



Resistance and Submission, by Ueli Greminger, retired Pastor at the Church of St. Peter in Zürich

Dietrich Bonhoeffer spent the first year and a half of his imprisonment, from April 5, 1943 to October 8, 1944, in the military section of the Berlin-Tegel prison. The Gestapo then transferred him to a more restricted prison on Prince Albrecht Street in Berlin, this due to files found in connection with his activities in the resistance. In the winter of 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer came to Flossenbürg concentration camp via the camps at Buchenwald and Schönberg. He was executed at Flossenbürg on April 9, 1945.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's letters from prison appeared in "Letters and Papers from Prison," originally *Widerstand und Ergebung*, first published in 1951. Here are some sentences from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's letters, which I think contain a special power:

"I keep on observing that there are so few people who can accommodate many things at the same time: when planes come, they are only afraid, when there is good food, they are only greedy; when a wish fails, they are only desperate; if something succeeds, they see nothing else. They pass by the fullness of life; everything that is objective and subjective dissolves into fragments for them. Christianity, on the other hand, presents us with many different dimensions of life, all at the same time: we harbor God and the entire world within us; we weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice; we fear for our lives, but at the same time we have to have thoughts that are much more important to us than our lives."

"There is hardly a happier feeling than when you can be something for other people. It is not the number of people that counts, it is the intensity of the feeling. After all, human relationships are simply the most important thing in our lives. Even modern high achievers cannot change that, nor can the demigods or the egomaniacs who know nothing about human relationships. God himself lets us serve him as if he were a human being."

"As soon as we are turned in a direction other than that of concern for our own safety, *i.e.* to the task of spreading calm around us, the situation becomes completely different, life is not pushed back into a single dimension, but it remains multidimensional and polyphonic.

What a liberation it is to be able to think and to maintain that multidimensionality in our thoughts. One would have to tear people out of their one-line thinking, so to speak, as a preparation for faith, although in truth it is faith itself that makes life in multidimensionality possible."

On July 20, 1944, a report reaches his cell in Berlin-Tegel that an attempt has been made to assassinate the Führer. However, in the course of the night, all hopes fade away: the Führer survived the attack. For the prisoner, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who has been involved in the preparations for the assassination, this means the end of any hope for turning the tide, the end of any hope of liberation: The day after, on July 21, 1944, he writes:

"Only in this hour do I discover how to believe in the full here-worldliness of life. When one has utterly renounced making anything of oneself, whether one aims to be a saint or a converted sinner or a churchman, just or unjust, sick or well—this is what I call believing in the here and now, into an abundance of tasks, questions, successes and failures, experiences and helplessness, when one throws oneself into God's arms, then one no longer takes one's own suffering seriously, but rather the suffering of God in the world, then one watches with Christ in Gethsemane."

"We cannot be upright without realizing that we must live in this world - as if God did not exist. God allows himself to be pushed out of the world to be crucified. He is powerless and weak in the world; but with that he is with us and helps us. Only a suffering God can help us. If you want to speak of God in a "non-religious sense," then you must speak of him so that the godlessness of the world is not somehow covered up, but rather is revealed so that a surprising light falls on the world. The mature world is more God-less and perhaps thus closer to God than the immature world."

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