

Andreas Pangritz

»To Fall within the Spokes of the Wheel«

New-Old Observations Concerning
»The Church and the Jewish Question«

1. Introduction

»To put a spoke in the wheel,« the programmatic slogan of the XIth International Bonhoeffer Congress, is a quotation – although a traditional mis-translation – from Bonhoeffer’s essay »The Church and the Jewish Question,« published for the first time in June 1933.¹ A considerable amount of secondary literature on this essay has been published, even to the extent that one could ask whether it makes sense to add yet another contribution. One reason I dare to do this is the fact that the discussion about the precise meaning of Bonhoeffer’s essay has been very controversial.

It has often been observed that Bonhoeffer’s theological-political concept in »The Church and the Jewish Question« is full of ambiguities. On the one hand, the essay is read as an early theological statement of solidarity with the Jews in protest against their legal discrimination in Nazi Germany. The main reason for this reading is the often quoted sentence in the first part, according to which in certain situations it might become necessary »to fall within the spokes of the wheel«, as I would prefer to translate the slogan.²

On the other hand, Bonhoeffer’s essay has been labelled a document of traditional theological anti-Judaism. Some commentators even find elements of antisemitism in Bonhoeffer’s view of the Jewish-Christian relationship. Franklin H. Littell, for example, a prominent pioneer of Holocaust studies in the United States, writes in his seminal work *The Crucifixion of the Jews*: »The sad truth is that Bonhoeffer was much better than his theology. [...] The man whose humanity and decency led him to run risks for Jews and to oppose practical Antisemitism was better than the

1. Cf. DBWE 12, 361-370 (= DBW 12, 349-358).

2. Cf. DBWE 12, 365, where the phrase is translated as »to seize the wheel itself« (= DBW 12, 353).

bad theology which laid the foundations for Christian Antisemitism.«³ Littell refers to sentences towards the end of the first part of Bonhoeffer's essay, which can only be read as affirmations of traditional Christian anti-Judaism.⁴ In a similar way, Eva Fleischner observes repetitions of the »teaching of contempt« (Jules Isaac) against the Jews in Bonhoeffer's essay.⁵

Because of these ambiguities, it seems to be necessary to re-examine the main line of Bonhoeffer's thought once more. In what follows, I have two aims: First, I want to pay attention to the handwritten headings to the two parts of the essay in Bonhoeffer's typescript, which have not been reproduced in the published version in 1933: »Ahasver peregrinus« [Wandering Ahasuerus] and »Modernes Judenchristentum« [Modern Jewish Christianity]. Secondly, I want to explore the precise meaning of the slogan »To fall within the spokes of the wheel« in the original context to which Bonhoeffer seems to refer.

2. Two Handwritten Headings

Bonhoeffer's essay was published for the first time in June 1933 in the journal *Der Vormarsch*, which was connected to the »völkisch« nationalist movement, »Jungdeutscher Orden«. In Bonhoeffer's written estate there are five drafts, none of them representing the immediate master copy of the published text. Larry Rasmussen, the editor of the critical edition in vol. 12 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English*, rightly states that »at present it is impos-

3. F. H. Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews* [1975], new edition, Macon/GA 1996, 51.
4. Cf. D. Bonhoeffer, *The Church and the Jewish Question*, quoted in: F. H. Littell, *Crucifixion of the Jews*: »Now the measures of the state towards Judaism stand in a special context for the church. The church of Christ has never lost sight of the thought that the »chosen people«, who nailed the redeemer of the world to the cross, must endure the curse for its action through a long history of suffering. [...] The conversion of Israel, that is to be the end of its people's period of suffering.« Littell refers to an earlier translation of Bonhoeffer's essay. The translation in DBWE 12, 367 (= DBW 12, 354f.), has been slightly altered compared with Littell's quotation.
5. Cf. E. Fleischner, *Judaism in German Christian Theology since 1945*, Metuchen/N.J. 1975, 24f., quoted in: E. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer und die Juden*, in: *Konsequenzen. Dietrich Bonhoeffers Kirchenverständnis heute*, ed. by E. Feil and I. Tödt, München 1980, 174.

sible to determine the editorial history of the published essay, particularly whether the changes [between the drafts and the printed version] were suggested by Bonhoeffer or someone else,⁶ that is, by the editors. Yet he does not mention that Bonhoeffer himself was a member of the editorial board of the journal.⁷

In the published version in *Der Vormarsch*, the essay is composed of two parts preceded by an introductory paragraph.⁸ According to the introduction, the first part deals with the question of how the church should judge »the fact [...] that the Jew is subjected to special laws by the state, solely on the basis of his race [...].« The second part deals with the question: »What are the consequences for the church's position toward the baptized Jews in its congregations?«⁹

In the carbon copy with handwritten additions and corrections (NL, A 37,3a), which comes closest to the published version, we find headings in Bonhoeffer's handwriting above the two parts of the essay. According to these headings, the first part deals with the attitude of the church towards the problem of »Ahasuerus peregrinus«, the wandering Jew,¹⁰ whereas the second part addresses the position of the church towards »Modern Jewish Christianity«.¹¹ There is a certain tension between the associations evoked by these headings and the two questions asked in the introductory paragraph.

6. DBWE 12, 361, note 1. Rasmussen's statement is true in spite of the research done by Marikje Smid (cf. M. Smid, *Deutscher Protestantismus und Judentum 1932/1933*, München 1990).
7. Cf. E. Busch, *Unter dem Bogen des einen Bundes. Karl Barth und die Juden 1933-1945*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1996, 52, note 75.
8. In addition, the whole essay is framed by quotations from Martin Luther, which obviously have the purpose to fortify Bonhoeffer's thought by references to the reformer's authority. At the same time these quotations serve to whitewash Luther from the suggestion that he himself was a pioneer of antisemitism, as the German Christians claimed. The editors mention that the quotations »are not in the three drafts written by Bonhoeffer,« but »have been inserted by the editor.« Cf. DBWE 12, 361, note 1 (= DBW 12, 349, note 1). Again, they do not mention that Bonhoeffer himself was one of the editors.
9. DBWE 12, 362 (= DBW 12, 350).
10. Cf. DBWE 12, 362, note 5 (= DBW 12, 350, note 5).
11. Cf. DBWE 12, 368, note 18 (= DBW 12, 355, note 15).

2.1 Ahasuerus peregrinus

Regarding the first heading, the editors mention that »according to a legend dated back to the early seventeenth century, the shoemaker Ahasuerus was condemned to wander eternally because he had driven Jesus away from the wall of his house when Jesus, exhausted by carrying his cross, leaned against it. This legend made Ahasuerus a symbolic figure for the fate of the Jewish people, homeless after the crucifixion.«¹² Editor Larry Rasmussen adds that, according to Else Liefmann's research, »the ›wandering Jew‹ story became a central motif in the anti-Jewish teachings that converged with anti-Semitism.«¹³ In any case, by »Ahasuerus peregrinus« the Jews have been characterized as »condemned to wander eternally« because they were regarded collectively responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus.¹⁴

The German popular story about the »wandering Jew« Ahasuerus, who had been present at the crucifixion of Christ, was printed for the first time under the title *Kurtze Beschreibung und Erzählung von einem Juden / mit Namen Ahaßverus* [Short description and story about a Jew, named Ahasuerus] in Bautzen in 1602.¹⁵ According to this story, Paulus von Eitzen, the Lutheran bishop of Schleswig, had met the »wandering Jew« in his youth, when he was a student of theology in Wittenberg, during a visit to his parents in Hamburg in winter 1542. It was another Lutheran theologian, Johann Jacob Schudt (1664-1722), who interpreted the figure of Ahasuerus for the first time as referring to the Jewish people collectively. In his work *Jüdische Merckwürdigkeiten* [Jewish Curiosities] he writes: »This wandering Jew is not an individual person, but the whole Jewish people, dispersed around the world after the crucifixion of Christ, wandering around and remaining until Doomsday according to the witness of Christ.«¹⁶

12. DBWE 12, 362, note 5 (= DBW 12, 350, note 5).

13. DBWE 12, 362, note 5. Cf. E. Liefmann, Die Legende vom Antichrist und die Sage von Ahasver. Ihre Bedeutung für den Antisemitismus, in: *Judaica* (3/1947), 122-156. Cf. also M. Körte, Art. Ahasverus, in: *Handbuch des Antisemitismus. Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. by W. Benz, Vol. 3: Begriffe, Theorien, Ideologien, Berlin / New York 2010, 3-6.

14. DBWE 12, 362, note 5 (= DBW 12, 350, note 5).

15. Cf. *Kurtze Beschreibung und Erzählung von einem Juden / mit Namen Ahaßverus / Welcher bey der Creutzigung Christi selbst persönlich gewesen [...]*, Bautzen 1602. Reprint in: *Ahasvers Spur. Dichtungen und Dokumente vom »Ewigen Juden«*, ed. by M. Körte and R. Stockhammer, Leipzig 1995, 9-14.

16. J. J. Schudt, *Jüdische Merckwürdigkeiten*, Vol. 1, Frankfurt and Leipzig 1714, 490f. (Reprint in: *Ahasvers Spur*, ed. by M. Körte and R. Stockhammer, 170):

In the 19th century the theological motif of the »wandering Jew« was transformed into antisemitic propaganda. For example, the political journalist Constantin Frantz (1817-1891) rejects the »emancipation« of the Jews, that is the idea of equality of Jews and Christians under public law, in his pamphlet *Ahasverus oder die Judenfrage* [*Ahasuerus or the Jewish Question*], because »the Jews remain always Jews and are, therefore, inwardly excluded from Christian history.«¹⁷ And the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) repeats that »the eternal Jew Ahasuerus« is »the personification of the whole Jewish people.«¹⁸ Schopenhauer is convinced that even a »baptized Jew« remains Jewish. Therefore he cannot take »part in the state.«¹⁹

However, it seems to be worth mentioning that the myth of the »wandering Jew« has been used not only in an antisemitic context, but also by Jewish thinkers like Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929). In his seminal work *Der Stern der Erlösung* [*The Star of Redemption*] Rosenzweig characterizes the Jews – *nota bene* in a positive evaluation – as »eternal wanderers« in order to emphasize the singularity of their existence among the nations.²⁰

In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's library, the book *Das Wesen des Antisemitismus* [*The Essence of Antisemitism*] by the Austrian diplomat Heinrich Graf Cou-

»Dieser umlaufende Jude seye nicht eine einzelne Person, sondern das gantze Jüdische nach der Creutzigung Christi in alle Welt zerstreute umherschweifende und nach Christi Zeugnuß biss an den jüngsten Tag bleibende Volck.«

17. Cf. C. Frantz, *Ahasverus oder die Judenfrage*. Neudruck der Ausgabe Berlin 1844, ed. by H. E. Onnau, Siegburg 1994, 38: »*Emanzipation* ist ein leeres Wort. Denn [...] die Juden bleiben immer Juden, und sind damit innerlich von der christlichen Geschichte ausgeschlossen.«; cf. C. Frank, *Ahasverus oder die Judenfrage*, 57: »Es gibt eine Sage von *Ahasverus*, dem ewigen Juden, der, weil er den Heiland von seiner Hütte gewiesen, verdammt ist, auf der Erde herum zu irren, den Tod zu suchen und ihn nicht finden zu können, bis einst der Heiland wiederkehrt. *Das jüdische Volk selbst ist der ewige Jude*.«
18. A. Schopenhauer, [*Ahasver und die Winkelnation*], in: *Parerga und Paralipomena* (2/1851). Reprint in: *Ahasvers Spur*, ed. by M. Körte and R. Stockhammer, 189: »Der ewige Jude Ahasverus ist nichts Anderes, als die Personifikation des ganzen jüdischen Volks.«
19. A. Schopenhauer, *Ahasver und die Winkelnation*, 190f.
20. Cf. F. Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (1921), 4th edition, ed. by R. Mayer, Den Haag 1976, 338f.: »Our life is no longer interwoven with anything external, we have taken root in ourselves, without roots in the earth, eternal wanderers therefore [...].« (Translation: F. Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. B. E. Galli, foreword by M. Oppenheim, introduction by E. Wolfson, Madison/Wisconsin 2005, 324).

denhove-Kalergi (1859-1906) still remains. It contains some marks by the reader, probably Bonhoeffer himself. In this book, we are informed that »the saga of the eternal Jew, this personification of the general fate of the Jewish people since the destruction of Jerusalem combined with their wandering around for hawking purposes for centuries and their oppressed homelessness in the later middle ages«, is mentioned for the first time »not earlier than the 13th century.«²¹

In the printed version of his essay, Bonhoeffer added a final paragraph to the first part, repeating a number of elements of the traditional teaching of contempt, which are in complete accordance with the heading »Ahasuerus peregrinus«. It is from this final paragraph that Littell took his quotations mentioned above:

»The measures of the state against Judaism, however, have for the church a very particular context. The church of Christ has never lost sight of the thought that the ›chosen people‹, which hung the Redeemer of the world on the cross, must endure the curse of its action in long-drawn-out suffering. [...] The conversion of Israel is to be the end of its people's suffering.«²²

In addition to Littell's quotation, we find in this paragraph a reference to Luther's »Table Talk«, reading: »The Jews are the most miserable people on earth. They are plagued everywhere, and scattered about all countries, having no certain resting place.«²³ The Ahasuerus myth refers precisely to this scattered existence of the Jewish people and gives theological reasons for it. As Bonhoeffer interprets it:

»From this perspective, the Christian church trembles at the sight of the people Israel's history, as God's own free, terrible way with God's own people. [...] The church's knowledge of the curse that weighs upon this people takes it far beyond any sort of cheap moralizing. Instead, it knows itself as the church that is unfaithful to its Lord over and over again, and that shares in the humiliation that it sees in this outcast people [...].«²⁴

21. H. Graf Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Das Wesen des Antisemitismus*, with an introduction »Antisemitismus nach dem Weltkrieg« by R. N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, Leipzig / Wien 1932, 234.
22. DBWE 12, 367 (= DBW 12, 354f.).
23. DBWE 12, 367 (= DBW 12, 354 f.); cf. M. Luther, *Tischreden*, Weimar Edition, Vol. 3, 36 (collection Aurifaber, between December 11, 1532, and January 2, 1533). The paragraph ends as follows: »[...] but they are rightly served, for seeing they refused to have Christ and his Gospel, instead of freedom they must have servitude.«
24. DBWE 12, 367 (= DBW 12, 355).

The congruence of Bonhoeffer's theological statements in the paragraph inserted at the end of the first part of his essay with the handwritten heading »Ahasuerus peregrinus« makes it likely that the heading – in spite of the fact that it was not reproduced in the printed version – represents authentically the main focus Bonhoeffer wanted to give to this part in the final edition.

2.2 Modern Jewish Christianity

The handwritten heading of the second part presents another problem. According to the introductory paragraph of the essay, the question of how the church should behave towards »the baptized Jews« in face of the German Christians' demand for an »Aryan clause« should be discussed here. Right at the beginning, Bonhoeffer writes unambiguously: »The church cannot allow the state to prescribe for it the way it treats its members. A baptized Jew is a member of our church. For the church, the Jewish question is therefore different from what it is for the state.«²⁵ However, the heading »Modern Jewish Christianity« does not refer to »Jewish Christians«, that is, to Christians of Jewish descent at all. Rather, it refers to the German Christians who are denigrated as typically »Jewish«. This is a contradiction that needs to be resolved.

Bonhoeffer builds his argument on the basis of the Lutheran distinction between »law« and »gospel« in order to construe types of religion. In this context, Judaism is defined as the religion of »the law« as opposed to »the gospel« – and therefore to Christianity in its Gentile type. Accordingly, Bonhoeffer maintains:

»From the point of view of Christ's church [...] Jewish Christians are not people of the Jewish race who have been baptized Christians, but rather *Jewish Christians* in the church's sense are those who see their belonging to the people of God, to the church of Christ, as *determined* by their observance of a divine law.«²⁶

Regarding modern times, Bonhoeffer adds:

»An analogous occurrence today would be a case in which a church group within the church of the Reformation made church membership dependent on observance of a divine law, for example, racial uniformity among the members of a congregation. By making this requirement, the people concerned would become

25. DBWE 12, 368 (= DBW 12, 355).

26. DBWE 12, 368 (= DBW 12, 356).

a type of Jewish Christian, regardless of whether they actually belong to the Jewish race or not.«²⁷

In other words, by the term »Jewish Christians of the modern type«²⁸ in opposition to the Gentile type of the Reformation church, Bonhoeffer aims at the German Christians because of their demand for a new racial law within the Protestant church. In Bonhoeffer's words, »To exclude persons who are racially Jewish from our ethnically German church would mean to make it into a church of the Jewish Christian type.« In the church of the Reformation this is »not possible«. Again, »The church community *doing the excluding* would thus be constituting itself as a *Jewish Christian* community.«²⁹ It seems that Bonhoeffer accepts the racial distinction between Jews and Germans. This becomes obvious also in the crucial statement of the final handwritten paragraph added later to the six theses, where we read: »[...] here, where Jew and German together stand under God's Word, is church; here it will be proven whether or not the church is still church.«³⁰

It is obvious that the handwritten heading »Modern Jewish Christianity«, although it is not reproduced in the printed version, represents precisely the main focus of Bonhoeffer's thought in the second part of the essay. In fact, Bonhoeffer repeats his concept of »modern Jewish Christianity« in the concluding paragraph of the essay. The crucial argument against an »Aryan clause« in the church is that those who make membership in the Reformation church dependent on a law are »bringing about the Jewish Christian idea of a religion of law, [...] lapsing into a modern type of Jewish Christianity.«³¹ Moreover, it seems that the notion of »modern Jewish Christianity« was Bonhoeffer's pet idea in 1933. He repeated it in other documents like the memorandum on »The Jewish-Christian Question as Status Confessionis« and in the »Bethel Confession.«³²

27. DBWE 12, 368f. (= DBW 12, 356).

28. DBWE 12, 369 (= DBW 12, 356).

29. DBWE 12, 369 (= DBW 12, 357).

30. DBWE 12, 370 (= DBW 12, 358).

31. DBWE 12, 370 (= DBW 12, 358). The last half of the sentence, about the »modern type of Jewish Christianity« has been inserted in the printed version only.

32. In his memorandum on »The Jewish-Christian Question as Status Confessionis« for Charles S. Macfarland (probably July 1933) Bonhoeffer blames the German Protestant Church for »erecting a racial law as a prerequisite of Christian communion.« This is dangerous because in doing so the church »puts itself under the Law; it is then a Church of Jewish Christian type« (DBWE 12, 372). The argument reappears in the August version of the »Bethel Confession«, where it seems to represent Bonhoeffer's specific contribution to Wilhelm Vischer's original draft

By defining the church of the Reformation as »Gentile« and blaming exactly the German Christians as »Jewish«, Bonhoeffer utters a provocative statement of highest degree. The antisemites are labelled »Jewish« without knowing it because they cling to a »religion of law«. However, the theological price Bonhoeffer has to pay for this provocation is still high. Although he rejects racial antisemitism, his »religious« concept of Jews and Jewish Christians is moulded by the theological anti-Judaism lurking in the Lutheran confrontation of »law« and »gospel«. It implies a defamation of Judaism because of its alleged clinging to the »law«. ³³ With his retort against the German Christians, Bonhoeffer makes Lutheran supersessionism his own. In addition, by his strange definition of »modern Jewish Christianity«, he obstructs any possibility of taking Jewish self-understanding seriously; for in his perspective, Lutheran theology knows already better from the outset.

3. »To Fall within the Spokes of the Wheel«

In spite of the relics of anti-Judaism in Bonhoeffer's essay it should not be denied that »The Church and the Jewish Question« contains a first consideration of the possibility of »direct political action« against the state on occasion of the persecution of the Jewish minority. This purpose finds expression in the slogan »To fall within the spokes of the wheel«, in the first part of the essay.

As already mentioned, »To put a spoke in the wheel« is a mistranslation of the German »dem Rad in die Speichen fallen.« The German original would urge an alternative translation, such as »To fall within the spokes of the wheel« – not exactly »to seize the wheel itself«, as the translators of DBWE 12 suggest. ³⁴ »In any case, the meaning clearly is to bring the appa-

of the paragraph on »The Church and the Jews« (DBWE 12, 420); cf. A. Pangritz, Die »Politik Gottes« mit Israel. Über Wilhelm Vischers Beitrag zum »Betheler Bekenntnis«, in: *Evangelische Theologie* (72/2012), 194-213.

33. Cf. E. A. Scharffenorth, Die Kirche vor der Bekenntnisfrage. Bonhoeffers Aufruf zur Solidarität mit den Juden, in: *Ethik im Ernstfall. Dietrich Bonhoeffers Stellung zu den Juden und ihre Aktualität*, ed. by W. Huber and I. Tödt, München 1982, 214: »Bonhoeffers Begriff des Judenchristen trägt noch deutlich die Spuren der neulutherischen Aversion gegen ›Gesetzlichkeit‹.«
34. DBWE 12, 365. There is a difference between the German »Dem Rad in die Speichen greifen«, which would permit the translation »to seize the wheel itself,« and

ratus of the unjust and illegitimate state to a halt«, as Larry Rasmussen claims.³⁵ Accordingly, the phrase has been interpreted as a first prophetic announcement, anticipating Bonhoeffer's later decision to participate in the conspiracy against Hitler and the Nazi system.

What has not been sufficiently explored, as far as I can see, is the source from which Bonhoeffer draws with his slogan. »Dem Rad in die Speichen fallen« – the German phrase used by Bonhoeffer – sounds like a traditional saying. Bertold Klappert suggests that Bonhoeffer's use of the slogan is an »antithesis« to an antisemitic speech by Adolf Stoecker (1835-1909), where the Prussian court chaplain blames the Jews, because they »want to throw themselves within the spokes of Germany's wagon and roll it back.«³⁶ The example is interesting because it refers to the context of the so-called »Jewish question«. However, the wording in Stoecker's speech is rather different compared with Bonhoeffer's slogan.

Heinz Eduard Tödt and Sabine Dramm present some more suggestions regarding the provenience of the phrase. Tödt mentions that the metaphor reappears in the famous speech »Politik als Beruf« [Politics as profession] by Max Weber (1864-1920). The sociologist asks the ethical question of »what type of human one must be as to be permitted to seize the wheel of history.«³⁷ Sabine Dramm adds that already Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

»Dem Rad in die Speichen fallen«, which implies an exceptional action of the person, who falls between the spokes of the wheel, risking his or her life.

35. DBWE 12, 365, note 12.

36. B. Klappert, Weg und Wende Dietrich Bonhoeffers in der Israelfrage. Bonhoeffer und die theologischen Grundentscheidungen des Rheinischen Synodalbeschlusses 1980, in: Ethik im Ernstfall. Dietrich Bonhoeffers Stellung zu den Juden und ihre Aktualität, ed. by W. Huber and I. Tödt, München 1982, 96 f. Cf. A. Stoecker, Die Berliner Juden und das öffentliche Leben. Reden [!], gehalten vor der Versammlung Deutscher Bürger in den Sälen der Berliner Bockbrauerei am 2. Juli 1883, in: Christlich-Sozial. Reden und Aufsätze, 2nd edition, Berlin 1890, 441: »Das sind Leute, die sich dem Wagen Deutschlands in die Speichen werfen und ihn zurückdrängen wollen.« It seems that Klappert conflates the speech with another antisemitic speech by Stoecker, titled »Das Judentum im öffentlichen Leben eine Gefahr für das Deutsche Reich« (February 3, 1882). A. Stoecker, Berliner Juden, 419-426.

37. H. E. Tödt, Judendiskriminierung 1933. Der Ernstfall für Bonhoeffers Ethik, in: Ethik im Ernstfall. Dietrich Bonhoeffers Stellung zu den Juden und ihre Aktualität, ed. by W. Huber and I. Tödt, München 1982, 182, note 68; cf. M. Weber, Politik als Beruf (1919), in: Gesammelte politische Schriften, ed. by J. Winckelmann, 3rd edition, Tübingen 1971, 545: »[...] die Frage, was für ein Mensch man sein muß, um seine Hand in die Speichen des Rads der Geschichte legen zu dürfen.«

had used the phrase. The Danish philosopher was convinced that »every great, excellently gifted man« in history has »seized the spokes of the wheel of human development.«³⁸ Yet both examples are no direct parallels to Bonhoeffer's slogan, because they presuppose the image of seizing the »wheel of history« instead of a man falling between its spokes.³⁹

It is true, on the other hand, that Max Weber seems to have had a marked preference for the metaphor of manipulating the »wheel of history«. Closer to Bonhoeffer's slogan is Weber's conviction that it is the exclusive calling of »master people« to intervene or to gear into the »spokes of global development.«⁴⁰ In his letter to Gertrud Bäumer, »Zwischen zwei Gesetzen« [Between two Laws], first published in the journal *Die Frau* in February 1916, Weber justifies Germany's military policy leading to the outbreak of the war: It was necessary for Germany »to fall within the spokes of the wheel« in the last moment, otherwise Austria would have been destroyed as a result of the Russian expansion.⁴¹ Here we have precisely the

38. S. Dramm, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Eine Einführung in sein Denken, Gütersloh 2001, 197; cf. S. Kierkegaard, Die Tagebücher. Eine Auswahl, ed. and trans. (into German) by H. Gerdes, Düsseldorf/Köln 1980, 53: »Alle großen, ausgezeichnet begabten Männer der ganzen Welt, die dem Rad der menschlichen Entwicklung in die Speichen gegriffen haben, versammelt zu sehen [...]«
39. By the way, the metaphor of the »wheel of history« has been used by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as well. In the »Communist Manifesto« (1848) they are convinced that »the lower middle classes, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these [...] are not revolutionary, [...] they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history« that leads to their decline as middle classes and to the rise of capitalist bourgeoisie (cf. K. Marx and F. Engels, Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei, in: Marx Engels Werke 4, 6th edition, Berlin/DDR 1972, 472).
40. M. Weber, Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland. Zur politischen Kritik des Beamtentums und Parteiwesens (1918), in: Gesammelte politische Schriften, 442: »Nur Herrenvölker haben den Beruf, in die Speichen der Weltentwicklung einzugreifen.« Cf. A. Demandt, Denkbilder des europäischen Epochenbewußtseins, in: Zeit und Unzeit. Geschichtsphilosophische Essays, Köln 2002, 21.
41. M. Weber, Zwischen zwei Gesetzen (1916), in: Gesammelte politische Schriften, 144: »Wir hatten nur die Wahl, im letzten möglichen Augenblick vor seiner [scil. Österreichs] Zerstörung dem Rad in die Speichen zu fallen oder ihr zuzusehen und es nach einigen Jahren über uns selbst hinweggehen zu lassen. Gelingt es nicht, den russischen Expansionsdrang wieder anderswohin abzulenken, so bleibt es auch künftig dabei. Das ist Schicksal, an dem alles pazifistische Gerede nichts ändert.«

wording used by Bonhoeffer in his essay. Yet we do not know if Bonhoeffer had knowledge of Weber's letter against pacifism.⁴²

It is more likely that Bonhoeffer had an earlier example in mind when he used the formula – an example provided by the well-known classical writer Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805). It seems to me that Bonhoeffer's slogan is an allusion to Schiller's dramatic poem »Don Karlos. Infant von Spanien« [Don Karlos. Infant of Spain], first produced in Hamburg in 1787. In the tenth scene of the third act, Marquis de Posa, the knight of the Maltesian order, confronts Philipp, the king of Spain, with the famous slogan of enlightenment: »Geben Sie Gedankenfreiheit« [Grant us liberty of thought!]. After the success of the French Revolution in 1789, Schiller – together with George Washington – was awarded French honorary citizenship for this slogan.

In Schiller's play, Posa's revolutionary slogan is preceded by a discussion in which the marquis addresses the king with words warning him from producing »a churchyard's peace« in the Netherlands. And he continues: »Sie wollen / allein in ganz Europa sich dem Rade / des Weltverhängnisses, das unaufhaltsam / in vollem Laufe rollt, entgegenwerfen? / Mit Menschenarm in seine Speichen fallen?« [Do you want to throw yourself alone in Europe against the wheel of the world's fate that irresistibly runs in full speed? With human's arm fall within its spokes?].⁴³

It seems that the dictum »To fall within the spokes of the wheel« has become a kind of familiar quotation or ›winged word‹ indicating a person's resistance against the run of history. It was used by the prominent liberal theologian Martin Rade (1857-1940) nearly at the same time, but independently from Bonhoeffer in a short article on »Die Kirche und die Rassenfrage« [The church and the problem of race] in the journal *Die Christliche Welt* on June 3, 1933. Rade regrets that concerning the state's legislation against the Jews »we could not fall within the spokes of the wheel.« Nevertheless he insists that, within the church, solidarity with baptized Jews is necessary because »they are ours.«⁴⁴

42. Weber is especially critical of the »pacifism of American ›ladies‹ (of both sexes!)« (M. Weber, *Zwischen zwei Gesetzen*, 144).

43. The translation provided by R. D. Boylan (*The dramas of Frederick Schiller*, trans. R. D. Boylan et al., London 1907) avoids the language of »falling within« and replaces it by »to seize«: »Would you alone, in Europe, / Fling yourself down before the rapid wheel / Of destiny, which rolls its ceaseless course, / And seize its spokes with human arm. Vain thought!«

44. M. Rade, *Die Kirche und die Rassenfrage*, in: *Die Christliche Welt* (47.11/June 1933), Gotha, col. 527; cf. F. W. Graf, »Wir konnten dem Rad nicht in die Spei-

With his reference to Schiller's prerevolutionary play, Bonhoeffer clearly takes into consideration the possibility of political resistance or »direct political action« against a state turned into tyranny.⁴⁵ However, whereas in Schiller's play the metaphor of a man falling within the spokes of a wheel describes the Spanish tyrant's futile resistance against the revolutionary movement of history – that is, the Protestant reformation and the uprising of the Dutch – Bonhoeffer turns the metaphor upside down, using it for characterizing resistance against tyranny. This inversion becomes possible because, from Bonhoeffer's perspective, the Nazi rule is an expression of revolutionary activity, which should be stopped by Christian conservative or even counter-revolutionary resistance. In some respect, he anticipates a military action by the »Wehrmacht« from above in order to save the authority of the state against the Nazi movement, which he perceived as a revolutionary upheaval from below.⁴⁶

In other words, the metaphor of a man falling within the spokes of the wheel in order to bring it to a halt is not revolutionary, but rather anti-revolutionary in its content. In Schiller's original setting, the metaphor is used in order to criticize the tyrant's policies of counter-insurgency against the Dutch revolutionaries. They are perceived as antecedents of the Enlightenment movement, which is compared with the wheel of time running irresistably into the future. In the long run, at least, resistance to the movement of the wheel will prove unsuccessful. Therefore, resistance is futile because history cannot be reversed.

In Bonhoeffer's setting, on the other hand, the metaphor is used in order to criticize the tyrannical policies of the Nazi government against the Jews, who are characterized as the victims of the running wheel of revolution. The rule of the Nazis is judged illegitimate because they are regarded as revolutionaries. Political resistance is aimed at defending the old order

chen fallen.« Liberaler Protestantismus und »Judenfrage« nach 1933, in: Der Holocaust und die Protestanten. Analysen einer Verstrickung, ed. by J. C. Kaiser and M. Greschat, Frankfurt a.M. 1988, 151-185. I am grateful to Marie-Theres Igrec for pointing me to this parallel use of Schiller's slogan by Martin Rade.

45. DBWE 12, 366 (= DBW 12, 353).

46. In 1940 Bonhoeffer would utter a similar suggestion in the chapter »Heritage and Decay« of his »Ethics«, referring to the figure of the »Refrainer« (κατέχων) according to 2 Thess. 2:7, »that is, the ordering power, equipped with great physical strength, which successfully stands in the way of those who would throw themselves into the abyss. The ›restraining power‹ is the force that is made effective within history by God's rule of the world, which sets limits to evil. [...] The ›restraining force‹ is the ordering power of the state« (DBWE 6, 131).

against its revolutionary transformation. Whereas Schiller's Marquis de Posa knows for certain that there is no chance of stopping the run of history, Bonhoeffer hopes that it is possible to resist successfully against an illegitimate revolutionary movement.

4. Conclusion and Outlook

Bonhoeffer's essay »The Church and the Jewish Question« has rightly been regarded as an early statement of solidarity with the Jews in the beginning of the German church struggle. At the same time, it was an early reflection about the conditions of political resistance against a state turned into tyranny. On the other hand, due to the fact that Bonhoeffer draws on highly problematic elements of the »teaching of contempt« in the Lutheran tradition, the essay is full of ambiguities. The anti-Jewish motifs have found expression in the two handwritten headings »Ahasuerus peregrinus« and »Modern Jewish Christianity« in Bonhoeffer's typescript. Although they have not been reproduced in the published version in 1933, they seem to signal the main topics Bonhoeffer wants to deal with in the two parts of his essay: First, the meaning of the suffering of the Jewish people among the nations, and the illusory character of the state's »attempt to ›solve‹ the ›Jewish question« is discussed.⁴⁷ Secondly, the German Christians' attempt »to exclude persons who are racially Jewish from our ethnically German church« is condemned as a heresy because it would pervert the church of the gospel into a »church of the Jewish type«⁴⁸, that is, a »religion of law«.⁴⁹

It is not easy to find reasons for political resistance on the basis of these theological arguments. The theological anti-Judaism of the Lutheran tradition provides an ambiguous source for political solidarity with the Jews. However, in spite of his strong allegiance to the Lutheran doctrine of the »two kingdoms«, Bonhoeffer feels compelled to think about the possibility of a situation, when necessary, »to fall within the spokes of the wheel.« This »would be direct political action on the part of the church.«⁵⁰ Yet the type of political resistance in which Bonhoeffer finally would participate, a military conspiracy, was in itself somehow ambiguous. Karl Barth, for instance, ex-

47. DBWE 12, 367 (= DBW 12, 355).

48. DBWE 12, 369 (= DBW 12, 357).

49. DBWE 12, 370 (= DBW 12, 358).

50. DBWE 12, 366 (= DBW 12, 353).

pressed some reservations against activities by the Prussian military forces.⁵¹ And there are historians who claim that the failure of these activities was nearly unavoidable. It seems that this perspective is supported by Bonhoeffer's use of Schiller's metaphor. The metaphor suggests that resistance against the irresistably running wheel is futile because it is impossible to bring the destiny to a halt. Whoever dares to fall within the spokes of the wheel must know that his action might be unsuccessful; he must know that he might not survive this action. Thus the question may arise if Bonhoeffer's use of Schiller's metaphor already anticipates the failure of the plot and the death of the conspirators. Resistance may be in vain, but it must be done.

Abstract

Bonhoeffer's essay »The Church and the Jewish Question« (1933) has rightly been regarded as an early statement of solidarity with the Jews in Nazi Germany. At the same time, the slogan »To fall within the spokes of the wheel« in the first part of the essay has been read as an early reflection about the conditions of political resistance against tyranny. On the other hand, it has been observed that Bonhoeffer's essay is full of theological ambiguities.

This contribution addresses the ambiguities by paying attention to the handwritten headings to the two parts of the essay in Bonhoeffer's typescript, which have not been reproduced in the published version in 1933: »Ahasver peregrinus« [Wandering Ahasuerus] and »Modernes Judenchristentum« [Modern Jewish Christianity]. In a second section, the precise meaning of the slogan »To fall within the spokes of the wheel« is explored in the original context to which Bonhoeffer seems to refer.

51. Cf. C. von Kirschbaum, Letter to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Basle, May 17 [?], 1942, in: DBWE 16, 280f.: »For Karl Barth there is in fact something ›unsettling‹, and that is all the attempts to rescue Germany, by means of further ›national‹ endeavors, from the immense predicament into which it has now been swept. This also includes the attempts that may be undertaken if necessary by the generals.« Cf. also: C. von Kirschbaum. Letter to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Basle, May 17 [?], 1942, 281, note 8. Cf. A. Pangritz, Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Grand Rapids 2000, 66.