

Part 1

The Interrogation Period: April–July 1943

1. From Karl Bonhoeffer

Berlin-Charl[ottenburg] 9

April 11, 1943

Dear Dietrich,

I wanted to send you a greeting from us and tell you that we are always thinking of you. We know you and are therefore confident that everything will turn for the better, and hopefully soon. Despite all the anxiety we are now experiencing, we have the happy memory, to which we will hold on, of the cantata *Lobe den Herren*, which you rehearsed and performed with your brothers and sisters and the grandchildren for my seventy-fifth birthday. Hopefully, we can speak with you soon. Kindest regards from Mama, Renate, and her fiancée, and your old Father

With permission we have sent you a package on Wednesday the seventh, with bread and some other groceries, a blanket, and a woolen undershirt, and such.

2. To Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer

April 14, 1943

My dear Parents,

Above all you need to know and indeed believe that I am doing well. That has really been true for the whole past ten days even though I was unfortunately unable to write to you until today. Curiously, those things that one usually imagines to be particularly unpleasant when in detention, that is, the various external privations, do in fact hardly matter at all. It is quite possible to satisfy one's morning appetite with dry bread—and by the way, I am also getting all kinds of good things!—and the cot does not bother me in the least. Between eight at night and six in the morning, one can get plenty of sleep. I have, in fact, been particularly surprised that, from the first moment, I have almost never had a craving for cigarettes. I believe that in all these things, psychological factors play the crucial role. The considerable internal adjustment demanded by such an unexpected arrest and having to come to terms and put up with a completely new situation—all this makes physical needs completely secondary and unimportant. I am finding this a truly enriching experience. I am not as unaccustomed as others to being alone, and it is certainly a good steam bath for the soul. What does or might torment me is the thought that you are fearful and worried about me, and that you are not eating and sleeping properly. Forgive me for the worries I am causing you, but I believe that this time it is less myself than an adverse fate that is to blame. As an antidote it is good to read and memorize hymns by Paul Gerhardt, as I am currently doing. By the way, I have my Bible and reading material from the library here, and now sufficient stationery as well.

As you can imagine, it is my fiancée for whom I feel particularly sorry during this time. It is a lot for her to bear after having just

recently lost her father and brother in the East. Being the daughter of an officer, she will perhaps find it particularly difficult to cope with my arrest. If only I could speak a few kind words to her. Now you will do it in my stead. Maybe she will come to Berlin sometime; that would be nice.

Two weeks ago today was the seventy-fifth birthday celebration. It was a beautiful day. The morning and evening chorale with the many voices and instruments still resonates within me: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty. . . . What need or grief ever hath failed of relief?—Wings of His mercy did shade thee." That is indeed true, and something on which we may continue to rely with confidence.

Now spring is on its way with full force. You will have a lot to do in the garden. Renate's wedding preparations are hopefully going well. Here in the prison yard a song thrush sings most wonderfully in the morning and now also at nightfall. One becomes grateful for small things, and that too is an added gift for sure. Stay well! Always thinking with gratitude and love of you and all my brothers and sisters and friends.

Your Dietrich

At some point, could you please drop off the following items for me here: slippers, shoelaces (long, black), shoe polish, stationery and envelopes, ink, a tobacco ration card, shaving soap, as well as a sewing kit and another suit to change into? Many thanks for everything!

**3. From the Senior Reich War Military Prosecutor
to Karl Bonhoeffer**

Berlin-Charlottenburg

5 April 20, 1943

In response to your letter of April 17, 1943, regarding the pending criminal case against your son Dietrich Bonhoeffer, you are hereby informed that your application for a visitors' permit [Sprecherlaubnis] is denied.

Under the authority of
pp. signed Dr. Roeder
Reich War Court 18
Attested as correct.
Ladenig
Army Judicial Inspector

4. From Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer

Leipzig, East 27

Am Wasserwerk 7

April 23, 1943

Dear Dietrich,

The most obvious does not always come to mind first. Only just now in Berlin did I learn that one is permitted to write to you and thus send at least a signal that someone is thinking of you in your isolation. For this is all it can be, since there are so many more questions on one's mind, rather than the desire to tell you about all kinds of trivia. Of course, all of us are hoping very much that this time of testing will soon be over for you, and that you will be released soon. I have often

been in Berlin in the past couple of weeks. There is no need for you to worry about our parents. They are, of course, quite shaken but full of trust and confidence that the matter will soon be straightened out. Much of our conversation is about what you should do after you have been released. But, of course, you will also have a say in that.

At the moment our garden is quite magical. The children are out of school, and the two older ones hang around in it all day long. The two little ones are in bed with harmless sore throats. Grete is on the go all day long, busy from early morning until late at night, dealing with children, kitchen, house, garden, and rabbit hutch. I am mulling over a manuscript that I had intended to get ready for publication during the Easter vacation. But my thoughts often stray, and I end up thinking of you all. Keep up your good spirits. All the best.

As ever,

Your Karl Friedrich

5. From Hans von Dohnanyi

Good Friday 1943

My dear Dietrich,

I do not know if I will be allowed to send you this greeting, but I will try. Outside the bells are ringing for worship. They bring back memories of beautiful, good, and solemn hours we spent together in the Garnisonkirche and of many happy, cheerful, and carefree Easter days with children, parents, and brothers and sisters. You will feel the same way, and it takes great effort to keep these memories under control.

You cannot imagine how heavy it weighs on me to be the reason that you, Christel, the children, and my parents should have to suffer like this, and that my dear wife and you are deprived of your freedom.

Socios *habuisse* malorum may be a consolation, but the *habere* is a terribly heavy burden. Again and again I just feel compelled to ask “why?” a question that springs from having too little faith. If I knew that you all—and you personally—do not think badly of me, a load would be lifted from my mind. What would I not give to know that you are all free again. I would take everything on myself if you could be spared this ordeal. It was so good to be able to see you. I have also been allowed to speak to Christel—but what can you really say when other people are present? How extremely difficult, indeed impossible it is to open one’s soul and show one’s pure and tender emotions, which had been modestly hidden even from those closest to you. You know me well. We are, I believe, more than “just” brothers-in-law; you know how much my wife means to me. I simply *cannot* be without her, who has shared everything with me up to now. That at this very time I am not allowed to share with her the burden that we have to carry—who can truly fathom what that means? It certainly does not help the *cause*. I am just dumbstruck.

I now read the Bible a lot; it is the only book that prevents my thoughts from drifting off all the time. This morning Matt. 26–28, Luke 22–24, and Pss. 68 and 70. I had never noticed before the peculiar differences in the Passion Narrative between the two evangelists. How much I wish I could talk with you about this.

From Ursel I hear that the children are in Friedrichsbrunn. *That* for us is the place for a perfect vacation.

I am grateful for everything you have been and remain for my wife, my children, and myself. That is something you should know. Well, then, God be with you.

Your Hans

6. To Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer

Easter Sunday
April 25, 1943

My dear Parents,

Today ten days have finally passed, and I am allowed to write to you once again. I would really like to let you know that I am celebrating a happy Easter here. What is so liberating about Good Friday and Easter is the fact that our thoughts are pulled far beyond our personal circumstances to the ultimate meaning of all life, suffering, and indeed everything that happens, and this gives us great hope. Since yesterday it has become wonderfully quiet throughout the building. One could hear many people call out "Happy Easter" to each other, and, without envy, one wishes that everyone who carries out their difficult duty in here be granted the fulfillment of that wish. In the silence I now also hear your Easter greetings as you are gathered together today with my brothers and sisters and are thinking of me.

Good Friday was Maria's birthday. I would really be worried about her if I did not know about her inner strength, with which she coped with the death of her father, her brother, and two of her cousins whom she especially loved. Now Easter will comfort her, her large family will strongly support her, and her work at the Red Cross keeps her fully occupied. Greet her warmly and tell her that I am very much longing for her. But also tell her that she should not be sad but be brave as she has been thus far. She is, after all, still so very young, which makes all this very hard for her.

But now, I first have to thank you very much for everything you have brought me and for Papa's and Ursel's greetings. You cannot imagine what it means to be told suddenly, "Your mother, your sister, your brother were just here and handed in something for you." Simply the fact that you were so near, and the tangible sign that you

are always thinking of me and for me—which of course I actually know—all this gives me a happiness that carries me through the whole day. Many, many thanks for everything.

I continue to be well, I am healthy, permitted to be outside for a half hour every day; and now that I am again allowed to smoke, I sometimes even forget briefly where I actually am! I am treated well and read a lot, besides the newspaper and novels especially the Bible. I don't yet have the concentration to work properly. However, during this Holy Week I was finally able to intensively study a section of the Passion Narrative, Jesus's high priestly prayer, in which I have had a long-standing strong interest as you know. I even managed to do an exegesis of several chapters of Paul's ethics for myself. This was very important for me. Thus I must still be very grateful. How are you doing, I wonder? Are you still enjoying the many beautiful birthday flowers? How about your travel plans? I almost fear that you will not take the trip to the Black Forest now, even though it would have been so good and necessary. In addition to all of this, there are now also the preparations for Renate's wedding. About this I would like to say that it is my express wish that Ursel not postpone the date by even a single day but rather let Renate marry as soon, as happily, and as lightheartedly as possible; anything else would only cause me pain. Renate knows, after all, with how many good wishes I think of her and how I share in her joy. In the last few years we have certainly learned how much joy and sorrow the human heart is able and forced to contain at the same time. Thus the sooner, the better. Please give her my love!

By the way, I would like to know how Maria's grandmother is doing. Please do not keep it from me if she has died. Both Maria and I have been very attached to her.

Now for a few requests: I would like the brown shoes or, even better, the tall black ones with shoelaces. The heels on my shoes here

are falling off. My suit is much in need of cleaning; I would like you to take it away and let me have the brown one in exchange. I would also like a hairbrush, lots of matches, a pipe with tobacco, pouch, and pipe cleaners, and cigarettes. As to my books: Schilling: *Moral*, volume 2, and a volume by Adalbert Stifter. Sorry for the trouble! Many thanks!

Surprisingly, the days are passing by quickly in here. It seems incredible to me that I have already been here for three weeks. I enjoy going to bed at 8:00 p.m.—supper is at 4:00 p.m.!—and I look forward to my dreams. In the past I never knew what a delightful gift they are. I dream every night, and they are always pleasant. Until I fall asleep, I recite the verse I memorized during the day. Then at six in the morning, I enjoy reading psalms and hymns, thinking of you, and knowing that you are thinking of me too.

By now the day has passed, and I only hope that you feel as peaceful as I do. I have read much that was good and thought and hoped much that was beautiful. It actually would be greatly reassuring for me if Maria could spend an entire day with you in peace and quiet sometime. Please allow her and also Renate to read this letter! In front of me are the brief notes from Papa and Ursel, and I read them again and again.

And now farewell. Please forgive all the worries I am causing you! Greet all my brothers and sisters and their children. Yours with all my heart, full of gratitude and love,
Dietrich

7. From Paula Bonhoeffer

Berlin-Charlottenburg 9

Wednesday after Easter, 1943

Twenty-fifth anniversary of Walter's death

My dear Dietrich,

I did not send the letter I wrote on Easter since Papa thought it would not be forwarded over Easter anyway. Thus I am adding a few lines today.

Yesterday I received a very nice letter from Maria. She sends you warm greetings. She is now taking care of patients with scarlet fever. However, she thinks she will be relieved in three weeks and intends to visit me on her first day off. Her attitude is wonderfully brave and confident. A true soldier's child!

Yesterday I myself came out with Susi to bring you the things you requested. Hopefully, I have met your wishes somewhat. You really must see to it that you conserve your strength. We still only have one letter from you and are eagerly waiting for the next one.

In fact, everything just happened too suddenly. Who would have thought it possible that something like this could happen to you. We are trying to come to terms with our old concepts of an arrest being a shameful thing. They only make life unnecessarily difficult, for one must understand that in these difficult times there is so much suspicion involved in the way people are judged, and how difficult it must be to remain unaffected by that. However, we are convinced that, once you hear the allegations that have been brought against you, you will be able to clear your name.

Today Ursula is at work decorating Renate's apartment. She is somewhat sad that not everything can be as beautiful as she would like to make it for her. I also intend to go over sometime at the end of the week to see how and whether I might be able to contribute

something from my old furnishings. May God continue to be with you in this hard time. Papa joins me in sending you our love.

Your Mother

The gorgeous flowers from Papa's seventy-fifth birthday are now gone as well. Thus everything has its season and its end.

8. From Rüdiger Schleicher

Berlin–Charlottenburg 9

April 29, 1943

Dear Dietrich,

Easter has passed, and daily life has returned to normal. We missed you very much during these days. We mostly worked in the garden, and the music took a backseat. Nevertheless, it was not absent altogether: I played in a quartet on Sunday night. But that was about it. In particular, the regular musical beginning to the day on Sunday morning fell somewhat short, not least because the children are not here.

But above all, you must know that our thoughts are with you. I want to tell you this explicitly here, even though I know that you yourself have sufficient strength to measure up to all the difficulties and perils of life. I hope and wish that you may soon be released and able to enjoy the ever more beautiful spring.

All of us are doing well. Hans Walter writes that he is very satisfied with his training in Nachod as a radio operator. Ursel is feverishly at work getting ready for Renate's wedding, which is to take place on May 15—as you already know. Hans Walter has been granted leave for the event. The three girls are still in Friedrichsbrunn with

Bärbel, Klaus, and Christoph. We expect them back this weekend; they wrote very enthusiastic reports from up there.

And now we send you our kindest regards. Stay healthy and keep up your spirits. As ever, your faithful
Rüdiger

9. To Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer

May 4, 1943

My dear Parents,

Many thanks for the letters from Mama, Karl-Friedrich, and Rüdiger. I am so happy that you are calm and confident and also that Karl-Friedrich is able to visit you quite frequently. I am certain that it is a good thing for me personally to experience what I am going through. I also believe that no one is given a heavier burden than one is able to bear. What is most difficult for me is the fact that you are forced to share in carrying this burden. But the way in which you do it is, on the other hand, also a source of boundless happiness and strength for me. I am very happy that Maria has written you a letter filled with such courage and confident trust. Oh, how our life indeed depends completely on trust, and how impoverished life becomes without it. I am now learning daily how good my life with you has always been, and besides, I now have to practice myself what I have told others in my sermons and books.

Now after four weeks of imprisonment, the quick, conscious, internal reconciliation with my fate is being gradually complemented by a certain unconscious, natural acclimation to the situation. This is a relief, but it also has its problems, for one should rather not want or ought to get used to this situation; you will feel the same way.

You would like to hear more about my life here. One does not need much imagination to picture a cell; the sparser, the more

accurate. However, on Easter the *DAZ* printed a reproduction from Dürer's *Apocalypse*, which I put up on the wall, and some of Maria's primroses are also still here. Of the fourteen hours of each day, I walk for about three hours in my cell, many kilometers; also, a half hour in the yard. I read, study, and work. I especially enjoyed Jeremias Gotthelf again, with his clear, healthy, and quiet style. I am well and healthy.

The wedding at the Schleichers' is really close now. I will not be able to write again before the event. A few days ago I read in a book by Jean Paul that the "the only joys that can survive a fire are the domestic joys." If the two of them understand this—and I believe they already understand it well—then I can foresee only great happiness in this marriage, and I am already looking forward to being included in their domestic joys someday. They should read together *Geld und Geist*, by Jeremias Gotthelf, soon. It is better than any wedding toast I could give them. As a wedding gift I would like to give them the spinet, which is already half theirs anyway. Also, as I already told Ursel, I would like to make my contribution, whatever it may be, to the grand piano that they will hopefully get soon. With all my heart I wish them a very happy day and will be with them with many happy thoughts and wishes. I would also like them to think of me *only* with happy thoughts, memories, and hopes. If one experiences a personal hardship, one wishes that the genuine joys of life—a wedding is most certainly among them—retain their rightful place alongside the hardship. Very quietly I also hope that someday we shall all be celebrating Maria's and my happy day—but when?—seems like a fantasy to me at the moment, but it is a great and beautiful hope. For Ursel all this is, of course, a bit much. I would love to help her think everything through and move things around. Instead, she now has additional troubles because of us. Give my love to the whole family, especially to the bride and groom, and

I congratulate the parents on their twentieth wedding anniversary. They should take a few photos.

And now again many thanks for everything you brought me, for all your efforts, your thoughts, and your love. Wednesday is always an especially awaited and beautiful day. Also a few requests: one coat hanger, mirror, towel, washcloth, and, if it remains cold (it seems to be getting warmer today), one warm shirt and socks; also: Holl, *Kirchengeschichte*, volume 3: *Der Westen*, and things to smoke, whatever is possible, and matches. I too cannot understand that you are unable find my suit and jacket.

Can I assume that everyone knows about the engagement by now? I do trust, though, that it will stay within the family? However, since by my count “the immediate family” from both sides includes over eighty people, the news will most likely not remain secret for long. I just would have liked to comply with the request of Maria’s mother. Please give Maria my special thanks for her greetings! How nice that the grandmother is doing better. She has to carry a heavy burden too, with five sons and grandsons killed in action and seven more still fighting in the war. Please send her my warmest regards; I am sure that I am in her thoughts. Unfortunately, I did not get to thank Aunt Elisabeth for the Bach cantatas. Please do greet her warmly also.

I now often think of the beautiful song by Hugo Wolf, which we sang several times lately: “Over night, over night, joy and sorrow come, and sooner than you thought, they both leave you, and go to tell the Lord how you have borne them.” Indeed, everything depends on this “how”; it is more important than any external circumstances. It completely puts to rest the sometimes tormenting thoughts about the future. Now once again many thanks for everything you think, do, and carry in your hearts for me every day. Love to my brothers, sisters, and friends. Renate should really have a joyful, unclouded wedding day and be confident that even here I will be able to share

her joy! On the fifteenth, the very day, I am permitted to send my next letter; I will thus write it the day before the wedding.

By the way, if I am here in the facility on Wednesdays, I will always give you the dirty laundry to take back right away; otherwise it has to sit here for a week. I always need to be personally present when your package is opened.

I send you all my love, with the wish that all worries will soon be taken from you and all of us.

Your grateful Dietrich

I have just heard that one of my sisters delivered the package. Again, many thanks! From the contents of the package I can see that you have not yet received my letter of the twenty-fifth; I am very sorry for your sake. It seems that letters often take a long time. Do keep on writing. I think the cigars might be from Stettin. Many thanks.

10. To Hans von Dohnanyi

May 5, 1943

My dear Hans,

Your letter so surprised, delighted, and moved me that I must at least make an attempt to respond. Whether you receive this letter is not in my hands, but I fervently hope you will. For you must know that there is not an ounce of reproach or bitterness in me about what has befallen you and me. Such things come from God and God alone, and I know myself to be of one mind with you and Christel that our response to God can only be submission, endurance, patience—and gratitude. Thus every question of “why” falls silent because it has found its answer. Until recently, until Papa’s seventy-fifth birthday, we were given to experience so many good things together that it

would almost be impertinent if we did not also accept something difficult calmly and bravely—and with true gratitude. I know it is more difficult for you because of Christel and the children. But I know Christel well enough not to be worried even for a single moment about her inner stability; she would only wish that you do not worry about her. I would now also like to let you know—not to burden you, but only to cheer you up and to let you share in my joy—that since January I have been engaged to Maria von Wedemeyer. Due to the death of her father and her brother, the subject was not supposed to be mentioned until the summer, and I could only tell my parents. It is a difficult trial now for Maria, but Mama writes that Maria is courageous, happy, and confident, and this is a source of great strength for me. I am convinced that this experience is good for both of us, even if today it is still so impossible to understand. Thus rejoice with me!

I am reading, studying, and working a great deal systematically. In the mornings and evenings, I have peace and quiet to think of all the many people, at home and on the front, whom one always intends and ought to entrust to God daily. Needless to say, you and Christel are especially included. No, you shouldn't and needn't worry about us; there is Another who carries this sorrow for you. We must now simply let go of what we cannot accomplish and confine ourselves to what we can and should do, namely, be manly and strong in the midst of suffering, trusting confidently in God. You too will know the hymn by Hugo Wolf: "Over night, over night, joy and sorrow come, and sooner than you thought, they both leave you, and go tell the Lord how you have borne them."

Stay healthy and in good spirits! I gratefully remember the many pleasant hours at your home, the music, walks, enjoying the garden, games, and conversations. The children are well taken care of at the grandparents', and they are old enough to know what kind of

conduct they owe to themselves and to you. God keep you. I'm thinking of you faithfully every day.

Yours as ever,

Dietrich

11. Notes I, May 1943

Separation from people

 from work
 from the past
 from the future
 from honor
 from God

Different mental patterns of behavior toward the past . . . *forgetting* . . .
caesura experiences.

Fulfilled, unfulfilled, depending on *history*.

Self-deception, *idealizing* the past and about the present in a sober way instead of illusion.

fading of memories

self-pity

passing time—killing time

for the one who has overcome, humor,

smoking and the emptiness of time

memory of what is possible

although not correct.

The meaning of illusion

Understanding of the past—fulfillment, gratitude. Remorse
sense of time

not only what has been *understood* is said to be present?
thus past after all?

Possession

Gen. 3 Eccl. 3

Rev. 10 Matt. 6

Novalis

In expectations (youth) slowly—ascending,
then quickly descending

wall slogan
and Ps. 31:16

an old woman lets time slip quietly by
similarly in the gravest danger . . . serenity

What is freedom?
formally love
Regarding freedom in prison

Waiting—but with utter calm, for *death*, for example

time of day—farmer, but not “time as such”

! *Experience of time* as experience of *separation*—engaged couple

before God

the past: why: in one hundred years everything will be over
rather than: until recently

everything was all right? no *possession* (that outlasts time,

no *task*

flight from the experience of time while dreaming, shock when
waking up,

in a dream what is past = what is to come, timeless.

The ravages of time—the gnawing of time
healing time—scarring over, unde est memoria . . .

Emptiness of time despite it being filled—“Fulfilled” time is very
different

love

12. Notes II, May 1943

wall slogan—time as help—as torment, as enemy.
boredom as expression of despair.

Ps. 31:1

time

benefit of time: forgetting, scarring over

opposite: Irrevocability

Separation—*from what is past and what is to come*

“If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength
being small”

Prov. 31 laughs at the time to come

Matt. 6 do not worry . . .

waiting

boredom

happiness

work

Whatever still determines the present is remembered
easily, is recent . . . while an *event that happened equally
long ago can be infinitely distant.*

continuity with the past and the future interrupted

discontent—tension

impatience

yearning

boredom

night—deeply lonely

apathy

urge to be busy, variety, novelty

dullness, tiredness, sleeping—against it strict order as antidote

Fantasizing, distortion of past and future
suicide, not out of a sense of guilt, but because I am

practically dead already, the closing of the book,
sum total.

Do we remember pleasant things better?

Why is this so? Past pain is remembered as having been *overcome*, but
pain that has not been overcome (unforgiven guilt) is still fresh and
torments us in memory

overcoming in *prayer*

13. From Karl Bonhoeffer to the Senior Reich Military Court Prosecutor

May 9, 1943

To the Senior Prosecutor of the Reich Military Court
Honorable Sir:

In regard to the investigation against my son Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I
submitted a request on April 17, 1943, for a permit to visit him. My
request was denied on April 20 by the senior Reich military court
prosecutor (StPl [RKA] III 114/43).

I hereby resubmit this request for myself and my wife, since my
son has now been in pretrial detention for five weeks. I wish to point
out that having been a member of the Senate of the Army Medical
Service for over thirty years, I believe I can be trusted to comply with
the existing regulations when visiting with my son. I can also vouch
for my wife.

[Karl Bonhoeffer]

14. From Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer

Berlin-Charlottenburg 9

May 9, 1943

My dear Dietrich,

We greatly enjoyed your letter of April 25, which arrived here on May 3. For it portrays you just as we imagine you in your current situation, calm and held by God's loving-kindness. . . .

The wedding is now this coming Saturday, and we intend to celebrate it joyously as you so expressly wished us to do. You are right; if a heart has the right disposition, it must have room for both sorrow and joy. On the evening before the wedding, Bärbel will bring the garland of roses, and little Christine, as a girl from the Mark Brandenburg, will bring salt and bread, and all the young people will sing the beautiful old folk song "Aennchen von Tharau," by Simon Dach, for them. Dorothee will bring the garland of myrtle. There may also be some chamber music. However, we will gather only after supper. The wedding, the ceremony that is, will be at 2:30 p.m.; it will be followed by a simple meal at the Schleichers'. Ursel has cleared out Christine's room for the event, decorated it with some pictures from your room, and already set the tables. It is amazing how many things can simultaneously find room in her heart and mind. . . .

We are very happy that you are able to continue doing serious theological work, even though you may perhaps lack the concentration for it sometimes. And how comforting is the "high-priestly prayer" in John 17. I have now read it once again with a great sense of gratitude. What Augustine said was indeed right: "The ear hears according to the disposition of the heart." Now Papa wants to add a greeting as well. God be with you,

Your Mother

Dear Dietrich,

I'd like to add a greeting to Mama's letter and to thank you for your letter of April 25. It was very reassuring for us to learn that you are healthy, that your accommodations are tolerable as far as the physical aspects are concerned, and that you also have the opportunity to occupy your mind. It is unhealthy to be dependent solely on meditation, even for someone who enjoys being alone, for it is contrary to our nature as human beings, who, after all, have been given language as a means of communication. We very much hope that we will soon be allowed to speak with you and see you, so that we are able to convince ourselves that your condition is tolerable. Best of all would be if you came yourself and surprised us at Renate's wedding. Mama has written you about the preparations. As for myself, there is little to report. I have answered the 160 birthday greetings, a somewhat arduous task for one who wants to avoid printed thank-you cards and is not in a writing mood. Kind regards,
Your Father

**15. From the Senior Reich Military Court Prosecutor
to Karl Bonhoeffer**

Berlin-Charlottenburg 5

May 10, 1943

At this time a permit to visit your son cannot be granted to you and your wife, since this does not appear to be in the best interest of the investigation.

Under the authority of
pp. signed Dr. Roeder

Prepared:
Ladenig
Army Judicial Inspector

16. From Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer

May 15, 1943

Dear Dietrich,

Your letters from prison are always a great joy for us. We eagerly wait for the ten days to pass, when you are allowed to write again; or to put it a better way, we always quietly hope that your next letter will be made obsolete by your own reappearance. By now it is, indeed, about time that they let you out.

From your letters I have now also learned that you are secretly engaged.

You cannot imagine how happy this made me. I basically feel sorry for every unmarried man, even if this confession sounds ridiculous. But of course, in your case, as I see it, there were special circumstances. You do not belong to those who by disposition are destined to remain bachelors. Especially with the difficulties your profession entails nowadays, you need a good, astute, and competent wife. In the meantime, Ursel has told me many nice things about your young bride, and our parents, who I assume already knew about this, are also very happy about her.

So I too hope that I shall have a chance to meet her soon. In thinking about your bride, however, you must find your current situation especially odious, and I really admire the equanimity with which you accept it as a misfortune without any kind of reproach.

Today is the wedding at the Schleichers'. As you wished, it has turned into a real celebration after all. Recently Hans-Walter was here with us for a few hours on his way home. He is tanned and well nourished and, in his air-force uniform, was suitably admired by the boys.

He is on leave for the wedding, which makes me very happy for Ursel. Everyone here is healthy. Be as well as is possible and make

sure that you get out soon so that you are not cheated out of a beautiful spring entirely.

With love from all of us,

Your Karl Friedrich

17. To Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer

May 15, 1943

My dear Parents,

When you get this letter, the busy days of preparing for and celebrating the wedding will already be long gone, as will the yearning I feel to be there. What will have returned instead is the quiet joy and confidence that the two of them have now found their happiness. The Schleichers will miss Renate very much, but they can know that she is in the best, most loving, and faithful hands imaginable. They have gained a son who is a full member of the family and who will bring them nothing but joy. Today I recall with gratitude many wonderful past years and times, and I share in everyone's joy. I am now eager to hear what the Scripture text for the wedding was. The most beautiful one I know is Rom. 15:7. I have used it often. What gorgeous summer weather they have! As a morning chorale they will thus probably sing "Die güldne Sonne," by Paul Gerhardt!

After a longer interlude I received your letter of the ninth rather quickly, on May 11. Many thanks. Anyone whose parental home has become such a part of himself, as it has for me, experiences each greeting with a special sense of gratitude. If only we could at least briefly see or speak with each other. This would greatly ease the internal tension. For it is, of course, difficult on the outside to imagine realistically what being in prison is like. The situation as such, that

is, the individual moment, is in fact often not so different from being someplace else. I read, reflect, work, write, pace the room—and I really do so without rubbing myself sore on the wall like a polar bear. What matters is being focused on what one still has and what can be done—and that is still a great deal—and on restraining within oneself the rising thoughts about what one cannot do and the inner restlessness and resentment about the entire situation. However, I have never understood as clearly as I have here what the Bible and Luther mean by “temptation” [Anfechtung]. The peace and serenity by which one had been carried are suddenly shaken without any apparent physical or psychological reason, and the heart becomes, as Jeremiah very aptly put it, an obstinate and anxious thing that one is unable to fathom. One experiences this as an attack from the outside, as evil powers that seek to rob one of what is most essential. But even these experiences may be good and necessary in order to learn to understand human life better.

I am currently trying my hand at a small study on the “sense of time,” an experience likely characterizing pretrial detention. One of my predecessors scribbled above the cell door: “In one hundred years everything will be over,” as his attempt to cope with this experience of the empty time. But there is much to be said about this, and I would enjoy talking it over with Papa. “My times are in your hand,” Ps. 31, is the biblical answer to this question. But the Bible also contains the question that threatens to dominate everything here: “Lord, how long?” Ps. 13.

I continue to do well and must be grateful for the past six weeks. I am especially happy that Maria’s mother came to see you. Is there any news yet from Tunis about Konstantin? This is very much on my mind as I think of Maria and her whole family. If only it won’t take too long until I see Maria again, and we can get married! She really

needs to get some rest sometime soon, and we also have all kinds of earthly wishes!

I just now received the packet of laundry back; you can't imagine how much joy and strength I derive from even this indirect connection. Many thanks. Please give my special thanks to Susi for all the help she's giving you these days. I am also happy that you managed to get the asthma drops again. They are very soothing. I have already managed to get a mirror in here. I would be grateful for some ink, stain remover, Laxin, two pairs of briefs, a string vest, the repaired shoes, and shirt collar buttons. It will probably become very hot once the thick walls have thoroughly absorbed the heat of the sun; up to now it is still very pleasant. I hope that Papa won't give up smoking altogether for my sake now! Many thanks, by the way, for the book by Jeremias Gotthelf; in two weeks I would enjoy getting Gotthelf's *Uli der Knecht*, which Renate has. By the way, you ought to read Gotthelf's *Berner Geist*; if not the whole book, at least start reading it. It is something very special, and I'm sure you will find it interesting! I recall that the old Schoene always praised Gotthelf highly, and I'd be inclined to suggest a compilation of excerpts [Brevier] from Gotthelf's writings to the Dietrich publishing house. Adalbert Stifter's background is also primarily Christian—his forest descriptions, by the way, often make me yearn for the quiet forest meadows near Friedrichsbrunn. Stifter is not as strong as Gotthelf, yet he has a wonderful simplicity and clarity that gives me great joy. Oh, if only we could once again talk together about all of this! Despite all my sympathies for the *vita contemplative*, I am nevertheless not a born Trappist monk. Anyhow, a time of enforced silence may be a good thing. After all, Catholics claim that the most effective scriptural expositions come from the strictly contemplative orders. By the way, I am reading the Bible straight through from the beginning and am just coming to Job, whom I especially love. I am also still reading the

Psalms daily as I have done for years. There is no other book that I know and love as much. I am no longer able to read Pss. 3, 47, 70, and others without hearing them in the musical settings by Heinrich Schütz. Thanks to Renate, who introduced me to this music; it has become one of the greatest enrichments of my life.

Please give Ursel my warmest good wishes on her birthday; I often think of her. Greet all the siblings, children, and friends, and especially the young married couple. Hopefully, Maria will come to see you soon. I feel so much a part of all of you that I know we are all joined together in experiencing, bearing, thinking, and doing things for one another, even though we have to be separated. Thanking you every day and every hour for all your love and care,

Your Dietrich

Of course, also give my greetings to Aunt Elisabeth and Maria's grandmother together with her whole family.

18. Wedding Sermon from the Prison Cell

Eph. 1:12 “—so that we . . . might live for the praise of his glory.”

A couple is entitled to welcome and celebrate their wedding day with a feeling of incomparable triumph. When all the difficulties, impediments, obstacles, doubts, and hesitations have not been brushed aside, but honestly faced and worked through—and it is certainly good if not everything goes all too smoothly—then both have indeed won the decisive triumph of their life. By saying yes to each other, they have freely decided to give their whole life a new direction. They have in joyful certainty defied all the doubts and reservations that life raises against any permanent bond between two people, and by their own action and responsibility conquered a new

land for their life. Every wedding must in some way resound with the jubilation that human beings can do such great things; that they have been given such unimaginable freedom and power to take the helm of their lives in their own hands. The happiness of the couple must include the sense that the children of this earth are properly proud of the privilege to be masters of their own destiny. It is not good to speak here all too quickly and submissively of God's will and guidance. It is first of all, simply and unmistakably, your thoroughly human will that is at work and celebrates its triumph here. The path upon which you embark is first of all very much the path you have chosen yourselves. What you have done and do is first and foremost not something pious but something thoroughly of this world. This is why you yourselves and you alone carry the responsibility for it, a responsibility that no one can take from you. More precisely, you, Eberhard, have been given the entire responsibility for the success of your undertaking, with all the happiness that such a responsibility entails; and you, Renate, will help your husband and make it easy for him to bear this responsibility and in doing so will find your own happiness. It would be an escape into false piety if today you did not have the courage to say: it is *our* will, it is *our* love, it is *our* path. "Iron and steel they may decay, but *our* love will ever stay." You long to find in each other the earthly bliss that consists, in the words of the medieval song, in comforting each other in body and soul. This longing is proper both in human and in God's eyes.

Certainly you two have every reason, if anyone ever did, to look back with extraordinary gratitude on your life thus far. The joys and beautiful things in life have practically been heaped upon you. You have succeeded in everything. The love and friendship of those around you have fallen into your lap. Your paths have for the most part been straightened before you embarked on them. In each life situation you were able to feel sheltered by your families and friends.

Everyone only wished for your best. Finally, you were allowed to find each other, and today you have been led to the goal of your desires. As you know yourselves, no one is able to create and choose such a life by oneself; rather to some it is given and to others it is denied. And that is just what we mean by God's guidance. Therefore, as jubilant as you are today to have arrived at the destination of your own will and own way, so will you in equal measure be grateful for God's will and God's way that has led you here; and as confidently as you today assume the responsibility for what you are doing, just as confidently you may, and will, lay it in God's hands.

Today God gives his yes to your yes, God's will consents to yours, and God grants you and affirms your triumph and jubilation and pride. But in so doing, God is also making you instruments of his will and plans for you and for other people. Indeed, in unfathomable generosity God speaks his yes to your yes. But in so doing, God does something entirely new: from your own love—God creates holy matrimony.

God is the founder of your marriage. Marriage is more than your love for each other. It has a higher dignity and power, for it is God's holy institution through which God wishes to preserve humanity until the end of time. In your love you see only each other in the world; in marriage you are a link in the chain of generations that God, for the sake of God's glory, allows to rise and fade away, and calls into God's kingdom. In your love you see only the heaven of your own happiness; in marriage you are placed and given responsibility within the world and the human community. Your love belongs only to you personally; marriage is something beyond the personal, an estate [ein Stand], an office. Just as it takes a crown to make a king and not just his will to reign, so it takes marriage and not just your love for each other to make you a married couple both in human and in God's eyes. Just as you first gave the ring to each other and now receive it once

again from the hand of the minister, so your love comes from you, and your marriage comes from above, from God. As God is higher than human beings, so the sacredness, the rights, and the promise of marriage are higher than human beings, so much greater is the holiness, warrant, and promise of marriage than the holiness, warrant, and promise of love. It is not your love that upholds marriage, but from now on it is marriage that upholds your love.

God makes your marriage indissoluble. “What God has joined together, let no one separate.” In marriage you are joined together by God; it is not something you do, but it is God who does it. Do not confuse God with your love for each other. God makes your marriage indissoluble and protects it from any internal or external danger. God wills to be the guarantor of its permanence. To know that no power in the world, no temptation, no human weakness can separate what God has joined together is an abiding source of joy; indeed, those who know it may say with confidence: what God has joined together, no one can separate. Free from all the anxiety that is always inherent in love, you may now with certainty and full of confidence say to each other: we can never lose each other; through God’s will we belong to each other until death.

God establishes an order, within which you are able to live together in marriage. “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives” (Col. 3). With your marriage, you establish a home. This requires an order, and this order is so important that it is established by God himself, since without it everything would be in disarray. In everything you are free to establish your home, but in one thing you are bound: the wife is to be subject to her husband, and the husband is to love his wife. Thus God gives to husband and wife the honor that belongs to each of them. It is the wife’s honor to serve the husband, to be his helpmate, as the creation story puts it. Likewise, it is the husband’s honor to sincerely

love his wife. He “leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife”; he “loves her like his own flesh.” A wife who seeks to rule over her husband dishonors herself and her husband, just as a husband who lacks in love for his wife dishonors himself and his wife. Both despise the honor of God that is to rest on marriage. Times and conditions are unhealthy when the wife’s ambition is to be like the husband, and when the husband considers the wife merely a toy of his freedom and desire for power. It is the beginning of the disintegration and decay of all the orders of human life when the wife’s service is considered a demotion, indeed, an affront to her honor, and when the undivided love of a husband for his wife is considered weakness or even stupidity. The place to which God has assigned the wife is the home of the husband. While most people today have forgotten what a home can mean, for others of us it has become especially clear in our own time. In the midst of the world, the home is a realm of its own, a fortress amid the storms of time, a refuge, indeed, a sanctuary. It is not built on the shaky ground of the changing courses of public and private life, but it rests in God, which means that God has given it its own meaning and value, its own nature and right, its own purpose and dignity. It is established by God in the world—despite what may happen there—as a place of peace, quietness, joy, love, purity, discipline, reverence, obedience, tradition, and, in all of these, happiness. It is the wife’s vocation and happiness to build this world within the world for the husband and to be active there. Blessed is she if she recognizes the greatness and richness of this her vocation and task. The realm of the wife is not what is new but what endures, not what changes but what remains constant, not what is loud but what is silent, not words but action, not giving orders but persuading, not desiring but possessing—and all this infused with and sustained by the love for her husband. Proverbs says, “The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack

of food. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household and for her servant-girls. . . . She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy. . . . Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. Her sons rise up and call her happy; her husband too, and he praises her: ‘Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.’” The happiness that a husband finds in a proper wife, or one who is “virtuous” and “wise,” to use biblical terms, is praised in the Bible again and again as the greatest earthly happiness altogether—it “is far more precious than pearls.” “A virtuous wife is the crown of her husband.” However, the Bible is equally clear about the misfortune that befalls the husband and the entire home through a perverse, “foolish” wife.

If the husband is now called the head of the wife, even with the special addition “just as Christ is the head of the church,” then our earthly conditions are imbued with a divine radiance, which we are to recognize and honor. The honor that is here assigned to the husband consists not in his personal skills and capabilities but in the office given to him by his marriage. His wife ought to see him as being clothed in this honor. For himself, however, this honor entails the highest responsibility. As the head he bears the responsibility for his wife, for the marriage and the home. His task is to care for and protect the family members; he represents the home in the world; he supports and comforts the family members; he is the master of the home who exhorts, punishes, helps, comforts, and stands before God on behalf of his home. It is good, because it is divinely ordered when the wife honors the husband in his office, and when the husband really exercises his office. “Wise” are those husbands and wives who understand and keep God’s order; “foolish” are those who think

they can replace it with another order based on their own will and intellect.

God has endowed marriage with a blessing and with a burden. The blessing is the promise of offspring. God allows human beings to participate in God's unending work of creation. It is nevertheless always none other than God who blesses a marriage with children. "Children are a gift from the Lord" (Ps. 127:3), and we ought to recognize them as such. It is from God that parents receive their children, and it is to God that they in turn ought to lead them. This is why parents have divine authority over their children. Luther speaks of God investing parents with a "golden chain," and keeping the fourth commandment has the special scriptural promise of a long life on earth. However, because human beings live on earth, and for as long as they do, God has given them a reminder that this earth stands under the curse of sin and is not the ultimate reality. Over the destiny of wife and husband lies the dark shadow of a word of divine wrath; it is weighed down by a divine burden, which they must bear. The wife is to give birth to her children in pain, and the husband, in caring for his family, is to reap many thistles and thorns and must work by the sweat of his brow. This burden is meant to lead husband and wife to call upon God and to remind them of their eternal destiny in God's kingdom. The earthly community is but a first beginning of the eternal community, the earthly home an image of the eternal home, the earthly family a reflection of God's fatherhood over all human beings, who are children before him.

God gives you Christ as the foundation of your marriage. "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom. 15). In a word: live with each other in the forgiveness of your sins without which no human community, let alone a marriage, can last. Do not antagonize each other by insisting on being right, do not judge and condemn each other, do not feel

superior over each other, never blame each other, but accept each other as you are, and forgive each other daily and sincerely. You are establishing a pastor's home. Your home is to spread a radiance and strength into many other homes. The life a pastor's wife takes on is a life of special sacrifice. Many things that are related to his office the husband must bear alone. For it is he who exercises the office, and the office is, for the sake of God, confidential. All the greater must be his love for his wife; all the more must he allow her to participate in everything in which he can let her participate. Likewise, the pastor's wife will do all the more to ease his bearing of the office, to be a support and helpmate to him. But how can both of them as fallible human beings live in the community of Christ and do their part unless they each constantly pray and receive forgiveness, unless each helps the other to live as a Christian? Here very much depends on the right beginning and daily practice. From the first day of your marriage to the last, let this hold true: accept each other . . . *to the praise of God.*

Thus you have heard God's word for your marriage. Thank him for it. Thank God for having led you thus far and pray that he may establish, strengthen, sanctify, and keep your marriage, so that in your marriage you "might live for the praise of his glory." Amen.

19. From Susanne Dreß

May 15, 1943

Dear Dietrich,

When I drop off the things out there in Tegel every week, I am always glad to hear that you are well, and I almost have the feeling that I've visited you. The physical proximity does make a big difference even though time and again one is gratefully aware of how

little our inner bond is affected by the external separation. Today we celebrated Renate's wedding; the twenty years since the wedding of Ursel and Rüdiger have certainly gone by very quickly. Tine is the same age as I was then, so the bridesmaids were rather young. Michael and Cornelie carried the train, and Andreas and Walter scattered flowers. Eberhard's three siblings all came, and Hans-Walter also was there on leave. . . .

We now have windowpanes and walls again; only the painter must still come. The last air-raid alarm was quite peaceful here, although it began very quickly. By the time I had managed to get the children downstairs, the worst was over. . . .

Affectionate regards from

Your Suse

20. From Paula Bonhoeffer

Berlin-Charlottenburg 9

May 16, 1943

My dear Dietrich,

Many thanks for your third letter, which we received two days before the wedding. By now you have hopefully received the letter from Renate and the letters from Maria and her grandmother. She sent a gorgeous bouquet of lilies of the valley from her garden, which stood on the table in front of the bride and groom. Today the guests are planning to leave, unfortunately including Hans Walter, who was granted furlough only from Thursday to Sunday. But he looked quite well and has enjoyed the days tremendously. The evening before the wedding I had all the guests over for a simple supper at our house, and at eight o'clock we then went over to the Schleichers. There the girls first danced the bridesmaids' circle dance around the