

'How can a sinful man live before a holy God?' was the question which drove Martin Luther first into despair, and then to the liberating discovery of the God who is righteous in his forgiving grace. The most famous Lutheran of this century, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was forced by circumstances to ask 'How can a sinful nation live before a holy God?' With this came a still more acutely personal question: 'How do I live in and with this people before God?' Bonhoeffer has often been described as a 'true patriot'. It is in terms of relating to his country in its sin and guilt that we see the full depth of such a description.

This is not just a matter of historical interest, whether of the Reformation or more recent past. 'Patriotism' is in the air again, especially in Britain, and especially since the Falklands conflict. What does it mean to love one's country? Being patriotic, we are often told, means expressing pride in one's country. But supposing we find ground not for pride but for shame, in what one's country has done or is doing? On the normal view, the last thing that patriotism will admit to, is the possibility of guilt incurred by the nation. That is tantamount to betrayal and treason. Bonhoeffer, however, drawing upon his Lutheran inheritance, offers the most explicit and penetrating Christian denial of this worldly assumption, and points us to a 'love of country' of a wholly new quality.

Can we love the guilty?

Can one identify with a country that has been found responsible for acts of injustice and inhumanity? The answer to this cannot be glib. The moral sense will not permit a straightforward 'yes'. The trouble is that as human persons we do not consist solely of consciences, nor does life comprise moral decisions alone. Life involves relationships of *belonging* to others, in circles of family and friends, associates and wider social groupings, including, of course, country. We feel a deep need to belong to such a wider whole; but what happens if the suspicion arises of dishonourable action by the group to which we belong? There is bound to be tension between the instinct of group solidarity, and the uneasy conscience. It is in the need to resolve this tension that patriotism faces its profoundest crisis. Indeed, it is just at this point that 'loyalty to country' comes to mean, for many people, the refusal to admit any guilt attaching to the nation whatsoever. One cannot readily belong to a community smeared with shame - therefore the slightest accusation against the nation must be ruled out of court from the start. Supporting one's country means protesting its innocence. Talking or its guilt is treason. Such 'patriotism' can take varying forms of expression, from aggressive self-justification to a complacent blandness. If accused of misdeeds, the misdeed is bluntly denied; or excused by pressing circumstances; or put alongside the record of other nations' dark deeds in order to be shown

creditable by comparison; or regarded as mere accidents unrelated to the 'real' life of the country. Taken out of context, two lines by Rudyard Kipling point up this attitude:

If England was what England seems
'Ow soon we'd drop 'er. But she ain't!

As C. S. Lewis pointed out, true love never spoke that way. 'It is like loving your children only "if they're good", your wife only while she keeps her looks, your husband only so long as he is famous and successful... A man who really loves his country will love her in her ruin and degradation'.¹

But can love of country actually survive the ruin and degradation, not just of military defeat or economic collapse, but the realization of great and awful guilt incurred by inhumanities committed in its name? Clearly, a love that is mere dotage on the beloved, a sentimentalizing or idealizing possessiveness, will recoil in horror - or would if it could. The difficulty is that loving a country is not like loving a friend, in that a friend can be 'dropped'. But, *pace* Kipling's soldier, we cannot 'drop' our country, even if we wanted to, for we are part of it. We cannot escape our national identity any more than slough off our skin. We cannot detach ourselves from it as we can from another person. We are in and of the country - we *are* our country. The reaction to real or imagined guilt must therefore take place differently: if we are not to belong to a guilty country, the country must never be allowed to appear guilty. Every opportunity must be seized for its self-justification before the eyes of the world. If we cannot detach ourselves from our country - and indeed the instinct for solidarity will be so strong anyway - then we have to detach ourselves from any mention of guilt.

This is the crisis point for patriotism. Everything hinges on whether the urge to solidarity will crush the conscience - which means that the country must now be painted in false colours - or whether the conscience will be allowed to speak the truth to the nation. But if the latter, how can the nation survive its own condemnation? Are not solidarity and the recognition of guilt incompatible? Must not loyalty consist in affirming the national innocence, like a mother or father telling the police that the youngster being questioned 'would never do a thing like that'? Societies are at their most sensitive on this point. The reaction of the right-wing press to the low-key stance of the service in St Paul's Cathedral following the Falklands conflict in 1982, was almost exactly that of Horatio Bottomley, editor of *John Bull*, in 1916 when plans were announced for the National Mission of Repentance and Hope. What need, thundered the mouthpiece of of patriotism, was there of national *repentance* when the nation was at war with evil? Least of all could the men at the front be called sinners - they were 'saints and heroes'. William Temple wrote reasoned letters in reply, but it was Studdert Kennedy, the most famous padre of the war, who had the plainest answer to Bottomley. Addressing troops in France

he exclaimed: 'Saints! Well, eyes right and have a good look at the man next door to you'.²

The peculiarity of the Christian tradition is that it does not see the recognition of guilt and the affirmation of solidarity as incompatible. The Christian understanding of love is of a love that moves towards its object in all its reality. This includes the sinful reality of the one who is loved. It is as grace for sinners that the love of God is revealed in the death of Christ (Romans 5, 6-8). A true love will be prepared to face fully the shame of the beloved and, not minimising in any way the reality of the guilt, to identify with the loved one in order that the guilt might not be born alone. The gospel takes sin seriously - desperately seriously - because it can also announce the remedy for sin, which is the divine forgiveness. The message of the forgiveness of sins both demands and enables guilt to be brought fully into the light of day, recognized, confessed and repented of, that it may be removed. A true love of country will therefore include the readiness to admit its guilt in quite concrete terms and to intercede for the expiation of that guilt. It will be expressed not in a denial of loyalty, but in the deepest identification and solidarity with the country under the thundercloud of judgment upon it, not as an accuser, but as one of the accused oneself. If patriotism means love, this will be patriotism at its deepest.

Guilt and grace: Lutheran Bonhoeffer

If the story of modern Germany, of all the western nations, provides the severest test-case of the recognition of national guilt, it is equally true that the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer - including his own reflections on his experience - offers us the most striking instance of a man who broke through to a new depth of love for his country, precisely by meeting unreservedly the reality of its guilt, and the need for its healing. At the end, this cost him his life. But as part of the coherence of life and thought in Bonhoeffer, it must be recognized that he was *theologically* prepared for this sacrifice from the very start of his career. Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran, and for him this signified not just an ecclesiastical label, but a deep theological commitment.

For Martin Luther, the forgiveness of sins through the cross of Christ was both the liberating breakthrough at the heart of Christian experience, and the basis of all theology. The doctrine of atonement was not just one among other doctrines in the Christian edifice, but that which alone made all true thinking about God possible. For how else could fallen man, his intellect no less than his other faculties warped by self-centredness, understand God except by God's gracious condescension even to the death on the cross? God, said Luther, 'is not to be found except in sufferings and in the cross'.³ On such a view, sin and guilt are taken with desperate seriousness, for they are always viewed *coram Deo*, before God, in God's presence. Equally, no other theology

can so gladly and assuredly announce the victory over sin and its consequences:

When sin is pardoned, and the conscience delivered from the burden and sting of sin, then may a Christian bear all things easily: because he feeleth all things within sweet and comfortable, therefore he doeth and suffereth all things willingly.⁴

The currents of later Protestantism in Germany did not always flow as deeply as this. Theological formulation was capable of becoming as rigid and abstract as the scholasticism which Luther rejected. At the other extreme, faith could become a matter of highly individualistic and self-indulgent pietism. More generally, as the centuries rolled on, Luther's 'Christian freedom' could be interpreted as a vague sanctioning of a complacent, bourgeois existence which felt neither the weight of the law nor the liberation of grace. But by the time Dietrich Bonhoeffer became a theological student a major revival of Luther studies was taking place; and a leader of this revival was Karl Holl of Berlin, whose seminar Bonhoeffer attended in 1925. Bonhoeffer confessed a lifelong debt to Holl for infecting him with an enthusiasm for Luther which drove him to a first-hand study of the reformer's writings. From Holl Bonhoeffer particularly imbibed Luther's radical view of sin as the 'heart turned towards itself', and consequently the inability of man to love God even when most devout. At the same time, the young Bonhoeffer felt that Holl did not adequately stress what he saw as *the* cornerstone of Luther's theology, and the source of faith's assurance: the Christ who is *other* than us and *for us*.

Luther's radicalization of sin and grace runs through Bonhoeffer's theological writings, alongside Barth's emphasis on the hiddenness of God and the sovereignty of his Word. We meet it in his inaugural lecture at Berlin University in 1930, 'Man in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology', where 'man under sin' and 'man under grace' are the twin poles of a true concept of man in relation to God.⁵ We meet it in his biblical expositions of creation, fall and temptation: 'It is not the purpose of the Bible to give information about the origin of evil but to witness to its character as guilt and as the infinite burden of man... As a creature of God I have committed a completely antigodly and evil act, and for that very reason I am guilty - and moreover inexcusably guilty. It will never be possible simply to blame the devil who has led us astray.⁶ To be human means to be exposed to the judgment of God, and no amount of devotion even for God's sake can exempt a person from this judgment. Any tendency simply to pay homage to Bonhoeffer as a hero-martyr is brought up short by his own words:

A suffering for Christ's sake which acknowledges no element of judgment in it is fanaticism... The *one* judgment of God which came upon Christ and will come upon all flesh in the end - the judgment of God on sin. No man can give himself to Christ without

sharing in this judgment of God. For it is that which distinguishes Christ from the world, that he bore the judgment which the world despised and rejected... It is that which distinguishes suffering in the fellowship of Jesus Christ from suffering in the fellowship of any other ethical or political hero. In suffering the Christian recognizes guilt and judgment. What guilt is it over which he recognizes judgment? It is the guilt of all flesh, which the Christian, too, bears until his life's end; but, beyond that, it is at the same time the guilt of the world in Jesus, which falls upon him and allows him to suffer. Thus his righteous suffering in the fellowship of Jesus Christ becomes vicarious suffering for the world.⁷

We meet the same emphasis in the *Christology* lectures, where the incarnate and crucified Christ is seen as sinless precisely through his bearing the likeness of sinful humanity, that is, in being utter grace through identification. Christ entered human sinful existence 'past recognition', but because it was *Christ* who took sinful flesh upon himself, he was without sin:

He was really made sin for us, and crucified as the *peccator pessimus*, the worst sinner. Luther says that he is himself robber, murderer and adulterer as we are, for he bears our sin, and in so doing describes the ultimate foundation of all christological statements. As the one who bears our sin, and no one else, he is sinless, holy, eternal, the Lord, the Son of the Father.⁸

We meet the same theme in *Cost of Discipleship*, with its sharp contrast between 'cheap grace' which justifies sin, and 'costly grace' which justifies the sinner who accepts the forgiveness of sins in fellowship with the suffering Christ.

It is, moreover, a theme met with continually in Bonhoeffer's personal and spiritual life. It was the basis of the practice of brotherly confession which he introduced into his seminary at Finkenwalde. It was, to the end, the mainspring of Bonhoeffer's own faith. In the last surviving prison letter to Eberhard Bethge he writes: 'My past life is brim-full of God's goodness, and my sins are covered by the forgiving love of Christ crucified. I'm most thankful for the people I have met, and I only hope that they never have to grieve about me, but that they, too, will always be certain of, and thankful for, God's mercy and forgiveness.'⁹ On Low Sunday, 1945, Bonhoeffer's last act before being taken away for the final interrogation was to conduct a service for his fellow-prisoners, at their request. The Old Testament text for the day was Isaiah 53.5: 'With his stripes we are healed'.

Bonhoeffer, then, was a Lutheran of the Lutherans. Sin and guilt must be faced but, even more importantly, *can* be faced and overcome through grace. In the light of this, guilt can be acknowledged, and presented for removal. Repentance does not lead to extinction in self-abasement, but to new life.

Corporate guilt: the nation

One of the most significant marks of Bonhoeffer is the way in which he transposed the traditional Lutheran theme of guilt and forgiveness into a key other than that of purely individual salvation. His doctoral thesis, *Sanctorum Communio*, is frequently described as a bold attempt to unite theology and sociology in an understanding of the church as community - and indeed it is. But it also contains some striking observations on non-ecclesiastical community in general, and on family, people and country in particular. Bonhoeffer agrees that a society consists of individuals, but also states that it may be thought of as a 'collective person'. The usual dichotomy between man as a social being and man as an individual, is a dangerous abstraction. Where men regard themselves as belonging together in society, their sociality is part of their individuality no less than their society being the sum of their individual existences. Bonhoeffer therefore demands a theological understanding of human community as under sin and grace, in need of atonement and repentance, no less than the individual. 'The call is to the collective person, and not to the individual', he says, referring to the Israelite concept of the people of God and the prophets' witness to that people. 'It is the people that is to do penance as the people of God. It was the people, and not the individuals, who had sinned. So it was also the people who must be comforted (Isaiah 40.1)'.¹⁰ Then a few lines later comes this passage:

It is not only individual Germans and individual Christians who are guilty; Germany and the church are guilty too. Here the contrition and justification of individuals is of no avail; Germany and the church themselves must repent and be justified. The community which is from God to God, which bears within it an eschatological meaning - this community stands in God's sight, and does not dissolve into the fate of the many. It has been willed and created, and has fallen into guilt; it must seek repentance, it must believe in and experience grace at the limits of time. It is clear that this can happen only 'in' the individual. Only thus can the hearing of the call be concretely comprehended, and yet it is not the individuals, but the collective person who, in the individuals, hears, repents and believes. The centre of action lies in the collective person.¹¹

This passage is remarkable, not least for being written in the Germany of 1927. 'Guilt' was then an explosive word to the mass of Germans still smarting under the terms of the Versailles Treaty, which attributed to Germany sole guilt for the outbreak of the First World War. This clause hurt German sentiment at least as much as the imposition of economic reparations; and the Bonhoeffer family, no nationalists themselves, did not repress their own sense of grievance. To speak of a 'guilty Germany' so directly as Bonhoeffer does

here, albeit in a recondite academic treatise, displays unusual theological objectivity.

Not long after writing this, Bonhoeffer spent his year on postgraduate study in the United States, where on several occasions he addressed student gatherings on contemporary German attitudes and aspirations. Even today, his accounts of the sufferings of German people during and immediately after the war make deeply moving reading: the loss of life, family sorrow (not least his own), poverty, hunger, disease and despair. His own attitudes to the guilt question then emerge:

... Christian people in Germany, who took the course and the end of the war seriously, could not help seeing here a judgment of God upon this fallen world and especially upon our people.

Before the war we lived too far from God; we believed too much in our own power, in our almightiness and righteousness. We attempted to be a strong and good people, we felt too much satisfaction with our scientific, economic and social progress, and we identified this progress with the coming of the kingdom of God. We felt too happy and complacent in this world; our souls were too much at home in this world. Then the great disillusionment came. We saw the impotence and weakness of humanity, we were suddenly awakened from our dream, we recognized our guiltiness before God and we humbled ourselves under the mighty hand of God. When I was speaking of 'guiltiness', I added on purpose: 'guiltiness before God'. Let me tell you frankly that no German and no stranger who knows well the history of the origin of the war - a sentence which we were compelled to sign in the Treaty of Versailles... I personally do not believe, on the other hand, that Germany was the only guiltless country, but as a Christian I see the main guilt of Germany in quite a different light. I see it in Germany's complacency, in her belief in her almightiness, in the lack of humility and faith in God and fear of God. It seems to me that this is the meaning of the war for Germany: we had to recognize the limits of man and by that means we discovered anew God in his glory and almightiness, in his wrath and his grace.¹²

A few years were to pass, and Bonhoeffer could only admit that Germany's actions in the eyes of the world corresponded much more closely with the actuality of guilt before God. But even in this passage we see an open-eyed admission of what is unacceptable in his country. Notice, too, his use of the first person plural. He identifies with what his country and its leaders did while he himself was but a child, no less than with the country in which he is now an adult, participating citizen. If it is objected that many of his

fellow Germans would refuse to be included in his 'we', would on nationalist grounds refuse to identify with his repentant attitude, Bonhoeffer would reply that the Christian repents on behalf of the total community. We may refer back to *Sanctorum Communio* again:

The 'people' is to repent, but it is not a question of the number who repent, and in practice it will never be the whole people, the whole church, but God can so regard it 'as if' the whole people has repented. 'For the sake of ten I will not destroy it' (Genesis 18.32). He can see the whole people in a few individuals, just as he saw and reconciled the whole of mankind in one man. Here the problem of vicarious action arises...¹³

Perceptive interpreters of Bonhoeffer have commented on how his radical prison theology reaches back to some of the christological insights of these early years. But equally significant was the way in which the course of action which put him in prison and led to the gallows, was itself a living out of this youthful concept of the guilty nation, and the need for some to be repentant, confessing ones who are drawn into the way of atonement for the sake of all. They are the ones who see, acknowledge, identify with and confess their people's guilt, and seek its expiation. They, of all people, love their country.

The church as the community of confession

Bonhoeffer was not completely alone in recognizing the call for confession of guilt during the Nazi years. On 27th September 1938, as the Munich crisis appeared to mean imminent European war, the Provisional Leadership of the Confessing Church produced an 'Intercession Liturgy' for use in the churches in the actual event of war. The work of Superintendents Albertz and Böhm, the proposed service was heavily weighted with penitential prayers on behalf of both the church and the nation, and with intercessions on behalf of all to whom war would bring upheaval and suffering. The implication was clear enough, that the involvement of Germany in war was to be interpreted as divine judgment rather than the great breakthrough to national glory:

We confess before you the sins of our nation. Within it your name has often been blasphemed, your Word attacked, your truth suppressed. In public and in secret much injustice has been committed. Parents and masters are despised, lives harmed and destroyed, marriage broken, property stolen, and the honour of one's neighbour impugned. Lord, our God, we lay before you in penitence these sins of ours and these sins of our people. Forgive us and temper justice with mercy.¹⁴

The liturgy was never used. Not only was the war postponed for nearly a year, but the service was condemned by certain

bishops, and by the nationalist and militarist press: treachery, defeatism, a threat to national morale were allegedly its main features (readers may draw what parallels they wish with the anger directed at the St Paul's Falklands service in 1982). Not until after the Second World War was any similar statement of confession to be issued in the name of German Protestantism, and even then it was occasioned by the renewing of relationships with the churches from abroad. In October 1945, a delegation from the infant World Council of Churches met leaders of the German Evangelical Church in Stuttgart, and the following declaration was read to the visitors:

With great pain do we say: through us has endless suffering been brought to many peoples and countries. What we have often borne witness to before our congregations, that we declare in the name of the whole church. True, we have struggled for many years in the name of Jesus Christ against a spirit which found its terrible expression in the national socialist regime of violence, but we accuse ourselves for not witnessing more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously and for not loving more ardently. Now a new beginning is to be made in our churches.¹⁵

The Stuttgart Declaration helped significantly in the process of reconciliation between Germany and the outside world, and not only in the churchly sphere. It also aroused resentment within Germany, among circles for whom national defeat once again signalled the time for self-pity rather than self-assessment. But one can hardly help wondering what form the confession would have taken if Bonhoeffer had survived to take a hand in its drafting. In fact, strong clues are provided in parts of *Ethics* and other writings from his active conspiracy period, for one of Bonhoeffer's services to the resistance was to prepare a confession of guilt to be read from pulpits in the event of a successful *coup*. By comparison with the Stuttgart Declaration, Bonhoeffer's confession is far more specific, blunt and terse:

The church confesses that she has not proclaimed often and clearly enough her message of the one God who has revealed himself for all time in Jesus Christ and who suffers no other gods beside himself. She confesses her timidity, her evasiveness, her dangerous concessions. She has often been untrue to her office of guardianship and to her office of comfort. And through this she has often denied to the outcast and to the despised the compassion which she owes them. *She was silent when she should have cried out because the blood of the innocent was crying aloud to heaven. She has failed to speak the right word in the right way and at the right time.*¹⁶

The church confesses that she has witnessed the lawless application of brutal force, the physical and spiritual suffering of countless innocent people,

oppression, hatred and murder, and that she has not raised her voice on behalf of the victims and has not found ways to hasten to their aid. *She is guilty of the deaths of the weakest and most defenceless brothers of Jesus Christ.*¹⁷

[Emphases mine, both quotations]

In the light of this, we need not doubt that in the aftermath of the war Bonhoeffer would have insisted that the unmentionable fate of the Jews should be made explicit, and the church itself confess its guilty share in responsibility for the holocaust. Bonhoeffer's proposed confession in fact took as its programme the ten commandments, every one of which the church must admit to having violated. No pleas in mitigation could be allowed, no pointing to cases where resistance to evil *had* been offered (and his own actions would have had the highest claim here). Only a church confessing itself to be under judgment could rightfully intercede for a nation in its guilt. To make such confession was exactly the commission of the church:

By her confession of guilt the church does not exempt men from their own confession of guilt, but she calls them in into the fellowship of the confession of guilt. Apostate humanity can endure before Christ only if it has fallen under the sentence of Christ. It is to this judgment that the church summons all those who hear her message.¹⁸

The sharing of guilt

The way of solidarity with his country in its guilt was a course which Bonhoeffer deliberately chose to follow, and from which he had ample opportunity of escaping. The attempt to escape that solidarity did not necessarily entail physical flight from Germany. Bonhoeffer knew well enough that simply to be a pastor and teacher in the Confessing Church could in itself lead to a certain distancing of oneself from one's fellow countrymen. The cause of the one true Word of God could be turned into a means of sheer accusation of the people for their apostasy (the 'radical' critic of his society, church, club or whatever is always known for the way in which he stands just to the edge of his group, and always makes sure that if and when his fellows do adopt a more enlightened stand, he will again set up his stall a little further away: he can never be satisfied). Early in the church struggle, he had warned that any martyrdom of the church in Germany would not be a guiltless martyrdom. The martyrs' own hands would be stained with blood. Bonhoeffer's sensitivity here made his part in the church struggle fraught with almost unendurable tension, and he was made deeply uneasy by Karl Barth's reprimand when he left Germany for London in 1933. Was it an attempt to escape? Maybe. But to Germany he did return two years later. The tension was even greater in 1939, for in almost every respect his second journey to the United States was outwardly entirely legitimate. To avoid military call-up was not only a respite for his conscience, but safeguarded the Confessing Church.

There was much that he could do for the ecumenical movement abroad, and much that he could do for theology in America. But once there, he again discovered that his way lay with Germany, suffering and guilty Germany. The ecumenical door was wide open, but to have gone through it would have meant a privilege he dare not take. Back in Germany, his entry into the conspiracy was an open-eyed venture in responsibility for his country's guilt - which he knew involved him in sharing in guilt in a way for which there was no clear theological or ethical guidance in his church tradition. It was not simply that traditional Lutheranism laid great stress on obeying the powers that be as ordained of God, and allowed the course of tyrannicide only as a remote, hypothetical possibility. The *means* of removing Hitler demanded taking part in the masquerade of evil - serving in the *Abwehr* (Military Intelligence), camouflaging oneself as a Nazi, pretending to serve the country's war effort while scheming to bring it to an end. Bonhoeffer fully realised the ethical cost of the way of solidarity, as he wrote to some of his fellow-conspirators in the winter of 1942-43:

We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds; we have been drenched by many storms; we have learnt the arts of equivocation and pretence; experience has made us suspicious of others and kept us from being truthful and open; intolerable conflicts have worn us down and even made us cynical. Are we still of any use? ... Will our inward power of resistance be strong enough, and our honesty with ourselves remorseless enough, for us to find our way back to simplicity and straightforwardness?¹⁹

He had discovered the paradox that responsible action in such an extreme situation meant not the avoidance of guilt in the interests of one's own purity, but doing that which is required for the sake of others regardless of the guilty contamination one may incur for oneself. One of the most profound themes of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* is that man becomes truly man in conformity with Christ, and because Christ is the bearer of divine judgment upon sin, conformity with Christ begins with the confession of guilt - one's own guilt and the guilt of all people. Because Christ entered into the guilt of others and took it upon himself, truly Christlike action will not flinch from bearing guilt if responsible action leaves no other course open. Personal innocence is a luxury by comparison, which a man may choose only at his peril, before God. 'He sets his own personal innocence above his responsibility for men, and he is blind to the more irredeemable guilt which he incurs precisely in this; he is blind also to the fact that real innocence shows itself precisely in a man's entering into the fellowship of guilt for the sake of other men'.²⁰

In one of the most haunting of his poems written in prison, 'Night Voices in Tegel', Bonhoeffer allows the frightened, sleepless consciences of his fellow-prisoners - and, through them, all his compatriots - to find a voice.²¹ But man's reproach against man is transformed by Bonhoeffer into a prayer,

out of which a new hope arises:

Only before thee, source of all being,
Before thee are we sinners.

Afraid of suffering and poor in deeds,
We have betrayed thee before men.

We saw the lie raise its head,
And we did not honour the truth.

We come before thee as men,
And confessors of our sins.

Lord, after the ferment of these times,
Send us times of assurance.

After so much going astray,
Let us see the day break.

Let there be ways built for us by thy word
As far as eye can see.

Until thou wipe out our guilt,
Keep us in quiet patience.²²

From this it is but a short step to Bonhoeffer's final poem, 'The Death of Moses', which perhaps enables us to guess some of the content of the prayer which he was seen to utter on the very steps of the gallows at Flossenburg:

To punish sin and to forgiveness you are moved,
God, this people I have loved.
That I bore its shame and sacrifices
And saw its salvation - that suffices.²³

Loyalty as martyrdom

Eberhard Bethge has described Bonhoeffer's relationships with his homeland in terms of the twin motifs of *exile* and *martyr*. Bonhoeffer can be seen to be an 'exile' in a physical sense at two stages of his life, during his time in London in 1933-35, and in his short visit to the United States in 1939. But in an inward sense he was also an exile in his commitment to the Confessing Church, and, insofar as it represented protest, as a member of the conspiracy. The exile is one who, finding his homeland intolerable, is constrained to protest and flee for the sake of his identity. But equally, Bonhoeffer felt constrained to identify with his country, and to fuse his sense of protest and exile with the summons to share in the process of its redemption, through martyrdom. Paradoxically, his choice to sink himself in the harrowing particularity of Hitler's Germany, when he could have chosen the straightforward route to ecumenical service in safety, has led to his posthumous status unrivalled in universal, ecumenical significance. 'Only when he proleptically took upon himself the guilt of his nation and confessed it, did the freedom of the Gospel unfold again'.²⁴

Raymond Williams, the Cambridge social and literary historian, has catalogued several possible ways in which persons

may be said to 'belong' to their society.²⁵ The *subject* is one who certainly regards himself as a member of society, but whose place is largely determined for him by authority, which he accepts with varying degrees of acquiescence. The *vagrant* is one for whom society has no place, and in whose drifting existence society has no place either. The *exile* is one repelled by his society and who opts out physically or mentally. The *rebel* is one who protests against the structure of his society as it is, in the name of an alternative which he desires and perhaps actively seeks to bring in. The *member*, finally, is one who is able to participate responsibly in the life and direction of his society. This is certainly an illuminating analysis. But Bonhoeffer reveals its incompleteness; for his own style of citizenship, while connecting with at least some of Williams's categories, does not finally fit into any one of them. As we have seen, he was certainly an exile at some stages of his life. As a conspirator, he was, in Williams's sense, a rebel. Within the exigencies of Nazi Germany he even remained in some senses a member, for he never lost his sense of bourgeois responsibility. Perhaps he even experienced the world of the vagrant, as he joined the wretched riff-raff of prisoners in Tegel. But what of the *martyr*, the one who moves beyond both membership, exile and rebellion, into willing acceptance of his country's shame and who feels the anguish of its guilt in his own soul, accepting it in spite of its unacceptability, and who bears in love the cost in his own death? There is something here which transcends the normal categories of citizenship, and which demands a new and deeper consideration of what 'loyalty to country' means.

'To complete the work of Martin Luther' - thus many German Protestants described their aspirations in the 1930s. Instead of Luther the theologian, it was Luther the cult-figure of German race and genius who was invoked. And of course Luther's protest against Rome had indeed partly been on behalf of 'poor Germans'. Nor was he on occasion mild in his remarks about the Jews, to say the least. What is more, Luther's distinction between the two kingdoms of church and state, gospel and sword, had been hardened by tradition into a separation between spiritual and political responsibility, allowing all too many churchmen to 'leave politics to the politicians' from 1933 onwards. What is noteworthy is that the figure who most decisively rejected the perverted nationalism of his time also went back to Luther, but the Luther of the *theologia crucis*, the Luther who spoke from the depths of guilt and grace. Bonhoeffer did not simply repeat what Luther had said but, in due responsibility, grasped and interpreted Luther's central christological insights for the sake of an authentic, Christian citizenship of his country in its gravest hour. In so doing, he enabled Luther to live again, and brought to birth a new form of patriotism, one of western man's most aged and ageing concepts.

NOTES

1 C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, London, 1960, p.38.

- 2 F. A. Iremonger, *William Temple - Archbishop of Canterbury*, Oxford, 1948, p.210.
- 3 Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis XXI, *Luther's Early Theological Works*, London, 1962, p.291 f.
- 4 Commentary on Galatians, *Martin Luther, Selections From His Writings*, ed. J. Dillenberger, New York, Archer Books, 1961, p.112.
- 5 D. Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, London, 1965, pp.50 ff.
- 6 D. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Temptation*, London, 1966, p.65.
- 7 *ibid.*, p.122.
- 8 D. Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, London, 1971, p.113.
- 9 D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, London, 1971, p.393.
- 10 D. Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, London, 1963, p.83 f.
- 11 *ibid.*
- 12 *No Rusty Swords*, p.79 f.
- 13 *Sanctorum Communio*, p.83 f.
- 14 The Intercession Liturgy, in P. Matheson (ed.), *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, Edinburgh, 1981, p.77 f.
- 15 W. A. Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs*, London, 1973, p.192.
- 16 D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, London, 1971, p.92.
- 17 *ibid.* p.93.
- 18 *ibid.* p.95.
- 19 'After Ten Years', in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p.16 f.
- 20 *Ethics*, p.210.
- 21 *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p.353.
- 22 *ibid.* p.354.
- 23 E. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, London, 1970, p.791.
- 24 E. Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr*, London, 1975, pp.97-116.
- 25 R. Williams, *The Long Revolution*, London, 1961, pp.84-93.

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