

# THE POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH

## *Responsibility for Future Generations*

**PRIMING THE PUMP:** When you think about the future the children of St. Andrew face, what fills you with foreboding?

### **INTRODUCTION: “AFTER TEN YEARS”<sup>1</sup>**

1. Written at Christmas 1942, a few months prior to arrest on April 5, 1943
2. Addressed to co-conspirators
  - a. Eberhard Bethge: student, confessing partner, and dear friend
  - b. Hans von Dohnanyi: brother-in-law and mastermind of conspiracy
  - c. Hans Oster: chief of Central Section in Military Intelligence Office
3. Included as Prologue in *Letters and Papers from Prison*
  - a. Bridges gap between final months of freedom and imprisonment
  - b. “New Year’s” reflection, taking stock of events of events and issues

### **EXPOSING THE MASQUERADE OF EVIL**

1. Nazis clothed themselves in “garb of relative historical and social justice”<sup>2</sup>
2. In extreme situation like Nazi Germany may have to stand firm with truthful/responsible deeds rather than words
3. Failed attempts to stand firm
  - a. Reasonable people: reason will fix things
  - b. Fanatical people: attack evil with purity of principle
  - c. People of conscience: torn apart by conflicting ethical factors
  - d. Dutiful people: obey commands of those in authority
  - e. People of freedom: value necessary deed more highly than untarnished conscience and reputation
  - f. Privately virtuous: close eyes to injustices around them
4. Standing firm by engaging in responsible/truthful action
  - a. Ultimate not reason, principles, conscience, duty, freedom, virtue
  - b. Obedient and responsible action toward God and other humans
  - c. Critiques any approach focused too exclusively on consequences, motives, or any one ethical factor
  - d. Consequences, motives, values, principles, facts, purposes, & all relevant factors taken into account in discerning responsible action
  - e. Limited point of view in history: sometimes may have to choose between good and good or evil and evil

---

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Papers from Prison*, volume 8 of Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, 37–52.

<sup>2</sup> *Conspiracy and Imprisonment: 1940–1945*, volume 16 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, 530–31.

## **STUPIDITY AS ENEMY OF THE TRUTH**

1. Stupidity more dangerous enemy of good than malice
2. Futility of trying to persuade stupid person with reason
  - a. Reasons fall on deaf ears
  - b. Facts contradicting prejudices not believed
  - c. Irrefutable facts pushed aside as inconsequential, incidental
  - d. Stupid persons utterly self-satisfied and easily irritated
3. Human defect, not an intellectual
  - a. Allow this to happen to them
  - b. Easily caught up in a strong upsurge of power, political or religious
  - c. Lose inner independence
  - d. Easily swayed by slogans, catchwords, and the like
  - e. Subject to misuse by irresponsible or diabolical leader
4. Internal liberation of human beings to live responsible life only genuine way to overcome stupidity

## **LIVING THE TRUTH WITH AN EYE ON THE COMING GENERATION**

1. Never abandon the future to irresponsible or diabolical opponent
2. Ultimately responsible question: How will coming generation go on living?
3. Younger generations surest sense of whether an action is responsible/truthful, because their future at stake

## **ARE WE STILL OF ANY USE?**

1. Silent witnesses of evil deeds
2. Learned arts of obfuscation and equivocation
3. Worn down by unbearable conflicts
4. Need for simple, uncomplicated, and honest human beings

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR CONTEXT**

1. We have not been reduced to silence in our culture
  - a. Need for responsible/truthful words and deeds
  - b. Not time for church to retreat into relative security of sanctuaries/online worship > failure to live the truth in our context
2. A large segment of country caught up in strong upsurge of political power and have been swayed by slogans, catchwords, and the like (stupidity)
3. Donald Trump's rhetoric often irresponsible or lacking in truthfulness
  - a. Naïve or devious about consequences of rhetoric
  - b. Lack of due consideration for large groups of people
  - c. Lack of attentiveness to full spectrum of ethical factors
4. Joe Biden struggles to express himself at times, but does seem to have genuine concern for future generations

## **DISCUSSION**

1. Who are the voices of wisdom/truthfulness in the public sphere, especially during this pandemic?
2. What is the responsibility of the church for future generations?