


# 'To our earthly view Dietrich is dead': George Bell's Eulogy for Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dan D. Cruickshank\*   
University of Glasgow

*This article considers the eulogy given by George Bell, then bishop of Chichester, at the London remembrance service held in July 1945 for Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bell's eulogy offers a unique form of marking a death. On the one hand he presented a traditional biography of Bonhoeffer, whilst at the same time he depicted Bonhoeffer's life as not over, but as having moved into a stage of glorified martyrdom. The article explores how Bell argued that Bonhoeffer's death offered the potential for life to a post-war Europe, raising issues with van Gennep's understanding of the relationship between the living and a dead person who had had no proper funerary rites. The article thus seeks to explain how Bell marked Bonhoeffer's death by presenting him as a man, a potential assassin and a martyr, in an attempt to secure an eternal earthly legacy for a man Bell believed had offered the world life through his death. The article is followed by an edition of the text of Bell's eulogy in full.*

---

It was a mild summer evening in London when on 27 July 1945 a congregation gathered at Holy Trinity, Kingsway, to mark the death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.<sup>1</sup> Those in the church were joined by those listening to the service as it was broadcast by the BBC, probably via the European Service.<sup>2</sup> According to Bonhoeffer's biographer

\* Theology and Religious Studies, No. 4 The Square, University of Glasgow, G12 8QQ. E-mail: [dan.cruickshank@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:dan.cruickshank@glasgow.ac.uk). This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, grant no. AH/R012717.

<sup>1</sup> Weather data obtained from the Met Office, 'DWR\_1945\_07', online at: [https://digital.nmla.metoffice.gov.uk/io\\_4e6f2851-384e-4933-8a3b-74560f6d9bdc/](https://digital.nmla.metoffice.gov.uk/io_4e6f2851-384e-4933-8a3b-74560f6d9bdc/), accessed 14 September 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Bethge recorded that the service was broadcast on the BBC. However, it was not broadcast on the Home Service and is not listed in their programming for the day: see BBC, 'Programme Index', online at: [https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/schedules/service\\_home\\_service/1945-07-27](https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/schedules/service_home_service/1945-07-27), accessed 20 September 2021. The fact that Bonhoeffer's parents

*Studies in Church History* 59 (2023), 446–470 © The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Ecclesiastical History Society. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.  
doi: 10.1017/stc.2023.19

Eberhard Bethge, 'the Church was packed to the doors with English people and German emigrants, theologians, and laypeople, including Bonhoeffer's twin sister and her family'.<sup>3</sup> The service began with the congregation singing 'For all the saints, who from their labours rest' before Bell offered a 'prayer of supplication and thanksgiving'.<sup>4</sup> A sermon was preached on Matthew 10: 17–42, most probably by either Franz Hildebrandt or Julius Rieger, both former associates of Bonhoeffer in the Confessing Church who had moved to England in the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> After the choir from Bonhoeffer's former London congregation had sung *Mir nach, spricht Christus, unser Held*, Bell rose to deliver a eulogy for his friend.<sup>6</sup>

Bell and Bonhoeffer had first become acquainted in Geneva in August 1932 at the meeting of the working committee of the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches.<sup>7</sup> Although the ecumenical world had first brought these two men together, it was the time which Bonhoeffer spent in London between 1933 and 1935, as the pastor of two German-speaking congregations, which would cement their friendship.<sup>8</sup> The two would work together to ensure the Confessing Church would have a place in the ecumenical movement, most famously at the Life & Work conference at Fanø, Denmark, in 1934.<sup>9</sup> After Bonhoeffer's return to Germany in 1935, the two men kept in contact as much as they could until war broke out in 1939. During the war they

---

seem to have listened to the service in Berlin suggests it was broadcast on the BBC European Service, for which programming information does not survive. Bonhoeffer was, of course, not that well known a figure within Britain at that time and, as Bethge comments, for the BBC to broadcast a memorial service for a German so soon after hostilities with that country had ended was rather unusual, so for these reasons it seems it was not broadcast in Britain: Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, transl. Eric Mosbacher et al., rev. edn (Minneapolis, MN, 2000), 930.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 930–1.

<sup>4</sup> Sabine Leibholz-Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffers: Portrait of a Family* (London, 1971), 188.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. For more information on these two men and their time in London see Amos S. Cresswell and Maxwell G. Tow, *Franz Hildebrandt: Mr Valiant-for-Truth* (Leominster, 2000), 84–6.

<sup>6</sup> Leibholz-Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffers*, 188.

<sup>7</sup> Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 249.

<sup>8</sup> For an account of this time, see *ibid.* 356–72.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 372–92; Andrew Chandler, *George Bell, Bishop of Chichester: Church, State, and Resistance in the Age of Dictatorship* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, 2016), 55–6.

would meet only once more, when Bonhoeffer surprised Bell by travelling to meet him during a trip to Stockholm in 1942. This meeting would lead to months of Bell's attempting to persuade the British Government to support Bonhoeffer's resistance circle in Germany, with no success.<sup>10</sup> As the Third Reich collapsed, Bonhoeffer's friends and family waited to hear his fate after the failure of the 20 July 1944 assassination plot, in which they believed he had been closely involved.<sup>11</sup> News of Bonhoeffer's death was slow to emerge, and in Germany the news only reached his friends and family in June and July, with Bonhoeffer's parents receiving confirmation of his death perhaps days before the memorial service.<sup>12</sup> Bell was in New York in May or June 1945 when he received a telegram, probably from the leading ecumenist Willem Visser't Hooft, informing him that Bonhoeffer had been executed in Flossenbürg in April.<sup>13</sup> On his return to Britain, Bell set about organizing a memorial service for his friend.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For an account of this period, see Andrew Chandler, 'The Patronage of Resistance: George Bell and the "Other Germany" during the Second World War', in idem, ed., *The Church and Humanity: The Life and Work of George Bell, 1883–1958* (Farnham, 2012), 89–107, at 98–102. For an account that puts Bell's actions into the wider context of 'peace feelers', see Rainer A. Blasius, 'Waiting for Action: The Debate on the "Other Germany" in Great Britain and the Reaction of the Foreign Office to German "Peace-Feelers", 1942', in Francis R. Nicosia and Lawrence D. Stokes, eds, *Germans Against Nazism: Nonconformity, Opposition and Resistance in the Third Reich. Essays in Honour of Peter Hoffmann*, rev. edn (New York and Oxford, 2015), 279–304.

<sup>11</sup> The 20 July 1944 plot was a failed attempt to assassinate Hitler through a bomb planted at Wolf's Lair. Although the bomb exploded, it failed to injure Hitler seriously, and the plotters' plan to seize control of Berlin in the aftermath likewise failed. Bonhoeffer had links to those who planned the 20 July plot, but was already in prison before it took final form in the autumn of 1943. For more information on the plot, see Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War* (London, 2008), 762–80. In the draft obituary Bell wrote for *The Times*, he claimed that Bonhoeffer was 'deeply involved in the Hitler plot of July 1944'. However, the obituary that appeared in *The Times* had been edited to say that 'he was deeply involved in the early stages of the plot to destroy Hitler, which failed in July, 1944'. The printed version thus better reflected the fact Bonhoeffer had been imprisoned since 5 April 1943. See, respectively, London, LPL, Bell Papers 42, fol. 87, G. K. A. Bell, 'Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Bishop of Chichester writes'; idem, 'Pastor D. Bonhoeffer', *The Times*, 25 July 1945, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 930.

<sup>13</sup> Leibholz-Bonhoeffer includes in her account a transcript of the letter of condolence she received from Bell upon his return to Chichester; in this he mentions receiving the telegram but does not say from whom. Bethge states that Visser't Hooft informed Bell and Leibholz-Bonhoeffer of Bonhoeffer's death by telegram on 30 May 1945, but Leibholz-Bonhoeffer recounts that it was in fact Julius Rieger who informed her of the news: Leibholz-Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffers*, 186; Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 930.

<sup>14</sup> Leibholz-Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffers*, 187.

The memorial service for Bonhoeffer, and in particular Bell's eulogy at the service, can be seen as a rite of passage. They marked, for those in Britain, the death of Bonhoeffer, and, as this article will explore, Bell's eulogy attempted to define the transition Bonhoeffer had undergone by dying. Bell's eulogy has formed a staple part of Bonhoeffer biographies since Bethge published his landmark account of the life of his friend in 1967.<sup>15</sup> Bethge had in fact first published the memorial service as a small pamphlet, including Bell's eulogy, in 1947.<sup>16</sup> In his biography of Bonhoeffer, Bethge included only a small section of Bell's eulogy, and it is this section, or extracts from it, which is found in the majority of Bonhoeffer biographies that mention the eulogy.<sup>17</sup> For a recent example, Ferdinand Schlingensiefen's biography of Bonhoeffer quotes from Bethge's work when discussing the eulogy.<sup>18</sup> However another independent source for the eulogy also exists. This is found in perhaps the most infamous recent biography of Bonhoeffer, that by Eric Metaxas.<sup>19</sup> Metaxas's source for

<sup>15</sup> Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologe, Christ, Zeitgenosse. Eine Biographie* (Munich, 1967).

<sup>16</sup> G. K. A. Bell, *Bonhoeffer Gedenkheft*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (Berlin, 1947).

<sup>17</sup> Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: Theologe, Christ, Zeitgenosse*, 1041–2. The extract, which was reproduced by Bethge in English, reads: 'His death is a death for Germany – indeed for Europe too. ... his death, like his life, marks a fact of the deepest value in the witness of the Confessional Church. As one of a noble company of martyrs of differing traditions, he represents both the resistance of the believing soul, in the name of God, to the assault of evil, and also the moral and political revolt of the human conscience against injustice and cruelty. He and his fellows are indeed built upon the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets. And it was this passion for justice that brought him, and so many others ... , into such close partnership with other resisters who, though outside the Church, shared the same humanitarian and liberal ideals. ... For him and Klaus ... there is the resurrection from the dead: for Germany redemption and resurrection, if God pleases to lead the nation through men animated by his spirit, holy and humble and brave like him: for the Church, not only in that Germany which he loved, but also the Church Universal, which was greater to him than nations, the hope of a new life.' These excerpts are identical with the text of the eulogy found in the Bell papers (London, LPL, Bell Papers 42, fols 81–3; see also the appendix to this article).

<sup>18</sup> Ferdinand Schlingensiefen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1906–1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance*, transl. Isabel Best (London and New York, 2012), 380–1.

<sup>19</sup> Metaxas mistakenly has the service taking place not at Holy Trinity, Kingsway, but at the now much more famous Holy Trinity, Brompton: Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy. A Righteous Gentile vs. the Third Reich* (Nashville, TN, 2012), 537. His biography has been criticized from many angles. Victoria J. Barnett in her review highlighted Metaxas's 'very shaky grasp of the political, theological, and ecumenical history of the period' and found that 'the book is a polemic, written to make the case that Bonhoeffer was in reality an evangelical Christian'. Clifford Green places the biography in the context

the eulogy is Bonhoeffer's twin sister Sabine Leibholz-Bonhoeffer, specifically her book on the Bonhoeffer family. However, the eulogy presented by Leibholz-Bonhoeffer is completely different to that presented by Bethge. Leibholz-Bonhoeffer included the following excerpt from Bell's eulogy:

He was quite clear in his convictions, and for all that he was so young and unassuming, he saw the truth and he spoke it out with absolute freedom and without fear. When he came to me all unexpectedly in 1942 at Stockholm as the emissary of the Resistance to Hitler, he was, as always, absolutely open and quite untroubled about his own person, his safety. Wherever he went and whoever he spoke with – whether young or old – he was fearless, regardless of himself and, with it all, devoted heart and soul to his parents, his friends, his country as God willed it to be, to his Church and to his Master.<sup>20</sup>

As Leibholz-Bonhoeffer provided neither references nor a bibliography, it is impossible to know the source of this text, or whether,

---

of Metaxas's political views and those of right-wing American Evangelicals in the Obama era. Stephen R. Haynes in 2019 examined Metaxas's use of Bonhoeffer in support for his political causes, and as a justification of why Christians 'must' vote for Donald Trump in 2016. Metaxas's use of Bonhoeffer for his support of Trump increased after the 2020 election. In an interview with *The Atlantic* in February 2021, when asked about his comments in a November 2020 podcast when talking to Donald Trump that he would 'die' in support of Trump's claims that the 2020 presidential election had been the victim of widespread fraud, Metaxas replied, 'When you believe liberty is being threatened; when you believe elections are being threatened; when you believe that any of these things are being threatened—people have died for these things. When you say something like that, what you're saying is: I would, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer ... stand up for what I think is right and true. I am not just going to go with the crowd.' See, respectively, Victoria J. Barnett, 'Review of Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy: A Righteous Gentile vs. the Third Reich*', 1 September 2010, *ACCH Quarterly* 15 (2010) [online journal], at: <<https://contemporarychurchhistory.org/2010/09/review-of-eric-metaxas-bonhoeffer-pastor-martyr-prophet-spy-a-righteous-gentile-vs-the-third-reich/>>, accessed 22 September 2021; Clifford Green, 'Hijacking Bonhoeffer', *Christian Century*, 4 October 2010, online at: <<https://www.christiancentury.org/reviews/2010-09/hijacking-bonhoeffer>>, accessed 22 September 2021; Stephen R. Haynes, 'Readings and Receptions', in Philip G. Ziegler and Michael Mawson, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Oxford, 2019), 472–85, at 478–82; Emma Green, 'Eric Metaxas believes America is creeping toward Nazi Germany', *The Atlantic*, 21 April 2021, online at: <<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/02/eric-metaxas-2020-election-trump/617999/>>, accessed 22 September 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Leibholz-Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffers*, 188–9.

having attended the service in person, she was simply writing from memory.<sup>21</sup>

A third source also exists: the Bell papers include a copy of the eulogy as prepared by Bell. The Bethge extracts from the eulogy appear in this text, whereas the text quoted by Leibholz-Bonhoeffer does not. It seems clear that Leibholz-Bonhoeffer was not using either a copy of Bell's eulogy as written or the published version prepared by Bethge and quoted within his biography. However, Leibholz-Bonhoeffer was present at the service, and although her quotations from the eulogy do not align with the source material we have, her other recollections of the contents do. Apart from the 'quoted' section of text, Leibholz-Bonhoeffer wrote that in the eulogy Bell 'also paid tribute to the memory of our brother Klaus and our brothers-in-law, Rüdiger Schleicher and Hans von Dohnanyi, whose fate had been revealed to us only at a later stage'.<sup>22</sup> All three were indeed mentioned in the eulogy that exists in the Bell Papers, suggesting that there were definitely intersections between the eulogy Leibholz-Bonhoeffer remembered hearing and this written text.<sup>23</sup> It is possible that Leibholz-Bonhoeffer conflated what was said in the sermon and what was said by Bell in the eulogy. As biographers of Bonhoeffer have relied on these earlier biographies, two distinct and to some extent contradictory versions of the eulogy have been passed on. Returning to the archival source material, and the original eulogy as found in Bell's papers, indicates that it is the more widespread tradition, sourced from the Bethge material, that aligns with the eulogy as originally drafted by Bell.

Bell's eulogy has struggled to find a place within studies of Bell himself. In Ronald Jasper's biography of Bell, neither the eulogy nor the memorial service for Bonhoeffer is mentioned.<sup>24</sup> Peter Raina, whilst recognizing that Bonhoeffer's death inspired much of Bell's enthusiasm for reconstruction in post-war Europe, also does not mention either the memorial service or Bell's eulogy, despite the eulogy's being perhaps Bell's clearest exposition of how

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 189.

<sup>23</sup> LPL, Bell Papers 42, fols 78–83, G. K. A. Bell, 'Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Holy Trinity Church, Kingsway: July 27th, 1945', at fol. 81. For an edition of this text, see the appendix to this article.

<sup>24</sup> Ronald C. D. Jasper, *George Bell: Bishop of Chichester* (London, 1967).

Bonhoeffer's death should inspire a post-war Europe.<sup>25</sup> Andrew Chandler quoted a brief section of the eulogy as found in the Bell Papers in his biography of Bell, also pointing the reader to where it could be read in full.<sup>26</sup> Building on Chandler's invitation, this article will offer a closer reading of the eulogy to examine how Bell envisaged the importance of Bonhoeffer's life and death in almost immediate response to the news of his death.

As Bell began his eulogy, there could be no doubt about his views on Bonhoeffer: 'In this church, hallowed by many memories of Christian fellowship in wartime, we gather now in memory of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, our most dear brother and a martyr of the Church.'<sup>27</sup> Straight away Bell was explicitly calling Bonhoeffer 'a martyr of the Church'. This was to be a most unusual eulogy. Lucy Bregman has presented a comprehensive overview of Protestant funeral sermons in the United States of America from the nineteenth century until the present day.<sup>28</sup> Although Bregman's work is the most extensive overview of funeral sermons in the twentieth century, Bell's eulogy does not fit neatly into any of the trends identified by Bregman, who argued that sermons developed from being mainly concerned with convincing mourners to come to Christ in the face of death and the hope of eternal life, to the more modern form of using biography and anecdotes related to the deceased to comfort the bereaved.<sup>29</sup> This suggests either that those trends were predominantly American, or that Bell's eulogy demonstrated unique characteristics.

The eulogy can be understood as consisting of two main sections: in the first, Bell presented a biography of Bonhoeffer, followed by a second in which Bell presented a meditation on the meaning of Bonhoeffer's death to the world he had seemingly left.<sup>30</sup> We should not see these sections as completely distinct: rather the biographical

<sup>25</sup> Peter Raina, *Bishop George Bell, the Greatest Churchman: A Portrait in Letters* (London, 2006), 284–7.

<sup>26</sup> Chandler, *George Bell*, 126–7.

<sup>27</sup> Bell, 'Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer', fol. 78.

<sup>28</sup> Lucy Bregman, *Preaching Death: The Transformation of Christian Funeral Sermons* (Waco, TX, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, especially 17–182.

<sup>30</sup> For a brief overview of the biographical nature of eulogies, as opposed to other forms of funeral oration, and their basis in ancient Greek oratory, see John Allyn Melloch, 'Homily or Eulogy? The Dilemma of Funeral Preaching', in David Day, Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis, eds, *A Reader on Preaching: Making Connections* (London and New York, 2016), 204–7, at 206–7.

material served the claims Bell would make in the second section about the implications of Bonhoeffer's death. Evidence of this is that Bell did not wait until after the biographical section to call Bonhoeffer a martyr; he made the claim in his first sentence. Bregman, surveying mainly American preacher's handbooks from the first half of the twentieth century, noted that they discouraged a focus on biographical information when preaching at the funerals of clergymen.<sup>31</sup> The fact that Bell did focus on Bonhoeffer's biography in his eulogy might further suggest the uniqueness of this eulogy. There is a sense in which the biography of Bonhoeffer served in the eulogy as hagiography. It did so not in the pejorative sense of the word as often employed today, but rather in a more literal sense. Bell, through his biography of Bonhoeffer, would demonstrate not only that Bonhoeffer was a martyr, but also that his whole life had been a path towards martyrdom. Petra Brown places Bell's eulogy as the first in a line of statements and claims within 'the English-speaking world' about Bonhoeffer as a martyr.<sup>32</sup> As Brown underscores, this claim was not made in the decades after his death, but only 'three months after Dietrich Bonhoeffer was killed on charges of conspiracy against the state'.<sup>33</sup> Even more startlingly, it was merely weeks after Bell had discovered that Bonhoeffer was dead.

Bell began the biographical section of the eulogy by stressing that Bonhoeffer had been born 'to a family which claimed not a few eminent divines, judges, and artists in its ranks in previous generations'. This, then, was a family at the apex of German culture, providing Bonhoeffer the opportunity to accomplish great things within that realm; as Bell pointed out, 'Dietrich himself achieved distinction in his own field of theology as a young man'.<sup>34</sup> Within the first two paragraphs, Bell placed the listener on first-name terms with Bonhoeffer. Undoubtedly there would have been many in the congregation at Holy Trinity, Kingsway who would have known Bonhoeffer personally. However, since the BBC was broadcasting the service, they would also be joined by potentially thousands who had never met him. In his obituary for *The Times*, Bell had only referred to

<sup>31</sup> Lucy Bregman, 'Funeral for a Homeless Vagrant? Religious and Social Margins', *Religions* 12 (2021), 1–10, at 2.

<sup>32</sup> Petra Brown, *Bonhoeffer: God's Conspirator in a State of Exception* (Cham, 2019), 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>34</sup> Bell, 'Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer', fol. 78.



Bonhoeffer by his last name or as ‘Pastor Bonhoeffer’.<sup>35</sup> Now, in his eulogy, Bell was suggesting that through his death, those who had not known him in life could truly know who this Dietrich was, and approach him on first-name terms. Bell would return to the idea of Bonhoeffer’s privileged lineage, explaining how Bonhoeffer, like his ancestors, could have claimed a place in the upper echelons of German culture. ‘There was no doubt,’ Bell claimed, ‘humanly speaking, of the high position which would have been justly his in the realm of theological scholarship and teaching had God willed that his qualities should be thus used.’<sup>36</sup> Bell was suggesting here that God had called Bonhoeffer to higher things, beyond the human heights of a permanent academic post and a scholarly reputation. Bonhoeffer also ‘loved life’ and was a ‘man in whose company, because of his charm, his humour, his character and his gifts it was a delight to be’, yet these things were mere background to Bell’s biography.<sup>37</sup> Bonhoeffer had a deep love of life, yet Bell was presenting a biography of a man whose life had found purpose in death.

Against this background and that of Bonhoeffer’s path to human greatness, Bell presented the ascension of Adolf Hitler to the chancellorship of Germany as the great interruption: Bonhoeffer ‘was not quite 27 on January 30th, 1933, when one whom history will surely judge as the source of Germany’s greatest shame and ruin became Chancellor of the Reich. But it was that event which was to determine the course of the rest of Dietrich’s life.’<sup>38</sup> In the structure of the eulogy it is at this point that Bonhoeffer’s life seems to really begin and to take meaning. ‘Young as he was’, Bell claimed, Bonhoeffer ‘immediately and instinctively perceived the significance of the National Socialist revolution.’<sup>39</sup> Nothing in Bell’s previous exposition of Bonhoeffer’s upbringing provided an explanation of Bonhoeffer’s immediate understanding of the ‘significance of the National Socialist revolution’.<sup>40</sup> Bell had so far shown his audience a young man, from a respected and cultured family, who seemed to be finding a place for

<sup>35</sup> G. K. A. Bell, ‘Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Bishop of Chichester writes’, London, LPL, Bell Papers 42, fols 87–9; idem, ‘Pastor D. Bonhoeffer’, *The Times*, 25 July 1945, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Bell, ‘Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer’, fol. 78.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, fols 87–9.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 79.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

himself in the world of theological academia. Now he presented a man who had immediately understood the crisis facing Germany. Bell claimed that this was because Bonhoeffer recognized the importance of National Socialism's 'annihilation of all human rights, and its repudiation of God'.<sup>41</sup> Bonhoeffer 'understood as few others understood that the attack on the Jews was an attack on Christ, as well as an attack on man'.<sup>42</sup> However, and intriguingly, Bell's retrospective presentation of Bonhoeffer's views in 1933 from the point of view of 1945 does not align with Bell's own attitudes in that same period. The question of National Socialism's religious views, and to what extent it was anti-Christian, had exercised some English Christians from the beginning of the regime, but Bell was a later convert to the view he attributed to Bonhoeffer.<sup>43</sup> In fact, Bell initially engaged with the National Socialist regime as a Christian regime that was being led astray by a fringe extreme of pagans.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, for much of the pre-war period Bell's defence of Jews against attacks and discrimination was focused almost exclusively on the plight of 'Non-Aryan Christians', that is Christians whom the National Socialist regime deemed to have Jewish heritage. Bell took the view that Jews would care for Jews, and the concern for non-German Christians should be helping non-Aryan Christians.<sup>45</sup> Bell himself, then, had at the time not 'understood as few others understood that the attack on the Jews was an attack on Christ'.<sup>46</sup> Consciously or not, Bell presented Bonhoeffer as a corrective to Bell's own pre-war understanding; a martyr who understood from the beginning the true nature of the regime in a way that Bell himself only came to understand as the regime developed or perhaps even after it had collapsed.

Bell depicted Bonhoeffer's part in opposing the policies and goals of the National Socialist authorities as part of a much larger struggle. In the context of the Third Reich Bonhoeffer had sought how he

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> See Dan D. Cruickshank, 'The Church of England and The Third Reich: A Case Study in Church-State Relations' (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, forthcoming).

<sup>44</sup> See Cruickshank, 'The Church of England and The Third Reich'; compare also Andrew Chandler, 'The Church of England and Nazi Germany' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1990), 25–31; Daphne Hampson 'The British Response to the German Church Struggle, 1933–1939' (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1973), 23, 30, 47–55.

<sup>45</sup> See Cruickshank, 'The Church of England and The Third Reich'.

<sup>46</sup> Bell, 'Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer', fol. 79.

‘could best serve God and the Church in the fight against Hitler’.<sup>47</sup> The fight against Hitler was not a mere political fight; rather Bonhoeffer sought to comprehend ‘how he could save Germany’s soul from the demons which were assailing it on every side’.<sup>48</sup> Bell thus portrayed the Third Reich not only as an arena of political struggle, but as the latest battlefield in the cosmic struggle between the forces of God and those of Satan. For Bell, Bonhoeffer had clearly positioned himself on the side of God and sought how better to overcome the enemies of God, as personified by Hitler and his regime. However, Bell had to acknowledge that Bonhoeffer had left Germany at the end of 1933 and spent two years in London. How could a man who had recognized so early on the dangers National Socialism posed to Germany have left the country at its hour of need? Bell passed over this period in a sentence, saying that during this time, whilst Bonhoeffer was ‘endearing himself to his two German congregations’, he also ‘saw much of British friends, and helped them at least to begin to see the inwardness of the German Church struggle’.<sup>49</sup> Bell seems here to be smoothing out the trajectory of Bonhoeffer’s life, so that it was all in service of Bonhoeffer’s final witness in death. Bonhoeffer’s sojourn in London did not fit easily into that narrative, but Bell was able to emphasize this period as a time when Bonhoeffer brought the *Kirchenkampf* to international attention. This is not to suggest that Bonhoeffer did not indeed do such work in this period, but rather to highlight that it was not the sole or even primary focus of his ministry in London; he was there as a pastor to two congregations, not as a link between English Christians and the German churches.<sup>50</sup> This latter aspect, however, was the aspect of his life in London that best aligned with Bell’s narrative of a life that led inevitably to martyrdom, and it was the part of Bonhoeffer’s life in London that had most affected Bell himself, and this is probably why it was the aspect Bell emphasized.

On Bonhoeffer’s return to Germany, he began ‘playing an active, militant part in the opposition to Hitler, and in the resistance to the barbarities of his regime’.<sup>51</sup> This activity, Bell noted, continued until

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> For more information on Bonhoeffer’s time in London, see Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 328–34.

<sup>51</sup> Bell, ‘Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer’, fol. 79.

the outbreak of war through Bonhoeffer's principalship of 'an illegal Confessional Church Training College in Pomerania', which was 'interspersed with visits to America and England'.<sup>52</sup> Throughout this period he was also 'giving aid and direction to the pastors within the Confessional Church'.<sup>53</sup> Bell thus placed Bonhoeffer at the heart of the Confessing Church, training its pastors, while also providing it with international links in the English-speaking world. This Bonhoeffer was a man of action, working in practical ways to oppose the National Socialist regime.

Bell was clear that Bonhoeffer 'hated war'. He recalled his 'last memory but one of Dietrich': 'a long talk at Chichester in the summer of 1939, when he was convinced that war was inevitable, on what his own duty should be if called up'.<sup>54</sup> Bell particularly remembered 'the horror with which [Dietrich's] conscience rejected any service under Hitler'. Fortunately, 'he was in fact spared the ordeal of serving in the army; and devoted his whole strength to his work for the Confessional Church, and to aiding the underground political opposition planning the overthrow of the Fuehrer'. Whilst not completely clear about what this involvement had entailed, Bell was aware that Bonhoeffer, during the war, was not solely involved in church opposition, but had involved himself in resistance groups actively working to overthrow Hitler. Bell was more confident about what had been involved in Bonhoeffer's work in the Confessing Church during the war, of how his seminary was dissolved in 1940 and his 'travels through the country, visiting parishes for the Confessional Church'.<sup>55</sup> Then Bonhoeffer 'at the end of 1940 ... was prohibited by the Gestapo from preaching and speaking'.<sup>56</sup> In light of this prohibition, Bell highlighted that Bonhoeffer became 'engaged on his book on Christian ethics, and in preparing memoranda for the brethren's councils'.<sup>57</sup> Bell was also not entirely certain how Bonhoeffer managed to be practically involved both in political and ecclesiastical opposition during the war, merely saying that he gave 'his evenings to political activities'.<sup>58</sup> Bell seems to have been quite astounded at

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., fols 79–80.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

how active Bonhoeffer was and how he managed to fit so much work into the time given him. The uncertainty on Bell's part of what Bonhoeffer's resistance work had entailed should not be seen as obfuscation about what resistance meant, but as genuine lack of knowledge of what it had actually entailed, understandable at this point of time, just months after the collapse of the Third Reich.

Bell's knowledge of Bonhoeffer's work amongst resistance circles was only really clear when it had involved Bell himself. In his eulogy, Bell recalled their last meeting: Bonhoeffer's surprise appearance in Sigtuna, Sweden, in 1942 while Bell was visiting on behalf of the Ministry of Information to help build stronger links with the Swedish churches.<sup>59</sup> Bonhoeffer had travelled to Sweden, Bell emphasized, 'at risk of his life, to give me information of the utmost importance about the movement of the opposition in Germany, to eliminate Hitler and all his chief colleagues, and to set up a new government which should repeal the Nuremberg Laws, undo Hitler's deeds so far as they could be undone, and seek peace with the Allies'.<sup>60</sup> Bell had been impressed by Bonhoeffer and the plans of his resistance circles, and had attempted without success to get the British government to support those circles.<sup>61</sup> Bell did not mention these attempts in the eulogy, perhaps sensitive to revealing such information so soon after the end of the war. However, whether the resistance circles in which Bonhoeffer was involved were as determined as Bell suggested in his eulogy to do away completely with the National Socialist regime, and specifically its anti-Semitism, is debatable.<sup>62</sup> Bell's portrayal of Bonhoeffer and the resistance circles in which he was involved fits into a common theme for Bell during the war, that of the 'other Germany'. Chandler has written of how during the war Bell became a 'patron' of resistance circles in Germany, bringing them to the attention of the British government and in some ways

<sup>59</sup> The Ministry of Information was attempting to help thaw relations between the British and Swedish governments. For an account of Bell's three-week mission to Sweden to help reinvigorate links between the Church of England and the Church of Sweden, see Jasper, *George Bell*, 266–9.

<sup>60</sup> Bell, 'Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer', fol. 80.

<sup>61</sup> For an account of this, see Chandler, 'Patronage of Resistance', 98–102.

<sup>62</sup> Whilst some in the resistance circles linked to the 20 July Plot felt the genocide of the European Jews led them to resistance, others were involved in the genocide, and the plans drawn up for the reconstruction of Germany after the assassination involved anti-Semitic elements: Evans, *Third Reich at War*, 766–7.

that of the public also.<sup>63</sup> In doing so, Bell 'stepped out from the centre of a powerful national consensus and into a difficult and even dangerous fringe'.<sup>64</sup> In all this work he was inspired by the image of 'another Germany': one with citizens who saw German ideals and culture as in conflict with National Socialism, and struggled to rid themselves of their National Socialist rulers. It was this Germany that Bell believed to be the majority, with the National Socialist regime a minority that had forced its rule upon the other.<sup>65</sup> After the war, as Tom Lawson has shown, this view would lead to Bell's opposition to war trials, and to his interventions on behalf of those involved in war crimes and the Holocaust, as he was unable – or unwilling – to conceive that anyone apart from the elite leadership of the National Socialists had been involved in these atrocities.<sup>66</sup> In the eulogy, we see Bell halfway between these positions. Bonhoeffer was presented as part of this 'other Germany', taking concrete action to overthrow National Socialism, part of a wider group of people willing to risk their lives to do so. However, Bell was not yet linking people like Bonhoeffer with figures such as Eberhard von Mackensen, one of the perpetrators of the Ardeatine massacre, on whose behalf Bell would later intercede during von Mackensen's trial for war crimes.<sup>67</sup> There was at this stage still a distinction in Bell's mind between those who had clearly been involved in attempts to overthrow National Socialism, and those who after its downfall would plead unease with the actions they had undertaken. The 'other Germany' of which Bell positioned Bonhoeffer as part in his eulogy was still that which Bell had envisioned during the war.

Although Bonhoeffer was 'deeply committed ... to the plan for elimination, he was not altogether at ease as a Christian about such a solution'.<sup>68</sup> Bell was aware from their meeting in 1942 that the resistance circles in which Bonhoeffer was involved were planning the assassination of Hitler. The eulogy reveals also that at that meeting Bell had learned something of Bonhoeffer's inner life and his

<sup>63</sup> Chandler, 'Patronage of Resistance', 89–107.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 107.

<sup>65</sup> Tom Lawson, 'Bishop Bell and the Trial of German War Criminals: A Moral History', in Andrew Chandler, ed., *The Church and Humanity: The Life and Work of George Bell, 1883–1958* (Farnham and Burlington, VT, 2012), 129–48, at 134.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 135–8.

<sup>68</sup> Bell, 'Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer', fols 80–1.

theological wrestling with the issue of tyrannicide.<sup>69</sup> In his eulogy Bell repeated Bonhoeffer's explanation to him from 1942 of how he could reconcile his Christian ethics with his involvement in an assassination plot. "There must be punishment by God," he said. "We do not want to escape repentance." The elimination itself, he urged, must be understood as an act of repentance. "Oh we have to be punished. Christians do not wish to escape repentance or chaos, if God wills to bring it on us. We must endure this judgement as Christians."<sup>70</sup> Using Bonhoeffer's own words, Bell related Bonhoeffer to the national story of Germany. This was a nation that had sinned before God by allowing Hitler and National Socialism to rise to power, and now the nation was being judged and needed to repent of this sin. For Bonhoeffer, and apparently also for Bell, this repentance started with the killing of Hitler. Bell did not comment on how Germany was to repent now that Hitler was dead by his own hand and the Third Reich had collapsed. This claim of a need for repentance also causes problems for our understanding of Bell's view of the 'other Germany', for why did the 'other Germany' need to repent of the acts of the National Socialist Germany? The simplest explanation would be that all had Germany had, in some way, shared in the guilt of the evil committed by National Socialism. Bell's actions after the war, however, and his interventions on behalf of those who had committed war crimes and been involved in the Holocaust, do not fit with this reading. Again, then, Bell's eulogy for Bonhoeffer seems to show Bell at a liminal stage, somewhere between his wartime thoughts and his post-war thoughts. At this time he envisioned a need for national repentance, even if he was not entirely clear about what that entailed.

The biographical section of Bell's eulogy ended with a brief summary of Bonhoeffer's final years, his arrest and his death. Bell said Bonhoeffer was tried in 'the People's court ... for his share in the events of July 20th, 1944', which was the official reason given at Bonhoeffer's trial.<sup>71</sup> However, this is inaccurate; Bell was understandably still quite confused about the events surrounding Bonhoeffer's death at this point, just over a month after he had learned of it. In fact, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was never tried in the People's Court,

<sup>69</sup> For an overview of Bonhoeffer's theological wrestling with tyrannicide, see Larry L. Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance* (Louisville, KY, 2005), 127–48.

<sup>70</sup> Bell, 'Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer', fol. 81.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

although his brother Klaus was.<sup>72</sup> Bell said in his eulogy that 'through the death of the judge in an air raid the sentence could not be carried out', a reference to the death of the judge president of the court, Roland Freisler, in an American air raid on 3 February 1945.<sup>73</sup> However, Friesler's death had no effect on Bonhoeffer, as he was never brought before the People's Court; instead he was tried by an SS court at Flossenbürg on 8 April 1945, the day before his execution.<sup>74</sup> Where Bell's account again meets the historical narrative is in his presentation of Bonhoeffer's death: 'Dietrich and Klaus were both murdered in Flossenburg Concentration camp only a few days before the Americans came to liberate the prisoners.'<sup>75</sup>

'And now Dietrich is gone.'<sup>76</sup> With these words Bell began his meditation on Bonhoeffer's death. 'He died, with his brother, as a hostage.'<sup>77</sup> This was definitive. Bonhoeffer was dead; he was no longer amongst the living. So far this seemed a standard rite of passage, marking Bonhoeffer's passing from the community of the living to the community of the dead, and having the community of the living recognize this. But Bell quickly troubled this simple understanding: 'Our debt to them, and to all others similarly murdered, is immense.'<sup>78</sup> Now he claimed that the living owed something of their existence to the dead person, but he would go further than this vague claim. 'His death is a death for Germany – indeed for Europe too.'<sup>79</sup> Bell, who had already linked Bonhoeffer's life to the national story of Germany, thus connected his death not only to Germany, but to the wider continent. Bell argued that Bonhoeffer was conscious of his role in the German national story, for 'he made the sacrifice of human prospects, of home, friends, and career because he believed in God's vocation for his country, and refused to follow those false leaders, who were the servants of the devil'.<sup>80</sup> Bonhoeffer, in Bell's view, had freely given up all he could have attained in the world to fight against the powers of evil which had

<sup>72</sup> Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 914.

<sup>73</sup> Bell, 'Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer', fol. 81; see also Nikolaus Wachsmann, *Hitler's Prisons: Legal Terror in Nazi Germany* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2004), 321.

<sup>74</sup> Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 927.

<sup>75</sup> Bell, 'Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer', fol. 81.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, fols 81–2.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 82.



overtaken Germany. Bell also believed that Bonhoeffer saw a 'vocation' for Germany, given by God, to which it was failing to attain. Bonhoeffer in this 'was inspired by his faith in the living God, and by his devotion to truth and honour. In this way Bonhoeffer's death, like his life, marks a fact of the deepest value in the witness of the Confessional Church.'<sup>81</sup> Bell here offered perhaps the first image of Bonhoeffer as the ultimate personification of the Confessing Church, a view that lingers to the present day.

It was now that Bell tried to explain how Bonhoeffer's death served those still living. Firstly, it gave support to the Confessing Church and its opposition to the regime's ecclesiastical policies.<sup>82</sup> Bell then went once again beyond the vague and into the bold. 'As one of a noble company of martyrs of differing traditions, he represents both the resistance of the believing soul, in the name of God, to the assault of evil, and also the moral and political revolt of the human conscience against injustice and cruelty.'<sup>83</sup> Bell's use of the present tense – Bonhoeffer 'represents', rather than 'represented' – seems to have been a conscious choice to emphasize the message of the eulogy. Though dead, he was still active, and still stood as a witness to the will of God against the powers of hell. In his actions, Bell argued, Bonhoeffer 'built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets'.<sup>84</sup> Bonhoeffer's struggle against National Socialism, and his involvement in the plot to assassinate Hitler, had thus represented a biblical Christianity, showing the judgment of God against National Socialist Germany as God had shown through the prophets his judgment on Judah and Israel. 'It was this passion for justice,' which, Bell argued, was the same passion which had fuelled the prophets and apostles, 'that brought him, and so many others in the Confessional Church who were in agreement with him, into such close partnership with other resisters who, though outside the Church, shared the same humanitarian and liberal ideals.'<sup>85</sup> Although others involved in the plot to assassinate Hitler had not been within the fold of the church, Bell believed that Bonhoeffer, and those who likewise joined it from the Confessing Church, had been able to link their sacred cause with those who agreed with the

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

principle of assassinating Hitler, bringing all involved in the political struggle into the wider, and for Bell more important, religious struggle. Bell was sacralizing the history of the resistance movements within the Third Reich, demonstrating how, knowingly or unknowingly, they had been following the will of God.

Bell ended his eulogy with his boldest claims, suggesting that Bonhoeffer's death was part of the power of God to bring about new life. 'Our Lord said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."<sup>86</sup> Bell had initially painted Bonhoeffer as a man who loved life, and yet he had now lost it; Bell had then added to that picture an image of a man at odds with the life of Germany as it existed in his time. Bell was here arguing that this tension could only be resolved by Bonhoeffer's death. Once again, Bell reiterated Bonhoeffer's mortality, for 'to our earthly view Dietrich is dead'.<sup>87</sup> Yet this was not the finality it seemed to be. It was, after all, only in our 'earthly view' that he was dead.<sup>88</sup> 'Deep and unfathomable as our sorrow seems, let us comfort one another with these words. For him and Klaus, and for the countless multitudes of their fellow victims through these terrible years of war, there is resurrection from the dead.'<sup>89</sup> This resurrection was not limited to the human dead, though; there was also the possibility 'for Germany [of] redemption and resurrection'.<sup>90</sup> This possibility was for Bell tied up with the death of Bonhoeffer, for the resurrection of Germany could only happen 'if God pleases to lead the nation through men animated by his [Bonhoeffer's] spirit, holy and humble and brave like him'.<sup>91</sup> As Bell had already intimated, Bonhoeffer's death gave wider hope outside Germany, offering the possibility of 'redemption and resurrection' 'for the church, not only in that Germany which he loved, but also the Church Universal, which was greater to him than nations, the hope of a new life'.<sup>92</sup> If the wider church could be animated by the spirit of Bonhoeffer, it

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., fols 82–3.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., fol. 83.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

could manifest ‘the hope of a new life’ which Bonhoeffer had seen in it.<sup>93</sup> In death, then, Bell saw Bonhoeffer calling Germany, its church, and the church universal to greater and greater things, moving closer and closer to the ‘Living God’ who had so animated him. In his death, then, was life, and the potential for new life throughout the world. By dying in opposition to National Socialism, Bonhoeffer offered those left behind the chance to build a new world that would also stand as the opposite of the ideals of National Socialism.

Bell ended his eulogy by quoting Tertullian, telling those listening in Holy Trinity, Kingsway, and over the wireless that ‘the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church’.<sup>94</sup> Bonhoeffer had imitated his Lord, following his call even unto death, and his blood shed could provide water for new life across the world. This was no typical rite of passage, for the man who had died was one who was giving new life to those still living. The Bonhoeffer Bell presented in his eulogy was a man whose life found true meaning and purpose in death. In death, Bonhoeffer’s life blood could be shared across the world. He was in a very true sense for Bell still living, if not in our ‘earthly view’, then in a heavenly one. Bell’s eulogy had not been entirely in service of Bonhoeffer, to mark his passage from life to death. Instead, Bell had been speaking to the living, highlighting the new life which could be found in Bonhoeffer’s death, calling them to take up the hope of resurrection and new life given by the death of Bonhoeffer.

Van Gennep, in his study of rites of passage, claimed that:

[P]ersons for whom funeral rites are not performed are condemned to a pitiable existence, since they are never able to enter the world of the dead or to become incorporated in the society established there. These are the most dangerous dead. They would like to be reincorporated into the world of the living, and since they cannot be, they behave like hostile strangers toward it.<sup>95</sup>

Bell’s eulogy for Bonhoeffer challenges this notion. No funeral was held for Bonhoeffer, and his remains were cremated immediately after his execution at Flossenbürg.<sup>96</sup> The memorial service in

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, transl. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Oxford and New York, 2010), 160.

<sup>96</sup> Schlingensiefen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 378.

London was the closest thing to a funeral held for Bonhoeffer. Nevertheless, there is no sense in Bell's eulogy of Bonhoeffer's being among the restless dead. He is not presented as a dangerous member of the dead, but rather as one who is dead and in death offers the living more blessings. Where van Gennep's work might help us understand Bell's eulogy is in his consideration of rites of incorporation in funeral practices. Considering 'the meals shared after funerals and at commemoration celebrations', van Gennep wrote that 'their purpose is to reunite all the surviving members of the group with each other, and sometimes also with the deceased in the same way that a chain which has been broken by the disappearance of one of its links must be rejoined'.<sup>97</sup> Bell used his eulogy to enact such a rite of incorporation. But, to use van Gennep's metaphor, instead of merely reforming the chain after the loss of one link, Bell was attempting to show those still living that in reality the link had not been lost at all. Bonhoeffer was dead in an earthly sense, and yet Bell stressed in his eulogy time and time again that in that death was life. In death, Bonhoeffer's life had found its fulfilment, and in losing his life in our limited understanding of life, he had truly gained life. Consequently his life now took on a meaning far more universal than it had when he had been alive only in the earthly realm.

The work of Douglas J. Davies may also help us to understand Bell's eulogy, specifically his thesis of 'words against death'. Davies sees language as the vital part of death rites as 'it is precisely because language is the very medium through which human beings obtain their sense of self-consciousness that it can serve so well as the basis of reaction to the awareness of death'.<sup>98</sup> Davies claims that 'death rites are a means of encouraging a commitment to life despite the fact of death'.<sup>99</sup> In this process, he sees a unique place for 'verbal rites to express human triumph over death'.<sup>100</sup> Thus these verbal rites become 'words against death'.<sup>101</sup> Such words are reliant on 'the content of the words which does the work against death. It is their rhetoric – their power to persuade, to state a case in defiance of the fact of death – through which mourners' beings and identities are

<sup>97</sup> Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 164–5.

<sup>98</sup> Douglas J. Davies, *Death, Ritual and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites*, 2nd edn (London and New York, 2002), 1.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

transformed.<sup>102</sup> Bell's eulogy was intended to have such an effect, to show how Bonhoeffer's death allowed the meaning of his life to be imbued into the life of those still living. It allowed them to continue the work that Bonhoeffer had begun, and thus to give his life a new global significance.

Bell's eulogy highlights a limitation of the concept of rites of passage. When it comes to rites of passage for the dead, they assume that the relationship to be reformed is between those who remain living in the mortal world, with the deceased forever removed from that community. This is not the claim of many religious traditions, especially Christianity. Bell was consciously emphasizing the link between the living and the dead, maintaining that Bonhoeffer still had gifts to impart to those left in mortality. The living and the dead were, in Bell's eulogy, in constant dialogue with each other, and the dead, especially those righteous dead who could be called martyrs, strengthened and encouraged the living to follow their example and continue the fight for the cause of God. Thomas G. Long, identifying what he sees as the fundamentals of a Christian funeral sermon, called such sermons 'faithful storytelling'.<sup>103</sup> This is the task in which Bell was engaged, constructing a story about Bonhoeffer's life that served to remind its audience 'that death changes, but does not destroy, the communion with this saint'.<sup>104</sup> Through this eulogy Bell attempted not only to bring comfort to those who had known Bonhoeffer in life, but to bring him onto an international stage. He presented the narrative of one whose life that found true fulfilment in the struggle against National Socialism, and his resultant death. Bell then affirmed that Bonhoeffer's death offered life to war-torn Europe, and the chance for Germany to rebuild itself based on the truer and purer traditions of the 'other Germany' Bell had so long championed. Through all this, it seems staggering to remember that Bell thought of Bonhoeffer as a friend. Bell presented to Europe the power that the death of his friend held, the opportunity that his friend's death gave them. To Bell's 'earthly view Dietrich is dead', but through this eulogy Bell began a quest to ensure that his friend's death would bring new life across a war-torn continent.

<sup>102</sup> Tara Bailey and Tony Walter, 'Funerals against Death', *Mortality* 21 (2016), 149–66, at 154.

<sup>103</sup> Thomas G. Long, *Accompany them with Singing: The Christian Funeral* (Louisville, KY, 2009), 182.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

APPENDIX

London, LPL, Bell Papers 42, fols 78–83, 'Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Holy Trinity Church, Kingsway: July 27th, 1945'.<sup>105</sup>

<78> Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer  
Holy Trinity Church, Kingsway: July 27th, 1945

---

In this church, hallowed by many memories of Christian fellowship in wartime, we gather now in memory of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, our most dear brother and a martyr of the Church.

He was born in Breslau on February 4th, 1906, the son of a famous physician, and belonging to a family which claimed not a few eminent divines, judges, and artisans in its ranks in previous generations. Dietrich himself achieved distinction in his own field of theology as a young man. After pursuing his studies not only in Germany but in Barcelona, Rome and New York, he became a lecturer in Systematic Theology in Berlin University in 1930, and was ordained in 1931. Before the war he had published at least five books, and in these last years was engaged on a work on Christian ethics. There was no doubt, humanly speaking, of the high position which would have been justly his in the realm of theological scholarship and teaching had God willed that his qualities should be thus used. He was also a man who loved life, and rejoiced in human ties and human pleasures, in home and friendship, in literature, and music and art; a man in whose company, because of his charm, his humour, his character and his gifts it was a delight to be.

<79> He was not quite 27 on January 30th, 1933, when one whom history will surely judge as the source of Germany's greatest shame and ruin become Chancellor of the Reich. But it was that event which was to determine the course of the rest of Dietrich's life. Young as he was, he immediately and instinctively perceived the significance of the National Socialist revolution, its annihilation of all human rights, and its repudiation of God. He understood as few others understood that the attack on the Jews was an attack on Christ as well and an attack on man. From the very first he sought both how

<sup>105</sup> Thanks are due to Lambeth Palace Library for permission to reproduce a complete transcription of the text of Bell's eulogy.

he could best serve God and the Church in the fight against Hitler; and how he could save Germany's soul from the ~~devils~~ demons which were assailing it on every side. For two years he ~~serve~~ ministered in London as a German pastor, and, while beyond doubt endearing himself to his two German congregations, he saw much of British friends, and helped them at least to begin to see the inwardness of the German Church struggle. He went back to Germany in 1935, and directed an illegal Confessional Church Training College in Pomerania; and from 1935 to the outbreak of war, interspersed with visits to America and England, he was giving aid and direction to the pastors within the Confessional Church, and playing an active, militant part in the opposition to Hitler, and in the resistance to the barbarities of his regime. He hated war, and my last memory but one of Dietrich is of a long talk, at <80> Chichester in the summer of 1939, when he was convinced that war was inevitable, on what his own duty should be if called up, and of the horror with which his conscience rejected any service under Hitler.

He was in fact spared the ordeal of serving in the army; and devoted his whole strength to his work for the Confessional Church, and to aiding the underground political opposition planning the overthrow of the Fuehrer. His illegal Training College was dissolved for the second time in 1940. He then ~~went~~ travelled through the country, visiting the parishes for the Confessional Church. At the end of 1940 he was prohibited by the Gestapo from preaching and speaking. In 1941 and 1942 he was engaged on his book on Christian ethics, and in preparing memoranda for the brethren's councils, while giving his evenings to political activities.

It was in May, 1942 that I had my last sight of him in Stockholm, when, altogether unexpected, he came from Berlin, at the risk of his life, to give me ~~much~~ information of the utmost importance about the movement of the opposition in Germany, to eliminate Hitler and all his chief colleagues, and to set up a new government which should repeal the Nuremberg Laws, undo Hitler's deeds so far as they could be undone, and seek peace with the Allies. Of those solemn last talks I had with Dietrich I will say nothing further ~~but~~ than this: deeply committed as he was to the plan for elimination, he was not altogether at <81> ease as a Christian about such a solution. "There must be punishment by God", he said. "We do not want to escape repentance". The elimination itself, he urged, must be understood as an act of repentance. "Oh we have to be punished. Christians

do not wish to escape repentance or chaos, if God wills to bring it on us. We must endure this judgement as Christians." Very moving was our talk: very moving our farewell. And the last letter I had from him, just before he returned to Berlin, knowing what might well await him there, I shall treasure for the whole of my life.

Not many months after his return he was arrested. For a long time he was kept in prison or concentration camp. Early this year he was tried in the "People's Court" for his share in the events of July 20th, 1944, and sentenced to death, with his brother Klaus, and his brother-in-law, Professor Schleicher. Another brother-in-law, Professor v. Donanyi [*sic*], was arrested at the same time, and fell ill in the concentration camp. Though through the death of the judge in an air raid the sentence could not then be carried out, and we hoped so much that he might be saved for the future of Germany, Dietrich and Klaus were both murdered in Flossenburg Concentration camp only a few days before the Americans came to liberate the prisoners.

And now Dietrich has is gone. He died, with his brother, as a hostage. Our debt to them, and to all others similarly murdered, is immense. His death is a death for Germany – indeed for <82> Europe too. He made the sacrifice of human prospects, of home, friends, and career because he believed in God's vocation for his country, and refused to follow those false leaders, who were the servants of the devil. He was inspired by his faith in the living God, and by his devotion to truth and honour. And so his death, like his life, marks a fact of the deepest value in the witness of the Confessional Church. As one of a noble company of martyrs of differing traditions, he represents both the resistance of the believing soul, in the name of God, to the assault of evil, and also the moral and political revolt of the human conscience against injustice and cruelty. He and his fellows are indeed built upon the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets. And it was this passion for justice that brought him, and so many others in the Confessional Church who were in agreement with him, into such close partnership with other resisters who, though outside the Church, shared the same humanitarian and liberal ideals.

Our Lord said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." To our earthly view Dietrich is dead. Deep and unfathomable as our sorrow seems, let us comfort one another



with these words. For him and Klaus, and for the countless multitudes of their <83> fellow victims through these terrible years of war, there is the resurrection from the dead: for Germany redemption and resurrection, if God pleases to lead the nation through men animated by his spirit, holy and humble and brave like him: for the Church, not only in that Germany which he loved, but also the Church Universal, which was greater to him than nations, the hope of a new life. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."