

THE POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH

Telling the Truth in Political Campaigns

PRIMING THE PUMP: How do Donald Trump and Joe Biden compare on “The Pinocchio Test”?

INTRODUCTION

1. In Bonhoeffer’s letters from prison he reports several times on his work on “What Does It Mean to Tell the Truth?” (November and December 1943)¹
2. Essay begun under impact of interrogations by Senior Military Prosecutor Manfred Roeder
 - a. Initial focus on Bonhoeffer’s role in Operation 7
 - i. 14 “non-Aryans” traveled to Switzerland under pretext of working for Military Intelligence
 - ii. Currency irregularities
 - iii. Effort to sabotage Reich deportation policies
 - b. Then Roeder sought to demonstrate UK classification a sham
 - i. Engaged in a civilian occupation essential to the war effort
 - ii. As courier for military intelligence, assigned to communicate through foreign church leaders with allied leaders
 - iii. Kept him out of military duty and provided cover for conspiracy activities
 - iv. Roeder also wanted to prove he was helping other pastors avoid active military duty
 - c. Fate sealed after failure of July 20, 1944, assassination attempt and discovery of Zossen files
 - d. Roeder’s shock in scene from *Agent of Grace*
3. Planned fundamental reflection on “Eighth Commandment”
 - a. What does it mean to bear false witness?
 - b. Did not address all the topics he hoped to in this essay
 - c. Last two points not explained
4. Hitler and Nazis were masters of the “big lie”

BONHOEFFER ON TELLING THE TRUTH

1. Contextual
2. Criteria
 - a. One’s intention
 - b. Accurate perception
 - c. Serious consideration of real circumstances
3. Must be learned
4. Zealot for truth
5. Concept of living truth
6. Increased profligacy (reckless extravagance) of public discourse

¹ *Conspiracy and Imprisonment: 1940–1945*, volume 16 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, 601–608.

7. Definition of lying
 - a. Inadequate
 - i. Conscious contradiction between thought and speech
 - ii. Conscious deception of others to their harm
 - b. Bonhoeffer's attempt
 - i. Denial of reality of God revealed to world in Jesus Christ
 - ii. "Negation, denial, and deliberate and willful destruction of reality as it is created by God and exists in God to the extent that it takes place through words and silence"
8. How does my word become true?
 - a. By recognizing who calls me to speak and what authorizes me to speak
 - i. Unconnected word hollow—contains no truth
 - ii. Justification for speaking emerges from office or role
 - iii. Thinking something does not authorize me to say something
 - b. By recognizing the place in which I stand
 - c. By putting the subject into this context
9. Speaking has mission, time, place, limits

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS IN OUR CONTEXT

1. Some candidates incapable of telling the truth fully because they lack an adequate grasp of reality of our situation
2. Lack of involvement or silence of citizens in the political process can be a form of not telling the truth.
3. Beware of "zealots for truth"

DISCUSSION: What other implications of Bonhoeffer's concept of telling the truth do you see for the current presidential campaign?