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THE TRANSLATION OF THE
Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,
English Edition

AN OVERVIEW

Introduction to the Index Volume

This volume includes translations of documents that were discovered after the publication of the *DBWE* volumes and indexes of the scriptural references and the primary subject references for the series. It also includes an alphabetized list of all the documents included in the sixteen *DBWE* volumes; a comprehensive chronology of significant dates in Bonhoeffer's life, career development, and thought, as well as key historical events; and a biographical index of all people referenced in volumes 1–16 and in the new documents included in this volume. It is intended primarily as a guide to help readers find their way through the sixteen volumes, particularly with regard to certain periods and events in Bonhoeffer's life and the evolution of his thought. With the exception of the master index of scriptural references, the indexes do not include page references but simply provide the respective volume reference; readers should refer to the indexes of the respective volumes for more-detailed references and cross-references. The editors especially thank Mark S. Bocker for his work in compiling the master biographical index.

The retrospective on the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, English Edition*, by Clifford J. Green, executive director of the *DBWE*, and the afterword to the German edition, by Wolfgang Huber, chair of the German *DBW* editorial board, explore the history and significance of this series for future scholarship and research. In the following section, I summarize the particular challenges we faced in translating the *DBW* volumes and how the *DBWE* team of editors and translators addressed them.

Approach to Translation in the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, English Edition*

The translation of the sixteen-volume German *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke* began in the 1990s. The first two volumes to be completed, *Act and Being* and *Life Together/Prayerbook of the Bible*, were published in 1996; the final volume published was *Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935–1937*, in 2013. Over the course of the project, twenty-two translators worked on the *Bonhoeffer Works*, and several volumes (8, 9, 11, and 15) were the work of more than one translator. Translation work on each volume was done in consultation with the respective volume editor and the general editor. By agreement with the German editorial board, the translation of each volume was also reviewed either by the respective German volume editors or by someone assigned to review the translation in their stead. The editorial and translation work on volumes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 16 was overseen by the first general editor, Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., while Victoria Barnett and Barbara Wojhoski oversaw the work on volumes 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and concluded the editorial work on 16. Some adjustments to the original editorial and translation policies were made for the second group of volumes, in part because of the change in the general editorial team and in part because the first group of volumes consisted of theological texts, while the second group consisted largely of correspondence and documents that were historical in nature.

The midseries transition in the general editorial team, the length of time during which the work proceeded, and the involvement of multiple translators mean that there is no single “voice” in this series and there is less consistency in translation than would be true of a single volume translated by one person. Throughout the life of the series, there has been regular consultation and discussion not just among members of the U.S. series team but also between the *DBW* and *DBWE* editors and editorial boards. This process made the translation of these volumes an ongoing “work in progress” during which some translation decisions made for earlier volumes were revised for the later volumes. In this regard, the *DBWE* editors are

particularly grateful to the invaluable assistance of two members of the German *DBW* project, Hans Pfeifer and Ilse Tödt.

Translators of these volumes were confronted by some additional challenges. One is the nature of translation itself, which at its best is both a science and an art form, an attempt to render meanings precisely and with an ear for nuance and eloquence. Depending on the context, the identical word can have very different nuances and meanings. Even in the original German texts, there were inconsistencies in how Bonhoeffer and his correspondents referred to certain ideas, events, and organizations such as ecumenical bodies. The editors of these volumes have tried to annotate and explain all such instances, and the master index of subjects and the master list of documents in this volume have been constructed to help readers recognize where such instances have arisen. It should be added that in both the German and the English editions the editors of the respective volumes had particular theological or historical expertise in the content of their volume and helped shape the translation accordingly. On the one hand, this has led to inconsistency in some of the translated terms. On the other, it means that each editor had a keen eye for the historical and theological accuracy of his or her respective volume, and readers who are particularly interested in the rationale for the translation of certain German texts should refer to the volume editor's introduction to the corresponding volume.

Several other factors unique to this series have shaped our approach to the translation of this material. These factors also help explain why these *DBWE* translations differ significantly from some of the earlier translations of Bonhoeffer's writings.

Nature of the Content in the *DBW/DBWE* Volumes

One such factor is the variety of the content of these volumes, as well as the fragmentary nature of some of the original texts. Volumes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 consist of Bonhoeffer's own writings, published (with the exception of volumes 6 and 7) in German during his lifetime. With the exception of volume 7 (which contains literary attempts), these are theological works for which previous English translations also exist: *Sanctorum Communio* (published as *The Communion of Saints* in America), *Act and Being*, *Creation and Fall*, *Discipleship* (previously published in English as *The Cost of Discipleship*), *Life Together* and *Psalms: The Prayerbook of the Bible* (published as one volume in *DBW/DBWE*), *Ethics*, and *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Many of these earlier translations were done for a more general readership and are markedly freer translations of the original German than the translations in *DBWE*.

The material in *DBWE* volumes 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 is primarily biographical and historical, although each of these volumes also includes shorter theological and academic texts, such as sermons, Bible studies, and lectures. Most of the content of these latter volumes consists of correspondence between Bonhoeffer and his family, friends, and colleagues, as well as material written by other individuals, ranging from lecture notes taken by his students to bureaucratic church records to documents written by Nazi officials. Translation of these texts demanded careful attention to the nature of the document (bureaucratic versus personal communications, for example) and the tone of the author in the original German. Even in Bonhoeffer's own correspondence, his voice changes over time, from his student days until his years in prison, and he naturally expressed himself differently when writing to different kinds of correspondents.

Differences between the *DBWE* Documents and Existing English Translations

The documents published in the *DBW/DBWE* volumes are from Bonhoeffer's literary estate, which has been cataloged by Dietrich Meyer and Eberhard Bethge in their edited volume, *Nachlaß Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Ein Verzeichnis; Archiv, Sammlung, Bibliothek* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1987). The documents that were cataloged in that volume were preserved on microfiche (housed at the Berliner Staatsbibliothek and Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary in New York). They include not only Bonhoeffer's papers but also copies of relevant material (such as correspondence and reports) from other archives that were microfilmed as well.

Some of these manuscripts exist as incomplete fragments, particularly the student notes made of Bonhoeffer's academic lectures and his seminars at Finkenwalde and texts by Bonhoeffer himself that exist only in draft form. While earlier translations of such material sometimes filled in the blanks, completing sentences and passages, the translation policy for *DBWE* was to follow the German closely, leaving incomplete phrases as they were and even including ellipses where the original German text was unreadable. All such instances have been carefully annotated in the *DBW/DBWE* volumes, and where necessary, additional information is included in the editorial notes. It should also be noted that even some of the "original" documents themselves were in fact transcriptions made by Eberhard Bethge, either of original handwritten documents (Bonhoeffer's handwriting was notoriously difficult to read) or, in the case of material that was disintegrating, as a preservation measure. Thus some of the documents preserved in the microfiche are in fact Bethge's transcriptions, complete with Bethge's (not

Bonhoeffer's) annotations and corrections, many of these made during the process of the publication of earlier anthologies such as *Gesammelte Schriften*.

In a very few instances, Eberhard Bethge organized material that in 1945 existed only in fragmentary form. The most striking case of this is the book *Ethik/Ethics* (DBW/DBWE 6). After 1945 Bethge compiled the incomplete manuscripts that Bonhoeffer had written during the early wartime years and published them in 1949 as the first German edition of *Ethik*. Debate about the order of manuscripts led to a second, rearranged edition that was published in 1963 (English edition, 1965). By the time of the DBW/DBWE publication, work done on these handwritten manuscripts and on Bonhoeffer's writing notes, especially Ilse Tödt's painstaking analysis of the different papers that had been used, enabled the editors of the German edition to reconstruct the order in which Bonhoeffer had probably written them. Following a basic DBW editorial guideline, the book was reorganized to reflect this writing sequence. Also, one manuscript previously in the appendix was incorporated into *Ethics*, while the other four were grouped with contemporary occasional pieces in DBW/DBWE 16,^[1] which includes the documentation from the resistance period, covering the same period during which the *Ethics* manuscripts were written. As a result, there are significant differences between the original German *Ethik* and the early English translations of that book, and the *Ethik/Ethics* published as volume 6 of the DBW/DBWE.^[2]

As the case of *Ethics* illustrates, the background and organization of some key Bonhoeffer texts were not established definitively by scholars until work began on the *Bonhoeffer Werke*. Some of the writings translated and published in early anthologies such as *No Rusty Swords* (1965), therefore, were based not on the German texts in the *Bonhoeffer Werke* (which reproduced the documentation exactly as found in the Bonhoeffer *Nachlaß* microfiches and include extensive annotation tracing the development of certain texts) but on the early German publication of Bonhoeffer's writings in the six-volume *Gesammelte Schriften* (1958–74).

[1.] These are the essays "State and Church" (2/10); "'Personal' and 'Objective' Ethics" (2/13); "A Theological Position Paper on the *Primus Usus Legis*" (2/18); and "What Does It Mean to Tell the Truth?" (2/19), which is in an appendix in the German editions but is called "Part Two" in the earlier translations of *Ethics*. The piece now published in *Ethics* is "On the Possibility of the Church's Message to the World."

[2.] For a more detailed explanation of the reordering of the *Ethics* manuscripts, see the introduction by Clifford Green to DBWE 6:1–44 and the comparison of the different editions on p. 477 of that volume.

Translation and Style Guidelines for the *DBWE*

At the beginning of the *DBWE* project, translators, editors, and representatives of the German *Bonhoeffer Werke* met several times to establish general translation guidelines for the English language edition, and consultations have continued throughout the life of the project. These consultations led to a list of translations for specific terms, particularly of the theological concepts that were central to Bonhoeffer's thought. At the same time, there was general acknowledgment of the complexity of conveying the meaning of such terms and the necessity of translating even key terms in different ways depending on the context. A primary example is the translation throughout *DBWE* of the German word *Gemeinde* as "church-community" when it refers to the larger theological sense of the church as the community of Christ in the world—a notion central to Bonhoeffer's understanding of the church. Yet in many places Bonhoeffer used *Gemeinde* to refer to a local congregation, and it can also be translated simply as "congregation."

Thus throughout *DBWE* there are variations in the translations even of key terms, and a great deal was left up to the discretion of the respective translators and editors, all of whom brought distinctive strengths and expertise to this project. Specific translation decisions made in the different volumes are discussed both in the editor's introduction to each volume and in editorial notes throughout. For reasons noted earlier, the translations of some terms were altered over the course of the series. With respect to the translation of historical terms and names of institutional bodies and church offices, an attempt was made at consistency, but even here there may be discrepancies across volumes. The subject index in this volume notes differing translations of some terms with cross-references to assist the reader. For example, the German word *Buße* can be translated variously as "repentance," "penance," or "penitence," depending on the context. This variation is indicated in the master index of subjects in this volume by including the German term in parentheses with all three entries and noting the appropriate cross-reference.

Gendered Language

One of the early decisions made by the initial *DBWE* team of translators, volume editors, and the first general editor was to follow a policy of nonsexist language where appropriate and possible in translating Bonhoeffer's theological writings.

This policy raised a number of issues that became more problematic with respect to the historical material in the second group of volumes.

In negotiating the complexities of this policy, for example, a common approach by translators was to translate passages that in the German were in the singular masculine as the more inclusive plural in English. Obviously, however, this meant a significant shift in tone and even meaning: with the shift from singular to plural, texts that in the German read almost autobiographically, with a heavy emphasis on the third-person masculine, were altered in the English translation to read much more generally and impersonally. It was also difficult to justify the change to nongendered inclusive language in Bonhoeffer's writings, including his correspondence, while retaining the gendered language of his correspondents, students, and others whose writings are included here. Thus with the change in general editorial leadership, and after much discussion among the editorial board members, this policy was abandoned for the second group of volumes, both for the historical and the theological material. Obviously this decision does not imply editorial support for sexist language and attitudes; it simply acknowledges that Bonhoeffer's language and attitudes reflected those of his times, and that the meaning of his texts as well as the context of his times and his church can best be conveyed by a close rendering of the German.

My general editor's foreword to the series, included in this volume, gives additional information about the conception of the series and concludes, as I do here, with great appreciation for all my colleagues who have worked on the German and the English volumes, and with special thanks to Fortress Press for its commitment to publishing these volumes, under the leadership of Marshall Johnson, Michael West, and Will Bergkamp.