

Preface

WHEN I FIRST BEGAN to follow Jesus as a teenager, I soon heard stories, songs, and snippets about the life and witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. His writings continued to challenge and influence my faith and discipleship as I progressed on my journey with Jesus. Many years later I began to wonder how Baptist Christians coped with the Nazi regime. I soon discovered a disturbing lack of stories of courage and faithful witness. That was until 2004 when I came across a book containing excerpts of sermons and lectures of a Baptist pastor called Arnold Köster.

The credit for the rediscovery of Arnold Köster belongs to Dr. Franz Graf-Stuhlhofer. As a member of the Baptist Church Vienna-Mollardgasse 35, he heard stories and in due course discovered that many of Köster's sermons had been noted down, copied, and distributed. Since then most of them had been forgotten but gradually these papers—stored in the attics, cellars and boxes of older members of the Baptist church in Vienna—began to reappear. Rather than recycle the lot, he and Köster's son-in-law Richard Matschinger laboriously sorted through these documents and collected hundreds of pages.

Franz Graf-Stuhlhofer opened the doors of his home and the archive at the Baptist Church Vienna-Mollardgasse 35 to me. After every visit I returned weighed down with a rich hoard of unique historical material. These documents and the accounts of people, who still remembered Köster, opened a window into the past of this critical war period. I began to hear and sense the passion and struggles of a Baptist theologian who, like his contemporary Bonhoeffer, simply sought to follow Jesus.

Reading Bonhoeffer and Köster together gave me a deeper appreciation of each. I was able to develop a sense of perspective regarding the most central issue of the Christian faith: following Jesus in a complex world. It is my prayer and hope that readers of this book will be similarly enriched. All of the Köster material is my own translation, as are quotes from other German works. Introducing Köster to the English world for the first time made it seem appropriate to make extensive use of footnotes containing substantial parts of the German original.