INTRODUCTION

THE FRAME OF THE BOOK OR:
MR MUNK AND MR PETERSEN

Søren Dosenrode

How is the Christian supposed to act when his or her government misbehaves? Is he or she expected to suffer or to resist? This fundamental question has been acute for many Christians throughout the ages and also for an ordinary Danish civil servant, Mr Paul Petersen, who wrote to the well known Rev. Kaj Munk (1898–1944)1 in July 1943, during Denmark’s occupation. Specifically, this short correspondence addresses the question of whether or not Christians should resist the German occupation of Denmark, thus illustrating the topic of this book. Mr Paul Petersen wrote [shortened by SD]:

København V., July 10, 1943
Dannevirkegade 27

Rev. Kaj Munk
Vedersø

I have seen several of your plays; I have read much of what you have written, including your memoirs [...] and have been glad for most of it, although I am—perhaps because of a lack of understanding—not equally fond of everything you are writing. Yes, I have admired you as a writer and portrayer; but unfortunately, I have also read your New

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1 It is hard to come to grips with Danish and Scandinavian *inter bellum* (cultural) history without including Kaj Munk in the analysis. Kaj Munk was a celebrated dramatist, a priest, a political journalist and a fierce opponent of the German occupation of Denmark. When Benito Mussolini and later Adolf Hitler seized power, they fascinated him immensely, and the ‘strong men’ were a theme of several of his plays, but when especially Hitler’s prosecution of the Jews became more and more obvious, his enthusiasm faded. When Denmark was occupied by German forces in 1940, he took up a position against Germany. During the years of occupation, he vehemently opposed the Danish policy of cooperation with the occupational forces, and he was killed by members of the German SS in January 1944. Chapter 4 in this book is dedicated to Kaj Munk.
Year-sermon in ‘Nyt fra “Dansk Samling”’,

which has caused an urge
within me to write some lines to you, even though I do not expect an
exchange of letters, as I certainly lack the ability to refute your possible
answer or defence.

It has disappointed me so inexpressibly.

For your information, I am a completely ordinary man, who privately
struggles with the problems of life and secretly thinks deeply about what
I hear and see.

The Lord’s prayer ends: “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and
the glory, for ever and ever.”

The bible says: “Humility precedes honour.”

You preach from the pulpit to the congregation about “For the sake of
honour, honour, honour—i.e. the honour of this country, and therefore
the honour of the Danes.”

You criticise the fact that we haven’t used weapons—how can a priest
urge others to use deadly weapons against one’s fellow man? How can
priests bless weapons at all?

Surely, God does let the disciples talk about “fighting” but in my eyes,
this can only mean to fight with “the spiritual sword.”

[...]

For me, one of the greatest tasks a priest has to undertake, is that he has
to talk about and urge love, love and again love—and not murder!

My beloved, late mother’s motto was: “Better to suffer wrongs than to do
wrong.” We Danes have suffered wrongs and suffer wrongs—but I think
it is objectionable if a priest urges to oppose this with armed force.

When I was 21 years old, I decided that I would not fire a shot, if I should
become part of a war while having my mind intact. My motivation was
that on the last day, I wanted to be able to say with my head held high
that I obeyed the commandment: “You shall not kill.” We do not agree
about this point, although I would have expected so, given that you are
one of God’s chosen men.

Nevertheless, thank you for all the good that you, as a poet, have given me
and my fellow men. We have appreciated it. I will, of course, let you alone

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2 ‘News from “Danish Unity”’ (Dansk Samling). Dansk Samling was a centre-right
party, founded in 1936 and represented in parliament between 1943–47. From 1943,
it was a part of the Danish resistance movement and represented in the Danish under-
ground ‘Council for Freedom’ (Frihedsrådet).