonished. They had thought the worst was over. Hadn't they done all the Allies had asked? Hadn't they chased the kaiser from his throne? And then hadn't they crushed the Communists? And after they'd dealt with the right and the left, hadn't they set up a decently centrist democratic government that possessed elements of the U.S., English, French, and Swiss governments? What more could be decently expected from them? As it turned out, much more.

The treaty required Germany to give up territory in France, Belgium, and Denmark, as well as all of her Asian and African colonies. It also required her to pay exorbitant reparations in gold, ships, lumber, coal, and livestock. But there were three demands that were particularly unbearable: first, Germany must give up most of Poland, thus cutting off East Prussia from the rest of the nation; second, she must officially accept sole responsibility for the war; and third, she must eviscerate her military. These

demands were individually heinous, but taken together, they were something beyond comprehension.

The outcry from all quarters was great. It was intolerable. It amounted to a death sentence for the nation, and that it would prove to be. But at the moment there was no recourse but to accept it and the deep humiliation that came with it. Scheidemann, the man who had thrown open the Reichstag window and fatuously proclaimed the German republic, now pronounced a curse: "May the hand wither that signs this treaty!" It was signed nonetheless.

A year earlier, when the Germans still expected overall victory in the war and had just defeated Russia, hadn't they forced the Russians to sign a treaty that was almost certainly worse than what they were being forced to sign now? Hadn't they shown less mercy then than they were being shown? The worm had turned, and these tit-for-tat troubles, now being sown like wind, would grow and grow.

The Bonhoeffer family, like all German families, followed the action closely. Living a few miles from the center of Berlin, they could not avoid it. One day a battle between the Communists and government troops broke out a half mile from the Bonhoeffer home, at the Halensee train station. Dietrich, in the tone of a typical thirteen-year-old boy thrilled to be close to "the action," wrote his grandmother:

> It wasn't too dangerous, but we could hear it quite clearly because it happened at night. The whole thing lasted about an hour. Then these fellows were pushed back. When they tried it again around 6 o'clock in the morning, they only got bloody heads. This morning we heard artillery fire. We don't know yet where it came from. At the moment it is thumping again, but it seems to be only in the distance.

But Dietrich had concerns even closer to home. His mother was still reeling from Walter's death. In December 1918, he wrote his grandmother: "Mama is doing much better now. In the morning she still feels very weak, but in the afternoon she feels quite steady again. Sadly, she still eats hardly anything." A month later: "So far mama is feeling pretty good again. . . . For

a while she lived with the Schönes across the street. Since then, she has been doing significantly better."

That year Dietrich finished at the Friedrich-Werder school and enrolled at the exclusive Grunewald Gymnasium. He had already decided he would become a theologian, but he was not ready to announce it. Turning thirteen was an important transition from childhood to adulthood, and his parents acknowledged it by enrolling him and Sabine in dancing lessons. They also let him and Sabine stay up with the adults that New Year's Eve:

> About eleven o'clock the lights were extinguished, we drank hot punch and the candles on the Christmas tree were lit once again. All this was a tradition in our family. Now that we were all sitting together, our mother read the ninetieth psalm: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." The candles grew shorter and the shadows of the tree longer and longer, and while the year was fading out, we sang Paul Gerhardt's New Year's Eve hymn: "Now let us go singing and praying, and stand before our Lord, who has given our life strength until now." When the last stanza had died away, the church bells were already ringing in the new year.

The social world of Grunewald was especially rich for the children, who ranged from Susanne, now eleven years old, to Karl-Friedrich, now twenty-one. No one had married yet, but there was a circle of friends who did everything together. Emmi Delbrück, who later married Klaus, remembered:

> We had our parties and dances where wit and imagination triumphed, and skating on the lakes till it was dark; both the brothers performed waltzes and figures on the ice with a simply entrancing elegance. Then, on summer evenings, we had strolls in the Grunewald, four or five couples of the Dohnanyis, the Delbrücks and the Bonhoeffers. Of course there was occasional gossip and vexation but such things were quickly swept away: there was so much style, such a clear standard of taste, such an intense interest in different fields of knowledge, that this period of our youth now seems to me like a gift which at the same time carried an immense obligation, and probably we all felt that way more or less consciously.

Bonhoeffer Chooses Theology

It wasn't until 1920, when Dietrich turned fourteen, that he was ready to tell anyone he had decided to become a theologian. It took a bold and courageous person to announce such a thing in the Bonhoeffer family. His father might treat it with respect and cordiality, even if he disagreed with it, but his brothers and sisters and their friends would not. They were a formidable group, all highly intelligent, and most of them openly and often mockingly opposed their cocky young brother's ideas. They always teased him and gave him a hard time over many things much less important than his choice of profession. When he was about eleven, he mispronounced the name of a play by Friedrich Schiller to roars of laughter. That he should be reading Schiller at that age was taken for granted.

Emmi Bonhoeffer remembered the atmosphere then:

> To keep a distance in manners and spirit, without being cool, to be interested without curiosity—that was about [Dietrich's] line. . . . He could not stand empty talk. He sensed unfailingly whether the other person meant what he said. All the Bonhoeffers reacted with extreme sensitivity against every mannerism and affectation of thought; I think it was in their nature, and sharpened by their education. They were allergic to even the slightest touch of this, it made them intolerant, even unjust. Whereas we Delbrücks shrank from saying anything banal, the Bonhoeffers shrank from saying anything interesting for fear it might turn out to be not so interesting after all, and the inherent claim might be ironically smiled at. Such an ironical smile from their father may often have hurt the gentle natures, but it did sharpen the strong ones. . . . In the Bonhoeffer family one learnt to think before asking a question or making a remark. It was embarrassing to see their father raise his left eyebrow inquiringly. It was a relief when this was accompanied by a kindly smile, but absolutely devastating when his expression remained serious. But he never really wanted to devastate, and everybody knew it.

Emmi also recalled that once Dietrich announced his choice to study theology, they peppered him with questions:

> We liked to ask him questions that haunted us, e.g. was evil really overcome by good, or did Jesus want us to offer the other cheek to the insolent person too, and hundreds of other problems which drive young people into a deadlock when they face real life. He often countered with another question which took us further than a concise answer might have done, e.g. "Do you think Jesus wanted anarchy? Did he not go into the temple with a whip to throw out the money-changers?" He himself was one who asked questions.

Dietrich's brother Klaus had chosen a career in law and would become the top lawyer at the German airline Lufthansa. In a dispute about Dietrich's choice of theology, Klaus homed in on the problem of the church itself, calling it a "poor, feeble, boring, petty bourgeois institution." "In that case," said Dietrich, "I shall have to reform it!" The statement was mainly meant as a defiant rebuff to his brother's attack, and perhaps even as a joke, since this was not a family in which one made boastful statements. On the other hand, his future work would lean more in that direction than anyone could have guessed.

His brother Karl-Friedrich was the least pleased with Dietrich's decision. Karl-Friedrich had already distinguished himself as a brilliant scientist. He felt Dietrich was turning his back on scientifically verifiable reality and escaping into the fog of metaphysics. In one of their arguments on this subject, Dietrich said, "Dass es einen Gott gibt, dafür lass ich mir den Kopf abschlagen," which means something like, "Even if you were to knock my head off, God would still exist."

Gerhard von Rad, a friend who knew Bonhoeffer from his visits to his grandmother's home in Tübingen, recalled that "it was very rare for a young man of this academic elite to decide in favor of the study of theology. The study of theology, and the profession of theologian, were not highly respected in those circles. In a society whose ranks were still clearly discernible, the university theologians stood rather apart, academically and socially."

Although the Bonhoeffers weren't churchgoers, all their children were confirmed. At fourteen, Dietrich and Sabine were enrolled in Paster Hermann Priebe's confirmation class at the Grunewald church. When he was con-

firmed in March 1921, Paula Bonhoeffer gave Dietrich his brother Walter's Bible. For the rest of his life he used it for daily devotions.

Dietrich's decision to become a theologian was firm, but his parents weren't quite convinced this was the best path for him. He was so talented as a musician, they thought he still might want to turn in that direction. The famed pianist Leonid Kreutzer was teaching at the Berliner Hochschule für Musik, and the Bonhoeffers arranged for Dietrich to play for him and hear his opinion.* Kreutzer's verdict was inconclusive. In any case, later that year Dietrich chose to take Hebrew as his elective in school. That might have been when his choice of theology became irrevocable.

In November 1921, at age fifteen, Bonhoeffer went to the first evangelistic meeting of his life. General Bramwell Booth of the Salvation Army had conducted ministry in Germany before the war, and in 1919, greatly moved by reports of the suffering there, especially the hunger among children, he found a way around the official channels and was able to have milk distributed. He also gave five thousand pounds to relief efforts.

Two years later, Booth came to Berlin to lead a series of evangelistic meetings. Thousands showed up, including many soldiers, broken by the war. Sabine recalled that "Dietrich was eager to take part in it. He was the youngest person there, but he was very interested. He was impressed by the joy he had seen on Booth's face, and he told us of the people carried away by Booth, and of the conversions." A part of him was powerfully attracted to this sort of thing, but he wouldn't see anything like it again for ten years, when he attended the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City.

The turmoil of the early Weimar Republic was never far away, especially in Berlin. When Bonhoeffer was sixteen, it came especially close. On June 25, 1922, he wrote Sabine, "I went to school and arrived after the third period. I just arrived when one heard a peculiar crack in the courtyard. Rathenau had been assassinated—barely 300 meters away from us! What a pack of right-wing Bolshevik scoundrels! . . . People are responding with crazed excitement and rage here in Berlin. They are having fist-fights in the Reichstag."

* Kreutzer was a German Jew later targeted by the Nazis (Alfred Rosenberg in particular) as a "cultural enemy," forcing him to immigrate to America in 1933.

Walther Rathenau, a politically moderate Jew, had been the German foreign minister, and he felt Germany should pay its war debts as stipulated by the Treaty of Versailles while simultaneously trying to renegotiate them. For these views, and for his Jewishness, he was despised by the right wing, who that day dispatched a carful of thugs with machine guns to murder him on his way to his offices in the Wilhelmstrasse, near Bonhoeffer's school. Eleven years later, when Hitler rose to power, these murderers were declared German national heroes. June 24 was made a national day of celebration to commemorate their deed.

Peter Olden, a classmate of Bonhoeffer, recalled that they heard the shots during class: "I still recall my friend Bonhoeffer's passionate indignation, his deep and spontaneous anger. . . . I remember his asking what would become of Germany if its best leaders were killed. I remember it because I was surprised at the time that someone could know so exactly where he stood."

Bonhoeffer had been raised in an elite community where many of his family's friends were Jewish. In his class that morning were several children of prominent Jewish families. One of them was Rathenau's niece.

A few weeks later he wrote his parents about a train ride to Tübingen: "One man actually began to talk about politics as soon as he had entered the railway compartment. He was really very narrow-mindedly right-wing. . . . The only thing he had forgotten was his swastika."