

Professorial Beginning in Heidelberg

1936–1940

MY HEIDELBERG YEARS constituted my first test in my actual profession. I now had to fulfill the duties of a full professorship and hold four lectures and one seminar each week. That alone was a watershed in my life. In addition to this, Heidelberg was the place where I fell in love and in 1937 got married. During my first years of married life, I came into serious conflict with the Nazi Party, eventually leading to my enforced dismissal from the university in 1940. Karl Jaspers shared the same fate and had to give up his post on the same day as I did.

Without yet knowing what subject I would have to lecture on—which was a very delicate position for a beginner to be in!—I arrived in Heidelberg with a few manuscripts in my saddlebag and with my motorcycle laden with books and the usual necessities. For want of another address, I stopped off at the Theology Student Hostel to ask for advice. This proved to be the right place for me to begin. The hostel was run by Dr. Ernst Köhnlein, a scientist who later became a theologian. He and his wife very kindly took me in and, in the form of a brief survey, gave me my first report on the situation in Heidelberg.

There were, he informed me, some world famous authorities in the theology faculty, such as the New Testament scholar Martin Dibelius, the church historian Walther Köhler, and the Old Testament scholar Gustav Hölscher. The Dean, he said, was absolutely loyal to the regime. I would certainly run into problems with him and should not allow myself to be deceived by his affable bonhomie. In the church at Heidelberg, as everywhere else in Germany, fierce clashes were taking place between the Confessing Church and the German Christians. Although the “famous old gentlemen” of the faculty were inwardly on the side of the Confessing Church, they refrained from getting directly involved in the dispute. Only the brave old pastoral

theologian, Renatus Hupfeld, was prepared to put up a fight. As a result, Köhnlein continued, Hupfeld was something like a father figure to the students, the vast majority of whom supported the Confessing Church. Hupfeld's extreme hospitality played an important role in keeping the Confessing Church together.

Of the younger members of staff, Köhnlein continued, the Patristic scholar Baron Hans von Campenhausen was the star of the faculty. He not only fascinated his audience with his immensely lively and original lectures, but also impressed them by adopting an open and unequivocal stance in the conflicts of the day. The students were delighted that this stance was now to be reinforced by two young scholars, namely, Günter Bornkamm who was soon to arrive from Bethel to take up a lectureship in New Testament, and myself. The air, Köhnlein added, was full of rumors that the theology faculties were soon to be closed and transformed into theological colleges.

My first solemn inaugural visits to the "big names" of the faculty were enough to allow me to gain an impression of these dignified gentlemen. In the period that followed, they became fatherly friends to me. Later they and their wives also took my young wife under their wing and touchingly took care of her. In order to increase the solemnity of the occasion, it was customary to wear top hats to such introductory visits. Because this type of headgear could not exactly be said to have an aerodynamic form, I could scarcely wear it on my motorcycle. Furthermore, I also had considerable difficulty finding another place on my vehicle to store it. To solve this problem, I bought myself a so-called opera hat, a collapsible construction that fitted snugly into my saddle bag and only needed to be popped open in front of the relevant house. This hat was to cause Walther Köhler considerable astonishment. Köhler was a dignified man who looked very much like an English Lord and whom one could easily imagine arriving at such occasions in a horse-drawn carriage. As a gentleman of the old school, he accompanied me, the humble novice, to where I had parked my motorcycle. By continuing our conversation for a while longer I put off the dreaded moment when I would have to confess that I had come to such an official event on this sporty and casual vehicle. This was made all the worse by my being in the presence of a man who, by virtue of his age and fame, was entitled to expect the proprieties to be observed.

The dreaded moment arrived and he gazed at me and my motorcycle in disbelief. "And what are you going to do with your top hat?" he asked, visibly confused. Seizing the bull by the horns, I replied, "No problem, my motorcycle's got a cylinder-head." With this I folded my hat together, bowed one last

time, and put my foot down. In my rear mirror I could see him gazing after me in bemusement.

Gustav Hölscher was a dainty old gentleman of noble intellect. He had a magnificent scholarly profile that was reminiscent of Erasmus of Rotterdam. The evening gatherings at his home were characterized by a formal, indeed, almost ritual character, but despite this, they were never stuffy. The hosts' friendly attention and playful command of etiquette simply did not allow any awkwardness to develop. Only once, when my attire did not quite correspond to the norms appropriate to his home, did he look me up and down with a hint of lofty disapproval.

People of Hölscher's intellectual sensitivity, of course, suffered especially under the Nazi barbarism. It worried me when I saw that his house too hoisted the swastika flag on important days in the Nazi calendar. At the same time, however, I was amused by how tiny the flag was. It was about as big as a handkerchief, and compared with the size of the neighbors' flags was in itself a statement of opposition.

The real star of the faculty was Martin Dibelius. Together with Bultmann, his form historical research enjoyed international reputation. From the very beginning, I was constantly being invited to his home. Later, whenever one of us was ill, we could rely on his radiant wife with her infectious vitality and positive attitude to life to give us motherly assistance. Even the gloomy days in which we were living were unable to darken her constant cheerfulness.

Among the many things that united Dibelius and me was our love of anecdotes and memoirs. At first, my respect for this famous man made it difficult for me to grasp the strength of his predilection for gossip and the delight he took in relating countless pieces of scandal about the members of large and small royal courts or other important people. He was especially fond of telling stories about the wives and widows of famous men. Such women were particularly numerous in Heidelberg, and Dibelius was marvelous at portraying their vanity and hostility towards their rivals. He even went so far as to say that some widows, whose defense and propagation of their husbands' legacy was so overpowering that it got on everyone's nerves, gave one a certain sympathy for the Indian practice of *suttee*. I often attended his lectures, which delighted me not only because of the splendid way he gave them, but also because of the jokes he made during them. When his lectures were over, Dibelius loved to travel home on the back of my motorcycle and revel in the astonishment of the students when they caught sight of him. When I stopped in front of his house, he would occasionally ask me to sound my horn so that his wife and children would see him on the imposing machine.

Günter Bornkamm and Hans von Campenhausen became two of my closest friends in Heidelberg. Today I marvel at how much time we had for each other, especially since all three of us had to slave away at preparing the huge amount of material necessary for our classes on time. We often used to drive out of town in Bornkamm's tiny Opel P-4 and go rambling. Sometimes, we laughed so much that the little car swerved all over the road and we had to stop until we had regained our composure. We would make fun of the odd characters among our enemies and took pleasure in relating the quick-wittedness with which many people reacted to their evil attacks. No period is capable of creating such a cascade of jokes as a tyrannical regime. Even the cabarets, which in our day are so colorless, were bursting with high spirits and often crossed the boundary of what was acceptable. Thus, for example, the Munich comedian White Ferdl once began his act by breaking off at the word *Heil* in the obligatory greeting *Heil Hitler*. Then, holding his head with embarrassment, he stuttered out, "I've gone and forgotten the name!"

My friend Campenhausen made me realize what aristocracy can really mean. He lived with his enchanting wife and four flaxen-haired children in a large but rather shabby apartment in busy Rohrbacher Street. They had no money to reupholster the once noble chairs, and their financial situation was generally difficult. Despite this, a festive splendor lay over each frugal meal. The ceremonial of the Baltic lord of the manor had become second nature to my friend (which was why it seemed natural and was more likely to inspire than to inhibit) and even the children behaved like well-bred princes. They were, thank heavens, not *always* well behaved. When their father had to spend long periods away from home because he had to stand in for someone at another university, his high-spirited sons would sometimes get so out of hand that their mother was forced to call for my assistance.

When, quite in accordance with proper procedure, Campenhausen was called to a chair, he discovered on making his inaugural visit to the Rector that the Party had vetoed his appointment. Although his life underwent a radical change as a result of this, he never uttered a word of complaint. He was then shamelessly sent as visiting professor to theology faculties at other universities. On one occasion he was even sent to be fifth (!) church historian at the little university of Greifswald, where he was completely superfluous. But this too he endured without complaint and with much self-irony.

Indeed, self-irony had become second nature to him. Because of a foot complaint, he had difficulty in standing for long periods. For this reason, he asked his students not to bring their questions to him in the corridors of the university, but to visit him in his office, where he would be able to sit down.

When despite this request a student spoke to him in the corridor shortly afterwards, he simply asked him to take a seat. He himself then sat down on the floor, compelling the embarrassed student to do the same. This then forced the passing crowds of students either to climb over them or to go to the trouble of finding another route. That was typical of him and his superior nature. He always did what he believed to be right and always had the last laugh.

Because we held our lectures at the same time, I always used to meet Karl Jaspers in the lecturers' common room. We had many lively discussions there and often arranged to continue them at his house. Because he was married to a Jewess, he lived in constant fear and hid her as much as possible from strangers. He had an enormously profound intellect and was constantly surrounded by an aura of thought. He avoided even the slightest allusion to the menacing political situation even though it was of particular relevance to him. He knew that it was only his fame that protected him and his wife, and that this protection was hanging by a thread. The order that had obviously been made to spare him would be immediately revoked if he dropped his guard in the slightest.

With a regularity that bordered on monotony, Jaspers was constantly bringing up theological problems at our meetings. For him such problems were of almost absolute and vital importance. He could not cope with the fact that Christianity claimed to be absolute (at least in the sense in which *he* understood it). His arguments were always variations on the same theme: Faith, he argued, was an existential act and in this respect was absolute for our subjectivity. Consequently, a religious truth—such as, for instance, the belief that Christ is our Savior—stands or falls according to the faith of the person who witnesses to this truth. If this person fails and denies his faith, this truth perishes with his denial. That is why Giordano Bruno had to suffer being imprisoned and burned at the stake in order to ensure the continued existence of the truth (belief that this and other worlds possess a soul) in which he believed. Galileo, on the other hand, was calmly able to renounce the astronomical truth that the earth revolves around the sun and then secretly append the ironical comment, “But the earth really *does* move!” Galileo could do this because he was not advocating an *existential* (and *ipso facto* a vulnerable) truth but an *objective* truth that did not require a witness to die for it. With regard to objective truths, it is the evidence that determines their validity. Jaspers then went on to argue that if the Christian faith claims to be something like an unconditional absolute that is valid for everyone, then it ceases to be solely an existential, unconditional truth that exists “for

me” alone. While laying claim to being an existential truth, it is at the same time claiming an objective universality for itself. In other words, it wishes to unite in itself the types of truth espoused by Giordano Bruno *and* Galileo. In doing so, however, it ceases to be a thoroughbred religious truth, as it were. It was this and this alone that had always prevented him from becoming a Christian, despite his wish to do so. More than once during such discussions he would with great emotion take up Lessing’s statement that this alone was the “infinitely wide chasm which he was unable to cross. Whoever helps me to cross it will earn my undying gratitude.” In these dialogues I for my part pursued the goal of making clear to him the fundamental difference between Bruno’s panentheistic belief and Christian testimony. I cannot pursue this debate with Jaspers any further here but have devoted a chapter to it in my work on dogmatics, *The Evangelical Faith*.

Our dialogue on existential truth intensified in Jaspers’ seminar on Kierkegaard. One day he invited me to dispute with him in the presence of the other participants in his seminar. He regarded Kierkegaard as the pure existentialist philosopher whose commitment to a historical (and in this respect objective) figure like Christ was absolutely incomprehensible in view of the nature of his thought. For this reason, Jaspers rejected Kierkegaard’s Christian commitment and regarded everything that nevertheless pointed towards it as mere ciphers, and as the mythological coding and circumscription of purely existential pronouncements. Because I held this to be an almost grotesque misunderstanding, a fierce battle of words resulted, which culminated in fundamentally different analyses of the text. The undergraduates and Ph.D. students present listened keenly to this debate, which, however, was unable to reach agreement.

This all had an extremely odd epilogue. Jaspers, who by his standards had got very heated during our debate, said at the end of the meeting that, if I would allow him to speak frankly, he would like to confess that he was not too keen on conducting this form of dialogue with a theologian. In his opinion, I had argued like one of his colleagues in the philosophy faculty. I had impressed him not so much as a theologian, but as an advocate of hermeneutical questions, in other words, as someone who reflected on the premises involved in comprehending Kierkegaard, but who went no further. Precisely *that* which he, Jaspers, valued most highly in a theologian had been absent, namely, the voice of the witness. I replied that, because he had addressed subtle questions of interpretation in his Kierkegaard seminar, it was my task to meet him on the same level. I did not consider it to be an adequate method of dealing with such issues simply to content myself with

stating my adherence to an opposing conviction, as he obviously expected from a theologian. On the following evening, I continued, I would be dealing with the text on the temptations of Jesus (Matthew, chapter 4) in the Students' Christian Union. There he would be able to hear me in another role, namely, precisely that of the witness.

When I casually made this rather brusque remark, I never expected Jaspers to understand it as an invitation and even go so far as to accept it. But lo and behold, the next evening he sat among the audience together with the members of his seminar and even followed the text of the hymns in his hymn book. I was very moved when he said to me afterwards, "This evening I have indeed heard the voice of a witness."

I have got ahead of myself again. In my first days at Heidelberg I was concerned only with my lectures and my student audience. According to the faculty's teaching program the next subject on my agenda was ethics. To lecture on this subject, I first had to work out a basic framework. There was no way of getting out of my lectures—and I really was a greenhorn! I had to give them on time immediately after my arrival. I made things easier for myself by first fishing out all my old manuscripts that were of any relevance and then sought to get myself and my students to believe that these were precisely the right themes with which to begin. I had a wonderful response from my audience, which in turn gave me the momentum to work on the further systematic construction of this large lecture course. Altogether it was to last two semesters.

We had splendid students. They were a small group who, in defiance of all the obstacles, came together to do theology. They were an élite (I use this word with pleasure, despite the abhorrence with which it is regarded today!). When August Winnig one day made the strange but sensible attempt to obtain the advice of young students on a matter of church policy, he was very much impressed by the passionate and decisive statements of these young men, saying afterwards that he "felt like a naked little child surrounded by knights in armor." These young men saw to it that one did not wilt under the strain and the energy one gained from them was then reflected back onto them. Most of them were later killed in action.

I would like to describe a few characters from my first generation of students. However, I am afraid that if I began with one student, I would soon not be able to stop. One of them (despite what I have just said, it now looks as if I am after all about to begin telling stories about my former students, but I promise to bite my tongue as soon as this story is finished!) was an energetic child of nature from Munich by the name of Gerhard Scholler. His satirical

folk songs and Bavarian folk dancing were the highpoint of every party. When he returned from the war after a long period in captivity, however, he was in such a desperate state that he was hardly recognizable. Soon afterwards he was struck down by the dreadful disease of multiple sclerosis. This meant that he was very soon only able to perform his duties as army chaplain from a wheelchair. He loved his work dearly and persevered with it as long as was humanly possible, which greatly moved his soldiers. But the day came when his ill-health forced him to give up his work. He spent the last years of his life in a nursing home together (!) with his elderly mother. When I visited him in his tiny room there, I was confronted by a completely paralyzed and bowed white-haired old man. Despite this, he still beamed at me with the last sparks of his old cheerfulness, a cheerfulness that was due to his faith. I used to call him every Sunday from Hamburg. His voice, which had by this time become cracked, was full of goodness and wisdom until the longed-for silence arrived at last and he was able to begin singing God's praises in another world. What an eventful life! What it is to be a human being!

Each semester I would take my students for a weekend in Spöck. This little village in Baden was truly one of Germany's most special spots. It was still under the lively influence of a revivalist movement founded in the previous century by Pastor Aloysius Henhöfer (1789–1862). As soon as the church bells rang out on Sunday, something like a Pavlovian conditioned reflex took place in people's legs and propelled them towards the church.

The magnet that attracted us to Spöck was Urban, the village priest. He was a very unusual character, a marvellous combination of primitive Christian and comedian. In his deep bass voice we believed we could hear the voice of the ancient prophets and the first witnesses to the faith. It was an elemental cry that was not to be heard either in a theology lecture or in an academic church service. That such elemental naturalness still existed in the lousy twentieth century was for us a comforting counterbalance to the barbarism of the Nazis. We always returned to Heidelberg uplifted, even when we did not always agree theologically with everything Urban said. Thus he once set aside two evenings to speak on "Law and Gospel" (which in this divisive form was a rather dubious undertaking). The first evening consisted of a judgmental sermon of such ferocity that many of the intimidated audience did not turn up for the second evening, when he spoke in much softer and milder terms on the Gospel. I can still hear the constantly repeated refrain of the evening when he spoke on judgment, "Even the savior first has to bash your heads in!"

There was considerable turmoil in this quiet village when a high-ranking

leader of the Hitler Youth dared to attack the clergy. Of all places, he chose a milieu saturated with Christian tradition. He accused the clergy of seeking to make the people submissive by propagating the imaginary fears of death and hell that had been invented by the Jews. As an alternative to this vale of tears mentality, he offered the Nazi slogan, "Die standing, die laughing!" We had the good fortune of being present when Urban replied to this Nazi attack. His deep voice shook with rage and scorn as he repeated the Nazi slogan. He then went on to relate how Clemenceau had similarly wanted to die standing and to this purpose had arranged for his coffin to be lowered into the ground vertically. "My dear congregation," he roared at the top of his voice, causing the congregation to cower in their seats, "I would not like to have heard the din he made when his kneecaps popped out." That was what he was like in full flight. And with this comment, the Nazi attack was crushed. It is only with considerable difficulty that I resist the temptation to continue with a series of similar anecdotes.

The earthy quick-wittedness we encountered in Urban was the antithesis of the somewhat overdeveloped intellectuality of the academic tradition at Heidelberg, at least in the form it took in the old days when the university's magnificent traditions were still observed. It is hard to believe in these more sober days the extent to which the academic moguls of those days held themselves to be the center of the universe. Even today, Heidelberg is still full of all sorts of anecdotes about them, although the distinction between historical reality and legend has naturally become increasingly blurred over the years. A good example is Kuno Fischer, the famous historian of philosophy, who is perhaps the most popular object of posthumous stories. Fischer attached great importance to being addressed by his title "Excellency" and not simply as "privy councillor." Moreover, he insisted on this title being used in the third person, which resulted in such sentences as, "Would his Excellency be so kind as to. . . ." This affected behavior is indicative of the cult hero status he and his star colleagues attributed to themselves.

Now one day, Kuno Fischer suffered a slight stroke. This prompted his servant to fetch a doctor who lived nearby and, with blue light flashing, as it were, drag the elderly physician up the stairs. Gasping for breath, the doctor asked him, "What have you done with his Excellency in the meantime?" Whereupon the butler replied, "Yes, what should I have done with him, doctor? I just kept calling to him, 'Won't his Excellency return to his former excellence?!' "

A somewhat macabre relict of this need to behave like a public monument occurred in the drawing room of Mrs. Marianne Weber, Max Weber's widow,

while I was still at Heidelberg. Marianne Weber belonged to a circle of rather stuck-up women—Mrs. Weber preferred the term “high-natured”—who liked to believe that they formed a distinguished “intellectual” *élite*. I was constantly evading invitations from this circle because from what I had heard it seemed likely that these old ladies, irrespective of whether they belonged to the aristocracy or to the bourgeoisie, would send a shiver down my spine. In her biography of her husband, Mrs. Weber also devoted some space to her mother-in-law, Helene Weber, and described how the latter nursed her daughters during childbirth. But this priestess of the intellect spiritualized everything and could not bring herself to say a word like “childbirth.” Instead, she wrote that Mother Helene played a very active role in the “wifely duties” of her two daughters.

My First Years of Marriage

I had already experienced how easy it was to fall in love in Heidelberg. At first, this happened in quick succession, and since I had decided to enter into holy matrimony sooner or later, I was torn this way and that by the torment of having to choose. Then I met Marie-Luise Hermann from Karlsruhe, and something clicked between us immediately. This caused the conflict raging within me to intensify. I myself am not sure whether it indicates particular responsibility or whether it is rather evidence of questionable bourgeois behavior on my part that I then attempted to weigh up systematically the merits of the three “candidates” in the hope of coming to a decision. Although Marie-Luise, whom I later came to know as Liesel, immediately went to the top of my list, I had to take as my criterion an as yet unknown factor of considerable importance. Both my profession and my political convictions were possibly leading me towards a serious conflict with the authorities. Up until now, I had only been responsible for myself. A wife would not only have to be on the same wavelength as me but would also have to be brave. The thought that she could perhaps be inhibited in her actions and anxious to appease, perhaps giving her husband’s career priority over his convictions instead of encouraging him in moments of despondency, was too dreadful to contemplate. A “scaredy-cat” would certainly be of no use to me. But how could I find this out?

This train of thought was what led me to the rather adventurous idea of setting each of the three women a sort of test of courage. (Fortunately, none of them knew either of the existence of the other two women or of my plan). I

decided to take each of them for a ride on my motorcycle and race around a sharp bend I knew well at top speed. Whoever then uttered a squeal of fright when our angle with the road was at its sharpest had failed the test. Only one of them—and it was precisely the lady I hoped it would be—did not utter a sound. Although this was certainly a dubious, perhaps adolescent way to behave, the result of this experiment has proved its validity throughout the whole of our life together, which now amounts to almost half a century. My wife valiantly endured all the crises of our more-than-eventful life. She never opposed those convictions of mine that threatened to endanger our position. On the contrary, her calm, quite unfanatical, but resolute manner ensured a straight course on her part. I do not know how I could have faced her if I had resorted to opportunism for the sake of my career or through sheer cowardice. I also had my moments of weakness. After I was dismissed from my position at Heidelberg, I wrote to various churches in the hope that they would offer me a post. When it emerged that nobody wanted a person who had compromised himself politically (and could in turn compromise them!) I temporarily considered changing faculties and toyed with the idea of studying medicine. Again, it was my wife who enabled me to regain my feet and who remained undaunted. Also as the mother of our children she found, in contrast to me, the correct combination of love and strictness. It may well be that my odd idea of a motorized test of courage was nothing more than a chance decision akin to casting lots. Nevertheless, a higher and gracious hand saw to it that this lot fell “on that which was most delightful,” as it says in the Psalms.

Before our wedding in October 1937, I went on a tour to visit all my old friends. When I returned home two or three days earlier than I had intended, I discovered several subpoenas from the Gestapo waiting for me, the last of which sounded urgent and threatening. I simply sent them a copy of the announcement of my forthcoming marriage in the expectation that this would provide them with a sufficient explanation. Among the wealth of wedding congratulations we received, we then actually found a card with a picture of two cooing doves and the printed words, “God’s blessing on your Wedding,” signed “The Gestapo.”

We had scarcely started out on our honeymoon—on my motorcycle, of course—when the Gestapo called on my mother-in-law and asked after me. When she replied that we had not informed her where we were going, they pushed off back to where they had come from. When we had returned home to our new apartment, our first guest was the Gestapo, who surprised us with a house search. Sometime earlier I had quoted in a lecture a few spine-chilling sentences from Julius Streicher, the “Leader of the Franks,” which a friend

had noted down for me. The Gestapo now wanted me to divulge the name of my source. When the official finally discovered a few lists of names such as, for example, the names of the students taking part in my seminar, he ran his finger down the list, constantly asking, "Is it him? Is it him?" My reply was just as mindless. I simply repeated the sentence, "No comment, no comment." Once during this the good man groaned loudly and said, "Oh, if only I could catch you out!" He was really a good man, an honest and normal policeman who, without himself having had a say in the matter, found himself transferred to the mob that made up the Gestapo. He found having to discriminate against "respectable gentlemen" extremely embarrassing, as he openly confessed to me. "If only I was back with my villains," he said wistfully at the end, before taking his leave of us with a simple "goodbye" instead of the usual "Heil Hitler." After the collapse of the Third Reich, I met him again in an American concentration camp for Nazis. Even poor wretches like him were locked up there.

Our landlady was an old Nazi and a dragon in every respect. I was a thorn in her flesh and she felt permitted to harrass such a politically notorious character as myself in every conceivable way. If anything in the building got damaged, she always regarded my students, who were constantly our guests in our little attic apartment, as the culprits. This was what prompted her to go so far as to take legal action against me over a burst toilet drainage pipe. All she received at court, however, was a severe rebuff. That this damage, along with broken door handles and upturned trash cans, could be put down to an attack by my students was not at all obvious to the judge. I do not know where she picked the expression up, but in the abusive and accusatory notes she kept putting in our letter box she was fond of speaking of the "*ecclesia militans*"(!), which was allegedly responsible for this or that act of destruction. We kept our spirits up through laughter and by adopting an ironical and exaggerated politeness towards her. We were even prepared to give a particularly energetic Hitler salute when we met her. Sometimes, however, it did become a little too much for us. I mention our experience with our landlady to show how even the trivial side of everyday life could provide opponents of the regime with some small but special pleasures.

Much more humiliating than these petty gibes was the totalitarian state's interference in certain aspects of one's private life. After we had been married a good two years and still had not yet produced any offspring—we had suffered the tragedy of several miscarriages—we received a letter marked "confidential" from the Ministry of Education and the Arts. In this letter we were informed that the Fuehrer expected young married couples to

produce many healthy children to ensure the continued existence of the Nordic race. In the enclosed envelope, which only the Minister himself was permitted to open, I sent an explanation by return of post as to why our marriage had not yet been blessed with children. An irresponsible action of this kind could not remain without consequences for the career of the guilty party.

This letter reached us just after my wife had arrived home from hospital after yet another disappointment. In my reply I made clear in the strongest possible terms that I was not prepared to tolerate questions and unreasonable demands of this kind. I do not know of any reaction on the part of the authorities to this.

The first days of our life together were overshadowed by an event that distressed us greatly. A friend of my youth, Horst Erbslöh, had accepted our invitation to spend Easter (1939) with us. He had been a few classes below me at school. Because his parents' villa was on my way to school, we often met each other and went part of the way together. It was his athletic figure, the grace of his movements, and his beaming smile that first drew my attention to him. He liked being led and advised a little by an older boy like me and also enjoyed being occasionally licked into shape when he complained about his poor marks at school. I would tell him that he had brought it upon himself through his charming tendency to be lazy.

It later became clear to me that this friendship was colored by a tender eroticism, although this was never openly expressed, not even in words. This restraint had less to do with our natural chastity than it did with the limits imposed upon our behavior by the collective taboo with which that age protected the erotic sphere. For this reason, our friendship did not proceed beyond an enthusiastic affection for each other. This affection still gives me great joy, even when I look back on it half a century later.

Once, not long before his expected visit to Heidelberg, I dreamed of him. I saw myself standing suntanned before his coffin holding a funeral oration in his honor. This dream came true. He did not arrive as expected on that Easter morning but sent instead a long letter in which he informed me that he had embarked on a journey from which he would never return. I was the only person to be informed of this, he said, and asked me not to search for him. He thanked me for what I had told him about faith and for all the friendship I had shown him. He said this would be of comfort to him when he went to his death at the most beautiful place on earth. As a young businessman, he continued, he had suffered several disappointments for which he held himself responsi-

ble. He did not feel at all capable of coping with life. Even his girlfriend, he complained, recoiled from entering into a life-long relationship with him and was constantly coming up with new excuses. (He did not know that another man had entered her life and that *this* was the reason for her reluctance). He specified the person to whom I was to bequeath on his behalf the most beautiful pieces in his collections. He closed with the words that he hoped that God would forgive him for fleeing from a life that had become unbearable to him and asked me “to pray that God might forgive him.” The last sentences were smudged. I believe his tears had fallen upon them.

After I had recovered from the paralyzing shock that this news caused me, I concentrated all my energy on whether I could still save him and, if so, how I was to go about it. I then remembered that he had the previous year sent me a postcard from Berchtesgaden, where he had been a mountain soldier. On it he had marked with a cross a spot in the Watzmann massif and had commented, “This is in my opinion the most beautiful place on earth. This is where I would like to die.” At the time I had thought nothing of it, but now this statement suddenly acquired a new significance. I picked the card out from my archives, reached for my train schedule, bundled together the most necessary utensils, and took the next train to Berchtesgaden. There I intended to persuade the mountain troops to place a search party at my disposal to help me look for Horst.

It was already late evening when I arrived in Berchtesgaden. I went straight to the barracks. I do not know what obscure entrance I had arrived at, but at any rate I did not meet a single living soul. It was Easter after all and most of the soldiers were on holiday. Eventually I came across a sentry, who nearly arrested me as an intruder. At any rate he listened to my explanations of the whys and wherefores of my visit with great suspicion. After a lot of to-ings and fro-ings, I was at last taken to an officer. He at least believed me when I introduced myself and explained my profession, and was prepared to listen to me with an open mind. After I had completed my story, he asked me with some resignation how I envisaged my plan being carried out. He could hardly scour the whole of the Alps just because my friend had been a mountain soldier. After all, I did not even know that he had not chosen another place to die! I then showed him the mark on the postcard and asserted with great resolution that we would find him at Hocheck and nowhere else. The captain knew this spot and promised to send out a search party at first light. Unfortunately, his orders prevented him from accompanying me.

On the following day, the search party found Horst at the exact spot I had predicted. He could not have been dead long. A shatteringly serious expression was etched into his features. I had to identify him. My friend's body was then transported to his home town of Barmen. There I conducted his funeral service and for one last time conjured up the radiant picture of earlier days and the hazy picture of his last days for those who had loved him. I did not conceal the fact that he had deliberately sought death, but I also quoted his last statement, in which he had said that he was certain he was not going into hopeless darkness but was convinced that a compassionate figure would receive him on the other side.

During the days we had spent looking for Horst, the mountain sun had given me a suntan, exactly as it had appeared to me earlier in my dream.

Under the Threat of Ideological Dictatorship

The two Nazis at the university with whom I had the most extensive dealings were the temporary rector, Ernst Kriek, and the dean of the theology faculty, Theodor Odenwald.

Ernst Kriek had worked his way up from the position of elementary school teacher. He had made a name for himself with sound educational books—and this was before the advent of the Third Reich—before becoming the chief ideologist, so to speak, of National Socialist educational theory. In comparison with similar publications of that period, his multivolumed *Völkisch-politische Anthropologie* ('National-Political Anthropology') was at least notable for its independent style and Kriek's aversion to swimming with the tide. He was at any rate no streamlined career man but a sullen character who could not easily be pigeonholed in any single group. He was thus at least respected for being genuine in his beliefs, even if one did have to fight against feelings of revulsion when he appeared at academic ceremonies in his SS uniform and kept clinking the golden rector's chain against the belt buckle of his uniform. He made it quite clear to me that he regarded me as a dissident, which must certainly have played an important role when I was later thrown out of the university. For this reason I was very moved when, after the collapse of the Third Reich and not long before his death, he wrote to me from the internment camp at Moosburg begging my forgiveness and hinting that he had found his way back to what had earlier once given his life meaning.

Theodor Odenwald, the dean of the theology faculty, was a plump man of

medium height who radiated good naturedness and bonhomie. He used to behave in a somewhat forced comradely way towards his students, but was also capable of giving them an extremely severe ticking-off if he was displeased with something. Because he was a good-natured and helpful man, he was generally well liked among the students, even if they did take a largely critical view of his theological and political pronouncements. He seemed to me to be living proof of the fact that a certain subjective decency is simply not enough when difficult decisions are called for. If one bases the norms of one's behavior on a dubious system of values or is prepared to come to an arrangement with the *zeitgeist*, such decency is not sufficient to prevent one from leaving the straight and narrow. As a result of this, Odenwald eventually lost any fixed standpoint he might have had and it became impossible to ascertain his position on anything. This instability could be clearly seen in his literary productions. He had never written an original and independent theological work but had merely published occasional essays on the contemporary situation such as, for instance, his essay on *The Current Crisis of Christianity*, or an essay imitating Nietzsche's polemical style on "emasculated Christians." He wrote nothing but publications in support of the system, in which he endeavored to create an aura of modernity, progressiveness, and of being up-to-date with all modern developments.

At first, Odenwald was always extremely friendly towards me. But then, during my last semesters at Heidelberg, an event occurred that triggered off in him something similar to Saul's resentment of the younger man, David. Because we both taught the same subject, it was a source of some embarrassment that virtually every student preferred my lectures to his. Eventually, the number of students fell so drastically that his lectures had to be canceled. After what I later suffered at his hands, I sometimes wondered how I would have behaved in a similar position. This thought was enough to dampen the self-righteousness that was threatening to overtake me.

The beginning of the end of my teaching career in Heidelberg began with a great scandal. In the summer of 1939, all the students in Germany were called upon to take part in the harvest. The approaching war was beginning to cast its shadow. To this purpose, a propaganda event took place in the hall of the university, which was given a big spread in the press. At this event, a representative of the German student leadership gave a speech containing the words (I paraphrase): "The only people who will be excluded from this operation are the theologians. They have dissociated themselves from our nation and its renewal. We shall therefore also dissociate them from the service of this nation." At this, our students, who were scattered through the

hall, left their seats as one man, pushed their way through the packed aisles, and left the hall *en masse*. In those days, this was an unheard-of, virtually unique demonstration and was the talk of the town for days. The speaker was so disconcerted that he stopped speaking and for a long time stood helplessly watching the events taking place around him. As a result, the walkout took place in complete silence. Not a single cry of protest was heard.

This incident was extremely depressing for our students. What actually was their country and their nation? Defamations of the Christian faith had been occurring with ever greater frequency. And now this public expulsion! In an age where people are free to demonstrate and oppose the government, as is the case today with our mild-mannered democracy, it is difficult to comprehend what this angry exodus meant back then and what a provocation it must have been in the climate of terror of that time.

After that evening, we sent two student representatives to Gustav-Adolf Scheel, who at that time was the German student leader in Stuttgart. Scheel was one of the few pleasant and decent characters in the higher echelons of the Nazi hierarchy. Our people made such an energetic, spirited, and drastic protest to him that he actually enjoyed it. Indeed, he made what almost amounted to a declaration of love to them before ordering the edict against the theologians to be revoked. This order was unique in the Third Reich, which usually never revoked anything and whose customary reaction to protest was to harden its position still further. When three special trains were subsequently laid on to take the students to the harvest, the theologians were on each occasion given a special welcome over the platform loudspeaker.

On the morning after the scandal in the hall, I gave a special lecture in which I fiercely attacked the student leader's speech and also sought to help my audience in their distress. I wanted to make clear to them (and to myself) how a Christian copes with such disparagements. I conjured up the "other Germany," whose place had been usurped by the contorted countenance of our present fatherland. Nazi Germany, I declared, was a mere caricature, cruelly concealing the *Germania invisibilis*. This speech, too, was to play an important role in my dismissal. It was later published as a contemporary document.

The Enforced End: The Events Leading to My Dismissal

My dismissal took place in two stages. The first stage was the sudden and to my eyes mysterious reappearance of the professor (Jelke) against whom

disciplinary proceedings had been taken and whose chair I had been representing all those years. As a result, I was now in danger of becoming superfluous unless another teaching post was found for me. The dean of the faculty at Erlangen, of which I was still officially a member, got wind of the new situation almost before I did and hastened to inform me that Erlangen had absolutely no use for me. I found it scandalous that in an age in which a noose had been placed around theology's neck that was constantly being pulled tighter, a young theologian who had not yet had the time to prove himself should be pushed out in such a callous way.

In this respect, the faculty at Heidelberg behaved quite differently. It decided unanimously to find a nontenure lectureship for me. Dean Odenwald revealed this decision to me with a broad smile and offered me his congratulations. He then went on to assure me that he would push this measure through and that he already saw a promising opportunity to do just this.

Despite being a member of the Nazi Party, the integrity of the oral surgeon K.F. Schmidhuber, who was the local Head of Lecturers, gained him everybody's trust. He was constantly trying to assist us young theologians. When I visited him in his clinic and told him that the fate that had been menacing me had fortunately been averted, he gave me a nonplussed and rather sad look. "I've just been reading your file," he said. "Unfortunately, it contains exactly the opposite. Your dean writes that it is now no longer possible to keep you on here. In his opinion, the unpleasant stir some of your recent lectures have caused makes your continued presence at this university undesirable. In addition to this, he felt that it was important to reduce the burden on the faculty caused by reactionary elements." "But Mr. Odenwald has only just promised his support!" I replied. "Then he's been playing a double game," Schmidhuber responded, "Please go to him and demand an explanation. You're quite welcome to tell him what I have disclosed to you. I always thought that clergymen didn't lie, but, as we now see, that's not the case. Oh well!"

I do not want to give a detailed account of the report I wrote on the pretty stormy argument with the dean that then followed. With a scarlet face and close to collapse, he accepted the reproach Schmidhuber and I made that he had been playing a double game with me. After a few excuses, which I swept aside, he was forced to admit his intrigue and then said in the embarrassing silence that followed, "What stress the likes of us live under! Please take into consideration that a theology dean cannot have any principles nowadays."

I will never be able to forget the moment Odenwald made this remark. He had completely disarmed me. The burning rage with which I had approached

him was extinguished at a stroke. The tragedy of his good-natured but unsteady character and finally the candor of his capitulation overpowered me. The conflicts of the day were simply too much for him. I felt sorry for him and the triumphant feeling of moral superiority that had previously inspired me evaporated. I saw that the integrity of the theologian—and especially that of such a feeble one as Odenwald—was under much greater threat than that of the indifferent contemporary into whose inner vacuum Nazi ideology could flow unhindered. The dean's Christian faith caused him to suffer from powerful inhibitions and he was plunged by his pact with the Nazi system into a gruelling conflict. Because he recoiled from making clear-cut but painful decisions, the only way he could escape from his dilemma was by suppression and denial. This reluctance to take a decisive stand was founded on his inadequate theology, which did not provide any real counterbalance to the rival ideologies of the day. I also suddenly understood something I had previously thoughtlessly disregarded, namely, why his last lectures had been canceled owing to lack of students. I was overcome with pity for a failed human being.

The second stage of the end of my career followed soon afterwards. Even before the decision on the agreed nontenure lectureship had been made, I received notification that "the Fuehrer's deputy" had exercised his veto on behalf of the party against my being allowed to continue to work as a lecturer in any form. This letter also contained the demand to pay back the income I had already received for that current month. I do not believe that even a maid would have been dismissed in this manner. Up until then, we had had to manage on my monthly salary of 350 marks, which was not enough to have made any savings possible. Consequently, we now found ourselves in serious financial difficulties.

No sooner had Schmidhuber heard of all this than he came to my assistance in a way that touched me greatly. He was in charge of a clinic and was snowed under with work. To alleviate some of his workload, he had just been assigned a new chief assistant. For my sake, he did without this urgently needed assistant for three months and gave me the latter's salary. He could not bear to see me treated unfairly, although our ideological views were anything but close. Yes, there were even Nazis of this kind! During the later denazification process they were lumped together with their evil comrades. When this happened to Schmidhuber, I fought for his rehabilitation with all my might. I have always remembered him with gratitude and respect. My treatment by the Nazi Party went too far even for the university, as I can

report to its credit. The then rector, who was also a medic, registered his protest and succeeded in obtaining an interim payment for me.

News of my dismissal spread very quickly, and all of a sudden I felt like an outcast. Some of my acquaintances no longer dared to greet me on the street or crossed the road to avoid meeting me. This was not the case with my faculty colleagues, however, who remained loyal to me. Also, a few professors from other faculties made no secret of their solidarity and even demonstrated it publicly. Thus the neurologist Viktor von Weizsäcker and the jurist Karl Engisch were constantly inviting me to take walks with them. There were also other ways in which I received some agreeable signals that heaven had not forgotten me and that my wife and I were being looked after. One of my students had heard of my dismissal and sent me his complete savings of several hundred marks. Only with great difficulty was I able to persuade him to take the money back again. The great Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad, who at that time was teaching in Jena and whom I did not know personally, wrote me an extremely sympathetic letter and invited us both to live for an unlimited period at his family's estate on the Chiemsee. We would, he said, be provided of in every respect and could live there free of worry and with no need for an income. I would have to compile a very long list if I wanted to enumerate all the signs of friendship and helpfulness that were shown us in addition to those I have cited.

I used the free time I suddenly had on my hands to write my fingers to the bone—I still have a whole file from this period in my archives—and to protest against my dismissal to every conceivably relevant authority. I was above all concerned to find somebody who could gain me access to the Brown House* in Munich. I was determined to speak to the Fuehrer's deputy or one of his advisers. Access to this house, however, was protected by a wall of iron. Old Pastor Scheel, the father of the German student leader, was also extremely concerned for my welfare. But despite his son's influence even he was not able to gain admittance for me, although he made a genuine effort.

Then, one day, Hans Heyse, the boss of the Academy for Lecturers I had attended and with whom, as I mentioned earlier, I had had many heated debates, paid a completely unexpected visit on me. Now an officer in the army, he was in Heidelberg on official business and just wanted to look in on me. He had not yet heard of my fate. Despite our opposing roles in the Academy, I had always the feeling that he liked me. On this occasion, too, he

* Nazi central office in Munich. *Translator's note.*

reminisced on our days at the Academy with great affection and spoke warmly of our “productive opposition.” When I told him about my vain attempts to storm the Brown House, he encouraged me simply to go there and not allow myself to be turned away. This seemed a good idea and I resolved to attempt it.

My Visit to the Brown House in Munich

This was no sooner said than done. I travelled to Munich and entered the Brown House’s threatening and cold walls. I had only got as far as the porter when I experienced my first “halt” because I was unable to show him either a summons or an invitation. And when I said in all naiveté—it was really very naive!—that I had to speak to the Fuehrer’s deputy, his only reaction was a quizzical smile as if I had said that I had come in the name of the Emperor of China. Anyway, he then ignored me completely and proceeded to leaf through some papers. However, I refused to budge an inch and stood watching the uniformed big shots that were going in and out. A young civil servant, one of the few civilians in the building, stopped for a moment and fixed me with his gaze. I do not know why. Perhaps I looked rather helpless and lost. At any rate, he suddenly approached me and asked whether he could be of any assistance, informing me that he knew his way around the Brown House. “I don’t believe you can help me,” I replied, “It seems that nobody here can help me.” “Well!” he said with a smile, “That remains to be seen. Who is it you want to see, then?” “The Fuehrer’s deputy,” I replied. “Good heavens,” he exclaimed, laughing out loud, “That’s aiming a bit high. It’s very difficult to get hold of Mr. Hess. But if you tell me what the problem is, perhaps I can advise you on somebody else who might be able to help you!”

The man was so kind and helpful that I quickly spluttered out my story to him. While I was doing this, I immediately gained the impression that our basic views were perhaps not at all so far apart. At any rate, he took up my cause with astonishing commitment. “I have an idea,” he said and pulled me into a corner. “I can gain you access to the adviser for the arts. I know her well. We’ll see how far that brings us. The real key figure for your case is the National Head of Lecturers. He’s pretty inaccessible. But who knows? If the girl manages the situation skilfully, perhaps she can get you an audience with him.”

He telephoned briefly from the porter’s telephone and then lead me to the

aforementioned lady who, in view of the responsibility of her position, struck me as very young and inexperienced. To my surprise, she was informed about my case and began immediately to find fault with my concept of history. I ought to understand, she said, that an understanding of history in which the fall played such a dominant role and which refused to predicate a “hierarchy of creation” for nation and race is unacceptable to National Socialism. As a pupil of Hans Heyse, if I had ever heard of him, she went on, she certainly had no sympathy for such a theology.

When I heard Heyse mentioned I intervened immediately, deliberately dropping the casual remark that I knew him very well and that Mr. Heyse had had tea with me a few days previously. Her reserved physiognomy lit up as if an electric impulse had passed through it. If her revered master had dignified me with a visit—she immediately asked about the whys and wherefores—then there must be more to me than this rather obsequious creature had suspected. This fan of Heyse’s had scarcely thrown me an almost reverential glance when I exploited the favorable impression I had created by saying, “Well then, if Hans Heyse respects me despite my theology of the fall, then I really ought also to be worthy of an appointment with the National Head of Lecturers, don’t you think? Of course, I don’t know if your influence reaches far enough to gain me an audience with him.” She was immediately prepared to dispel my doubts about her influence and asked me to take a seat for a moment in the waiting room. A few minutes later she appeared again, saying, “The National Head of Lecturers will see you now,” and informed me of the corridor and room number of his office.

Still slightly stunned by the suddenness of my success, I made my way to the stronghold of this Mr. Big and after marching past a few receptionists suddenly found myself standing before him. To the outside world he was known as “Laddie Schulze.” I had already been told that he was a typical apparatchik and had himself never been a lecturer. He wore a glittering (diplomat’s?) uniform covered with innumerable medals that were unknown to me. (It crossed my mind that they might have originally belonged to foreign potentates.)

I wrote up my notes on the pretty dramatic and occasionally loud conversation that followed in a café immediately afterwards. I can only give an account of a few moments of this model case of contemporary history here. (Despite immediately making a record of this meeting and despite the quotation marks, the following is, of course, not an absolutely literal account, but is an attempt to give the most accurate report possible.)

“So you made it!” he said in greeting, before immediately showering me

with a wild torrent of words. “I was expecting a fat, little priest, but instead I find a nordic youth before me! You should be ashamed of yourself for being a Christian. It shows that you’re still wet behind the ears! It is outrageous that someone like you can still talk about sin and such pathological nonsense and make the whole of world history dependent upon Adam’s having eaten an apple!” All this and more was hurled at me in an extremely loud and wildly staccato voice.

It suddenly became clear to me that any discussion with this man would be utterly pointless. He would just throw me out. This being the case, I wanted at least to try to make a dignified exit. It was thus not a courageous act on my part when I snapped back at him in the same high volume, “That’s just typical of National Socialists like you. You present us with some nonsense your advisers have talked you into believing and fling a caricature of Christianity at us. It’s enough to make us blow our tops. This discussion is really quite pointless. I think I might as well leave right now.” I was so angry that I had completely forgotten where I was.

But then a strange thing happened. These people were so used to (and disgusted by) fawning subservience that they often reacted affectionately to violent opposition conducted in their own style. This was also how I fared. After my outburst, the official beamed at me and said almost sentimentally and thoughtfully, “Oh, when I look into your blue eyes, it’s clear that you belong to us! I did of course express myself somewhat drastically. I’m a blunt sort of person and like to speak frankly.”

He was at any rate suddenly very much more friendly and listened quietly to me. However, because he was only superficially informed of my case from hearsay, he was not able to make much of a response. Finally, I even sensed a certain barbaric goodwill on his part—I do not know how else to describe this crude character’s good mood—and, in simple terms and taking his primitive nature into account, was able to tell him something about my Christian faith. “At the beginning of our conversation, you said that my Christian faith was proof that I was still wet behind the ears. But I have not always been a Christian. I only acquired my faith later. I have then, as it were, deliberately chosen to be wet behind the ears. This choice alone and not the relicts of pious traditions is my faith!”

The atmosphere had meanwhile eased to such an extent that I could say to him, “After all that we have discussed and after correcting a few things your advisers have told you, I find it very odd that I was thrown out of the university and see no reason why this decision should remain in force. I

would be grateful if you would inform me of your precise reasons for this decision.”

“I’m sorry, old man, but the decision stays and, what’s more, I’ll tell you why,” he said. “Strictly speaking, it has nothing to do with you personally.” And then came the decisive sentence, which I can repeat almost word for word. “As long as theology faculties still exist—and that won’t be for much longer, I can tell you!—I will make sure that only sucking pigs and no wild boars are appointed to professorships. You belong to the younger generation of lecturers who have most influence with the students. We don’t want lecturers like that. We’ll deal with the older lecturers later.” “I have understood you very precisely, Sir!” I said and got up to leave. He accompanied me to the door and took his leave of me with the words, “We’ll talk again in ten years. By then you’ll be one of us.” To this I replied slowly, thoughtfully, and with very clear enunciation, “Yes, in . . . ten . . . years, Sir.” Long before the ten years were up, no one could tell me where he was and what had become of him. “His own home knew him not.”

A few months later, he inquired whether I would be prepared to accept a professorship in philosophy, should one arise. He obviously wanted to help me. But because this was unmistakably part of the strategic goal of closing theology down, I rejected his offer. Althaus described this offer as a “diabolical temptation.”

Unemployed

So now I stood in a professional void and considered what move I should make next. For a brief moment, a chance appeared that caused me great excitement. I received an inquiry from Hamburg whether I would be willing to accept a candidacy for the post of main pastor at the Church of St. Nicolai. You bet I was willing! This was a special post that had a long tradition lying behind it. Its duties consisted exclusively in preaching, teaching, and running the church. Above all, the teaching aspect of the post (the preparation of candidates for confirmation and the holding of public lectures) bore at least some resemblance to my previous work. This offer seemed like a sign from providence to me. Such assumptions, however, often prove to be human, all too human speculations. This was also to be my experience.

As soon as the church authorities at Hamburg found out that I had been dismissed, they retracted their offer, saying that they could not afford to

burden themselves with someone like me. The former German Christian but now long since “converted” Bishop of Hamburg, Franz Tügel, a keen and sympathetic reader of my works, tried to intervene and reinstated me on his list of candidates. This caused us yet more days of nerve-racking tension. But then everything was suddenly brought to an end in one fell swoop. A letter signed “Heil Hitler” arrived from the parish council containing the curt message that the selection committee had rejected my candidacy. I was in great despair and suffered a crisis of faith when I saw this last chance destroyed. Later, when I was summoned in a quite different way to a wonderfully fulfilling job in Hamburg, I thought back not unashamedly on how easily we insignificant human beings identify our wishes with the will of God and are then vexed when “higher thoughts” deal with us according to quite different and much wiser principles.

I now sought a church that would be willing to entrust me with a clerical position. I possessed the necessary educational background and had taken the necessary examinations for such a post. But my application met with no success and I received rejections from every quarter. I was *persona non grata* and was regarded as a liability. The State Church of Baden, with which I had had very close relations from my Heidelberg days, sent me a very warm invitation. However, the Church had had a governmental and therefore Nazi “financial department” forced upon it. It was this department’s duty to approve every church living, every church event, and even every transfer. It simply used its veto to prevent my being awarded a post, describing me as “politically suspect.” From Bishop Meiser, the head of the Bavarian State Church, I received a letter that contained neither a salutation nor a polite closing sentence, informing me that I could find “temporary” employment in his State Church. How welcome I was to him was made crystal clear by the following statement: “This does not entail acceptance into the list of candidates for a church position or inclusion in our health insurance scheme.” For somebody who, after all, had been a professor for three years, the style and manner of this brotherly helpfulness appeared so “untempting” to me that I did not bother to respond to the letter. From other quarters, too, there only came rejections, or I was put off, which again was of no help.

But I had to do something and do it fast. Not only was our money on the point of running out, but the Gestapo was also beginning to make threatening noises. Nowhere did there appear to be a light at the end of the tunnel. During these weeks I wrote, primarily for my own consolation, a little book entitled *Wo ist Gott* (Where Is God?) This little book was later printed in several editions. It was concerned with the problem of Job and dealt with my

own religious doubts in the form of letters addressed to an imaginary “Sergeant K.” I always found working through my personal problems in literary form very therapeutic. By imposing intellectual order upon my chaotic worries in this way, I sought to bring them under control. I received many letters in response to this book, especially from the front. Some of these letters occasionally caused me a little embarrassment. The imaginary Sergeant K had become so real to quite a significant number of people that they requested his army postal number so as to get in contact with him.

Emergency Accommodation in the Army

In the midst of this awkward situation, God’s gracious hand once again reached into my life and sent Major Klein to my home. Klein’s reason for visiting me was that he had read some of my books and wanted to discuss a few issues with me. When I told him of my apparently hopeless situation, he advised me to enlist in the armed forces. “Your wife will then receive enough financial support to live on. And in the army you’ll also be safe from the Gestapo.” I had to explain to him that I had unfortunately been declared unfit for military service on the grounds of my illness and, furthermore, was permanently dependent on medicine. “That doesn’t matter,” he said, completely unimpressed. Because he occupied an influential position at the records and recruiting office of the regional headquarters at Heidelberg, he saw a few (rather crooked!) possibilities of making the relevant alterations to my military records and getting me into the army. I very soon received my call-up papers and was drafted into a special division of the aircraft recognition corps at Wiesbaden. After the customary basic training, which I had no trouble in passing, we learned how to identify and report invading enemy aircraft. To apply what I had learned, I was later transferred to Evreux, a town between Paris and Le Havre that had been almost completely destroyed by German aircraft.

I will spare the reader my military experiences. They were nothing out of the ordinary and did not involve me in any military engagements. Until my enlistment, I had spent my whole life in an academic ivory tower. It was a very enjoyable change to be able to associate with ordinary people. The camaraderie often made me forget the desolateness of my life as a civilian. For some of my fellow soldiers, I was a welcome assistant in the writing of letters, primarily to girlfriends, fiancées, and wives, but also to mothers-in-law. Before putting pen to paper, I would first ask exactly how large a dose of

emotion—from a soft purring to fiery passion—the individual wished to have in his letter. I was always proud when I was told that the letter had had the desired effect. I also enjoyed thinking up all sorts of unusual answers and modes of behavior for my often rebellious dealings with my superiors. Unable to fit these into their routine, they were reduced to helplessness. Such embarrassing situations also gave my comrades a lot of pleasure. I can remember that a particularly fierce and much feared sergeant, an individual who truly loathed Christianity, once interrupted his lesson to tell a joke that was not only dirty but also blasphemous. Now you really cannot and should not be prudish when you are in the army. But this combination of two obscenities was going too far. I put up my hand and said with the routine curttness, “Sir, I would ask you to refrain from such inappropriate jokes while on duty!” This was one of those cases for which there was no provision in his rules of behavior towards subordinates, and consequently caused him a verbal block. In addition to this, the added threat that he had also done something impertinent “on duty” may have thrown him off balance. At any rate, he gaped at me dumbfounded and, grinding his teeth and thinking frantically, paced up and down in the deathly silence that filled the room. What would happen now? Then abruptly and without making a single remark, he continued with the lesson. Afterwards, I received a small ovation from my comrades, who hated the sergeant because of the sadistic pleasure he took in tormenting the less skillful among us.

After about nine months, life in the army became deadly boring. I also knew from Liesel that the Gestapo had in the meantime fallen silent. I longed for meaningful work. So I decided to bring about my discharge from the army. A simple trick was all that was needed to achieve this. All I had to do was to reveal my illness to the army doctor. After I had done that, I would be immediately included in the discharge proceedings. The first stage in achieving this consisted in getting myself transferred to barracks in Frankfurt where hundreds of candidates for discharge were assembled. There, however, the process then ground to a halt. Horror stories were told about how many weeks one could be detained there. And that was indeed what happened to me.

Every morning at the barracks there was a roll call. At these, fatigue-parties were detailed to clean the latrines in other barracks and attend to other extremely unpleasant duties. So I concentrated the whole of my acumen on how I could escape as quickly as possible from performing this inspiring service for my country. Then I had an idea. At each morning roll call, anyone with venereal disease had to fall out to the left. I made a mental

note of a few faces and discovered that they no longer turned up the next day. So one morning I also joined those suffering from venereal disease. The sergeant on duty had meanwhile got to know me reasonably well during my stay there. At any rate, when I fell out to the left with those suffering from venereal disease, he bawled at me, “What are *you* doing here?” adding ironically, “Alright, which venereal disease have you got?”

That by-now-familiar moment when an unexpected answer paralyzes the military mind arrived once again, for when I told him about my “chronic postoperative tetany,” instead of giving him the usual familiar information, his inventory of routine jokes for such cases failed completely. Furthermore, he probably did not want to reveal that his knowledge of venereal diseases was incomplete and that he found himself confronted with a new and unknown disease. After giving me that rather helpless look that I love so much in military men, he let me remain with the V.D. crowd and gave me my identity papers shortly afterwards. I was now a civilian again and was very pleased to be able to return to my young wife.