

Homily for Friday in the Sixth Week after Pentecost

July 10, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year 2, Proper 9: Hosea 14:1–9; Psalm 51:1–8*; Matthew 10:16–23

I'm reading an eBook version of Englishman Andrew Wilson's *After the Victorians: The Decline of Britain in the World*.¹ Born in 1950, he is a significant British writer of his generation. That said, no one ever gets it all right. The name Geoffrey Bell comes up in Wilson's account of the 1930s. I know his reputation as the English bishop whom Winston Churchill disliked and blocked from becoming archbishop of Canterbury. As a member of the House of Lords, Bell openly and loudly condemned the bombing of civilian population centers in Nazi Germany. I didn't know until I read Wilson that Bell and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran pastor and theologian, who was executed on Hitler's direct order, three weeks before Hitler shot himself, were friends.

I was surprised to read these words in Wilson's book, "From the very first, Bonhoeffer had seen that there could be no compromise whatever between

¹ A.N. Wilson, *After the Victorians: The Decline of Britain in the World* (New York: Picador eBook, 2005).

Christianity and Hitlerism.”² But there’s more to that story. Some years back, I came across the work of Saul Friedländer, professor emeritus of history at UCLA. He survived the Holocaust by being hidden in a Roman Catholic boarding school in France. His parents were not so lucky. They were captured while trying to enter Switzerland from France and died in Auschwitz.

In his book *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, Friedländer writes about Bonhoeffer’s being one of the two founders of the Confessing Church—Lutherans in Germany opposed to the broader Lutheran community support of Nazi anti-Judaism. I think what can be said is that it took a little time for Bonhoeffer to become clear that Christians would suffer and die for opposing the evil Germany of Adolf Hitler and all who, by things done and things left undone, gave us the Holocaust.³

Religious persecution is alive and well in many parts of the world today. North Korea, China, and Cuba are notable persecutors of people of faith. Islamic fundamentalism challenges Christianity in many places

² Ibid., search eBook for the quotation.

³ Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: Volume I The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 45–46.

in Africa and Asia.⁴ There is little freedom of religion in too many places in our world.

Today we continue to hear Jesus' Mission Sermon to his apostles and his disciples—not just for twelve, but for the community of believers. Jesus spoke to his disciples about perseverance in the face of suffering. I think perseverance brings its graces to us in all the challenges and opportunities that life itself brings us. The words of the Lord's Prayer continue to mean so much, "Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil."

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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⁴ Eliza Griswold.