

Hans Buurmeester

„The Political Relevance of Bonhoeffer”

Further in the Footsteps of Gerard Rothuizen

1. Introduction

The Dutch theologian Gerard Rothuizen (1923-1988) dealt intensively with the work of Bonhoeffer.¹ His interpretation of Bonhoeffer's theological legacy, his importance to Bonhoeffer's reception in the Dutch language, and his significance for answering the question of the political and ethical relevance of Bonhoeffer for today are still relevant, hence my subtitle „Further in the footsteps of Gerard Rothuizen.“

According to Dorothee Sölle, Bonhoeffer is perhaps the only theologian who can introduce us to the third millennium.² She is not the only one who emphasized the ongoing importance of Bonhoeffer. Konrad Raiser, then Secretary General of the World Council of Churches, also said in 1995 that „Bonhoeffer was a theologian whose thoughts were fresh, stimulating and challenging. Even fifty years after his death, his words still have relevance.“³

Kevin Rudd, the former prime minister of Australia, was also clear about the importance of Bonhoeffer's theology.⁴ „I Argue that a core, continuing principle shaping this engagement [between a Christian and the state] is that Christianity should be consistent with Bonhoeffer's critique in the '30s, and must always take the side of the marginalized, the vulnerable and the oppressed.“⁵

In short, Bonhoeffer inspired many in their thinking about faith, church and theology. He certainly inspired Gerard Rothuizen, especially in his „Een Spaak in het wiel“ (*A Spoke in the Wheel*), a book from 1985.⁶ In my preparation for this conference, I read this study again, and I discovered how, some 27 years after the writing, both Bonhoeffer and Rothuizen still have relevance. Rothuizen's interpretation of the meaning of Bonhoeffer's life and work for the 1980's remains as useful to us now as it did in a period characterized by the contrast between East and West, the arms race between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the threat of a 3rd World War, and in response to the mass demonstrations against nuclear weapons and for peace in Bonn, London, Amsterdam and The Hague. His analysis of Bonhoeffer's work is useful in answering the questions that have arisen since 9/11, questions about modern warfare, humanistic missions in civil wars, terrorism, etc. His interpretation also remains useful in helping us answer the question

¹ In 1977 he was one of the founders of the Dutch Language Section of The International Bonhoeffer Society and wrote several books about Bonhoeffer.

² D. Sölle, quoted by J. M. de Jong of NBD / Biblion on www.bruna.nl books, obtained November 2011 / Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

³ K. Raiser, *Bonhoeffer Memorial in the Upper Church at Kampen, the Netherlands*, 1995.

⁴ Kevin Rudd, Australia's former Prime Minister, wrote a powerful tome, „Faith in Politics“, exploring the relevancy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's religious principles on modern politics.

⁵ K. Rudd, *Faith in Politics*, in: *The Monthly* (October 2006). Quoted in: V. Vlanza, *Rudd, Bonhoeffer, and the War on Gaza*, in: *The Palestine Chronicle* (December 2011), www.australiansforpalestine.net/56132, obtained November 2011

⁶ G. Th. Rothuizen, *Een spaak in het wiel: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Peace*, Baarn 1985.

posed at this conference: „Can the Church be asked again to participate in political resistance in a world characterized by an increasing gap between rich and poor?“

2. Rothuizen's Intellectual Formation in the Reformed Tradition

Gerard Rothuizen was born on February 23, 1923 in Goes in the province of Zeeland in The Netherlands and grew up in a Reformed environment that was marked by the Doleantie, a separatist movement of the rural Protestant church in the Netherlands in 1886. In the 1950's he became acquainted with Dietrich Bonhoeffer for the first time. From that time on, Bonhoeffer was a lifelong companion for Rothuizen, not only because of the theology that Bonhoeffer developed, but also because of the courage that he had shown. Rothuizen spoke of „Aristocratic“ Christianity, which he exposed in a study with the same title (1969).⁷

Why was Rothuizen so fascinated by Bonhoeffer? The reason was that he recognized in the life and work of Bonhoeffer much of what he already had learned from Luther, Calvin and Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), leader of the Doleantie movement.

Rothuizen experienced the Second World War as an adolescent – an experience that influenced his theology throughout his life. With his experience as a naval chaplain, his studies and his dissertation and in writing his books, Bonhoeffer was a source of inspiration for him.⁸ The World Wars I and II remained a constant theme in his later writings. In his growing fascination with the work of the English war poets of the first World War, he could combine his love for England, his strong association with poetry and his moral and theological perplexity about the wars. In Kampen, his hometown, he was committed to the restoration of the former Jewish synagogue. As previously mentioned, Rothuizen was formed by Luther, Calvin and Kuyper. Their theology, ethics and lives offered him the opportunity to build a bridge to Bonhoeffer.

The question that concerns us is whether Bonhoeffer today, thanks to Rothuizen's interpretation, can be of service in questions of war and peace, wealth, poverty and the role of the church therein. Within the context of these issues, it is interesting to see what Rothuizen says in response to a note in Clements' book *A Patriotism for Today*, „August 6, 1945 the bomb on Hiroshima 'brought a watershed in human history' – and Bonhoeffer remains on the other side of it.“⁹

Clements calls the Hiroshima bomb a watershed in human history, but adds that this mushroom cloud did not loom on Bonhoeffer's horizon. Clements says „we need to remind ourselves that in one crucial sense he cannot be our contemporary.“¹⁰ Although he says that it is „hard to believe that if Bonhoeffer had survived, he would have done something different than to regard nuclear weapons as a sign of man's worst separation from God. This is in light of the divine commandment to preserve life and not to kill.“¹¹ The 21st century also has its watershed, namely 9/11.¹² To say it in the style of Clements, the collapsing twin towers did not loom on

⁷ G. Th. Rothuizen, *Aristocratisch Christendom. Over Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Kampen 1969.

⁸ Through his books and his work for the Dutch Language Section of The International Bonhoeffer Society he made an important contribution to the Bonhoeffer-reception in the Dutch language.

⁹ K. Clements, *A Patriotism for Today. Dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Bristol 1984, 111.

¹⁰ K. Clements, *Patriotism for Today*, 111.

¹¹ K. Clements, quoted in: G. Th. Rothuizen, *Een spaak in het wiel*, Baarn 1985, 133.

¹² „The financial crisis certainly brought more ruin upon the country than the 9/11 attacks. But 9/11 jarred a happy land out of its complacency, and history has flowed in a different direction ever since. So the terrorists

Bonhoeffer's horizon. However, we should ask ourselves the question whether Bonhoeffer can be of service to us concerning the questions of the reaction to 9/11. One can think of Afghanistan, Iraq, The Arab Spring and, more recently, Syria. If Dorothee Sölle's judgment about Bonhoeffer's relevance is correct, an affirmative answer to this question must be possible.

2.1 Responsible Living

Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave a lot of attention to what he called „responsible life“. In word and deed he practiced „responsible living“. For Bonhoeffer, this was a matter of ethics. The traces of this concern for „responsible life“ can be found in *Sanctorum Communio*, *Akt und Sein*, *Nachfolge*, *Gemeinsames Leben* and in other writings of his hand, as his lecture in Barcelona on *Grundfragen einer christlichen Ethik*, his impressive meditation at Fanø, and many others. These writings form, according to Forell, what he calls, „an allusion to *Ethik*.“¹³

Rothuizen tries to find his way to understanding in the 1980s with the help of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's work. He shows us how Bonhoeffer's ethics developed from „consensus of ethics to accounting ethics.“¹⁴ Bonhoeffer was in favour of a situational rather than a principled ethics.¹⁵ For example, in 1939, when he tried to evade military service and wrote about it to his friend Bishop Bell of Chichester, he said that he must do so „under the current conditions.“¹⁶ For Bonhoeffer, these conditions meant that later he became actively involved in the resistance against Hitler's regime.

Rothuizen thinks we can learn something from Bonhoeffer about ethics in general and peace ethics in particular. „He did not leave us behind without any hermeneutical key.“¹⁷ He is convinced that even after the previously mentioned watershed Bonhoeffer can be of service to us and provides us with insights that remain fruitful even today (1985).

In Rothuizen's view, the „victim“ is the hermeneutical key in understanding Bonhoeffer. The millions of people who die in the Third World can be seen as victims of poverty and inequality, but especially as victims of the arms race. „The arms race in the North is an undeclared war against the South.“¹⁸

2.2 Rothuizen and Luther

In 1962, Rothuizen received his Ph.D. with a dissertation entitled „Primus usus legis.“¹⁹ This dissertation is about the question of the relationship between the church and the world, and raises

won.“ (R. W. Bulliet, 9/11: Landmark or Watershed? After September 11. Perspectives from the Social Science, in: Social Science Research Council (2001), <http://essays.ssrc.org/10yearsafter911/911-landmark-or-watershed/>. obtained November 2011

¹³ G. W. Forell, The Christian in the World Responding to the Answer in Jesus Christ. Realized Faith. The Ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in: The Place of Bonhoeffer, ed. by M. E. Marty, London 1963, 197-221. Quoted in: G. Th. Rothuizen, Een spaak in het wiel, 165.

¹⁴ G. Th. Rothuizen, Een spaak in het wiel, 29.

¹⁵ G. Th. Rothuizen, Een spaak in het wiel, 39.

¹⁶ E. Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Eine Biographie, 8th edition, München 2004, 717.

¹⁷ G. Th. Rothuizen, Een spaak in het wiel, 133.

¹⁸ E. Eppler, Die tödliche Utopie der Sicherheit, Hamburg 1983, 175. Quoted in: G.Th. Rothuizen, Een spaak in het wiel, Baarn 1985, 136.

¹⁹ G. Th. Rothuizen, Primus usus legis, Kampen 1962.

the question of the political use of biblical law. It is a quest for a broad theological justification of the Christian attitude towards politics and society. He did this by using the two-kingdom doctrine and the theological frameworks of Luther, Calvin and Kuyper. He came to his own theological insight on which the two-kingdom doctrine is based, namely, that God governs the world in two ways, directly through the kingdom of God and indirectly through the empires of the world. Creation speaks with its own word. Accordingly, there are „twofold ethics“ to be practiced – thus the title of Rothuizen’s inaugural speech in Kampen in 1964 deals with Calvin. In politics, this means that the use of force is permitted in extreme cases.

Rothuizen rarely used the two-kingdom doctrine explicitly as a concept. Instead, he understood it as a central intuition to express the paradoxical and unruly behaviour of human society in theological terms. In a style that is typical of Rothuizen, he argued, „One should not expect too much system into something that is unsystematic. And that is not [. . .] just because Kuyper was such a journalist²⁰, but also because of the situation in which he was – and we no less! – This situation is called a two realms situation, which simply means highly complicated.“²¹

2.3 Rothuizen and Calvin

According to Rothuizen, Calvin took the secular more seriously than two of his reformist allies, Bucer and Luther.²² Rothuizen remarked enthusiastically that „a truly Christian ethic can be found better with Calvin than with Luther.“²³ There is no ethical issue that Luther did not preach about, but a sermon about an ethical issue is not the same as ethical behaviour. „Es gibt ein soziales Evangelium Luthers.“²⁴ Indeed, but that is not the same as Christian ethics, Rothuizen says.

Calvin left his mark on Rothuizen’s ethics with the idea that ethics is not only social but also political. This is a link with Bonhoeffer and the concept of „empowerment“. „Since Luther started to pull the world in every way away from the influence of the church (Gogarten), we can no longer stop and leave this world to a God who wanted empowerment of the world. In this respect we can not only go to Lutheranism from Luther to Bonhoeffer, but also to Calvinism from Calvin to Kuyper.“²⁵

Rothuizen sees a similar line running from Luther to Bonhoeffer as from Calvin to Kuyper when it comes to the concept of „empowerment“. With this, we come to a third theologian after Luther and Calvin who has influenced the formation of Rothuizen, namely, Abraham Kuyper.

2.4 Rothuizen and Kuyper (and Bonhoeffer)

Kuyper was a theologian, preacher, politician and journalist. He was the founder of the first political party in the Netherlands, the ARP, which stands for „Anti-Revolutionary Party.“ He

²⁰ Th. L. Haitjema, Ds. A. A. van Ruler, Kuypers idee eener Christelijke cultuur, in: Onder eigen vaandel, Wageningen 1941, 159 f.

²¹ Th. L. Haitjema, Ds. A. A. van Ruler, Kuypers idee eener Christelijke cultuur, 253.

²² G. Th. Rothuizen, Tweeërlei ethiek bij Calvijn, Kampen 1964 (inaugural address), 17.

²³ G. Th. Rothuizen, Tweeërlei ethiek bij Calvijn, 10.

²⁴ K. H. Becker, Die Frage der politischen Ethik des Luthertums in der schwedischen Theologie, in: Evangelische Theologie, München 1946-1947, Quoted in G.Th. Rothuizen, Tweeërlei ethiek bij Calvijn, 10

²⁵ G. Th. Rothuizen, Tweeërlei ethiek bij Calvijn, 16.

founded the Free University in Amsterdam, contributed to the formation of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, and was Prime Minister from 1901 to 1905.²⁶

Even a superficial observation of the lives of Bonhoeffer and Kuyper shows there are parallels in both their personal lives worth discovering. For instance, we find striking similarities in the their vision of the church and in the course of their lives. Both are theologians, and early in life can even be called brilliant theologians. Both were promoted at a very young age, and both dissertations dealt with the church. Both became post-doctoral pastors, and both also worked at a university. Both had a leading role in the church struggle that broke out in their time, and both did not hesitate to leave the church in which they lead in order to become „leaders“ in an alternative church organization. Finally, both in a later phase of their lives shifted their theological focus from the church to the wider society and to culture as a whole.

But the parallels runs even deeper. Both of them experienced a religious transformation in their lives. Kuyper came, as he says, in his first church (Beesd) to the true faith, while a decade later, also in his own words, his soul was transferred to the determination of the decisive and vigorous religion of our fathers. Similarly, Bonhoeffer, as Bethge tells us, experienced a „transition from theologian to Christian.“²⁷ Bethge speaks of a second turning point in the life of Bonhoeffer. „With the conversion of 1939, the Christian and theologian Bonhoeffer began to share in the full actuality of his world, his place and his time.“²⁸

Gerard Dekker wonders if the focus on the world and the time in which they lived were so important that we can say that both Kuyper and Bonhoeffer developed their vision of the church into a confrontation with modern society.²⁹

A remarkable parallel in the concept of church in the work of Kuyper and Bonhoeffer is shown by Dekker. He calls this concept a „twofold concept of church,“³⁰ one being narrow and one wide.

According to Kuyper, the original concept of „the body of Christ“ has two appearances, one being an organism (wide) and one being an institute (narrow). Although Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology remained unfinished, therefore making it more difficult to portray accurately, he too speaks of two different ways of conceptualizing the church, namely, Christ being „Christ existing as community (Christus als Gemeinde existierend)“³¹ (wide) and the church as a place in which God's Word and Sacrament are being proclaimed (narrow).³²

Both men also show a remarkable similarity in their view of the dominion of Christ. Rothuizen says, „Certainly, Bonhoeffer has said that there is nothing, nothing at all which falls outside of

²⁶ The complete archive of Abraham Kuyper will soon be available worldwide via the Internet. It is the result of close cooperation of the Historical Documentation Centre for Dutch Protestantism of the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam and Princeton Theological Seminary in the United States.

Princeton is the only one in the world who has the whole work of Kuyper. Princeton also has a chair for Neo-Calvinism and Abraham Kuyper Institute for Public Theology. In the U.S. there is great interest in Kuyper and Neo-Calvinistic thoughts.

²⁷ E. Bethge, *Bonhoeffer Biographie*, 246-250.

²⁸ E. Bethge, *Bonhoeffer Biographie*, 760-762.

²⁹ G. Dekker, *Kuyper and Bonhoeffer on the Church*, a working document. [www.debonhoeffer.eu / archief.html](http://www.debonhoeffer.eu/archief.html), obtained November 2011 3.

³⁰ G. Dekker, *Kuyper and Bonhoeffer*, 3.

³¹ DBW 1, 76.

³² DBW 4, 110-115.

the dominion of Christ.³³ In this respect, this German resembles a Dutchman who, decades ago, said the same thing.³⁴

In short, it is not surprising that, in Bonhoeffer, Gerard Rothuizen recognized much of what he had learned earlier in his Reformed tradition. Just like Luther, Calvin and Kuyper, Bonhoeffer became another important figure of inspiration that accompanied and shaped Rothuizen during the rest of his life.

3. Bonhoeffer According to Rothuizen

3.1 Bonhoeffer and the 1980's

In his study and in his thoughts about peace, Rothuizen searched for Bonhoeffer's „peace ethics.“ He called Bonhoeffer a great ethicist, and his study was conducted against the background of Europe's development during the 1980's. During this time, weapons of mass destruction were being developed. The costs of this development were high and the threat to world peace increased because of it. Questions about responsible living under these circumstances arose. Rothuizen hoped to find answers in Bonhoeffer's ethics, expecting his ethics still to be applicable in that time. Three years earlier, an overall study on this subject titled, *Frieden – das unumgängliche Wagnis*³⁵ had appeared, edited by Hans Pfeifer. Although Rothuizen was very much impressed by this study, and made use of it in different ways, he also thought that the contemporary applicability of Bonhoeffer's ideas on the matter of peace were not emphasized enough. To Rothuizen, it was important to discover how to apply Bonhoeffer's ethics and ideas on the matter of peace to the 1980s?

Whoever desires to study Bonhoeffer's peace ethics should start in the year 1929, the year in which Bonhoeffer believed he had to defend his neighbours at all costs against the language of „blood and soil.“ In the midst of his congregation, the young pastor displayed his accountability on the matter. This third lecture is one in a series of three which was titled *Grundfragen einer christlichen Ethik*.³⁶ Although Bethge calls this lecture a „Titanischen Augenblicksethik“³⁷ and Rothuizen speaks of „ill-formed sentences“, he concludes that Bonhoeffer stopped using this kind of language after a short period. In 1932, when Bonhoeffer became the youth secretary of the so-called „Weltbund für Freundschaftsarbeit der Kirchen“, he gave a speech at a union conference in Ciernohorské Kúpele in Tsjecho, Slovakia titled, „Christus und der Friede.“ Instead of speaking about peace in relation to people and state, Bonhoeffer spoke of peace regimens [*Friedensordnungen*] in general.³⁸

Rothuizen further expressed his admiration for Bonhoeffer's line of thinking, as is evidenced in the speech he gave at the Danish island of Fanö in 1934. Through his writings and his publications step by step Rothuizen studied how Bonhoeffer's thinking developed over time. It is clear that Rothuizen thought highly of Bonhoeffer, although he was also critical of his work. He

³³ DBWE 6, 348.

³⁴ G. Th. Rothuizen, *Aristocratisch Christendom*, 351.

³⁵ H. Pfeifer (ed.), *Frieden – das unumgängliche Wagnis. Die Gegenwartsbedeutung der Friedensethik Dietrich Bonhoeffers*, München 1982.

³⁶ DBW 10, 323.

³⁷ E. Bethge, *Bonhoeffer Biographie*, 153.

³⁸ G. Th. Rothuizen, *Een spaak in het wiel*, 16.

expressed most of his criticism in a chapter of his book, *A Spoke in the Wheel*, which deals with the „deficit“ of Barmen.

3.2 The Deficit of Barmen

In the chapter mentioned above,³⁹ Rothuizen discussed the consequences of this so-called „deficit of Barmen.“ It must be mentioned that Rothuizen derived this term from Bethge, who used it in 1984 at the 50th anniversary of Barmen and in 1974.⁴⁰ Bethge acknowledged having been very much impressed by Barmen. Although, like Barmen, he too did not notice the Jewish matter even though it must have played an important role in the background. Like Bethge, he also spoke of the missing seventh thesis. „Without this seventh thesis, which of course should have dealt with the Jew in a way in which the church stood up for Israel, the first thesis could no longer be acquitted of Christian egocentrism.“⁴¹

This thesis gained fame. It reads:

„Jesus Christus, wie er uns in der Heiligen Schrift bezeugt wird, ist das ein Wort Gottes, das wir zu hören, dem wir im Leben und im Sterben zu vertrauen und zu gehorchen haben. Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als könne und müsse die Kirche als Quelle ihrer Verkündigung außer und neben diesem einen Worte Gottes auch noch andere Ereignisse und Mächte, Gestalten und Wahrheiten als Gottes Offenbarung anerkennen.“⁴²

The first thesis focuses on Christ alone. By doing this, the authors hoped to deter the temptation of the church to serve God and Mammon and, in this case, also God and the *Führer*. Rothuizen states that the focus on Christ alone led to a more narrow-minded perspective. Although Christ appears very vividly in the first thesis, the way he is portrayed leaves little to no room for the Jew, while defending the Jew should have been significant for the church. Even the *Führer* would have been able to happily benefit from a „Christus solus“ by evoking the first thesis. The historian George Harinck says, „If we read the Barmen Theses as they were explained in Barmen, Hitler could have accepted them, so to speak. Anyway, his supporters endorsed them all.“⁴³ Without the seventh thesis about the Jew, who in 1934 was already quite cornered, the first thesis could easily have been made into a paragon of anti-Judaism instead of the long requested and required opposition against modern paganism of anti-Judaism in party and state. Behold the „deficit“ of Barmen.

In his book *Aristocratisch Christendom*, Rothuizen is very critical of the „Christus solus“ of Barmen. In this book, which was first published in 1969, he states that the Dutch theologian Van Ruler not only argues that Christianity serves the incarnation, insofar as being a Christian serves the fulfillment of incarnation. He even dares talk about the eventual consummation or cessation of the incarnation when its ultimate purpose of attaining true humanity is fulfilled. Van Ruler

³⁹ G. Th. Rothuizen, *Een spaak in het wiel*, 66 ff.

⁴⁰ E. Bethge, *Barmen und seine Wirkungsgeschichte*, Anmerkungen zum 40. Jahrestag der Barmer Erklärung, in: *Am gegebenen Ort* (1974): **Aufsätze und Reden, 1970-1979**, München 1979, 140-147.

⁴¹ G. Th. Rothuizen, *Een spaak in het wiel*, 67.

⁴² Barmer Theologische Erklärung, in: *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland 1996-2013*, http://www.ekd.de/glauben/bekenntnisse/barmer_theologische_erklaerung.html obtained November 2011

⁴³ G. Harinck, *Tussen Barmen en Amsterdam*, Inaugural lecture, Amstelveen, Netherlands, 6 June 2003.

writes that “We are not human to be a Christian, but Christian to become a human.”⁴⁴ Van Ruler says, „Christ and his spirit have done their job so well that one day we will see the impermanence of incarnation: eventually we ourselves will be God’s glory in and of ourselves.“⁴⁵ Rothuizen gives this citation as an example of the intense use of Christianity in the service of humanity. He even concludes with the removal of Christianity after fulfilling its duty in service of humanity.

In other words, in honour of the secular, Rothuizen would have liked Bonhoeffer to have been worldlier, less Christological and more theological. At the same time, in his stimulating of the Christian, Rothuizen would have liked Bonhoeffer to have been more of a Christian himself, more of a Calvinist, a bit more of what he thought so highly of, the „tertius usus legis“ (the fulfillment of the law in the life of the believer).

Bonhoeffer had seen the value of Christianity amidst humanity, but according to Rothuizen he could have seen more. This doesn’t mean that Bonhoeffer should be associated with the missing seventh thesis in the declaration of Barmen. On the contrary, after the takeover, Bonhoeffer made a statement about the church and the Jewish question (1933). In this statement, he argued in favour of the immediate victim – much like Barmen would have done in 1934. The statement also raises questions that need to be answered. According to Rothuizen, after reading Bonhoeffer’s article about the church and the Jewish question, one can conclude how much in human rights Bonhoeffer included the rights of the Jew. Bonhoeffer saw three tasks as ecclesiastical responsibilities from which the third stood out. The third task reads „when the church witnesses the state practicing too much or too little law and order her task is not only to connect the victims that have fallen under the wheels, but to tackle the spokes in the wheel directly.“⁴⁶ The victims are Bonhoeffer’s main concern.

3.3 The „Victim“ as Bonhoeffer's Hermeneutical Key

According to Rothuizen, the „victim“ is the hermeneutical key in the work of Bonhoeffer. He argues that in *Grundfragen einer christlichen Ethic*, Bonhoeffer sees his countrymen as a victim the same way he sees the Jews as victims in 1933 – ultimately choosing the victims in general, the victims of any system. In Rothuizen’s days, this meant the people who were threatened by nuclear war, but also victims of hunger and poverty, the marginalized, vulnerable and oppressed. They can go to Bonhoeffer. Whether this is a refugee, an asylum seeker, or a sick or injured person, the victim has Bonhoeffer on his side.⁴⁷

In this regard, also in „Nach Zehn Jahren,“ we see the choices of Bonhoeffer. „Es bleibt ein Erlebnis von unvergleichlichem Wert, dass wir die grossen Ereignisse der Weltgeschichte einmal von unten, aus der Perspektive der Ausgeschalteten, Bergwöhnten, Schlechtbehandelten, Machtlosen, Unterdrückten und Verhöhnnten, kurz der Leitenden sehen gelernt haben.“⁴⁸

⁴⁸Rothuizen considers Bonhoeffer's peace ethic, in more ways than one, as an example and

⁴⁴ „We are not human to be a Christian, but Christian to become a human“ (A. A. Van Ruler, *Gestaltung Christi der Welt*, Neukirchen 1956, 37).

⁴⁵ A. A. Van Ruler, quoted in: G. Th. Rothuizen, *Aristocratisch Christendom*, 338.

⁴⁶ E. Bethge, *Bonhoeffer Biographie*, 325.

⁴⁷ G. Th. Rothuizen, *Een spaak in het wiel*, 48: „Open thy mouth for the benefit of the stupid,“ Proverbs 31:8 – today in the church, this is, indeed, the least of what the Bible asks of us in such times (From a letter from Bonhoeffer to his friend Erwin Sutz).

⁴⁸ DBW 8, 38.

⁴⁸ DBW 8, 38.

preferably as a „model“ of his life and work. It is no coincidence, then, that Bonhoeffer wrote an ethics in the same year (or same timeframe) when, more than ever, he was available. Here the theory is indeed a reflection on praxis. To the youth who came after him, he speaks from prison therefore as follows: „You will only think about what you can justify as an act. Our thinking was often the luxury of the beholder, when you will all stand in the service of ‘doing’.⁴⁹ Rothuizen sees the ethos of Bonhoeffer completely as the service to responsible action.

In response, Rothuizen stated, „The promise for Bonhoeffer’s theology is that this man has been so much an ethicist and has also done both practical and political advancement for ethics. So much so, that after the war one church was of the opinion that he, as a Christian and theologian, had done too much.“⁵⁰

4. Summary

According to Rothuizen, Bonhoeffer calls for reflection on the acts for which we ourselves are accountable, as well as on the context and time in which they occur. In this lies the core of our ability to answer the question of whether or not the Church may be expected to offer political resistance in a world characterised by a growing gap between the rich and the poor. Whether this gap is indeed growing while economies in Asia, Africa and South America are emerging, is a question which, in my opinion, remains to be answered. Of great concern in this respect is the growth of expenditure on arms worldwide⁵¹.

In any case, Rothuizen found Bonhoeffer’s ethics to be of great relevance for the 1980s because, according to Bonhoeffer, „ethics are a matter of history and of the earth, not of heaven“ (Barcelona).⁵² Ethics, with all its fundamental pretensions is brought down to everyday reality.⁵³ In the final part of his book *A Spoke in the Wheel*, Rothuizen advises against applying the adjective „Christian“ to ethics. He shows that Bonhoeffer also struggled with this adjective and planned to use the subtitle, „Attempt at a Christian ethics,“ for his first book on ethics. Although the combination of ethics and Christianity can be found in all of Bonhoeffer’s books right through to the book called, *Ethik*, eventually Bonhoeffer also refrains from using this adjective.

Rothuizen also states that an ethic that corresponds truly to human need not be called Christian but has to be connected to Christ. „One should pay attention to the fact that the Christ of Bonhoeffer is the one that is relevant for today and represents the pinnacle of topicality or better yet: of actual commitment to the people of today.“⁵⁴ It is a highly theological ethics that, no doubt, deserves to be continued in the way in which Bonhoeffer intended it. Rothuizen underlines that the Christ of Bonhoeffer is the one that is relevant for today with the following: „ethics does not float in the empty midst between inner and outer values, between unity and accountability, between love and order [...] but instead thinks, investigates and works from a place of, ‘being

⁴⁹ DBW 8, 433.

⁵⁰ G. Th. Rothuizen, *Een spaak in het wiel*, 184. Rothuizen here refers to the fact that after the war several churches in Germany took away from Bonhoeffer’s participation in the resistance.

⁵¹ SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Yearbook 2011), Yearbook 2011; <http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2011/files/SIPRIYB11summary.pdf>. obtained November 2011 The volume of international transfers of major conventional weapons in 2006-2010 was 24 percent higher than in 2001-2005, continuing the upward trend.

⁵² DBW 10, 323.

⁵³ G. Th. Rothuizen, *Een spaak in het wiel*, 171.

⁵⁴ G. Th. Rothuizen, *Een spaak in het wiel*, 51.

true', of what was promised in the Messiah. [...] In this way this ethics shows us where we stand, the place in which only one question can be asked, namely, 'What should we do?'"

Shaped by Luther, Calvin and Kuyper and by his own experiences with the Second World War, Rothuizen came to know Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a man in whom he recognized so much of what he had learned earlier in his own life. He developed a way of theologizing in which he gave Bonhoeffer the credit he deserved while at the same time criticizing him. Bonhoeffer was a man who, since the 1950's, became Rothuizen's theological companion. According to Rothuizen, Bonhoeffer was a theologian whose importance for the church and for the world still remains. In answering the question „what should we do?“ lies the lasting relevance of Bonhoeffer, even in the 21st century after 9/11. In this sense, Bonhoeffer still puts a spoke in the wheel!

Abstract

In 1985 Gerard Rothuizen investigated the meaning of the life and work of Bonhoeffer during the 1980s in Europe which was characterized by the East-West opposition. The response to this was protests against nuclear weapons that were expressed in mass marches all over Europe. Rothuizen navigates through these circumstances by drawing on Reformation ethics (radical obedience) and upon Bonhoeffer's ethical stance (contextual resistance) as well. Rothuizen argued that „one should read *Ethik* as a document of resistance“. He indicates that „the victim“ was Bonhoeffer's hermeneutical key. Rothuizen was convinced that the millions of people dying in the Third World are the victims of inequality. The work of this Dutch theologian allows us to recognize the ongoing relevance of Bonhoeffer's theology for a responsible life today.

BUURMEESTER, HANS: is a pastor in the Protestant church of Vlaardingen, The Netherlands. He is married and has three children. In preparation for theological study, he did his „entrance examination“ in modern languages, Greek, Latin and history. He studied theology from 1981 to 1987 at the Theological University of Kampen, where he graduated in practical theology (pastoral theology and pastoral psychology). He became pastor in 1987, and since 1995, he has been a member of the Dutch Language Section of The International Bonhoeffer Society (BWN), of which he has been the secretary since 2000. On behalf of the BWN, he was co-organizer of the XI International Bonhoeffer Congress.

