

## ABSTRACT

### Understanding the World Better Than It Understands Itself: The Theological Hermeneutics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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This dissertation argues that Dietrich Bonhoeffer's work is best understood as a consistent project of theological hermeneutics with an ecclesial focus. The project examines Bonhoeffer's life and writings with the intention of demonstrating how theological hermeneutics is at the center of his theological project and that each phase of development in his hermeneutics logically fits both with his historical and cultural context and the remainder of his writings. In order to make this argument, the dissertation demonstrates how certain theological themes (Christ existing as church-community, obedience to Scripture, and vicarious representative action, specifically) develop over the course of Bonhoeffer's work. The dissertation concludes by arguing that the ecclesially-focused hermeneutics proposed by Bonhoeffer provide an excellent framework for contemporary theological reflection and suggest some possible interpretive paths forward given his methodology.

After introducing the argument in the first chapter, the second chapter examines Bonhoeffer's development of Christ existing as church-community. Chapter two

investigates Bonhoeffer's interaction with philosophy, epistemology, and ontology in order to create a theological anthropology rooted in this ecclesial theme of Christ existing as church-community, noting ties to Radical Orthodoxy through participatory ontology.

Chapter three examines Bonhoeffer's time as a professor and pastor, closely reading *Creation and Fall*, *Christ the Center*, and *Discipleship*. Through this reading, the chapter argues that Bonhoeffer builds upon the theological anthropology of Chapter Two using the concept of obedience to Christ. With this theological theme of obedience, Bonhoeffer interacts with and interprets the situation in 1930s Germany.

Chapter four surveys the final phase of Bonhoeffer's life—that of conspirator to overthrow Hitler. The chapter examines Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* and prison writings, arguing that the final ecclesial theme that emerges in his theological hermeneutics is vicarious representative action.

The final chapter demonstrates how each of Bonhoeffer's hermeneutical themes builds toward his position regarding nonviolence and provides an example of how the contemporary church might learn from such a hermeneutic.

Understanding the World Better Than It Understands Itself:  
The Theological Hermeneutics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

by

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A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Religion

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To Joy, Ben, and Drew,  
my partners in understanding the world,  
my friends in practicing the faith,  
my gifts from God

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

“Thus the world’s coming of age is no longer an occasion for polemics and apologetics, but is now really better understood than it understands itself, on the basis of the gospel and in the light of Christ.”

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*

#### *Thesis*

In this dissertation I shall argue that Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s work is best understood as a *consistent* project of *theological hermeneutics* with an *ecclesial focus*. I shall argue for this particular reading of Bonhoeffer over other scholarly readings of his thought, specifically readings that argue his theology radically shifted during his later years,<sup>1</sup> readings that overlook the hermeneutical focus of his work,<sup>2</sup> and readings that emphasize theological concepts other than the church as the central locus of his writings.<sup>3</sup> The bulk of my dissertation will examine Bonhoeffer’s life and writings with the intention of demonstrating how theological hermeneutics is at the center of his theological project and that each phase of development in his hermeneutics logically fits both with

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<sup>1</sup>The most well-known of these thinkers is John A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963).

<sup>2</sup>Few scholars have read Bonhoeffer as a hermeneutical theologian to this point. The notable exception is the recent work of Jens Zimmermann in his *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004). Zimmermann briefly discusses Bonhoeffer in chapters 8 and 9 of his work. My treatment of Bonhoeffer’s theological hermeneutics is more extensive than Zimmermann’s and, as I shall soon demonstrate, has an ecclesial focus, where Zimmermann reads Bonhoeffer with a Christological focus.

<sup>3</sup>This is the most popular method of reading Bonhoeffer: finding one theological theme and tracing it throughout his work. I will discuss this phenomenon more extensively later in this chapter, but as an example will note the excellent book by Josiah Ulysses Young, *No Difference in the Fare: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Problem of Racism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

his historical and cultural context and the remainder of his writings, noting intersections with various schools of contemporary theology along the way (for example, Radical Orthodoxy). I will conclude the dissertation by arguing that the ecclesially-focused hermeneutics proposed by Bonhoeffer can be tested and understood with utilizing the case study of nonviolence in his writings, particularly as examined by John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and James McClendon.

To further clarify my project, I emphasize three terms in the opening sentence: *consistent*, *theological hermeneutics*, and *ecclesial focus*. Each of these terms tightens the scope of my project and clarifies it from other scholarly engagements with Bonhoeffer. Each is a point of emphasis in my reading of Bonhoeffer in order to understand the direction my argument will take. To begin, my reading of Bonhoeffer will argue that his theology is *consistent* thematically, for the most part, across his life and writings. I am not arguing that Bonhoeffer's earliest theological writings, *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*,<sup>4</sup> are exactly representative of his most mature theological reflections. I am, however, suggesting that many of the theological themes put forth in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* (for example, "Christ existing as church-community"<sup>5</sup>) are not absent from the remainder of Bonhoeffer's theological corpus; I instead argue that they are formative for his later thought and theological hermeneutics. I am also suggesting

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<sup>4</sup>Unless otherwise noted, each of the primary Bonhoeffer sources I use will be from the critical English edition of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, the definitive German edition of Bonhoeffer's collected works. I will, from time to time, turn to the *Werke* themselves in order to clarify usage of a specific theological term. For the most part, however, the English editions have been translated in such a way that the terminology is consistent throughout.

<sup>5</sup>Throughout this dissertation I shall use the term "church-community" in order to refer to the a local church congregation. This is the translation of *Gemeinde* used by the International Bonhoeffer Society in the critical English editions of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. The term "church" will typically refer to a universal understanding rather than a local congregation.

that some of the more surprising turns in Bonhoeffer's later work—for example, “religionless Christianity”—do not represent a radical departure from his previous writings but are instead a logical continuation of his earlier theology.<sup>6</sup> While I shall grant that Bonhoeffer's latest work does employ new ideas and terminology, I shall argue that those new concepts are still connected to the natural development of his previous work. The most noted point of seeming *inconsistency* in Bonhoeffer's corpus—his attitude toward nonviolence—will be extensively addressed in the concluding chapter but also engaged throughout the argument.

At various times in the history of Bonhoeffer scholarship, reading his work with an emphasis on consistency would not have been well received. For example, in the 1960s Bonhoeffer was co-opted by a group of thinkers who read his texts as evidence that Christian theology was tending toward the “death of God.” John A.T. Robinson led this charge in his *Honest to God*, linking Bonhoeffer to the theological sensibilities of Paul Tillich.<sup>7</sup> Several scholars have refuted Robinson since his work was published, noting that Bonhoeffer rejected Tillich's methodology and that Robinson tended to lift Bonhoeffer's words out of context.<sup>8</sup> Despite the refutation of Robinson's specific project, other scholars have argued that while Robinson may have misappropriated Bonhoeffer's conclusions, the assertion that Bonhoeffer makes a significant shift in his later work is credi-

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<sup>6</sup>I develop this idea more completely in chapter four.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. footnote #1. Robinson did so by noting Bonhoeffer's supposed acknowledgment of the “world come of age,” a concept I more fully investigate in chapter four.

<sup>8</sup>For example, John E. Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960). Godsey's book was written as a doctoral dissertation under Barth at the University of Basel and definitively refutes Robinson's approach. His book is probably the most complete study of Bonhoeffer's theology done to date.

ble. Thinkers in this vein have argued that while the prison writings may not support the “death of God” theology, they do represent a departure from Bonhoeffer’s earlier work, and a significant departure, at that.<sup>9</sup>

My reading of Bonhoeffer will suggest that his earliest writings at the University of Berlin and those later writings from Tegel Prison, while different in many respects, do not represent radically different streams of thought. As I work through my argument, I will take time to demonstrate how the early themes Bonhoeffer develops tie into his later work. And in chapter four, the chapter devoted to the later theology of his *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers From Prison*, I will show how the later Bonhoeffer is, in many respects, continuing the same hermeneutic project he began with his two doctoral dissertations: *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*.

The next point of emphasis in my argument, and possibly the most important, is that Bonhoeffer’s project is essentially one of *theological hermeneutics*. Hermeneutics, in this case, is much broader than the idea of biblical interpretation, as some scholars of religion use the term. I am instead employing the term in a fashion similar to scholars such as Graham Ward and Jens Zimmermann. For both Ward and Zimmermann, hermeneutics is the interpretation of reality in order to create meaning within that same reality.<sup>10</sup> As Ward—one of the central members of Radical Orthodoxy—describes it,

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<sup>9</sup>The most well-known of this sort of approach is John A. Phillips, *Christ for Us in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967). Phillips suggests that the prison theology of Bonhoeffer is the “most productive” of all his theology, finally breaking free from the church as his central focus. Cf. Phillips, 30.

<sup>10</sup>I have already footnoted Zimmermann’s excellent book, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics*. Graham Ward’s text, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (Cambridge: University Press, 2005), provides another excellent description of hermeneutics within a theological context. As I shall discuss in chapter five, Ward is directly connected to the Radical Orthodoxy theological sensibility. Zimmermann, while not explicitly associated with Radical Orthodoxy, does appear sympathetic with its interpretive project as well.

hermeneutics “is a story we tell ourselves about where we are. It is the manufacture of an event of meaning in a situation; a discursive event and a discursive meaning.”<sup>11</sup> In this sort of approach, hermeneutics is no longer limited in its interpretive capacity to written words on a page—although such interpretive activity is certainly within its purview. This kind of cultural hermeneutics described by Ward and Zimmermann is instead the interpretation of any set of signs: words, images, politics, customs, and the like. It seeks to make sense of reality, to interpret it, in order to understand it. To speak of *theological* hermeneutics, then, means to speak of the act of cultural interpretation through a specifically theological interpretive lens—to understand reality from a specifically theological perspective. For Zimmermann, for example, the divine Logos incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ provides the theological basis for reality, thus allowing him to claim “that theological premises provide the best framework for hermeneutics.”<sup>12</sup> In a more concrete fashion, I shall argue that, for Bonhoeffer, the *church of Jesus Christ existing as community* is the interpretive lens through which he engages and gives meaning to reality, providing a specifically theological approach to his hermeneutics. This approach will demonstrate that, for Bonhoeffer, *the church is the hermeneutic*.

While I will make the argument that Bonhoeffer’s work is best read as a project of theological hermeneutics throughout chapters two, three, and four, some preliminary remarks are necessary to explain why I want to make this argument at all. The answer lies in the approach most scholars take when they read Bonhoeffer. As I will demonstrate shortly, the most popular methodology in reading his theology has been to take a *singular*

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<sup>11</sup> Ward, 71-2.

<sup>12</sup> Zimmermann, 304.

*theme* and employ it as the central focus of the study.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the thematic method, many scholars choose to focus on a *particular period* of Bonhoeffer's work. For example, a writer might choose to focus on his academic writings or on his pastoral work.<sup>14</sup> These methods are helpful, but they are quite different in their focus. The scholar that focuses on reading Bonhoeffer's theology *per se* is attempting to describe his conclusions and methodology; he or she focuses the reading of Bonhoeffer on Bonhoeffer's material almost exclusively. In a way, he or she reads Bonhoeffer as a theological *soliloquy* of sorts.

Consequently, just as I am arguing that Bonhoeffer's work is primarily *consistent* in its theological themes over against those who see his later work disjointed from the rest of his corpus, I am also arguing that the best way to see his theology is as a hermeneutical project, one where he is working to interpret reality through the church of Jesus Christ. This is a significant argument, as I am only aware of two scholars who explicitly deal with Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics, neither of which does so in an extended fashion.<sup>15</sup> I am not suggesting that other scholars would necessarily argue *against* the

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<sup>13</sup>I will do something similar by arguing his theological hermeneutics have an ecclesial focus, but will broaden that project by examining his work as a task in hermeneutics.

<sup>14</sup>Clifford Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) has written the definitive text on Bonhoeffer's work to date, but it is primarily a study of Bonhoeffer's early theology, an area he felt had been neglected. Clyde Fant, *Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1975) wrote an excellent volume examining Bonhoeffer's thought through his sermons. Both are examples of "period pieces" on Bonhoeffer's work.

<sup>15</sup>Zimmermann's *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics*, while explicit and engaging, is quite brief in its treatment of Bonhoeffer, as he only explores the thought of Bonhoeffer within two chapters of his book. Currently he is editing a volume with Brian Gregor detailing Bonhoeffer's interaction with philosophy (under the working title of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Cruciform Philosophy*) in which he authors an essay detailing Bonhoeffer's engagement with Heidegger in *Act and Being*. The other work, Klaus-Michael Kodalle, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Zur Kritik seiner Theologie* (Munich: Gütersloh, 1991) is quite different from my project in that Kodalle rejects ecclesiology as Bonhoeffer's focus.



idea that Bonhoeffer is engaged in a hermeneutic exercise, but I am emphasizing that the vast majority of Bonhoeffer scholars to date have largely overlooked this aspect of Bonhoeffer's thought or have only mentioned it in passing.<sup>16</sup> By reading Bonhoeffer as a hermeneutical theologian, I want to read him as he engages the philosophical and theological interlocutors of his day and the social and historical context from where he works and writes.

The hermeneutical task as understood by Ward and Zimmermann (and Bonhoeffer, I will argue), is predicated on the assumption that all knowledge is mediated through interpretation.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, hermeneuticians consciously engage culture, writings, politics, and the like in order to interpret them in a particular manner to provide meaning to their context. When I read Bonhoeffer as a hermeneutical theologian, I want to read his engagement with these outside influences, so that I might be able to understand the interpretation he proffers in his theological conclusions. Consequently, my reading of Bonhoeffer will focus not only on Bonhoeffer, but also on his social context and interlocutors. I want to examine *who and what* he engages, *why* he engages them, and *how* he, in turn, interprets them through the church-community. My work in chapters two, three, and four, will work not only to explain Bonhoeffer's theological argument, but also how his theology is a work of hermeneutics, intentionally and carefully interpreting his social and historical context theologically. Such a reading of Bonhoeffer will be profit-

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<sup>16</sup>It is worth mentioning the final chapter of Stephen E. Fowl and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 135, mention that the most overlooked area of Bonhoeffer scholarship to date is his "scriptural interpretation and its bearing on his understanding of ethics and theology." This lacuna would fall squarely within the realm of his theological hermeneutics.

<sup>17</sup>Ward and Zimmermann follow Gadamer in making this claim. Cf. Zimmermann, 20 and 227.

able, I think, given his assertion toward the end of his life that “the world *must* be understood better than it understands itself”<sup>18</sup>—a statement clearly supporting the hermeneutic task. For example, in chapter two I will examine Bonhoeffer’s doctoral dissertations not only based on Bonhoeffer’s theological conclusions, but also on the the sources he chooses to engage, such as Martin Heidegger and point out how Bonhoeffer’s conclusions anticipate some currents in contemporary theology. Contrasted against reading Bonhoeffer’s work as a *soliloquy*, then, I hope to read Bonhoeffer *dialogically*, noting his theological engagements, arguments, and interpretations. It is my contention that until Bonhoeffer is read as a hermeneutician intentionally interpreting his world from the theological perspective of the church, one cannot fully appreciate and understand his work.

Alongside *consistency* and *theological hermeneutics*, the third point of emphasis in my thesis is the *ecclesial focus* of Bonhoeffer’s work. My emphasis on his ecclesial focus is unique in that I hope to demonstrate how Bonhoeffer’s ecclesiology is tied inseparably to his Christology, forming an interpretive framework for his hermeneutics. Multiple Bonhoeffer scholars over the years have noted the importance of Christology in his writings, leading some to assert that it is *the* central theme in his work.<sup>19</sup> A reading of Bonhoeffer’s work would, in some sense, support such an idea. For example, his early writings on the nature of the church talk repeatedly of the person of Jesus Christ taking

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<sup>18</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Touchstone, 1971), 328, emphasis Bonhoeffer’s.

<sup>19</sup>This conclusion is not without merit. See, for example, Jürgen Moltmann, “The Lordship of Christ and Human Society,” in Jürgen Moltmann and Jürgen Weissbach, *Two Studies in the Theology of Bonhoeffer*, trans. Reginald H. Fuller and Ilse Fuller (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1967). Additionally, John A. Phillips has performed a thematic study on others-centered nature of Bonhoeffer’s Christology entitled *Christ for Us in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

form in the church-community.<sup>20</sup> Soon after Bonhoeffer gave a series of Christology lectures at the University of Berlin.<sup>21</sup> His more pastoral texts focus on obedience to Christ,<sup>22</sup> and his later writings, particularly his *Ethics*, reflect on the inseparable nature of Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection.<sup>23</sup> It would certainly be reasonable to see Christology as the dominant idea in his writings.

I want to suggest, however, that Bonhoeffer's Christology, while extremely important, cannot be understood apart from his ecclesiology — what I shall argue is the central focus of his hermeneutics. Where Jesus Christ provides direction for his thought, the church enacts it; in a manner of speaking, the church is the concrete representation of Bonhoeffer's theology.<sup>24</sup> Because Bonhoeffer's thought is so concerned with engaging his social and historical context, the church is central; the church lives and enacts the teachings of Jesus Christ within that same context. I shall demonstrate that Bonhoeffer

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<sup>20</sup>Specifically speaking, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume One*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume Two*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., trans. H. Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

<sup>21</sup>These lectures have been compiled and published as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, trans., Edwin H. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

<sup>22</sup>Particularly Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume Four*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelley and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

<sup>23</sup>Chapter four will speak more explicitly of how Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Ethics* focuses on the triad of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume Six*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

<sup>24</sup>With this assertion I am disagreeing primarily with Andreas Pangritz and his statement that Bonhoeffer's "almost compulsive identifications of Christ and community" are relaxed. To the contrary, I shall argue that Bonhoeffer identifies Christ and church-community throughout his work. Cf. Andreas Pangritz, "Who Is Jesus Christ For Us, Today?" in John W. de Gruchy, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1999), 151.

saw this in a theoretical fashion during his student years and then worked to enact his theory through his later years as a pastor, ecumenicist, and conspirator. Consequently, Christology will be a key component of my argument, but I shall demonstrate how that Christology works to partner with the concrete church-community—the focus of his theological hermeneutics.

As I noted earlier, the most popular approach in Bonhoeffer scholarship to date is a thematic study. Larry Rasmussen wrote one of the earliest and best thematic studies of Bonhoeffer, examining how pacifism and resistance work throughout the early and later stages of his thought, a theme I shall return to in my concluding chapter.<sup>25</sup> Since then, a number of other thematic studies have been done, emphasizing various themes in Bonhoeffer's writings. For example, sociality, life, race relations, nonviolence, and a host of other themes surface in books and essays about Bonhoeffer.<sup>26</sup> In one respect, these thematic studies support my contention that Bonhoeffer is a hermeneutic theologian; only a theologian concerned with his social and historical context would trouble over such ideas throughout his work. Most of these thematic studies are quite useful; they draw attention to often neglected concepts in his work that bear further attention. At their best, these thematic studies clarify details within Bonhoeffer's work that deserve further attention. However, as Clifford Green points out, "this method cannot, by definition, directly concern itself with the question: what are the distinctive marks and developments which

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<sup>25</sup>Larry Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972).

<sup>26</sup>Among those referenced are Green's *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, Young's *No Difference in the Fare*, Ralf K. Wüstenberg, *A Theology of Life: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Religionless Christianity*, trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), and Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004). Each of these texts traces a theme throughout various stages of Bonhoeffer's theological corpus.

characterize Bonhoeffer's theology *as a whole*.”<sup>27</sup> In order to understand Bonhoeffer's work as a whole, one must have a broader framework from which to observe his work. Only with this broader perspective can one comprehend Bonhoeffer's task; a single theme makes the study too limited. Consequently, theological hermeneutics will be the broad framework I employ in order to understand Bonhoeffer's larger project.

Green's critique aside, however, a thematic study does have at least some merit. As noted earlier, such an approach does help clarify details within Bonhoeffer's work. If the primary weakness of a thematic study is that it fails to examine Bonhoeffer's theology as a whole, it seems that when employed alongside or within a broader framework it might accomplish both tasks—clarifying details *and* examining Bonhoeffer's theology as a whole. Hence, I suggest that not only should Bonhoeffer be read as a hermeneutical theologian (the broader framework), I also argue that his interpretive project—which is grounded in the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ—has an *ecclesial focus* (a more specific theme). I shall argue that if Bonhoeffer is read engaging in a type of hermeneutics which interprets reality through the church of Jesus Christ, one might better understand his theology as a whole and simultaneously clarify details concerning his conclusions along the way.

As I stated in my opening paragraph, by arguing for an *ecclesial focus* in Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics, I am arguing for this particular reading over other scholarly readings of Bonhoeffer that emphasize particular themes (sociality, life, nonviolence, race relations, and the like) within his thought over his ecclesiology. I am not suggesting that these other themes are not present; I am also not suggesting that these themes

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<sup>27</sup>Green, *Bonhoeffer*, 9.

are not important to his thought. Obviously with a thinker as complex as Bonhoeffer, as with a superbly cut gemstone, there are many facets to his thought that deserve attention. I am, however, arguing that while these themes deserve attention, it is more important to read his work as interpretation grounded in his ecclesiology. And if I as I have already stated, Bonhoeffer's theology is best read and understood as a project in theological hermeneutics, and if those hermeneutics employ the church as their interpretive focus for constructing meaning in reality, then I will obviously argue that Bonhoeffer's theology is best understood with *ecclesiology as its focus*.

But, as Stanley Hauerwas says in an essay on Bonhoeffer, "I also have a dog in this fight,"<sup>28</sup> on more than one front. To begin, I am a Baptist—and baptist (as James McClendon uses the term<sup>29</sup>). In one way or another, my family actively has participated in a local Baptist congregation since my birth; I have served as a pastor in Baptist congregations for over ten years. Additionally, this dissertation marks a beginning of sorts in my endeavor to work as a Baptist theologian. Consequently, the direction of Baptist—and baptist—theology, generally speaking, greatly matters to my own life and faith. Beyond my personal investment, as this dissertation hopefully demonstrates, I also care a great deal about how Bonhoeffer's work is interpreted and appropriated inside theological circles. Aside from his prison writings, it may be possible that the area of greatest confusion regarding Bonhoeffer is his position regarding violence, so engaging this position in

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<sup>28</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids, Brozos, 2004), 56.

<sup>29</sup> McClendon uses the term "baptist" to describe the broader members of the ecclesial community that is neither Catholic nor Protestant, but part of a third manifestation of Christianity, distinctly free church and with its own method of approaching the Bible. I shall discuss this at greater length in chapter three and again in chapter five. Cf. McClendon, *Ethics, Systematic Theology, Volume One* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988).

his corpus by way of his theological hermeneutics should be of great value. But beyond either of those concerns lies the problem of violence in our increasingly visceral culture and how the church-community might rightly comment and act in such a culture. This question is extremely important, and so it bears further attention from a theological perspective, and it is where my conclusion shall focus.

### *Methodology*

Thus far I have indicated *what* my argument will be: I intend to argue that Bonhoeffer's work is best understood as a *consistent* project of *theological hermeneutics* with an *ecclesial focus*. In this section I want to demonstrate *how* I will make my argument. I contend that Bonhoeffer's project of theological hermeneutics was carefully and intentionally developed across his life, while consistently maintaining its ecclesial focus. In order to show this development, I shall divide his life and writings into three distinct periods and examine how his hermeneutics develop in each of those phases. These three phases, incidentally, are not my creation, but are commonly used in Bonhoeffer studies.<sup>30</sup> Because I am arguing that his theology is consistent, I will note connections between each of the phases. And because I argue that his theological hermeneutics have an ecclesial focus, I will demonstrate how his ecclesiology intentionally engages his culture and aids him in his process of interpretation as part of each theological phase.

I will demonstrate in each phase of my argument why I believe Bonhoeffer's focus is ecclesial. In order to do so, I shall demonstrate that this project of theological hermeneutics utilizes *three consistent concepts* from his writing, each of which stems from

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Eberhard Bethge's definitive biography on Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, trans. Eric Mosbacher (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) or John Godsey's *Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*.

Bonhoeffer's Christologically grounded ecclesiology. These three concepts appear quite early in his work, and each one demonstrates a specific aspect of his ecclesiology and its role in his theological hermeneutics. These concepts are woven throughout Bonhoeffer's writings, but he gives primary attention to each of them separately at different points in his work. I shall examine each of these ecclesial concepts and their influence in Bonhoeffer's work in order to better understand how ecclesiology truly is the focus of his interpretive work.

In chapter two, I shall examine Bonhoeffer's time as a student, specifically his life between 1923 and 1930. These *student years* represent the first phase of Bonhoeffer's theological development, as he engaged the academic—and essentially liberal—theology of his day. There are two primary texts I shall read as representative of this phase, his doctoral dissertations—*Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*. While these dissertations are quite different in their scope and argument (*Sanctorum Communio* focuses on sociology while *Act and Being* is primarily concerned with ontology and epistemology), both employ ecclesiology at the crux of their respective arguments. In both cases, I shall demonstrate how the ecclesial concept of *Christ existing as church-community* shapes the respective arguments into a hermeneutical exercise, noting connections between Bonhoeffer's project and that of the contemporary theological movement known as Radical Orthodoxy, particularly on the front of participatory ontology.

In my examination of his student phase, I shall demonstrate that *Bonhoeffer's early theological project uses the ecclesial concept of Christ existing as church-community to reinterpret sociology, epistemology, and ontology in order to envision a new theological anthropology*. In order to make this argument I shall work to accomplish



three goals. *First*, I want to demonstrate that, from the outset of Bonhoeffer's theological career, he engages in the hermeneutic task. While scholars such as Zimmermann have noted that *Act and Being* explicitly engages hermeneutical philosophers such as Gadamer and Heidegger,<sup>31</sup> I want to begin my argument by noting that *Sanctorum Communio* is just as involved in the hermeneutic task, albeit on a more implicit level. In other words, while Bonhoeffer may not argue within *Sanctorum Communio* that he is engaging in theological hermeneutics, I hope to show that a careful reading of the work will demonstrate otherwise. I will argue that Bonhoeffer's interaction with sociology and social philosophy in his attempt to envision a new theological anthropology is, in fact, a hermeneutical endeavor. His reinterpretation of sociological concepts through a theological framework will serve as the basis for my argument.<sup>32</sup> To date, I am unaware of any other scholars who have read *Sanctorum Communio* in such a fashion. I will note other scholars and their approach to *Sanctorum Communio*, particularly Green, and point out how my reading focusing on hermeneutics differs from their particular readings. My contention is that my hermeneutical reading of Bonhoeffer will provide insights other readings have overlooked.

Once I have worked through *Sanctorum Communio* and argued for its hermeneutic nature, I shall turn my attention to Bonhoeffer's second doctoral dissertation, *Act and Being*. I shall argue that *Act and Being* marks a turning point in Bonhoeffer's work, in that he moves from being an *implicit* hermeneutical theologian to an *explicit* one. Draw-

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<sup>31</sup>Zimmermann, *Recovering*, 285-ff. and Jens Zimmermann, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Heidegger: Two Different Visions of Humanity" in Brian Gregor and Jens Zimmermann, eds., *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Cruciform Philosophy*, forthcoming from Indiana University Press.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum*, 122-ff. Chapter five contains the heart of this reinterpretation.

ing heavily from the work of Jens Zimmermann and Charles Marsh, I will demonstrate how Bonhoeffer moves into an intentional engagement with the hermeneutical philosophers of his day, namely Gadamer and Heidegger.<sup>33</sup> I want to demonstrate that precisely in choosing to interact with Gadamer and Heidegger, Bonhoeffer also chooses to engage the philosophical field of hermeneutics—the very field Gadamer and Heidegger were developing at that time. I shall further argue that in reinterpreting their work, particularly that of Heidegger, Bonhoeffer was consciously working at his *own* project of interpretation. Once I demonstrate this maturation in Bonhoeffer’s work, I shall part ways with Zimmermann. Where he takes a more *Christological* focus in his reading of Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic project, I shall return to my *ecclesial* concept of Christ existing as church-community as the center of Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic project for this earliest phase of his work.

*Second*, once I have clearly shown that Bonhoeffer’s dissertations are, to varying degrees, projects in theological hermeneutics, I shall turn my attention to the specific ecclesial concept guiding that project of interpretation at this point in his life—*Christ existing as church-community*. I want to agree with Green in his assertion that Christ existing as church-community is the central axiom in *Sanctorum Communio*.<sup>34</sup> In order to make this point I shall trace the concept’s origins and development within the dissertation, providing a working definition. But in addition to placing Christ existing as church-

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<sup>33</sup>I shall draw from Zimmermann’s *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics*, his forthcoming essay, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Heidegger: Two Different Visions of Humanity,” and his introduction to the forthcoming volume written with Brian Gregor.

<sup>34</sup>Green notes this centrality of Christ existing as church-community in Clifford J. Green, “Editor’s Introduction to the English Edition,” in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume One*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 14.

community at the center of *Sanctorum Communio*, I also want to argue that it has a significant place in *Act and Being* as well. Consequently, I will note how Bonhoeffer continues to use the concept (buttressing my argument of *consistency*) in support of his epistemological and ontological arguments in his second dissertation. Finally, I will continue to support my contention that Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics are consistent by noting how Christ existing as church-community surfaces in some of his later work, as well.

*Third*, after I have unpacked the concept of Christ existing as church-community and demonstrated how it is central to both of Bonhoeffer's dissertations, I shall show how he employs Christ existing as church-community to further his project of theological interpretation toward envisioning a new theological anthropology. For example, I shall demonstrate how Bonhoeffer uses the final chapter of *Sanctorum Communio* to reinterpret several sociological concepts, working toward a theological anthropology where relationships are mediated by Christ in the church-community. I will argue that the concept of Christ existing as church-community is the central interpretive idea at work in that chapter in producing those reinterpretations. In addition, I shall look at how Bonhoeffer uses Christ existing as church-community to reinterpret epistemology and ontology in *Act and Being*, leading him to suggest that the church-community is the only place where true knowledge and true being can exist. These reinterpreted concepts of knowledge and being, coupled with the new interpretations of relationality in *Sanctorum Communio*, will be the basis for Bonhoeffer's new theological anthropology which, in turn, will serve as a starting point for the rest of his theology. As I shall demonstrate, part of this new theological anthropology centers on a participatory ontology, something widely discussed in

theological circles with the advent of Radical Orthodoxy. Chapter two will include a brief discussion of the similarities and differences between Bonhoeffer's version of participatory ontology and that of the Radical Orthodoxy movement.

Chapter three will begin with the year 1930; that year Bonhoeffer completed his doctoral work and was invited to join the faculty at the University of Berlin. Prior to accepting his teaching post, however, he decided to embark upon a year of postgraduate study at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Union provided a change of pace for Bonhoeffer, both theologically and politically. Here he encountered new theological streams and observed American politics while his own country experienced the rise of National Socialism. This trip to New York marks the beginning of Bonhoeffer's second phase—his *pastoral years*. While some might suggest this trip belongs in his student phase, I want to argue that the theological influences Bonhoeffer encounters during his time in the United States moved his focus from academic theology toward the pastoral needs of the church and, eventually, affected his view of Scripture within the church-community. While at Union, Bonhoeffer engaged a more pragmatic view of theology embodied in the work of Reinhold Niebuhr. He also became part of Abyssinian Baptist Church, an African-American congregation in Harlem. These influences of pragmatism and Baptist theology, along with the rising specter of National Socialism, I shall argue, worked within Bonhoeffer as he prepared to continue his theological project, serving as a precursor of sorts for contemporary narrative theology.

With these influences in mind, in chapter three I shall demonstrate the next development in Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics. In light of the rise of National Socialism in Germany, I will argue that *the theology of Bonhoeffer's pastoral phase utilizes the*

*ecclesial concept of acting in obedience to Christ through faithful proclamation of Scripture to envision the church-community, particularly as described in the Sermon on the Mount.* In order to make this argument I will demonstrate three unique aspects of this phase and how they affect his theological hermeneutics. *First*, following Eberhard Bethge, I shall argue that between the conclusion of *Act and Being* and the beginning of his lectureship at the University of Berlin, Bonhoeffer underwent a spiritual change—one that deeply affected his outlook on Scripture.<sup>35</sup> Bethge uses the language of Bonhoeffer moving from being a “theologian” to a “Christian.”<sup>36</sup> I shall argue that this change in Bonhoeffer’s demeanor directly impacted his theology. I do *not* want to argue that his theology took a radically different trajectory at this point in his life; I instead contend that his theology continued on the same church-centered path he began as a student. I do, however, want to argue that this spiritual change in Bonhoeffer augmented his previous work in theological anthropology, driving it more toward the Scriptures, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. Consequently, Christ existing as church-community comes to depend more on the proper engagement with the Scriptures as part of that same church-community. As Bethge notes, upon Bonhoeffer’s return from New York City, “he practiced a meditative approach to the Bible that was obviously different from the exegetical or homiletical use of it.”<sup>37</sup> Additionally, he “[m]ore and more frequently quoted

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<sup>35</sup>Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, Revised Edition, ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 202-206.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 202.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid, 204.

the Sermon on the Mount as a statement to be acted upon, not merely used as a mirror.”<sup>38</sup>

Drawing upon this change in Bonhoeffer’s demeanor, I want to begin chapter three by noting how Bonhoeffer’s spiritual shift drove him to re-examine his attitude toward the Bible and the Sermon on the Mount, thus allowing for further reflection upon the development of his theological hermeneutics.

*Second*, I want to demonstrate how Bonhoeffer’s changed attitude toward Scripture shifts the hermeneutic task from more philosophical arenas like ontology and epistemology toward the concrete political situation of National Socialism in his earlier writings from this phase, particularly *Creation and Fall* and his Christology lectures.<sup>39</sup> These earlier writings take on perennial theological questions, but they also engage Nazism through a well-developed Christology and reading of Scripture. With this new attitude toward Scripture taking root in Bonhoeffer’s spiritual life and the Nazis rising in power and popularity in Germany, I shall argue that Bonhoeffer used his academic post as a place to engage Nazi practices from a distinctly Christian perspective. As John W. DeGruchy notes, “several of the key themes in Bonhoeffer’s exposition of Genesis 1-3 recur in his addresses and lectures of this period in the church struggle against Nazism and in his passionate advocacy of international peace through the ecumenical movement.”<sup>40</sup> I will demonstrate how in *Creation and Fall* Bonhoeffer, while engaging the Scriptural

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid. The traditional Lutheran reading of the Sermon on the Mount encouraged believers to despair in the Sermon so that they would turn to Christ for righteousness. Bonhoeffer’s reading suggests that, rather than causing despair, the Sermon is to be read as a direct instruction.

<sup>39</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume Three*, ed. John W. DeGruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).

<sup>40</sup>John W. DeGruchy, “Editor’s Introduction to the English Edition,” in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume Three*, ed. John W. DeGruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 8.

story, also looks for every opportunity to demonstrate how the Christian story is different from and judges the Nazi version of reality. Additionally, I shall argue that Bonhoeffer's Christology lectures are both a description of a perennial Christology and simultaneously an argument against the Nazi attempt to elevate their policies to the center of human existence, particularly as he argues in his section on "The Place of Christ."<sup>41</sup> I shall demonstrate that Bonhoeffer intentionally engaged the National Socialists through his theology in an attempt to reinterpret them with his sustained engagement with Scripture.

*Third*, I shall argue that Bonhoeffer's increased engagement with the exegesis of Scripture, particularly within *Discipleship*, draws heavily from Baptist and Anabaptist influence, namely the Bruderhof community. I view Bonhoeffer's trip to New York City as a watershed in his reading of Scripture, for it was in New York that Bonhoeffer was first exposed to the theology and preaching of Adam Clayton Powell, pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church.<sup>42</sup> I will note how Bonhoeffer's time as pastor to a German-speaking congregation in London from 1933 to 1935 exposed him to the Bruderhof community and their theology. I shall argue that during two meetings with Hardy Arnold, son of Bruderhof founder Eberhard Arnold, Bonhoeffer discovered more about the Anabaptist community of the Bruderhof, further influencing his theology.<sup>43</sup> I shall argue that these

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<sup>41</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 59-65.

<sup>42</sup> Powell served as pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church from 1908 until 1936. Cf. Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2004) 989-901.

<sup>43</sup> I originally constructed this argument in a paper read at the 2003 meeting of the American Academy of Religion for the Bonhoeffer and Social Analysis Group, "Ontological Obedience: Examining Bonhoeffer's Hermeneutics of Nonviolence in Light of the Bruderhof Community."

influences moved Bonhoeffer's thought to be more dependent upon the New Testament, particularly upon the Sermon on the Mount, thus developing his view of the church.

It is at this point in his writings with his book *Discipleship* that nonviolence and the literal enacting of biblical community become formative for Bonhoeffer. Consequently, I shall demonstrate how Bonhoeffer's engagement with these Baptist and Anabaptist sources led him to read the Bible with more emphasis upon simple obedience to Scripture within the church-community, sources I shall return to again in chapter five. It is through the emphasis on this concept of the obedience to Scripture that Bonhoeffer interprets his political realities and posits the kingdom of God as envisioned in the Sermon on the Mount as the new concrete reality toward which Christians are to work. I shall demonstrate that by the end of Bonhoeffer's pastoral phase, the ecclesial concept receiving the most emphasis is no longer Christ existing as church-community but is instead obedience to Christ through faithful obedience to the Scriptures. This shift in emphasis becomes clearer in *Discipleship*, the capstone works of Bonhoeffer's pastoral phase. Bonhoeffer, however, soon began to realize that living in obedience to Scripture encompassed more than the Sermon on the Mount. As his reading of the Sermon developed, I believe—along with Barry Harvey and Victoria Barnett—Bonhoeffer began to recognize the onset of an era of post-Constantinian Christianity approaching Germany and reflected this in his theology.<sup>44</sup> This growing awareness led Bonhoeffer to rethink Christian engagement with reality, eventually leading him to participate in the resistance movement against Hitler, seemingly marking a stark inconsistency in Bonhoeffer's thinking. While

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<sup>44</sup>Barry A. Harvey, "Preserving the World For Christ: Toward a Theological Engagement With the 'Secular,'" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 1 (2008): 64-82. Victoria J. Barnett, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Relevance for Post-Holocaust Theology," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 2, no. 1 (2007): 53-67.



I note this inconsistency along the way, I shall develop it more fully in my concluding chapter.

Chapter four shall examine Bonhoeffer's theological work as a member of this resistance against the Nazis, beginning with his initial contacting of the conspirators in February, 1938.<sup>45</sup> From 1938 until his execution in the Flossenbürg concentration camp on April 9, 1945, Bonhoeffer was a member of the resistance with varying degrees of involvement. These last years represent his final phase—the *resistance phase*—of his theological development. As Hitler began his march toward war, Bonhoeffer joined forces with a small group that hoped to see him removed from power, seemingly shifting his stance on Jesus' peace commands. Consequently, Bonhoeffer eventually joined the *Abwehr*, the German intelligence group, as an undercover agent of the resistance.<sup>46</sup> Because of his extensive travel and meetings with other members of the resistance from 1938 to 1940 and his imprisonment soon thereafter, we have fewer significant theological texts from this period. The texts we *do* have, however, are among the most important Bonhoeffer ever wrote, particularly with regard to his theological hermeneutics. Although never completed, Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* towers over this final period of his theology as his theological masterpiece; Clifford Green has said, "*Ethics* is Dietrich Bonhoeffer's mag-

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<sup>45</sup>Referenced in the "Chronology of *Life Together* and *Prayerbook of the Bible*" in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and The Prayerbook of the Bible*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume Five*, ed., Geoffrey B. Kelley, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 184. Bethge details Bonhoeffer's involvement in the church struggle in immense detail, but he is less clear on an exact date when contact begins with the conspiracy leaders other than Hans von Dohnanyi—his brother-in-law, cf 626-8. Since *Discipleship* was published in 1937 and *Life Together* was written in 1938, I will use 1938 as the starting point for the late period, although one could argue it should not begin until the work on *Ethics* commenced, in 1940.

<sup>46</sup>Cf. Bethge, 726-734.

num opus.”<sup>47</sup> In addition to *Ethics* are the prison writings, fragmented letters and notes from Bonhoeffer’s two years in Nazi custody. Despite being fragmented and cryptic, Bonhoeffer’s prison writings and their phrases like “religionless Christianity,” “world come of age,” and “secret discipline” have been the source of much conversation and debate. Investigation of the final phase of Bonhoeffer’s development must include extensive engagement with these works in order to understand his final vision for his theological hermeneutics and its influence upon contemporary theologies of suffering.

Drawing from these last two major works written while actively involved in a conspiracy to commit tyrannicide, chapter four shall argue that in the final phase of his theological hermeneutics, Dietrich Bonhoeffer *employs the ecclesial concept of the church’s participation in Christ through vicarious representative action to present a new pattern of Christian engagement with reality, one grounded in theological categories he terms the penultimate and the ultimate*. As part of this chapter, I shall further develop Bonhoeffer’s awakening to a post-Christendom Christianity described in chapter three and examine how Bonhoeffer’s attitudes toward nonviolence shift during this time. I shall develop this argument across three sections. *First*, I shall note how the theme of vicarious representative action threads throughout Bonhoeffer’s work, slowly maturing into a significant theme in his *Ethics*. Vicarious representative action is present in Bonhoeffer’s earliest work—*Sanctorum Communio*—albeit in a form limited to the church.<sup>48</sup> In those early days, Bonhoeffer thinks of believers acting vicariously for other believers

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<sup>47</sup> Clifford J. Green, “Editor’s Introduction to the English Edition,” in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume Six*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 1.

<sup>48</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum*, 155.

within the church-community. The theme matures significantly in *Discipleship*, and by the time Bonhoeffer pens his *Ethics*, vicarious representative action is action taken by the church for the sake of the world, not just for the church itself. He concludes that behavior in accordance with reality, and thus participating in Christ, will be marked by a “willingness to become guilty” for the world.<sup>49</sup> This decision of the church to act on behalf of the world continues into his theological work from prison, as some of his latest writings argue that the “church is the church only when it exists for others.”<sup>50</sup> By tracing the development of this theme, I hope to demonstrate that, from the beginning, Bonhoeffer’s theology has modeled the action of Jesus Christ for others as the basis of reality. At the heart of the Christ-centered reality is a church acting vicariously for others. By demonstrating its presence both in Bonhoeffer’s early work and in his last reflections, I shall argue that the notion of Christ acting for others is an interpretive key for all of Bonhoeffer’s thought, particularly the *Ethics*.

*Second*, I shall demonstrate how Bonhoeffer uses this theological theme of vicarious representative action to envision the church’s role in the world, one he imagines using the terms penultimate and ultimate. For Bonhoeffer, the ultimate is that which is representative of an eschatological reality—those things that are centered on the justification of a sinner by grace.<sup>51</sup> The penultimate for Bonhoeffer are those things preceding the eschatological consummation of the ultimate: the current earthly and human realm. Rather than rejecting the penultimate as sinful and imperfect or compromising on a *de facto* ac-

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<sup>49</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 275.

<sup>50</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 382.

<sup>51</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 149.

ceptance of the penultimate, Bonhoeffer argues that “Christian life neither destroys nor sanctions the penultimate. In Christ the reality of God encounters the reality of the world and allows us to take part in this real encounter.”<sup>52</sup> In order to faithfully live as a Christian, one must participate in Christ’s encounter with the world. Employing the theme of vicarious representative action, Bonhoeffer proposes a reality in which the church-community lives within and acts upon the temporal, penultimate world, and by doing so participates in the ultimate reality grounded in Jesus Christ and his same vicarious action. Through a careful reading of the *Ethics* I shall argue that this participating in Christ through vicarious representative action is the center of Bonhoeffer’s late work, and that he models this engagement by presenting a new reality grounded in Christ in contrast with Nazi propaganda.

*Third*, I shall argue that Bonhoeffer’s prison writings are an extended reflection upon the church’s participation in the penultimate through vicarious representative action. My discussion of the prison writings shall center upon the more controversial ideas from the prison writings, specifically “religionless Christianity.” I shall argue against scholarly readings of the prison writings that believe Bonhoeffer wants to do away with the church-community, but will instead argue that by using the term “religionless” Bonhoeffer is shifting focus toward acts of righteousness within the world. I shall *not* argue that Bonhoeffer wants to do away with the liturgy; his insistence on maintaining the “secret discipline” indicates otherwise. I will simply argue that he envisions a church where the most important engagement with the penultimate happens outside the liturgy through acts of kindness. Consequently he writes from his cell that to be a Christian in post-war Ger-

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 159.

many will essentially consist of two aspects: “prayer and righteous action among men.”<sup>53</sup> In the prison writings, as in *Ethics*, participating in the Christian life means acting out of vicarious representative action for others; it means modeling the actions of Jesus Christ. By discussing Bonhoeffer’s phrase “world come of age” in connection with the theological concept of the penultimate, I shall argue that he believes the world has outgrown an approach to God centering solely on religious concepts. Instead, the world needs to see Christ, and consequently the church, acting on its behalf in order to participate in the gospel. I shall argue that it is this attitude of worldly engagement that prompted him to participate in the conspiracy and ultimately meet his end, but I shall also argue that in the prison writings Bonhoeffer indicates a turn back toward nonviolence, particularly in his emphasis upon the messianic sufferings of God in Jesus. The topic of suffering emerges in multiple places in contemporary theology, meriting a brief discussion in this chapter distinguishing Bonhoeffer’s understanding of suffering theology from that of much of contemporary thought.

Chapter five shall conclude my argument by demonstrating how Bonhoeffer’s attitude toward nonviolence, while apparently inconsistent during the writing of the *Ethics*, eventually returns to its original form in the prison writings. In that chapter I shall employ nonviolence as a case study of sorts, examining Bonhoeffer’s apparently contradictory opinions on the topic, eventually arguing that Bonhoeffer’s understanding of nonviolence is the place where all three of his ecclesial themes merge together in a cohesive whole. In order to do so, I shall examine John Howard Yoder’s complaints against Bonhoeffer, using Stanley Hauerwas and James McClendon to answer his concerns. Thus I

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<sup>53</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 300.

shall demonstrate how Bonhoeffer's interaction with free church thought began in 1933, but still continues today. By allowing Bonhoeffer to dialogue with these contemporary free church thinkers, I shall demonstrate that Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics, if read correctly, hold much promise for the church of today. I shall finish that chapter by noting how hermeneutics of nonviolence might manifest themselves in our contemporary context through employing Bonhoeffer's church-centered approach to interpretation—focusing on the issue of nonviolence—and subsequently fulfill Bonhoeffer's understanding that the church is, indeed, a hermeneutic.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Student Phase: Christ Existing as Church-Community

“For several centuries now, secularism has been defining and constructing the world.”  
—John Milbank, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*

#### *Thesis*

In chapter one I stated the argument of this dissertation: Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s work is best understood as a *consistent* project of *theological hermeneutics* with an *ecclesial focus*. In this chapter I shall sharpen that argument’s focus to the first phase of his life—his student years. I shall argue that *Bonhoeffer’s early theological project uses the ecclesial concept of Christ existing as church-community to reinterpret sociology, epistemology, and ontology in order to envision a new theological anthropology culminating in a theological epistemology he calls “ecclesial knowing.”* I shall examine Bonhoeffer’s time as a student, specifically his writings between 1923 and 1930. These *student years* represent the first phase of Bonhoeffer’s theological development, as he engaged the academic—and primarily liberal—theology of his day. There are two primary texts I shall read as representative of this phase, his doctoral dissertations—*Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*. In both cases, I shall demonstrate how the ecclesial concept of *Christ existing as church-community* shapes the respective arguments of these dissertations toward a hermeneutical exercise. Along the way, I shall highlight how Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutical exercise of creating a theological anthropology hinges on a participatory ontology and acts as a precursor of sorts to the program of theological interpretation known as Radical Orthodoxy.

### *Academic Response to Bonhoeffer's Early Theology*

To begin, I shall demonstrate that *Sanctorum Communio* is a work of theological hermeneutics and that this first dissertation of Bonhoeffer's sets the tone for the remainder of Bonhoeffer's work. While Bonhoeffer may not specifically argue within *Sanctorum Communio*—or the rest of his writings, for that matter—that he is engaging in theological hermeneutics, I believe a reading of the work will demonstrate that his first dissertation is, in fact, practicing theological interpretation. This is important because, to date, no Bonhoeffer scholar has read *Sanctorum Communio* in such a fashion.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the early theology of Bonhoeffer is the lack of scholarly attention it receives, particularly any mention of hermeneutical methodology. While there are dozens of monographs investigating his work from 1933 and later,<sup>1</sup> there is little to be found regarding Bonhoeffer's earliest theology and even less regarding theological hermeneutics. To date, there are only two book-length treatments of his student phase work: Clifford Green's *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality* and Charles Marsh's *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology*.<sup>2</sup> Green's book is considered the definitive treatment of the early theology, emphasizing the theme of sociality in Bonhoeffer's work, and Marsh explains in great detail the philosophical interactions Bonhoeffer has with Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger. Both texts are indispensable in understanding Bonhoeffer, but neither explicitly engages the question of

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<sup>1</sup>For example, Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson, *The Cost of Moral Leadership: The Spirituality of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) provides an overview of Bonhoeffer's spirituality primarily focusing on Bonhoeffer's work after the two doctoral dissertations.

<sup>2</sup>Clifford J. Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) and Charles Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).



theological hermeneutics. In addition to these two texts, John Godsey and Ernst Feil have each written a chapter summarizing the theological argument of the student phase, but, as with Green and Marsh, neither engage the topic of theological hermeneutics.<sup>3</sup> Finally, and most recently, Jens Zimmermann has inspected Bonhoeffer's hermeneutical methodology by examining his early writings in a chapter of his *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation*.<sup>4</sup> As I mentioned in the previous chapter, however, Zimmermann is more concerned with Bonhoeffer's Christology as it leads to his own project, not the ecclesial focus of the hermeneutics I am suggesting. These writings comprise the vast majority of the secondary sources on the student phase, aside from brief mentions.<sup>5</sup> For a theologian of Bonhoeffer's stature, particularly given the brevity of his life and relative shortage of primary writings (compared with, for example, Barth or Luther), it is somewhat surprising that secondary writings concerning his earliest theology are so rare.

This is not to suggest that Bonhoeffer scholars see these works as unimportant.

Most full-length treatments of his work acknowledge the significance of both

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<sup>3</sup>John Godsey, *Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) and Ernst Feil, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985). Feil does open his book by mentioning the "hermeneutical difficulty" of doing Bonhoeffer studies, but by this he means that it is difficult to read Bonhoeffer because of the scope of his writings. He reads the prison writings as the most important part of the Bonhoeffer corpus and sees the student writings as stepping stones toward the later, more important works. Cf. Feil, 3.

<sup>4</sup>Jens Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics, An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

<sup>5</sup>An ATLA database search for full text articles using the terms "Dietrich Bonhoeffer" and "Discipleship" (a work from the pastoral phase) held on November 16, 2007 resulted in 8 articles. By comparison, searches for "Dietrich Bonhoeffer" and "Sanctorum Communio" or "Act and Being" (the doctoral dissertations) resulted in no articles. Without searching for full text articles, the same search yields fewer than 10 articles for both dissertations combined, where the previous "Dietrich Bonhoeffer" and "Discipleship" search multiplies greatly.

dissertations. To date, however, most studies of Bonhoeffer's theology have viewed both *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* as academic works that serve as background for his more practically-focused canon rather than works of theological interpretation engaging the academic world in their own right. While I would not argue against the claim that the earlier theology, in a sense, foundational, I do argue that the early theology is constructive *as well as* foundational, for it is part of the larger project of Bonhoeffer, namely the project of theological hermeneutics.

### *Biography: Roman Holiday*

Studying the church from both a theological and sociological perspective was a concern of Bonhoeffer's upon his arrival at the University of Berlin, and that concern was strongly influenced, I believe, by a visit to Rome with his brother, Klaus, the summer prior to his arrival in Berlin, in 1924—three years before the writing of *Sanctorum Communio*. The Catholic church in Rome, particularly the Holy Week services at the Vatican, awakened Bonhoeffer to a new envisioning of the church, particularly its concrete nature. While Klaus was primarily interested in “classical antiquity and Mediterranean colorfulness,” “Dietrich succumbed to the spell of Catholic Rome, and found it difficult to tear himself away from St. Peter's.”<sup>6</sup> During this visit the influence of Catholic thought upon Bonhoeffer's subsequent theology began, especially within his ecclesiology; Rome struck him with a new awareness and appreciation of the church, demonstrating to him the connection between Christ and church. Bonhoeffer kept a diary during his stay in Rome; his entries reveal regular visits to the Vatican and St. Peter's

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<sup>6</sup>Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, ed. Victoria Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 57.

Basilica, in particular.<sup>7</sup> During the weeks leading up to Easter, it appears Bonhoeffer visited St. Peter's at least daily, sometimes twice a day. The beauty of the Mass connected deeply with Bonhoeffer, and his later thoughts on the necessity of preaching and the proper administration of the sacraments (perhaps anticipating Catherine Pickstock's assertions)<sup>8</sup> may have begun with this important visit.

Palm Sunday services were especially significant for Bonhoeffer. He describes them in his diary, "The universality of the church was illustrated in a marvelously effective manner. White, black, yellow members of religious orders—everyone was in clerical robes united under the church. It truly seems ideal."<sup>9</sup> On Palm Sunday afternoon Bonhoeffer observed a ceremony in which "approximately 40 young girls who wanted to become nuns entered in a solemn procession."<sup>10</sup> This ceremony in conjunction with Palm Sunday Mass had a powerful effect upon him. He writes of that day, "It was the first day on which something of the reality of Catholicism began to dawn on me—nothing romantic, etc.—but I'm beginning to understand the concept of 'church.'"<sup>11</sup> At the very least, Bonhoeffer's extended time in Rome led him to think about his own church roots in an extended fashion. He writes in his diary: "Catholicism can do without Protestantism

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<sup>7</sup>The diary can be found in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume Nine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 82-108.

<sup>8</sup>Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), one of the original proponents of Radical Orthodoxy, argues that human reason dissipates outside the logic of the Mass, insisting that only the proper administration of the Eucharist "allows us to ground a view of language which does not evacuate the body," xv.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.* The ceremony was quite powerful in Bonhoeffer's estimation because the girls were yet to become familiar with the process. He writes, "The impression left by these novices was even greater than would have been left by real nuns, because every trace of routine was missing."

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

for a long time yet, the people are still very attached to it, and, compared with the tremendous scale of the ceremonies here, the Protestant church often looks like a small sect.”<sup>12</sup> Bonhoeffer’s appreciation of the Catholic church and its ecclesiology surfaces from this point forward in his work, particularly so in his latest theology.

With this trip to Rome in mind, the sociological categories examined in *Sanctorum Communio* take on new light. In his native Germany, the church was, for the most part, a homogenous group unified not only by faith, but also by race, nationality, and class. The Palm Sunday services Bonhoeffer witnessed in Rome, however, gave him an image of a larger church, a church that transcended racial and national barriers, a church that embodied sociological concepts of community in a concrete context.<sup>13</sup> Given the holiday in Rome, it is not surprising that the significance of the church-community moved to the forefront of Bonhoeffer’s writings. *Sanctorum Communio*’s declaration that it shall employ social philosophy and sociology in the service of theology is, in significant part, Bonhoeffer’s attempt to explain his experience in Rome from a theological perspective. He wants to interpret non-theological concepts theologically so that he can construct a theological anthropology that makes sense of the larger church-community he witnessed in the Vatican. In moving to engage and interpret non-theological concepts from a specifically theological perspective, Bonhoeffer’s work seemingly anticipates the work of theological interpretation done by Radical Orthodoxy, something I shall discuss in greater detail later in this chapter.

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<sup>12</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Jugend und Studium: 191-1927, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke, Volume Nine*, ed. Hans Pfeifer, with Clifford Green and Carl Jürgen Kaltenborn (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1986), 119.

<sup>13</sup>This will surface later in the chapter when *Sanctorum Communio* is discussed, specifically on page 35. A simple glance at the index of *Sanctorum Communio*, however, shows that Roman Catholicism is mentioned at least 13 times.

### Sanctorum Communio as Theological Hermeneutics

In order to interpret social philosophy and sociology from a theological perspective, Bonhoeffer creates a sweeping argument, albeit implicit, of ecclesial-centered interpretation in *Sanctorum Communio*. As Green has noted, the work is difficult to digest; he reports that the advisor for the dissertation, Reinhold Seeberg, “had difficulty with its sophisticated conceptuality and intricate argument.”<sup>14</sup> As I mentioned in my previous chapter, I am arguing that Bonhoeffer’s theological hermeneutics has an ecclesial focus and that the development of these hermeneutics are consistent across his phases. Consequently, when engaging the broad argument of *Sanctorum Communio*, I shall argue that the thrust of the interpretation centers around the church, staying consistent with his hermeneutical vision.

At first glance, this appears to be quite easy. The subtitle of the dissertation, after all, is *A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*. Additionally, as I pointed out above, Bonhoeffer argues that social philosophy and sociology will be employed to the service of theology in the dissertation, anticipating John Milbank’s project of engaging “secular social theory from a perspective with which it is in variance: in this case, that of Christianity,” in his *Theology and Social Theory*.<sup>15</sup> It seems obvious enough that these two fields will play into his new ecclesiology, thus demonstrating its ecclesial focus. Beyond these aspects, Green notes the orthodoxy among Bonhoeffer scholars is that “the

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<sup>14</sup>Green, *Bonhoeffer*, 20.

<sup>15</sup>John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).

complex argument of *Sanctorum Communio* can be adequately subsumed under the rubric of ecclesiology.”<sup>16</sup>

Green, however, breaks with the orthodoxy of Bonhoeffer studies and suggests that the focus of *Sanctorum Communio* is not ecclesiology, but is rather a larger category: a theology of sociality.<sup>17</sup> For Green the definition of sociality is admittedly convoluted, but he summarizes it by saying, “Suffice it for the present to say that Bonhoeffer sees all human life as essentially social, that he develops a theological phenomenology of the human person in relation to other persons and to various types of corporate communities.”<sup>18</sup> In some ways, Green reads the early theology of Bonhoeffer in a similar fashion that I am proposing: he sees it as a recasting of humanity. My reading, however, differs from Green’s in at least two significant aspects: First, I believe that while sociality is an important theme within Bonhoeffer’s work, like other thematic studies, it misses the broader task of his theology, namely theological hermeneutics with a specifically ecclesial focus. Second, while the social aspect of humanity clearly is important in the early theology, I believe that this social nature is better understood if it is subsumed under the larger heading of theological anthropology, the very theological anthropology Bonhoeffer envisions through *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*. Consequently, I shall use Green’s insights as a stepping stone to my own thesis, that *Sanctorum Communio* is best read, not as a construction of a theology of sociality, but rather as a

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>17</sup>Green argues that “sociality” is the driving theme behind all of Bonhoeffer’s corpus, but he suggests the theology of sociality idea as it relates to *Sanctorum Communio* on 20-21.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 21.

work of theological hermeneutics constructing a theological anthropology centered in the church-community.

I contend that the sort of theological interpretation Bonhoeffer utilizes in *Sanctorum Communio* is, in many respects, similar to the hermeneutic task described by another member of the Radical Orthodoxy sensibility, Graham Ward, in his *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*—even if the task is not explicitly clarified within *Sanctorum Communio* as it is in Ward’s text. Ward’s project bears similarities to Bonhoeffer’s work in that he proposes to combine the “procedural, interpretive task (hermeneutics) with a critical, reflective task (critique).”<sup>19</sup> In doing so, Ward argues that one cannot separate the interpretive task from the critique of what one is interpreting. If one is interpreting politics, he argues, one interprets from within political systems and having made judgments regarding the same systems. Thus interpretation is both critique and hermeneutics. As he notes, one cannot begin a project of cultural interpretation without recognizing originally that one is within a cultural production. Thus, “Interpretation does not begin *in vacuo*.”<sup>20</sup> For Ward, rather, theological hermeneutics involves evaluating and critiquing, along with interpreting.<sup>21</sup> As part of Radical

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<sup>19</sup>Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (New York: Cambridge, 2005), 62.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Although not part of my main argument in this chapter, it is interesting to note the number of times that Bonhoeffer’s work has theoretical intersection with the members of the Radical Orthodoxy sensibility. For the most part, Radical Orthodoxy has not utilized Bonhoeffer in their project, but his texts seem to be strongly aligned with their project. Cf. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 2000). Later I shall more fully develop the intersection between Bonhoeffer and the Radical Orthodoxy theological sensibility, particularly in the realm of participatory ontology.

Orthodoxy, Ward views theology as an essentially hermeneutic task, interpreting the world through its lens.

In like fashion, in the “Preface” to *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer declares that he will be employing social philosophy and sociology “in the service of theology.”<sup>22</sup> This is significant, for from the outset of the dissertation, he employs an inter-disciplinary approach toward his work, suggesting that fields traditionally outside the realm of theological inquiry can be examined and appropriated for his conclusions.<sup>23</sup> In doing so, he foreshadows a project like that of Ward (and Radical Orthodoxy in general), simultaneously utilizing, evaluating, critiquing, and interpreting the very fields that he discusses. In using social philosophy and sociology, Bonhoeffer’s dissertation serves as a sort of implicit precursor to more contemporary theological projects that engage “secular” fields from a theological perspective, most notably Radical Orthodoxy. Obviously Bonhoeffer is not the first theologian to dialogue with fields outside of theology, but his willingness to dialogue across academic disciplines in order to complement his theological conclusions marks an intelligence and a bent toward theological interpretation not seen in most theological dissertations, particularly a dissertation written by one at the age of nineteen. Its breadth, in fact, prompted Karl Barth to write, “I openly confess that I have misgivings whether I can even maintain the

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<sup>22</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 21.

<sup>23</sup>This is another instance where Bonhoeffer’s thought seems to intersect with the work of the Radical Orthodoxy movement, namely the sweeping text of John Milbank’s, *Theology and Social Theory* (New York: Blackwell, 2006). Milbank’s primary thesis rests on the scope of theology to interact with any and all fields of study.



high level reached by Bonhoeffer.”<sup>24</sup> This breadth of discussion between sociology, social philosophy, and theology indicates the work ahead in *Sanctorum Communio*. In addition, it supports my argument that *Sanctorum Communio* is best read as a work of theological hermeneutics, as it interprets sociology and social philosophy theologically.

To completely dissect *Sanctorum Communio* would require more space than allowed, but I shall highlight some of the salient points within the work that demonstrate the validity of my argument that it is, at center, a work of theological hermeneutics. To begin, I shall move beyond Green’s theme of sociality to argue that Bonhoeffer’s re-envisioning of personhood as an essentially social creature is, at its core, an act of reinterpretation—theology reinterpreting social philosophy and sociology in order to envision the concept of human identity.<sup>25</sup> Green notes that chapters two and three of *Sanctorum Communio* recast the discussion of anthropology in light of sociality. As I shall discuss later in this chapter, those two chapters re-envision the I-Thou relationship and its place within social philosophy, eventually arguing that there can be no “self” without an “other.” Here Bonhoeffer seems to engage the thought of Martin Buber, although he never mentions him; he simply employs Buber’s familiar framework of “*Ich-Du*” in describing human relationships.<sup>26</sup> This essentially social aspect of humanity (the need for a Thou in order to have an I) prompts Green to conclude that Bonhoeffer’s

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<sup>24</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume IV/2, trans. G. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 641.

<sup>25</sup>Green, 21.

<sup>26</sup>Green is insistent that Bonhoeffer is *not* engaging Buber, since he does not explicitly footnote him (cf. editorial discussion in *Sanctorum Communio*, pp. 5-6). I, however, am inclined to believe that Bonhoeffer is recalling Buber for two reasons: first, Buber’s work is too famous and too influential and too similar to not be somehow in dialogue with Bonhoeffer at this juncture, and, second, Bonhoeffer often quotes material and authors without footnotes. Consequently, it appears as if Bonhoeffer does not footnote Buber because he assumes the reader knows with whom he is in dialogue.

essential intent in *Sanctorum Communio* is to create a theology of sociality. However, I think that the more programmatic statement for Bonhoeffer's first dissertation can be found in the original Preface of the dissertation when he writes that he intends to craft "a specifically Christian social philosophy and sociology" in order to show these fields arise "out of fundamental concepts of Christian theology" and that those concepts are "most fully articulated in the concept of the church."<sup>27</sup> In other words, while sociality is obviously an important theme in the work, Bonhoeffer is more concerned with using theological concepts to reinterpret sociology and social philosophy, culminating with an appropriate understanding of the church. Consequently, he argues for theological hermeneutics culminating with an ecclesial focus.

While I do not believe Bonhoeffer's primary intention within *Sanctorum Communio* is the construction of a theology of sociality, I do believe he uses the idea of sociality as one of his hermeneutic themes in his interpretation of sociology and social philosophy. For example, in the same Preface mentioned above, Bonhoeffer writes, "The more I have focused on this problem [of a Christian understanding of humanity], the more clearly I have recognized the social intention of all the fundamental Christian concepts."<sup>28</sup> These theological concepts, he maintains, are only "understandable in relation to sociality."<sup>29</sup> Because of his emphasis upon sociality, the concept plays an important part in the interpretive task within *Sanctorum Communio*, even if it is not—in my opinion—the ultimate focus of his argument.

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<sup>27</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 22, footnote 5.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

For example, in an early section of *Sanctorum Communio* he examines what he claims to be the four fundamental philosophical views of a person: Aristotelian, Stoic, Epicurean, and German idealistic.<sup>30</sup> Bonhoeffer ultimately rejects these four categories, instead opting to construct a Christian conception of person, one grounded in this concept of sociality, manifested in two relationships: the relationship between self and the divine, and the relationship between self and the other. For Bonhoeffer, the relationship between the human and the divine reconfigures the German idealistic concept of *Geist*, reinterpreting the concept theologically. Spirit cannot be understood, he argues, from a singularly human spirit but must instead be seen as the relationship between the human and the divine. Consequently, Bonhoeffer argues that the encounter between God and humanity “lies entirely in the spirit, as in idealism. Spirit here, however, has a different meaning than it does in idealism.”<sup>31</sup> For Bonhoeffer, the Spirit of idealism is better understood as God’s Spirit—the Holy Spirit—opening pneumatological doors through which he will later walk, particularly in his discussion of biblical interpretation in *Discipleship*.<sup>32</sup> In creating this new meaning of spirit in contrast to German idealism, Bonhoeffer performs the task of theological interpretation by using the theme of sociality.

Sociality continues to serve the project of theological interpretation as Bonhoeffer argues that this relationship between the human and the divine allows the self to recognize the other important relationship within Bonhoeffer’s theological anthropology: the social and ethical relationship between the self and the other. Continuing his

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<sup>30</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum*, 36-ff.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>32</sup> I shall discuss this in greater detail in the next chapter.

reinterpretation of sociological concepts he argues that, from a Christian perspective, a person is not truly a self until he or she recognizes the social and ethical relationship with the other, leading him to posit the notion that a person, ontologically speaking, is always in such a social and ethical encounter with the other. This “*social ontic-ethical basic-relations of persons*”<sup>33</sup>—as he calls it—serves as a locus of Bonhoeffer’s new theological anthropology, and it is clearly enabled by his understanding of sociality. He writes, “Thus the individual exists only in relation to an ‘other’; individual does not mean solitary. *On the contrary, for the individual to exist, ‘others’ must necessarily be there.*”<sup>34</sup> Again, Bonhoeffer seems to refer to Buber, despite not mentioning him by name. And again he uses the theme of sociality in order to reinterpret social philosophy in order to create a Christian anthropology. Clearly sociality is in play during the project of theological hermeneutics within *Sanctorum Communio*.

However, against Green, rather than reading sociality as the specifically constructive focus of the project, I contend a close reading of *Sanctorum Communio* reveals that sociality is simply *one of the themes* Bonhoeffer uses in his larger task of theological interpretation toward the construction of *a theological anthropology grounded in ecclesiology*. After the dissertation was complete, as part of his graduation qualifications, Bonhoeffer submitted a list of eleven original theological theses to the university faculty, one of them stating, “There is no sociological concept of the church which does not have a theological foundation.”<sup>35</sup> As this theological thesis demonstrates,

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 50, emphasis Bonhoeffer’s.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 51, emphasis Bonhoeffer’s.

<sup>35</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures, and Notes, 1928-1936*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 32.

both in the Preface of *Sanctorum Communio* and upon completion of the dissertation, Bonhoeffer indicates that his primary project was not simply sociality, but rather a *re-envisioning of humanity made possible by the theological interpretation of sociological concepts*. The theme of sociality, it seems, is simply one of the tools he uses to carry out his interpretive task—one that it is centered upon the church.

Beyond sociality, it is generally agreed that the most important theological concept Bonhoeffer develops and employs in *Sanctorum Communio* is “*Christ existing as church-community*.”<sup>36</sup> In this concept, when the church-community rightly gathers around the sacraments and preaching, and when the church members are truly those “being-in Christ,” then Christ is truly present in the church-community; the church-community is the “body of Christ.”<sup>37</sup> A later section of this chapter shall explain how this theme serves as the primary interpreter in both *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, where the church-community and its new theological anthropology engage and reinterpret a number of sources. But in keeping in line with the task of *this* section, I argue that the concept of “Christ existing as church-community” is, in itself, an essentially hermeneutical concept, one most likely influenced strongly by his trip to Rome and the Catholic assertion that Christ is present in the church, particularly through the Eucharist.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Cf., for example, Marsh, 67-8, emphasis mine.

<sup>37</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum*, 190.

<sup>38</sup>This line of reasoning is exemplified in the work of the Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame, 2007). De Lubac’s insistence on the retrieval of the Eucharist as the basis for the church demonstrates a line of Catholic reasoning to which Bonhoeffer was most certainly exposed while in Rome.

As he crafts the concept of “Christ existing as church-community” throughout *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer creates a comparison between the church and other “empirical communities” in order to refute their “individualistic social atomism.”<sup>39</sup> Consequently, Bonhoeffer uses chapter three of *Sanctorum Communio* in order to argue that various sociological pictures of community are essentially flawed according to a Christian perspective. Citing ideas like the “community of will” or the “objective Spirit” from Hegelianism, Bonhoeffer eventually argues that these pictures of community fall short because they ignore the “social ontic-ethical” relationship between humans (as does the community of will) or they fail to clarify the source of Spirit as Christ (as does the Hegelian community grounded in objective Spirit). Bonhoeffer reinterprets and combines each of these concepts into one theological concept he calls “Christ existing as church-community.” Again, while not *explicitly* stating that he is engaging in a hermeneutical exercise, *Sanctorum Communio* finds him re-envisioning non-theological concepts in theological ways. He notes this reinterpretation openly when he explains that “Christ existing as church-community” is at its core a “modification of [a] Hegelian concept.”<sup>40</sup> Transforming the objective Spirit of Hegelianism into the Holy Spirit found in the human-divine relationship and the community of will into a community based on the “social ontic-ethical” relationship between the self and the other, Bonhoeffer reinterprets and molds the two concepts into what eventually becomes a life-long theological concept for his work: “Christ existing as church-community.” Clearly such transformation and appropriation can be read as representing a work of theological hermeneutics.

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 189.

## Act and Being as *Theological Hermeneutics*

If, as I contend, *Sanctorum Communio* is an implicit work of theological hermeneutics, interpreting sociology and social philosophy from a theological perspective, Bonhoeffer's second dissertation more explicitly engages the world of hermeneutics. In this section I shall attempt to demonstrate that *Act and Being* continues the program of theological interpretation begun by *Sanctorum Communio* by interpreting philosophy from a theological perspective, specifically the work of Martin Heidegger. Bonhoeffer engages a host of European philosophers in his *Habilitationschrift*, including Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel, but his encounter with Heidegger marks an intentional engagement with philosophical hermeneutics, marking his desire to create a hermeneutical framework that is theological rather than philosophical. Consequently, in this section I shall highlight Bonhoeffer's engagement with Heidegger, noting how his reading and appropriation of Heidegger's work continues the project of creating a theological anthropology begun in *Sanctorum Communio*. I shall argue that this new theological anthropology is grounded, as it is in *Sanctorum Communio*, within the church.

The project of *Act and Being*, simply put, is the construction of a theological epistemology in tandem with ontology. Bonhoeffer hopes that his envisioning of such a theological epistemology can, in turn, overcome "the problem of act and being," namely the limitations of purely philosophical ontology and its resulting epistemology.<sup>41</sup> Thus throughout *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer regularly engages philosophy, with both grateful and critical tones. On the one hand, Bonhoeffer appreciates the task of philosophy and its

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<sup>41</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 25.

attempts to explicate the task of knowledge and constructing an epistemology in line with human ontology. On the other hand, as Charles Marsh notes, he spends much of *Act and Being* demonstrating how purely philosophical attempts to construct an epistemology without taking seriously the category of revelation always, in some regard, become limited and consequently fall short in their epistemological constructions.<sup>42</sup>

Bonhoeffer's interaction with Heidegger follows this model quite closely. On the one hand, he appreciates and even embraces the Heideggerian task. Bonhoeffer believes Heidegger's ontological category of *Dasein* ("Being-there") to be the closest philosophical attempt to overcoming the need for a theological epistemology.<sup>43</sup> While scholars are uncertain when, exactly, Bonhoeffer first read Heidegger, the title of *Act and Being* strongly suggests to be allusion to Heidegger's most famous work, *Being and Time*, given the fact that Bonhoeffer wrote his *Habilitationsschrift* one year after its publication. Additionally, as Eberhard Bethge points out, *Act and Being* refers to Heidegger more than any other thinker except Martin Luther.<sup>44</sup> This thorough engagement with Heidegger leads some to categorize Bonhoeffer as a Heideggerian.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, John Baille mentions that he regularly looked to Bonhoeffer for details within Heidegger's writings while Bonhoeffer was a student at Union Seminary.<sup>46</sup> But true to form within *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer's appreciation for Heidegger's work is not

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<sup>42</sup>Cf. Marsh, 111. My understanding of Bonhoeffer's engagement with Heidegger is extremely dependent upon Marsh's reading of these texts.

<sup>43</sup>There are well over thirty references to *Dasein* within *Act and Being*. It is clearly the one philosophical concept that most shapes Bonhoeffer's argument.

<sup>44</sup>As noted by Charles Marsh, 112. Cf. Bethge, 133.

<sup>45</sup>Marsh, 111.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 111-12.



without critique. While I shall discuss this critique in greater detail later in this chapter, Bonhoeffer eventually accuses Heidegger of attempting to create a self-contained system of ontology, consequently resulting in an epistemology devoid of true transcendence.

I argue that Bonhoeffer's extensive engagement and appreciation of Heidegger, while important for his construction of a theological epistemology as part of his theological anthropology, is perhaps more significant because it indicates Bonhoeffer's intention to engage in the field of hermeneutics, thus continuing the interpretive program begun in *Sanctorum Communio*. In other words, I argue that Bonhoeffer sees Heidegger not simply as another Continental philosophical interlocutor, but as an *intentionally significant* interlocutor precisely because of Heidegger's hermeneutical framework within which he worked. I contend Bonhoeffer *specifically chooses* to interact with Heidegger, as it were, because he wants to engage in hermeneutics, and Heidegger represents the most well-knowns contemporary academic interlocutor through which to do so. As Zimmermann notes, it is Heidegger's work that essentially created the field of philosophical hermeneutics, inspiring his student, Hans-Georg Gadamer, to develop the concept of philosophical interpretation even further.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, by engaging Heidegger, I believe Bonhoeffer demonstrates his intention to be a hermeneutical theologian.

Heidegger argues against a foundationalist<sup>48</sup> view of knowledge, instead claiming that "human knowledge, or more basically, human contact with reality, is not immediate,

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<sup>47</sup>Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics*, 160-63.

<sup>48</sup>Zimmermann distinguishes between "foundationalist" and "foundational" understandings of knowledge. He argues that Heidegger is "foundational" in that every epistemology has a set of foundational presuppositions but not "foundationalist" because those presuppositions shift from person to person depending upon his or her hermeneutical framework.

but mediated.”<sup>49</sup> He does not argue, however, that knowledge is essentially a relativistic project; he instead argues that once humans recognize the role that interpretation plays within the realm of knowledge, a clearer understanding of knowledge can be recognized, resulting in a better understanding of ontology. Heidegger claims that once a discipline or a person recognizes their foundational concepts as time-bound descriptions of our world, they can understand how, exactly, they process knowledge through these mediating concepts.<sup>50</sup> Once perspective and concepts are understood, the interpretive framework is identified. Consequently, Heidegger states, knowledge for humans is primarily done through interpretation, or hermeneutically.<sup>51</sup> These claims create a substantially new philosophical epistemology, one that fascinated Bonhoeffer and, I believe, spurred him to create a new epistemology grounded instead in a theological framework over against a framework grounded primarily in human knowledge or phenomenology.

Heidegger’s watershed work, *Being and Time*, begins his query into philosophical hermeneutics, describing the resulting epistemology when the ontological category of *Dasein* is applied to his anthropology.<sup>52</sup> *Dasein*, in turn, is employed as an hermeneutic framework through which Heidegger interprets reality. Thus, when Heidegger writes, “Our investigation [in *Being and Time*] itself will show that the meaning of

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 161.

<sup>50</sup>Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1962), 30, §10.

<sup>51</sup>My synopsis of Heidegger draws heavily from Zimmermann’s *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics*, particularly pages 160-163.

<sup>52</sup>Heidegger’s project is, in actuality, even broader than this, instead exploring “what we really mean by the word ‘being,’” 19. *Dasein* is his way of categorizing and understanding being, and the bulk of his project examines the implications of understanding being as *Dasein*.

phenomenological description as a method lies in *interpretation*,”<sup>53</sup> he is, in effect, arguing for an epistemological method grounded in philosophical hermeneutics. Additionally, he describes *Dasein* as “a *hermeneutic* in the primordial signification of this word,” as a “hermeneutic [that] becomes a ‘hermeneutic’ in the sense of working out the conditions on which the possibility of any ontological investigation depends,” and he further notes that *Dasein* is only understood *hermeneutically* when viewed historically.<sup>54</sup> In each case, he creates a category of interpretation by using and employing *Dasein* in his phenomenological approach toward epistemology. He additionally connects the problem of epistemology to ontology through *Dasein*, thus making the category even more essential to Bonhoeffer’s own project of creating an epistemology in balance with a Christian ontology. When Bonhoeffer read *Being and Time*, it would seem that he understood the work as an ambitious project of phenomenology intended to create a new epistemology through its groundbreaking use of hermeneutics—a relatively new concept at the time.

This is significant, for while other scholars—like Green, Marsh, and Zimmermann—have done excellent work detailing his engagement with Heidegger, they have done so by recounting Bonhoeffer’s attempts to work *beyond* Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein*.<sup>55</sup> My reading shall incorporate such an approach as well, but it *additionally* argues that in

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<sup>53</sup>Heidegger, 61, §37, emphasis Heidegger’s.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 62, §38, emphasis Heidegger’s.

<sup>55</sup>Green, 67-103; Marsh, 111-134; and Zimmermann, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Heidegger: Two Different Visions of Humanity,” in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Cruciform Philosophy* (Indiana University Press, forthcoming) each do excellent jobs of restating Bonhoeffer’s argument against Heidegger and his attempt to overcome it. Both Marsh and Zimmermann depend heavily on Green’s work, the first extensive engagement with *Act and Being*.

choosing to engage Heidegger on such an extensive level in *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer intentionally chooses to engage in a hermeneutical approach with his theology. If, as I have argued, Heidegger is a hermeneutician—and a ground-breaking one at that—Bonhoeffer’s choosing to engage his work signifies that *Act and Being* is also a work of hermeneutics. By relating the hermeneutic category of *Dasein* found in *Being and Time* with a new epistemology grounded in the church-community, Bonhoeffer is performing a ground-breaking theological task. He proposes that knowledge is not mediated by *Dasein* (or any other philosophical category or system), but it is rather mediated by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ embodied by the church-community. *Act and Being*, therefore, is best understood as a work of theological hermeneutics, re-interpreting philosophical categories—such as *Dasein*—in order to create a new theological epistemology (known as “ecclesial knowing”) as part of a new theological anthropology. In doing so, he again seemingly anticipates later theological attempts to theologically interpret reality, particularly Radical Orthodoxy.

*Act and Being*, given its intentional engagement with the primary work of philosophical hermeneutics from its day, is more explicitly concerned with theological hermeneutics than its predecessor, *Sanctorum Communio*. Both, however, are openly involved in the task of theological interpretation. While neither book uses the term “hermeneutics” in the course of its argument, our discussion thus far clearly indicates that in both works Bonhoeffer intends to engage and interpret non-theological concepts within a theological framework. Consequently, *Act and Being*, like *Sanctorum Communio* is best read as a project of theological hermeneutics. With that in mind, I shall now turn my argument to the methodology of each work and the primary theological concept

Bonhoeffer utilizes in both projects of interpretation: Christ existing as church-community.

*Christ Existing as Church-Community as a Hermeneutical Concept*

Thus far I have argued that *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* are both works of theological hermeneutics, engaging and interpreting sociology and philosophy. Having made this contention, in this section I shall argue that the primary theological concept employed in this process of interpretation is “Christ existing as church-community.” In doing so, I shall agree with Clifford Green in his assertion that “Christ existing as church-community” is the central axiom in *Sanctorum Communio*,<sup>56</sup> but I shall additionally argue that the same concept grounds the argument of *Act and Being* as well. In order to make this point I shall further trace the concept’s development within *Sanctorum Communio*. I shall demonstrate what “Christ existing as church-community” means and how it affects Bonhoeffer’s theological hermeneutics. Next, I will note how Bonhoeffer continues to use the concept (supporting my argument of *consistency*) as part of his epistemological and ontological arguments in *Act and Being*. This is significant since Green does not emphasize “Christ existing as church-community” within *Act and Being*. These moves shall allow me to demonstrate how “Christ existing as church-community” works toward the creation of a new theological anthropology.

To this point, I have critiqued approaches of Bonhoeffer’s work that attempt to summarize his theology from a single perspective. I do not, consequently, want to fall

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<sup>56</sup>Green notes this centrality of Christ existing as church-community in Clifford J. Green, “Editor’s Introduction to the English Edition,” in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume One*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 14.

prey to the same shortcoming. While I shall argue in this section that the most important theological concept in his theological hermeneutics is Christ existing as church-community, I do *not* want to suggest that there are *no other* themes or concepts at work in the early theology. Clearly such an assertion would belittle the complexity of Bonhoeffer's work in both of his dissertations. I am instead suggesting that the argument of *Sanctorum Communio* slowly builds upon *several* theological themes leading toward the formation of "Christ existing as church-community." Once this concept is in hand, Bonhoeffer is then able to embark upon his hermeneutic task, interpreting sociology and social philosophy. *Act and Being* takes the argument in a different direction, engaging ontology and epistemology rather than sociology and social philosophy, but I contend that it also does so with the concept of "Christ existing as church-community" firmly in mind.

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, as he crafts the concept of "Christ existing as church-community" throughout *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer creates a comparison between the church and other "empirical communities" in order to refute their "individualistic social atomism."<sup>57</sup> As I further explicated, Bonhoeffer compares the church-community to other forms of community, like the Hegelian community of will, in order to demonstrate its uniqueness. This leads to his conclusion that the church-community's relationships are essentially grounded in two relationships: the relationship between the individual and God as revealed<sup>58</sup> in the person of Jesus Christ and the

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<sup>57</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum*, 33.

<sup>58</sup>I use the term "revealed" as Bonhoeffer uses it throughout both *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*—in the Barthian sense. When he speaks of the revelation of Christ, he means the person of Christ himself freely making himself known to humanity. Revelation will take a more central role in following sections discussing preaching and epistemology in Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics.

relationship between the individual and the Other, as mediated in the person of Jesus Christ. Both of these relationships are possible, Bonhoeffer claims, because of Christ's presence within the church-community. In grounding the church-community in the revelation of Christ and the social ontic-ethical relationship between the self and the other, *Bonhoeffer connects the lives of the individuals within the church-community together with one another*. Thus he argues that Christ is present in the church-community through the lives of the individuals within that same church-community.

By connecting the lives of the individuals within the church-community together under the personhood of Christ, Bonhoeffer argues that the church-community is a sort of metaphysical unit.<sup>59</sup> As I mentioned in the first section of this chapter, for Bonhoeffer, Christ existing as church-community is a sort of reinterpretation and combination of *Geist* and the community of will. Recasting these ideas as a community concerned with the "social ontic-ethical" (the Other) and guided by the Holy Spirit (rather than a purely human spirit), Bonhoeffer reshapes the idea of a community embodied as a collective person (*Kollektivperson*)—a community bound together in a unified identity.<sup>60</sup> Citing Hegel's concept of *Volksgeist*, Bonhoeffer claims that social philosophy already argues that humans can be bound together under a common spirit of cause or nationality.<sup>61</sup> He

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 77. This is an interesting label for Bonhoeffer to use, given his later problems with metaphysics, particularly in the prison writings. As I shall show in chapter four, Bonhoeffer eschews the theological category of "religion" because of what he perceives to be too strong inclinations toward individual metaphysical control of what he calls the working hypothesis 'God.'

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 102. Charles Marsh, however, is not impressed with Bonhoeffer's reading and appropriation of Hegel in *Sanctorum Communio*. While he believes Bonhoeffer's understanding of Hegel greatly matures by the time he delivers lectures on Hegel in Berlin the next year, Marsh believes Bonhoeffer's critique of Hegel does not completely engage Hegel's concept of community. Nevertheless, the move of interpreting Hegel's *Volksgeist* is a hermeneutical one within Bonhoeffer's argument, so I engage it on Bonhoeffer's terms. Cf. Marsh 81-109.

differentiates his interpretation of this concept, however, by arguing that the unified identity of a community does not necessarily have to be a philosophical, political, or sociological category. Bonhoeffer instead suggests that the binding collective identity can be centered on something else—namely the identity of another individual. He writes that a collective identity of a community can be “an *individual* collective person”—individuals can make up the collective identity of a person “that transcends all individuals.”<sup>62</sup> Thus Bonhoeffer employs the concept of Christ existing as church-community as a hermeneutical concept in order to reinterpret Hegel’s *Volksgeist* (in addition to *Geist* and the community of the will) in order to recast the collective person under the rubric of a transcendent individual, thus furthering his hermeneutical project.<sup>63</sup>

With this last hermeneutical move, the meaning of “Christ existing as church-community” becomes clearer. Bonhoeffer argues that *all of humanity* participates in one of two collective persons. For those *outside* the church-community, the transcendent individual within whom they participate is Adam; for those *within* the church-community, this transcendent individual is Jesus Christ.<sup>64</sup> The church-community, for Bonhoeffer, is the collective person of Jesus Christ within the world, and those within the church-community participate in his actions. In theological/mystical language, Bonhoeffer explains that those within the church-community are bound together in unique fashion: “In Christ all are one, differences no longer exist; there is not even a plurality any more.

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<sup>62</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum*, 79.

<sup>63</sup> Although not mentioned explicitly by Bonhoeffer, this echoes Augustine’s notion of the church existing as the *totus Christus*—the total Christ—where both Christ’s head and body are present. For Augustine, Christ joins with the church as a completion of His presence. Cf. Augustine *Sermons* 341.1.1 and 9.1.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 121. This is probably Bonhoeffer’s interpretation of Romans 5.



They are all *one*, ‘one loaf’ to use Luther’s phrase.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, for Bonhoeffer, when the church-community gathers rightly, Christ is really present within the church-community, and the members of the church-community are *in* Christ on a unique ontological level, binding themselves together. A definition of Christ existing as church-community, then, must include Christ being really present in the rightly gathered church-community and the members being ontologically bound together both with Christ and one another within this community. As I shall soon discuss, this binding together is grounded in the administration of the sacrament for Bonhoeffer.

This does *not* mean, however, that Bonhoeffer sees the individual and differences within the community as disappearing within the collective person. He does not want a homogenous community; such a group would not be a community at all. Recalling Bonhoeffer’s impetus for imagining a theology of the church-community was his experience in Rome observing multi-racial Palm Sunday services at the Vatican, clearly his theology would leave room for individuality and difference within this community of collective person. He indicates as much when discussing the Hegelian community of will as helpful for imagining the church-community. He writes that such communities can be built only “upon the inner separateness of You and I.”<sup>66</sup> Furthermore he explains that separateness must be maintained between individuals, for community with God would not be possible if the persons were one and the same; otherwise “community with God becomes unification.”<sup>67</sup> Additionally, the difference between individuals is what creates

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 199, emphasis Bonhoeffer’s. Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:17, “Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.”

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 84, Bonhoeffer’s emphasis removed.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

the essential relationship between the I and the Other; individuality must be maintained for that relationship to exist at all. Maintaining individuality and difference within the community continues through his thought (more *consistency*), since in *Life Together* he warns, “*Whoever cannot be alone should beware of community.*”<sup>68</sup> The church-community is not an attempt by Bonhoeffer to eradicate difference; to the contrary, Bonhoeffer sees the church-community as the place where difference and particularity can be celebrated. For him, the church-community is where difference exists yet is unified under the collective person of Christ.

*Sanctorum Communio* is primarily concerned with the social aspect of Christ existing as church-community, despite its ontological gestures of the community members being bound together. *Act and Being*, however, further develops the ontological and epistemological aspects of Christ existing as church-community, further engaging the work of Heidegger I discussed earlier in the chapter. As I previously mentioned, Bonhoeffer believed Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein* was the best attempt at a philosophical ontology at the time of writing *Act and Being*. Consequently, Bonhoeffer writes that through *Dasein* “from the perspective of the problem of act and being, it would seem that here a genuine coordination of the two has been reached.”<sup>69</sup> But as Zimmermann notes, Bonhoeffer eventually concludes that “Heidegger’s openness will always remain closed to revelation because it insists, despite all assurances to the contrary, on a ready-made definition of openness to Being that continues to reject the

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<sup>68</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and The Prayerbook of the Bible*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume Five, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 82, emphasis Bonhoeffer’s.

<sup>69</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 71.

Christian God and theology as ontic entities.”<sup>70</sup> As Marsh writes, Bonhoeffer’s critique of Heidegger is similar to his critique of Hegel and Kant earlier in *Act and Being*: an enclosed, totally human system cannot achieve true transcendence, and thus cannot achieve a true ontology.<sup>71</sup> Bonhoeffer certainly appreciates the concept of *Dasein*; but unlike Heidegger, he cannot imagine a successful conjoining of ontology and epistemology outside a theologically-grounded reality, specifically the church-community.

Consequently, Bonhoeffer furthers the ontology begun in *Sanctorum Communio* in his engagement and reinterpretation of Heidegger’s *Dasein* through the concept of Christ existing as church-community. He picks up the concept of the collective person begun in *Sanctorum Communio* in *Act and Being*, arguing for a theologically-based *participatory ontology* (yet another precursor of Radical Orthodoxy<sup>72</sup>) that furthers the project of *Dasein*. The project of *Being and Time*, Heidegger states, is to project humans as shepherds of Being.<sup>73</sup> According to Zimmermann, this leads Heidegger to separate ontology from theology, instead arguing that “true self-understanding and knowledge of God have no real presence in the realm of ontology.”<sup>74</sup> Bonhoeffer rejects this

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<sup>70</sup>Zimmermann, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Heidegger: Two Different Visions of Humanity,” in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Cruciform Philosophy*, ed. Brian Gregor and Jens Zimmermann, forthcoming Indiana University Press, 204.

<sup>71</sup>Cf. Marsh, chapter three, 55-ff.

<sup>72</sup>I shall flesh out the similarities between Bonhoeffer’s participatory ontology and that of Radical Orthodoxy in my concluding chapter, but it is significant that both projects of theological interpretation hinge upon participation as a central concept.

<sup>73</sup>Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, Bd. 9: Abteilung 1, Veröffentlichte Schriften 1914-1970 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1996), 331, cited in Zimmermann, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” 202.

<sup>74</sup>Zimmermann, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” 202.

ontological framework of Heidegger, instead suggesting that ontology must stem directly from theology rather than remaining separate. He suggests that human beings participate in a collective person and derive their ontological status from the metaphysical reality of that collective person. For Bonhoeffer, being human means “being in”—participating in—some larger reality, namely the collective persons of either Adam or Christ.<sup>75</sup> This participatory ontology of “being in” serves to complement the “being there” of *Dasein* in which human beings participate in the world separate from any metaphysical reality. Consequently Bonhoeffer suggests that the church-community is the only place where *Dasein* can be understood; *only in the church-community* do ontology and epistemology intersect in the collective person of Christ.<sup>76</sup> The church-community employs *Dasein* and its “being there,” but then adds to it by insisting that “being there” must also “be in,” specifically, in Christ. Bonhoeffer’s “being in” assumes in something larger, namely, the theological framework he has created in Christ existing as church-community. As with *Sanctorum Communio*, so does *Act and Being* conclude by comparing the two possible states of human “being in”—either “in Adam” or “in Christ”<sup>77</sup>—both examples of participatory ontology.

Christ existing as church-community in *Act and Being* and its mode of being “in Christ” further develops the ontological argument by positing that authentic human existence is only that which is found “in Christ,” and consequently, in the church-community. As I shall demonstrate in the final section, this changed state of existing “in

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<sup>75</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 108.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 136-ff. Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 107-ff.

Christ” within the church-community affects multiple layers of anthropology, particularly the epistemology Bonhoeffer argues for in *Act and Being*. This is why, for example, Bonhoeffer concludes that ontology and epistemology are understood and conjoined completely within the church-community; it is only within the church-community that a new state of being “in Christ”—thus making room for the theological—operates. Thus in this section I have demonstrated how “Christ existing as church-community” engages and reinterprets Hegelian visions of community and Heideggarian views of ontology in Bonhoeffer’s early theology in order to create new social and ontological space. This new space—the church-community—is where Bonhoeffer begins his ultimate work of the early theology: crafting a new theological anthropology.

### *Towards a Theological Anthropology*

In this section I shall argue that the theological anthropology Bonhoeffer is constructing is based upon a social/participatory ontology developed in *Sanctorum Communio* and a social/participatory epistemology developed in *Act and Being* and that each depends upon the conception of “Christ existing as church-community” as a hermeneutical concept. I shall discuss each aspect of his theological anthropology and its development within the early theology, drawing particular attention to how each aspect stems directly from “Christ existing as church-community.”

### *Social/Participatory Ontology*

If “Christ existing as church-community” is the central hermeneutical concept in Bonhoeffer’s early theology, as I have argued, the resulting ontology of his can be read as emphasizing different portions of that ecclesial concept. “Christ existing” emphasizes the

participatory aspect of the concept whereas the “church-community” emphasizes the social aspect of the concept. Having reinterpreted the collective person concept to include the possibility of a transcendent individual—either Adam or Jesus Christ—Bonhoeffer can speak of the members of the collective person as able to carry out the actions of—*participating in*—that transcendent individual. For example, when Bonhoeffer invokes biblical passages referring to the church as the body of Christ, he means that when a church-community gathers rightly around the Word and sacraments that the same church-community’s actions are, in a sense, the actions of Christ in the world. For Bonhoeffer, the Word and sacraments bind the community together. Consequently, actions that only Christ can perform, are now able to be performed by the church-community.<sup>78</sup> As the term “Christ existing as church-community” indicates, when the church-community rightly gathers, Christ is present in the church-community, and the church-community is able to carry out his functions.<sup>79</sup>

Interpreting the church-community as a collective person is essential to Bonhoeffer’s argument, for it allows him to accent the *communal* aspect of the church while focusing on the *individual* person of Jesus Christ and his actions. Thus the sociological dimensions of the church-community as highlighted by Green in his work and mentioned earlier in this chapter—such as the “social ontic-ethical” dimension of the church and the need for an Other—can be discussed theologically, specifically in terms of

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<sup>78</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 189.

<sup>79</sup>This participatory language represents yet another intersection between the early theology of Bonhoeffer and the Radical Orthodoxy sensibility. Both John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock have drawn attention to the participatory nature of the church in their works. Cf. Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) and Pickstock, *After Writing: On The Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

the actions of Jesus Christ. Consequently, the theological hermeneutics within Bonhoeffer's early theology employ Christ existing as church-community in order to discuss how individuals within the church-community might take on Jesus' actions in the world. These actions on behalf of Jesus—participating within Jesus' being—by the church-community constitute much of Bonhoeffer's new theological anthropology he is constructing. In this section, I shall examine three aspects of this social/participatory ontology: vicarious representative action, being-for-each-other, and the administration of the sacraments.

*Vicarious Representative Action.* Exemplifying this reinterpretation of anthropology and the resulting participation in the collective person of Jesus Christ, Bonhoeffer expounds upon another theological concept that becomes central to his late theology, particularly his *Ethics*: vicarious representative action (in German—*Stellvertretung*).<sup>80</sup> Although the concept of vicarious representative action develops more fully in his later writings (as I shall discuss in chapter four), Bonhoeffer's exploration of the concept in *Sanctorum Communio* can be seen as part of the hermeneutical framework embodied by Christ existing as church-community. By centering on vicarious representative action, Bonhoeffer re-interprets other versions of community, moving the center of ethical action from a non-theological center—such as Kantian responsibility—and transforming it into divine love. From Bonhoeffer's perspective, vicarious representative action is the primary example of the members of the church-community carrying out the actions of Christ in the world.

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<sup>80</sup>In spite of my disagreements with Green's work, I must admit that it is his work that originally pointed out the importance of "vicarious representative action" in Bonhoeffer's corpus. Cf. Green, 55 and 312-ff.

Taking a cue from his doctoral advisor, Reinhold Seeberg, *Stellvertretung* is a central aspect of Bonhoeffer's Christology and soteriology. As Bonhoeffer explains it, in order to atone for the sin of humanity against God, Jesus Christ takes the divine punishment for that sin "upon himself, accomplishes the forgiveness of sin, and, to use Seeberg's expression, stands as surety for the renewal of human beings."<sup>81</sup> In this way, Jesus acts as an advocate for the members of the church-community, thus modeling how they should act as for their neighbor. Such language and reasoning leads one to read Bonhoeffer's early conception of vicarious representative action as grounded in a substitutionary/participatory concept. Rather than settling for a clean, easy understanding of *Stellvertretung*, Bonhoeffer argues that vicarious representative action is a substitutionary system coupled with a participation metaphor in which individuals *stand in for* and simultaneously endure punishment *alongside* other members of the church-community.<sup>82</sup> As part of his discussion, Bonhoeffer employs Seeberg's language of "surety";<sup>83</sup> he describes Christ's sufferings on the cross as "punitive";<sup>84</sup> he invokes the example of Moses and Paul willingly accepting damnation so that their respective peoples might be redeemed;<sup>85</sup> he uses the term "substitute" in describing how members in the community ought to relate to others in the community willingly in love. He writes,

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<sup>81</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 155. Bonhoeffer cites Reinhold Seeberg, *Die spezielle christliche Dogmatik* (Munich: Erlangen and Leipzig, 1925), 271-ff.

<sup>82</sup> Incidentally, this focus will shift in the later theology to a suffering *with* as opposed to a suffering *for*, particularly within the theology of the prison writings. I discuss this more fully in chapter four.

<sup>83</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum*, 155.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 184-5.



“All of these involve giving up the self ‘for’ my neighbor’s benefit, with the readiness to do and bear everything in the neighbor’s place, indeed, if necessary, to sacrifice myself, standing as a *substitute* for my neighbor.”<sup>86</sup> It seems that vicarious representative action means “to represent in place of another—to act, advocate, intercede on behalf of another.”<sup>87</sup>

Despite advocating acting in the place of another through vicarious representative action, perhaps even as a substitute, Bonhoeffer does *not* argue that this removes culpability. Instead he contends that individuals maintain their culpability. He writes that God cannot approach our sin “as if it did not exist.” Additionally, he argues that overlooking sin would mean removing culpability, and “that would mean no re-creation of the person, and therefore no re-creation of community.”<sup>88</sup> When members of the church-community recognize that they are indeed guilty of sin yet have been spared punishment, relations within the community are transformed from an ethical center to a theological center; members of the church-community are freed to act within their community out of divine love rather than ethical responsibility. Bonhoeffer maintains that it is this act of *Stellvertretung* that makes members of the church-community “whole and sustained.”<sup>89</sup> The *Stellvertretung* of Jesus thus transforms the ethical center of the church-community and consequently “gives Christian basic-relations their substantial uniqueness.”<sup>90</sup> Without the guilt of sin and having been freed by the divine love of Christ

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 184, emphasis Bonhoeffer’s.

<sup>87</sup>As defined in editorial footnote 29 in *Sanctorum Communio*, 120.

<sup>88</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum*, 155.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 156.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

within the church-community, social relationships take on a new dimension. Viewed in this manner, Bonhoeffer uses the concept of Christ existing as church-community to re-interpret social relationships within the church-community, furthering his project of theological hermeneutics.

Because members of the church-community are participants in the collective person of Jesus Christ, they also participate in his act of vicarious representative action as well. Thus Bonhoeffer further re-imagines the social dynamics of the church through the theological concept of Christ existing as church-community. Rather than simply acting as *beneficiaries* of vicarious representative action, Bonhoeffer suggests that members of the church-community serve as vicarious representatives *for others* within the community. Where the Hegelian community of the will centers on the collective human *Geist* and Kantian ethics focus on universal maxims, Bonhoeffer's envisioning of community incorporates the divine in that the relationships within the community focus on the Other as mediated through Jesus Christ within the church-community.

Unfortunately, most of Bonhoeffer's interpreters miss this point. Despite their insightful analysis of *Sanctorum Communio*, none of the major secondary readers marks the significance of vicarious representative action among Bonhoeffer's new theological anthropology. Of Green, Marsh, Zimmermann, Godsey, and Feil, only Green mentions the concept of *Stellvertreter*, but he does so only in reference to the work of Christ, not the resulting actions of the church-community as vicarious representatives for one another.

This vicarious representative action is not simply a responsible or ethical concern for the Other; it is an act of mediated love toward the Other through participation in the

act of Christ. The Other, within the church-community, significantly recasts anthropology, for it insists that the basis for relationships is not only dependent upon the Other, but it is also based in divine love and enacted in vicarious representative action for the Other within the church-community. This re-envisioning of how humans are *with* one another and *for* one another in community constitutes another aspect of the social/participatory ontology: *being-for-each-other*.<sup>91</sup>

*Being-For-Each-Other. Being-for-each-other is the natural social ontological corollary of vicarious representative action within the church-community.* As the church-community rightly gathers around the Word and the sacraments, Christ is present. When Christ is present in and among the church-community, those gathered as part of the community participate in his actions. Participating in the actions of Christ means sharing in his vicarious representative action, resulting in being-for-each-other. This gives rise to a number of concrete social actions, including the concrete actions of “self-renouncing, active work for the neighbor, intercessory prayer, and, finally, the mutual forgiveness of sins in God’s name.”<sup>92</sup> Each of these concrete actions are, in a sense, examples of vicarious representative actions that members of the church-community might take on behalf of another member of the community.

In the case of sacrificial work for the neighbor, Bonhoeffer writes, “We are called to advocate *vicariously* for the other in everyday matters, to give up possessions, honor, even our whole lives.”<sup>93</sup> In this case, those who are strong have been given advantages

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<sup>91</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 182.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., emphasis mine.

so that they may work for the good of the entire church-community. Citing 1 Corinthians, Bonhoeffer suggests that the church-community can rightly ask such sacrifices of its members because the foundational principle of action within the community is love grounded in Christ. This love leads individuals to help others, acting vicariously through sacrificial work. In seeming paradox, Bonhoeffer says, one must love God more than people in order to love people enough to serve them sacrificially.<sup>94</sup> Thus working sacrificially emphasizes the love aspect of being-for-each-other.

The next concrete manifestation of being-for-each-other within the church-community is intercessory prayer. As Kelly and Nelson point out, Bonhoeffer argues that members of the church-community must pray for one another in order to participate in Christ and to learn that one must participate in the life of the community for one's spiritual life to be effective.<sup>95</sup> He writes, "It is a mistaken individualism to rely exclusively on one's own prayer, as if God could not take seriously an intercession as seriously as any other kind of prayer."<sup>96</sup> In addition to the necessity of love introduced through sacrificial work for the Other, intercessory prayer reinforces the social reality present within the church-community, insisting that individuals must open their existence to the community so that they and others might more completely participate in the vicarious action of Christ. By opening up to the church-community with spiritual needs, the individual allows others to act on her or his behalf and to participate in her or his struggles. Thus love is coupled with and made necessary by this social ontology.

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 185.

<sup>95</sup>Kelly and Nelson, 64.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 186.

The final concrete manifestation of being-for-each-other is “*the deepest insight into the miracle of the church-community*,”<sup>97</sup> namely, that one individual can forgive the sins of another — another point of influence for Catholic thought upon Bonhoeffer’s work. Bonhoeffer’s understanding of forgiveness of sin is not exclusively clerical, as in Catholicism, but is instead centered upon the priesthood of all believers. Citing Jesus’ exhortation found in John 20:23, “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven,” Bonhoeffer develops the idea that members of the church-community can carry out the actions of Jesus to the furthest metaphysical possibility. This “miracle of the church-community,” as he calls it, incorporates both the attitude of love found in sacrificial work for others and the social ontology of intercessory prayer. By hearing confession of sin within the social ontological structure of the church-community, a Christian “takes sin from the others’ conscience and bears it; but clearly one can do that only by laying it in turn on Christ.”<sup>98</sup> By taking the sin upon oneself, the individual is able to turn that same sin over to the church-community; the church-community bears the sin, just as Christ does, for it is Christ existing as church-community. The church “bears the sins by receiving forgiveness through the word and seeing its sins wiped out on the cross . . . it can take the sins of individuals upon itself.”<sup>99</sup> This concept of confession returns in Bonhoeffer’s later pastoral theology, most notably

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 189, emphasis Bonhoeffer’s.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 189.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 190.

*Life Together*, as he describes Christian communal life and the significance of confession within that community.<sup>100</sup>

The first aspect of Bonhoeffer's new theological anthropology — vicarious representative action — is clearly dependent upon the theological concept of Christ existing as church-community. The individual participating within the church-community bears the sins, acting as Christ, and is thus able to forgive them. Consequently, Christ existing as church-community interprets and incorporates being-for-each-other and vicarious representative action: sacrificial work for the neighbor, intercessory prayer, and the forgiveness of sins. Each of these models a mode of being dependent upon the Other, where actions for the Other embody the model of Christ.

*Administration and Reception of the Sacraments.* The first two aspects of Bonhoeffer's social/participatory ontology I have examined focus on ethical actions within the community. The final aspect of this ontology I wish to examine centers upon the place of the sacraments within the church-community and their necessity to the proper maintaining of the ontology Bonhoeffer proposes in his theological anthropology. In both *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer suggests that the administration of the sacraments and the preaching of the Scriptures are functions that make the church-community different from any other sociological community. Discussing the difference between Christian marriage and the church-community, he notes that only the church-community can perform the sacraments, thus Christian marriages, while in a sense the smallest sociological representation of the church-

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<sup>100</sup> Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 108-ff.

community, must still be part of the larger church that administers the sacraments and preaches the Scriptures.<sup>101</sup>

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are, in a sense, ontologically grounding for members of the church-community, for each sacrament represents a participation *both* in the life of the community *and* the being of Christ. Simultaneously, for Bonhoeffer, the sacraments and preaching of the Scripture ontologically ground the church-community, for only the church-community can perform these tasks. Without the sacraments and the preaching of the Scriptures, Bonhoeffer maintains, the church-community is no longer the church but is instead some other sociological entity.<sup>102</sup> This reciprocity of relationship constitutes the very being of the church-community, for Christ cannot exist as church-community if the sacraments are not administered and the Scripture is not preached. In a sense, receiving the sacraments refers back to the vicarious representative action taken by the church-community and its participation in the actions of Christ in the world. As Bonhoeffer sees it, when one receives the sacraments and is forgiven of sin, that individual is taken into a new form of being, one that is part of "Christ's community of faith, the new humanity."<sup>103</sup> Thus Bonhoeffer can speak of baptism of infants being an induction into the faith and social ontology of the church-community so that the community can have faith *for* the child through its participation in Christ.<sup>104</sup> Likewise, the Lord's Supper is the giving of Christ's presence to the church-community, and it also

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<sup>101</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 226.

<sup>102</sup> Bonhoeffer makes this argument throughout *Sanctorum Communio*, for example, 226-ff.

<sup>103</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 121.

<sup>104</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 241.

is the church-community's accepting of that presence and its participation in that presence.<sup>105</sup>

Preaching serves as a continuation of the communal life, furthering the social and participatory ontology. To begin, Bonhoeffer asserts that the word—the Scriptures—are able to become the word only when they are used within the church; only the church-community views the Scriptures as God's word. Indeed, for Bonhoeffer, the "word created the church-community again and again [and] calls it together into concrete assembly."<sup>106</sup> Preaching is an activity "of the church for the church."<sup>107</sup> Consequently, the word, in a sense, constitutes the church, for the church-community gathers around the word. By hearing the preached word, the members of the church-community are judged by that same word and are called to participate in the word by participating in the work of Christ. Thus the hearing of the Scriptures in community supports the notion that Christian ontology is social; participating in the preached word supports the notion that Christian ontology is also participatory.

For Bonhoeffer, then, Christ existing as church-community reinterprets ontology as part of a Christian anthropology that is both social and participatory in nature. Vicarious representative action, being-for-each-other, and the sacraments tie these ontological aspects together; each is part of the life of the church-community and part of the life of Christ. Thus the being of the church-community is closely tied to the being of the individual within the church-community on both social and participatory grounds.

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 243-4.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 227, emphasis removed.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid, emphasis removed.



The prevalence of this participatory ontology in Bonhoeffer's early theology, however, brings to the forefront the question of how his thought intersects with the contemporary theological movement known as Radical Orthodoxy, and their insistence upon a participatory ontology, as well.

*Excursus: Reading Bonhoeffer with Radically Orthodox Eyes*

Given this connection point, I shall cursorily note how Bonhoeffer's insistence upon participation has emerged in another theological circle. As I have demonstrated, Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics are closely tied to the theme of Christ existing as church-community. This ecclesial theme binds the church-community to the person of Jesus Christ through *participation* in Christ on a number of fronts: being-for-one-another, a willingness to bear guilt for the other, administration and reception of the sacraments, and by taking part in the sufferings of Christ within the world. Consequently, the notion of a participatory ontology weaves its way throughout Bonhoeffer's writings. As early as *Sanctorum Communio*, participation makes its way toward the forefront of Bonhoeffer's thought, as he wonders whether "there might be an *individual* collective person in which the individual participates."<sup>108</sup> This language of participation surfaces throughout Bonhoeffer's corpus, reaching its climax regarding vicarious representative action in the prison writings as Bonhoeffer wonders how "participation in the powerlessness of God in the world" looks like for the church-community.<sup>109</sup> Participation in God's activity

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<sup>108</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 77.

<sup>109</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Touchstone, 1971), 362.

through the church-community in the person of Christ in the world is central to Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics in each phase of his writing.

The theme of participation has experienced a revival of sorts in recent theology, perhaps most notably in the theological "sensibility" known as Radical Orthodoxy.<sup>110</sup> Radical Orthodoxy resists identification as a school or movement in theological circles, but is centered around the task of "attempts to reclaim the world by situating its concerns and activities within a theological framework."<sup>111</sup> Consequently, Radical Orthodoxy and its central proponents—John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward—work to re-interpret the world in light of the theological, rejecting the notion of the secular as a lately devised idea. As Milbank notes in the opening sentence of his seminal theological text, *Theology and Social Theory*, for those in Radical Orthodoxy, "Once, there was no 'secular.'"<sup>112</sup> Milbank argues that the notion of secular is a rather late development, in that most areas of academic discourse originally assumed a theological foundation. This is similar to Charles Taylor's separate project arguing that, at least in the West, we are living in a "secular age."<sup>113</sup> Rather than accepting the construction of the world that secularism produces, Radical Orthodoxy proposes to re-interpret the world from a

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<sup>110</sup>Graham Ward, one of Radical Orthodoxy's supporters, uses the term "sensibility" to describe Radical Orthodoxy in order to differentiate it from a movement or school, like the so-called "Yale School" of theology based on the work of George Lindbeck and Hans Frei. Cf. Graham Ward, "In the Economy of the Divine: A Response to James K.A. Smith," *PNEUMA: Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 25 (2003): 115-16.

<sup>111</sup>John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock, "Introduction: Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy," in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1.

<sup>112</sup>John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 9.

<sup>113</sup>Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap, 2007), 1.

theological perspective, engaging philosophy, sociology, musical theory, anthropology, and a host of other, previously believed ‘secular’ areas.

Since the chief task of Radical Orthodoxy is a re-interpretation of the world from a theological perspective, it is unsurprising that Catherine Pickstock describes it as a “hermeneutic disposition and a metaphysical vision; and it is not so much a ‘thing’ or a ‘place’ as a ‘task.’”<sup>114</sup> This hermeneutical task is carried out in a variety of forms in the various texts associated with the Radical Orthodoxy sensibility, ranging from engagement with Aquinas to sexuality.<sup>115</sup> As the Radical Orthodoxy project seeks to interpret the world from within a theological framework, it sounds increasingly like the task of theological hermeneutics I have described thus far in this dissertation. Just as Radical Orthodoxy describes re-interpreting the world, Bonhoeffer argues that the world must be understood better than it understands itself. It appears that both Bonhoeffer and Radical Orthodoxy endeavor along similar paths.

Given their similar projects of theological interpretation, it is not too surprising that the language of participation that figures repeatedly into Bonhoeffer’s theological interpretation is a central component of the Radical Orthodoxy sensibility. As James K.A. Smith notes, one of the central gathering principles for Radical Orthodoxy writings is “an ontological commitment to participation as the only proper metaphysical model for

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<sup>114</sup>Catherine Pickstock, “Radical Orthodoxy and the Meditations of Time,” 63, cited in James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 67.

<sup>115</sup>See, for example, John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, (New York: Routledge, 2001) and Gerard Loughlin, “Erotics: God’s Sex,” in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 143-162.

understanding creation.”<sup>116</sup> This participatory ontology is succinctly described by Milbank, Ward, and Pickstock: “Participation, however, refuses any reserve of created territory, while allowing finite things their own integrity. . . . [E]very discipline must be framed by a theological perspective; otherwise these disciplines will define a zone apart from God, grounded literally in nothing.”<sup>117</sup> By allowing finite things their “own integrity”—much like Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the penultimate—Milbank argues that this participation extends into the realm of human activity and creativity, stating that participation “can be extended also to language, history, and culture: the whole realm of human *making*” and that such human making “participates in a God who is infinite poetic utterance: the second person of the Trinity.”<sup>118</sup> For both Milbank and Bonhoeffer, the reinterpretation of the world within a theological framework depends upon an ontology centered in participation in the person of Christ.

Granted, Bonhoeffer’s version of participatory ontology is not identical with that of Radical Orthodoxy. Where Bonhoeffer explicitly uses language repeatedly tying his notion of participation to the person of Christ, Radical Orthodoxy often couches its idea of participation in the language of “gift.” In doing so, Radical Orthodoxy engages thinkers like Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida, who employ gift as a transcendental category in constructing their anthropology. Milbank interprets gift through the lens of the gift of Christ from God, and consequently interprets all of creation as participating in

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<sup>116</sup>James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 74.

<sup>117</sup>Milbank, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>118</sup>John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (New York: Routledge, 2003), ix.

that initial gift.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, despite their differing terminology, the central component of both remains the same: human identity is best understood as participation in the person of Christ.

More surprising than the language differences, however, is the surprising lack of theological connections that the core members of Radical Orthodoxy explicitly make to Bonhoeffer in their writings. They are surely familiar with his work; Radical Orthodoxy has been lauded for its breadth of source material, and Bonhoeffer is hardly a minor figure in the most recent century of theological history. Nevertheless, there are only tangential references to Bonhoeffer in the central monographs of Milbank and Ward; Pickstock does not reference him at all. Perhaps even more interesting is that the references to Bonhoeffer are complimentary. Milbank cursorily refers to Bonhoeffer in his essay, “Can Morality Be Christian?” stating that Bonhoeffer agrees with his point.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, Ward writes about his project of cultural hermeneutics and along the way includes an obscure quote from *Sanctorum Communio*.<sup>121</sup>

Since the argument from silence is impossible to interpret, one simply cannot know why the chief proponents of Radical Orthodoxy do not draw more heavily from Bonhoeffer, given that his theological project bears a striking similarity to theirs. Perhaps Milbank and company read Bonhoeffer as a Barthian, depending too strongly on the category of revelation for theological insight. Or perhaps they were exposed to

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<sup>119</sup>Cf., for example, *Ibid.*, 156-57. Milbank uses the language of gift throughout his writings, citing the term 42 times in the index of *Being Reconciled* alone.

<sup>120</sup>John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 224.

<sup>121</sup>Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (New York: Cambridge, 2005), 65.

Bonhoeffer interpretations that linked him to the “God is dead” movement. Whatever the case, it is clear that Bonhoeffer is not a primary figure in their theological conclusions.

But despite the lack of interaction between Radical Orthodoxy and Bonhoeffer, their usage of a participatory ontology leads them down similar paths of cultural interpretation with a strong emphasis upon the sacraments. As I demonstrated throughout this chapter, Bonhoeffer emphasizes the administration of the sacraments as central to the church-community’s participation in the collective person of Christ in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*. As Victoria Barnett has noted, Bonhoeffer’s thought returns to the practices of the church-community in his later writings as he meditates on the dismantling of cultural and political Christendom for a post-war context.<sup>122</sup> For Bonhoeffer, it seems, the sacraments are at the center of participating in Christ’s incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Likewise, Radical Orthodoxy centers on liturgy and the sacraments in its interpretive project, particularly “the role that liturgy plays in leading us to the divine.”<sup>123</sup> Pickstock’s book *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*<sup>124</sup> most completely develops this aspect of Radical Orthodoxy, but as Smith notes, this same concept is central to Milbank and Ward, as well.<sup>125</sup>

Given the aforementioned theological intersections, it seems reasonable to assert that Bonhoeffer’s theological project is a predecessor of sorts to Radical Orthodoxy.

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<sup>122</sup> Victoria J. Barnett, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Relevance for Post-Holocaust Christian Theology,” *Studies in Christian Jewish Relations* 2:1 (2007), 53-67.

<sup>123</sup> Smith, 77.

<sup>124</sup> Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

<sup>125</sup> Smith, 77-8.

Both are clearly engaged in a project of cultural interpretation; both are concerned with participation in the person of Christ; and both are concerned with the sacraments as sources of meaning for the church-community. The projects are far from identical, particularly given Bonhoeffer's seeming acceptance of the "secular" as a necessary category in his prison writings, while Radical Orthodoxy seeks to argue that humanity is currently in a post-secular age. Nevertheless there are enough theological similarities to argue that both Bonhoeffer and Radical Orthodoxy should be read in light of one another, further informing their projects of theological hermeneutics.

One possible path forward regarding dialogue between Bonhoeffer and Radical Orthodoxy might center on a contemporary re-imagining of Bonhoeffer's initial ecclesial concept: Christ existing as church-community. Against Andreas Pangritz's assertion that Bonhoeffer's association of Christ and church are "compulsive,"<sup>126</sup> it seems that a theological project of cultural interpretation and transformation might be furthered if it expands its ecclesiology to incorporate how Christ might exist as church-community in the post-secular. In other words, the emphasis is placed upon not only the inward practices of the church-community as it participates in the Eucharist, but also upon how the church-community might participate in—and consequently *be*—the person of Christ *beyond* of the the practice of the liturgy. This, of course, does not mean that the liturgy is unimportant, but it instead seeks to meditate on reading Bonhoeffer's Christ existing as church-community in a post-Christendom fashion, where Christ's presence as the church-community is intentionally developed when the church-community encounters the world outside of the liturgy. Such thoughts would have to consider Bonhoeffer's belief that the

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<sup>126</sup> Andreas Pangritz, "'Who is Jesus Christ, for us, today?'" in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1999), 151.

church-community of the future would engage the world come of age while also considering the Milbankian assertion that there is no secular.

### *Social/Participatory Epistemology*

Just as Christ existing as church-community serves as the primary hermeneutical concept in the formation of Bonhoeffer's social/participatory ontology, it also serves as the central hermeneutical concept in the formation of his theologically-based epistemology. I am suggesting that just as the ontology constructed through Christ existing as church-community is social/participatory in nature, so also is his epistemology. In this section I shall demonstrate how revelation and the act of preaching within the church-community form Bonhoeffer's new theological epistemology and how that epistemology is directly related to the concept of Christ existing as church-community.

*Revelation and Social/Participatory Epistemology.* Christ existing as church-community directly interprets theological epistemology since members within the church-community experience knowing through the revelatory act of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Barth's influence upon Bonhoeffer arises as he notes, for all humans, but particularly those within the church-community, human knowledge always means that "[r]oom remains for God's free utterance, and God remains in each instance the subject."<sup>127</sup> With God's utterance in the person of Jesus Christ, those participate in Christ's being and actions through the gathering of the church-community will also participate in the knowledge of Christ. Participating in this communal knowledge of

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<sup>127</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 124.



Christ is, Bonhoeffer says, a knowing of faith since it is found within the community of faith.<sup>128</sup> This “believing way of knowing,” as Bonhoeffer calls it, is a “basic sociological epistemology” grounded in the reality of an individual “pardoned by the person of Christ in the preached word.”<sup>129</sup>

In the preaching of Christ within the church-community, God’s revelation to it “stands as person over against human beings as persons,” and resists any attempts to rename or misinterpret it, such as the Kantian “transcendental I, or any nonobjectification.”<sup>130</sup> When the person of Christ is so recognized by the church-community, it is acknowledged to be from God, originating from outside the church-community and therefore radically Other. Thus the persons within the church-community can be encountered by the person of Christ, who can then either judge the persons or incorporate them into the church-community. Consequently, Bonhoeffer argues that an individualistic epistemology ultimately fails because it searches for an outside source of transcendence from philosophical sources which eventually prove to be human and thus from within the individual.<sup>131</sup>

The revelation of Christ within the church-community changes the ways of knowing for members of the church-community because only revelation provides radical transcendence, providing a reference point for knowing to begin. Here Bonhoeffer’s

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<sup>128</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

<sup>131</sup>Both Marsh and Zimmermann demonstrate this within their respective arguments. Cf. Marsh, 55-ff. and Zimmermann, *Recovering*, 285-ff. Marsh particularly focuses on Bonhoeffer’s reading of Hegel, noting that Bonhoeffer’s thought in *Act and Being* works to reject human enclosed systems, instead opting for the category and possibility of revelation. Zimmermann’s argument focuses on Bonhoeffer’s reading of Kant, but reaches conclusions similar to those of Marsh, also positing that Bonhoeffer insists on revelation.

ontology and epistemology intersect. He writes, “Only through Christ does my neighbor meet me as one who claims me in an absolute way from a position outside my existence. Only here is reality utterly pure decision.”<sup>132</sup> As discussed multiple times earlier in this chapter, Bonhoeffer’s ontology is based upon the relationship between the I and the Other as mediated in the person of Christ, thus providing a social ontology. This social ontology, however, entails a social epistemology in that the relationship with the Other as mediated through the person of Christ is only cognizant to those *who are aware* of the mediating Christ, who have embraced the revelation of the person of Christ within the church-community. Consequently Bonhoeffer argues that true knowledge requires revelation, resulting in the believing way of knowing. Christ existing as church-community recasts epistemology for Bonhoeffer, for it provides a social context within which members of the community embrace the revelation of Christ and are thus capable of achieving a knowledge based in true transcendence.

*Preaching and Social/Participatory Epistemology.* As I mentioned in the previous subsection, the revelation of Christ enters the church-community through the act of preaching. Just as the preaching of the word provides a means for participation in the ontology of Christ for members of the church-community, Bonhoeffer suggests that it is also closely tied to the knowledge of members of the church-community. In one sense, preaching is the memory of the church-community, for it calls the church-community to remember the person of Jesus Christ. When the act of preaching takes place within the church-community, “the living person of Christ declares itself in them by disclosing itself

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<sup>132</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 127.

to the hearer,”<sup>133</sup> and the church-community remembers, is judged by, and acts upon the words of Christ carried through the preaching act.

When preaching challenges the church-community to remember the life and works of Jesus, it in turn challenges the church-community to think theologically. Consequently Bonhoeffer states that “preachers must be theologians.”<sup>134</sup> Theology, Bonhoeffer writes, is the practice of turning “revelation into something that exists.”<sup>135</sup> Preachers are theologians challenging the church-community to encounter the revelation of the person of Jesus Christ, to act on it; preachers challenge the church-community to *participate* in the work of making theology something that exists. Just as preaching brings revelation into the church-community by speaking the word of Christ to the church-community, it challenges the church-community to bring this word into reality. This act is specific to the church-community, however, because the revelation of Christ through preaching is irrelevant to any other sociological community. “Only the community of faith knows that theology is merely the remembrance of the word, taking care and ordering it.”<sup>136</sup>

Because only the church-community is capable of interpreting the preached word of Christ, Bonhoeffer maintains that it is the only group capable of thinking theologically. Knowing and understanding the proclamation of Christ and the manner in which that proclamation is made to exist in the world constitutes the knowledge of the church, or

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<sup>133</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., 133.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 131.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid.

“*ecclesial knowing*.”<sup>137</sup> Ecclesial knowing is a way of knowledge that is social, since it is only possible within the relationally-based church-community, and participatory, since it participates in the actions of Christ. This *ecclesial knowing*, centered in preaching, partners with the *believing way of knowing*, centered in revelation, and provides a new epistemology for the church-community. This new epistemology is certainly formed by the hermeneutical concept of Christ existing as church-community. The reality of Christ’s revelation and presence within the church-community makes radical transcendence possible for the *believing way of knowing*, and the communal act of preaching is only possible because of the church-community. Additionally, Christ existing as church-community incorporates the communal act of preaching, thus making *ecclesial knowing* possible.

For Bonhoeffer, both revelation and preaching are interpreted by Christ existing as church-community, thus producing a new epistemology. This social/participatory epistemology couples with his social/participatory ontology and serves as the groundwork for his theological anthropology. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, this theological anthropology was the result of his theological hermeneutics interpreting sociology, social philosophy, ontology, and epistemology—primarily employing the theological concept of Christ existing as church-community. These concepts are integral, for they will re-emerge throughout Bonhoeffer’s writings and will shape his opinions regarding future theological issues, particularly that of nonviolence, an issue I will explore in more detail in the final chapter. As the next chapter shall demonstrate, Bonhoeffer’s theological writings of his pastoral years continue to employ theological

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid., 131-2, emphasis Bonhoeffer’s.

hermeneutics to engage and interpret reality, but with a new emphasis—the theological exegesis of Scripture.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Pastoral Phase: Church Formation Through Obedience to the Christ of Scripture

“The Bible is a book whose explanation centers in the one upon whom it centers—Jesus, and the God whose gospel Jesus preached.”

—James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Doctrine*

#### *Thesis*

In the previous chapter, I argued that Bonhoeffer’s student phase interprets sociology, ontology, and epistemology in order to envision a new theological anthropology. In this chapter I shall examine how the theological hermeneutics of Bonhoeffer’s pastoral phase *build upon* his theological anthropology, interpreting and engaging the situation in 1930s Germany in order to develop his Christocentric ecclesiology. I shall argue that *Bonhoeffer’s pastoral phase theology uses the ecclesial concept of acting in obedience to Christ through faithful proclamation of Scripture to envision the church-community.*

This ecclesiology, I shall argue, draws upon the theological anthropology developed during his student years and simultaneously further develops the concept of “Christ existing as church-community.” As part of that argument, I shall also demonstrate that toward the end of this period Bonhoeffer moves toward imagining the church as an *alternative political community* of sorts, arguing that the church-community is the true har-binger of humanity over against Nazi propaganda, thus continuing his theological project of engagement and interpretation. It is this idea of an alternative political community that pushes Bonhoeffer to develop his ideas of nonviolence, as I shall demonstrate throughout the chapter. I shall also note how, as argued by Barry Harvey and Victoria Barnett, this development in his theology marks the beginning of Bonhoeffer’s awareness that Christi-

anity in Germany was rapidly approaching a post-Christendom model of operation.<sup>1</sup> As part of this new understanding, my reading of Bonhoeffer will view his pastoral writings as both *perennial and timely*. On the one hand, they present *perennial* theological formulations of Scripture, Christ, and church; on the other hand, they engage in a *timely* fashion with the happenings of his day, theologically interpreting from an ecclesial perspective.

In order to demonstrate my point, I shall begin the chapter exploring Bonhoeffer's renewed interest in Scripture following his one year stay in New York City, highlighting the influence of Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. Next I shall demonstrate how Bonhoeffer's new method of reading Scripture shifts the hermeneutic task from the philosophical arena toward the concrete situation in Germany—with regard to both politics and the church. This shift is particularly apparent in his earlier writings from this phase—*Creation and Fall* and his Christology lectures. I shall demonstrate in each of these works that Bonhoeffer employs the *perennial/timely* strategy, providing both solid theological reflection coupled with cultural engagement and interpretation. Finally, I shall argue that Bonhoeffer's increased use of Scripture, particularly within *Discipleship*, demonstrates further free church influences, namely the Bruderhof and Moravian communities. I shall read these works highlighting their focus on exegesis of, and obedience to, the Scriptures—particularly the Sermon on the Mount and the the peace commands of Jesus. This focus, I shall argue, moves Bonhoeffer toward envisioning the church-community as a political alternative to National Socialism (and other earthly governments, as well), one where Christ judges *Führer* and where love supplants the Final

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Barry A. Harvey, "Preserving the World for Christ: Toward a Theological Engagement with the 'Secular,'" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61/1 (2008): 64-82; and Victoria J. Barnett, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Relevance for Post-Holocaust Christian Theology," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 2/1 (2007): 53-67.

Solution.<sup>2</sup> In doing so, I shall demonstrate how Bonhoeffer's thought anticipates contemporary theologies employing a similar post-Christendom strategy with regard to church and government—namely the narrative theology embodied in the work of John Howard Yoder, James Wm. McClendon, Jr., and Stanley Hauerwas.<sup>3</sup> I reserve my discussion of Bonhoeffer's relationship to those thinkers for my final chapter.

### *Biography: Interlude and Awakening*

A variety of influences converged in order to reawaken Bonhoeffer's interest in Scripture. In 1930, he completed *Act and Being* and was offered at least two different professional positions.<sup>4</sup> Upon delivery of his inaugural lecture,<sup>5</sup> however, he decided to postpone his academic career for a year and accept a postdoctoral fellowship at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. This academic year in New York City served as an interlude of sorts for Bonhoeffer. Prior to his time in New York, he was strictly an

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<sup>2</sup>"Final Solution" was the intra-Nazi term for the ultimate extinction of Jews from Europe. Probably the most extensive research on the topic can be found in Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992). More recently, Peter Longerich, *The Unwritten Order: Hitler's Role in the Final Solution* (London: Tempus, 2005), has supported Fleming's account while clarifying some portions of his argument.

<sup>3</sup>It is somewhat unfair to lump these three thinkers together and not simultaneously include others; I admit the decision to do so is somewhat arbitrary. That having been said, Yoder, McClendon, and Hauerwas each draw deeply from one another's work and are often read and studied in tandem, and each of them, as I shall demonstrate, interacts to varying degrees with Bonhoeffer—particularly McClendon and Hauerwas.

<sup>4</sup>*Act and Being* was officially accepted on July 12, 1930 and Bonhoeffer presented his inaugural lecture at the University of Berlin less than three weeks later on July 31. Since the completion of *Sanctorum Communio*, he had served as a *Privatdozent* at Berlin and considered staying there; additionally the technical school in Berlin needed a chaplain and he was immediately considered for that as well. Cf. Bethge, 141-45.

<sup>5</sup>The inaugural lecture, "Man in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology," confirms much of the anthropological argument made in the previous chapter. The text of the lecture can be found in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 50-69.



academic. After this year, his concerns, while still academic, shifted increasingly toward the church and its concrete action within the world.

His American year was both immensely rewarding and frustrating for Bonhoeffer. From a theological standpoint, he expressed disappointment in his concluding report on his time at Union, arguing that many of the professors have “turned their back on all genuine theology.”<sup>6</sup> The bulk of this theological frustration centered on the American insistence upon ethics and social work rather than dogmatics and theory. Bonhoeffer’s theological methodology, as evidenced in chapter two, proceeded from theoretical grounds, regularly engaging both philosophy and dogmatics. His knowledge of European theology, and Barth in particular, made him unique at Union. Professors and students alike respected his acumen but also viewed him as somewhat curious. For example, Union theologian John Baillie appreciated Bonhoeffer’s knowledge of philosophy and “relied on him for ‘detailed information’ about Heidegger and other contemporary Continental thinkers such as Bultmann, Gogarten, and Barth.”<sup>7</sup> At the same time, Baillie struggled with Bonhoeffer’s dialectical terminology, puzzling over phrases like “revelation in hiddenness.”<sup>8</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr—a favorite of many Union students—was a particular source of consternation for Bonhoeffer. Niebuhr challenged each of his students to think both theologically *and* politically, something that Bonhoeffer had yet to undertake formally.

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<sup>6</sup>Bonhoeffer, “Report on a Period of Study at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, 1930-1,” *No Rusty Swords*, 89.

<sup>7</sup>Charles Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 112.

<sup>8</sup>Bethge, 160.

Consequently, when Bonhoeffer wrote a paper for Niebuhr's seminar, "Religion and Ethics," Niebuhr strongly critiqued Bonhoeffer's concept of grace, arguing that Bonhoeffer's insistence upon transcendence prevented his ability to "ascribe any ethical significance to it."<sup>9</sup> While Bonhoeffer and Niebuhr grew to respect one another a great deal over the coming months and years, they clashed strongly over theological methodology. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer's engagement with American theologians, particularly that of Niebuhr, left him with an impression that an "American student of theology has one powerful advantage over his German counterpart: he knows much more of everyday matters."<sup>10</sup> Consequently, while Bonhoeffer never fully adopted the pragmatic, social gospel approach to theology, at the end of his time in New York, he wrote, "The impression I have received from today's representatives of the social gospel will leave a decisive imprint on me for a long time."<sup>11</sup>

While Bonhoeffer's American professors were stressing the importance of the ethical and the political in the classroom, his classmates also began to affect his theological focus. He communicated disappointment in his classmates' intellectual preparation, reporting that when he quoted sections of Luther's *De servo arbitrio* during a lecture, students laughed out loud. This response prompted Bonhoeffer to state that such students had "evidently completely forgotten what Christian theology by its very nature stands for."<sup>12</sup> Bonhoeffer, however, encountered at least two students—each outsiders of

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<sup>9</sup>Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, Revised Edition, ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 160.

<sup>10</sup>Bonhoeffer, "Report," in *No Rusty Swords*, 88.

<sup>11</sup>Renate Bethge and Christian Remmels, eds. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Life in Pictures, Centenary Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 48.

<sup>12</sup>Bonhoeffer, "Report," in *No Rusty Swords*, 91.

sorts—that affected his thinking toward Scripture concurrent with his professors’ insistence upon the ethical and political nature of theology.

The first student, Jean Lasserre, was a French student participating in the same postdoctoral fellowship as Bonhoeffer. Lasserre surprised Bonhoeffer with his focus on the peace commands of Jesus and his reading of the Sermon on the Mount. While Bonhoeffer could dismiss some of his American classmates because of their lack of knowledge of dogmatics, Lasserre was extensively knowledgeable in European thought. He challenged some of Bonhoeffer’s preconceived notions, particularly the way in which he read the Scriptures. Lasserre insisted upon an outright rejection of violence as an embodiment of Christian faith, turning Bonhoeffer’s attention further toward concrete manifestations of theology through the church community. Bethge says, Lasserre “confronted him with the question of the relationship between God’s word and those who uphold it as individuals and citizens of the contemporary world.”<sup>13</sup> Lasserre’s reading of the Sermon on the Mount influenced Bonhoeffer, transforming his position “into a committed identification with Christ’s teachings of peace.”<sup>14</sup> While Bethge maintains that Bonhoeffer never became a fully committed pacifist (something I shall address further in chapter five), it is clear that his friendship with Lasserre transformed his reading of Scripture, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. Lasserre emphasized the unity of the church over nationalism in its practice of peace in his *War and the Gospel*, writing, “Nothing in the Scriptures gives the Christian authority to tear apart the body of Christ for the State or

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<sup>13</sup> Bethge, 154.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

anything else . . . one cannot be Christian *and* nationalist.”<sup>15</sup> Later, Bonhoeffer was moved to follow him in his teaching. In the coming years, Bonhoeffer extolled the importance of the universality of the visible church over nationalism: “Come what may, let us never more forget that one Christian people is the people of God, that if we are in accord, no nationalism, no hate of races or classes can execute its designs.”<sup>16</sup> Such words hint at the seeds of post-Christendom theology slowly taking root in Bonhoeffer’s thought at the time, serving as a foreshadowing of things to come, particularly in the realm of nonviolence.

While Lasserre was emphasizing the peace commands of Jesus and a new reading of the Sermon on the Mount to Bonhoeffer, Josiah Young notes that Bonhoeffer’s friendship with Frank Fisher, an African-American student, provided another new avenue of approaching the Bible. Fisher took Bonhoeffer into Harlem to Abyssinian Baptist Church where Bonhoeffer experienced the church-community in a completely new way.<sup>17</sup> Bonhoeffer attended Abyssinian Baptist most Sundays during his first six months in New York, eventually helping in their Sunday School.<sup>18</sup> Despite his skin color, he achieved “a remarkable kind of identity with the Negro community, so that he was received there as though he had never been an outsider at all.”<sup>19</sup> As Bethge notes, because race relations

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<sup>15</sup> Jean Lasserre, *War and the Gospel* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 34.

<sup>16</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *A Testament to Freedom*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), cited in Bethge, 154.

<sup>17</sup> Josiah Ulysses Young III, *No Difference in the Fare: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Problem of Racism* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998) provides the most comprehensive summary of Bonhoeffer’s interaction with African-American culture in Harlem.

<sup>18</sup> Bethge and Remmels, 48.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Lehmann, as quoted on British Broadcasting Corporation on March 13, 1960, BBC archive reference: LP26507-8, cited in Eberhard Bethge, 155.

were so delicate at the time, “the extent to which Bonhoeffer became a welcome guest in the homes of the outcasts of Harlem was astounding.”<sup>20</sup> This closeness with members of the Harlem church exposed Bonhoeffer to a great deal of African-American culture, particularly the music commonly known as spirituals. Bonhoeffer acquired several recordings of spirituals and played them for his students in later years in order to explore African-American theology.

His interest in African-American theology was particularly influenced by Abyssinian Baptist Church, specifically its pastor, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. Powell scholar Ralph Garlin Clingan notes that Powell used a unique hermeneutics in preaching, one he terms “spiritual biblical hermeneutics.”<sup>21</sup> These spiritual biblical hermeneutics, derived from Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Yale Divinity professor Samuel Harris, mark Powell as a “prophetic, Spiritual interpreter of the Bible, using Frederick Douglass’ works and the Spirituals’ interpretation of the Bible.”<sup>22</sup> Powell’s biblical interpretation differed from that of Bonhoeffer’s native Lutheranism; with Powell the Scripture is not only immediate and narrative, it is also emotive and all-encompassing. For Powell, biblical “texts justify and sanctify all of a person’s reasons, emotions, and actions.”<sup>23</sup> Consequently, Powell worked among a group of pastors employing the Scripture to recast the story of African-

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<sup>20</sup>Eberhard Bethge, 155.

<sup>21</sup>Ralph Garlin Clingan, *Against Cheap Grace in a World Come of Age: An Intellectual Biography of Clayton Powell, 1865-1953* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 17. Clingan uses the term “hermeneutics” to mean “biblical interpretation” rather than the cultural and theological hermeneutics of Bonhoeffer. As I noted in the opening chapter, there is some doubt surrounding Clingan’s research regarding Bonhoeffer. Consequently, I shall note Clingan’s assertion but not base my argument on his work unless I can corroborate his claims.

<sup>22</sup>Clingan, x; 17-19.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 19.

American culture, identifying the members of his congregation with those characters in the biblical narrative, not unlike the “baptist vision” described in the theology of James McClendon.<sup>24</sup> Later in this chapter, I shall demonstrate how Bonhoeffer’s reading strategy differs from that of McClendon’s, but the free church influence is nevertheless apparent in Bonhoeffer’s thought in *Discipleship*, as he grants that discipleship is essentially a “hermeneutical problem.”<sup>25</sup> This problem shall become clearer as the discussion progresses, particularly as I examine Bonhoeffer’s interaction with the free church.

As Bonhoeffer’s year in the United States drew to a close, his theological perspective had been broadened, and his style of reading Scripture had been deeply affected. The practical/ethical influences of Union professors, the literal reading of the Sermon on the Mount of presented by Lasserre, and the spiritual hermeneutics of Adam Clayton Powell all merged upon Bonhoeffer in a relatively short time. These converging streams of thought changed him personally and, consequently, his theological methodology. Writing to a friend from New York, Bonhoeffer explained he encountered some “‘new perspectives’ that [are] changing his philosophy and theology.”<sup>26</sup> Bethge does not name the change that Bonhoeffer underwent; he says Bonhoeffer would have resisted calling it a “conversion.”<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, Bethge maintains that upon his return from the United

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<sup>24</sup>Clingan, 19. I shall discuss the “baptist vision” at greater length later in this chapter. Cf. James Wm. McClendon, Jr., in his *Doctrine, Systematic Theology, Volume Two* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 44-6.

<sup>25</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 82.

<sup>26</sup>Eberhard Bethge, 206.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 174.

States people began to notice a change in Bonhoeffer, and that this change “marked the beginning of a phase in his life that continued right up to 1939.”<sup>28</sup>

The change Bonhoeffer underwent represents a new attitude toward Scripture and Christianity, an attitude unfamiliar to his academic phase. He said nothing explicitly to inform others of his shift, but those familiar with his personality and work began to notice subtle differences. To begin, he was much more concerned with regular church attendance; those who knew him prior to 1931 were “struck by how freely he behaved in this matter.”<sup>29</sup> Additionally, he moved from speaking about oral confession theologically to talking of it as “an act to be practiced”—a marked change from his student-phase theology.<sup>30</sup> His increased church attendance and practice of oral confession was also coupled with increasing references to “a communal life of obedience and prayer;” this interest stayed with him throughout his pastoral years, eventually manifesting itself at Finkenwalde in the *Brüderhaus* he formed as part of the Preachers’ Seminary in Finkenwalde.<sup>31</sup> His piety additionally carried at least some of the language and emotiveness of Powell on occasion. As one of Bonhoeffer’s students recalled a prayer meeting in 1932:

There, before the church struggle, he said to us at the new Alexanderplatz, with a simplicity like old Tholuck might have once used, that we should not forget that every word of Holy Scripture was a love letter from God directed very personally to us, and he asked us whether we loved Jesus.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 204.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Communication between J. Kanitz and Eberhard Bethge, 1955, cited in Eberhard Bethge, 204.

Perhaps most striking, Bonhoeffer joined all of these outward changes with a new interest in and reading of the Bible, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. In a letter to Bethge he wrote:

Then something happened, something that has changed and transformed my life to the present day. For the first time I discovered the Bible . . . I had often preached, I had seen a great deal of the church, spoken and preached about it—but I had not yet become a Christian. . . . *Then the Bible, and in particular the Sermon on the Mount*, freed me from that. Since then everything has changed.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, in a separate letter to his brother-in-law Rüdiger Schleicher, he wrote:

“And I want to say something to you personally: *since I learned to read the Bible this way*—which has not been long at all—it becomes more wonderful to me with each day.”<sup>34</sup> And again in a letter to his brother Karl-Friedrich: “I think I am right in saying that I would only achieve true inner clarity and honesty by really starting *to take the Sermon on the Mount seriously*.”<sup>35</sup> As Bonhoeffer rediscovered the Bible and the Sermon on the Mount, he “also practiced a meditative approach to the Bible that was obviously very different from the exegetical or homiletical use of it.”<sup>36</sup> This reading practice caught many of his students off guard; they commented regularly on it. He continued this meditative reading style for many years, teaching it to his seminary students. As a result of all of this, the Sermon on the Mount, particularly its peace commands, became more central to his thought and practice. As Bethge notes, “More and more frequently he quoted the

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<sup>33</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Letter from Finkenwalde, 27.1.1936,” in *Illegale Theologenausbildung: 1935-1937, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, Volume 14, ed. Herbert Anzinger (Berlin: Christian Kaiser, 1996), 112-14, cited in Eberhard Bethge, 205, emphasis mine.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 146-48, cited in Eberhard Bethge, 206, emphasis mine.

<sup>35</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “To Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer,” in *London: 1933-1935, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 13, ed. Keith Clements, trans. Isabel Best (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 284-5, emphasis mine.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.



Sermon on the Mount as a statement to be acted upon, not merely used as a mirror.”<sup>37</sup>

This new attitude toward the Bible capped a significant life change for Bonhoeffer, and it served as a precursor for later narrative theologians for whom the Scripture and Sermon on the Mount are central—namely Hauerwas, McClendon, and Yoder.<sup>38</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s renewed interest in the Bible and the Sermon on the Mount apparently stems from his American year and the theological influences he encountered while abroad. Most notably, his new method of reading the Sermon on the Mount bears striking similarities to that of Lasserre. While Bonhoeffer never left the theoretical aspect of theology behind, the writings of the pastoral years—as I shall demonstrate below—become more concerned with the concrete than either *Sanctorum Communio* or *Act and Being*. Bonhoeffer himself noted this late in his life, writing from his prison cell: “I don’t think I’ve ever changed very much, except perhaps at the time of my first impressions abroad...It was then I turned from phraseology to reality.”<sup>39</sup> As Bonhoeffer remembers it, his American trip served as a time when he moved from abstract and theoretical concepts toward reality.

Bonhoeffer’s student years are indeed intensely concerned with phraseology, as he calls it; as chapter two argued, *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* intentionally engage philosophy on a number of fronts in order to make their theological arguments. Despite the turn toward reality, I shall argue that his theological project did not *radically*

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Yoder is the pioneer among this group, and his *Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) is extremely influential for both McClendon and Hauerwas. Yoder embraces nonviolence as described in the Sermon on the Mount, something that both McClendon and Hauerwas follow in their works.

<sup>39</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Touchstone, 1971), 275.

change during his pastoral phase. His works from this period continue to be concerned with theological hermeneutics—interpreting reality from a theological perspective. Rather than solely interpreting the theoretical and philosophical, however, Bonhoeffer's theology after his year in New York is marked with a renewed interest in interpreting his concrete surroundings as well. Politics, economics, violence, and ecumenism all come to the forefront of his interpretive project during his pastoral years, further anticipating developments in contemporary narrative theology. As his focus moves from the phraseological to the real, his new way of reading the Bible and focusing upon the Sermon on the Mount increasingly informs his theological hermeneutics. In the following sections, I shall demonstrate how Bonhoeffer's theology engages Scripture in order to interpret reality, slowly moving from the theoretical to the concrete. First I shall focus on his time at the University of Berlin where his theological hermeneutics begin their turn toward reality. Then I shall turn my attention toward his later pastoral work, namely *Discipleship*.

### *Theology, Scripture, and Politics: The Lectures of 1932-33*

While Bonhoeffer's approach to Scripture was changing, so was his political climate. On January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany, bringing remarkable power to the relatively new—and nationalistic—National Socialist Party. Almost immediately Bonhoeffer and his family feared how Hitler's leadership would take Germany; Bonhoeffer himself predicted Germany would certainly end up at war.<sup>40</sup> The Nazi predilection for war-mongering and Bonhoeffer's renewed commitment to the peace commands of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount—along with Hitler soon being referred to as *Führer*—served as starting points for Bonhoeffer's theology at the time. Bonhoeffer

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<sup>40</sup>Eberhard Bethge, 257.

desired to continue his project of theological hermeneutics, interpreting the German situation from a distinctly Christian perspective, marking his move toward a post-Christendom vein of thought. With his new approach to Scripture, he executed a *two-part theological maneuver*. *First*, he emphasized the lordship of Jesus Christ in his university lectures of 1932-33 at the University of Berlin, operating as a sort of foil against Nazi concepts, similar to Yoder's project in *The Politics of Jesus*.<sup>41</sup> *Second*, he demonstrated how humanity redeemed in Christ could live out an alternative reality to Nazism (and other earthly governments) through obeying the commands of Scripture in the church-community in his *Discipleship*, much as Hauerwas would later do.<sup>42</sup>

In this section I shall examine the first aspect of that two-fold theological maneuver. I shall demonstrate how *Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology, coupled with his new reading of Scripture, led him to formulate a theology designed to engage and reinterpret his situation by emphasizing Christology*. This Christological emphasis, I shall argue, arises from the theological anthropology of his student years and his new commitment to the theological exegesis of Scripture. Bonhoeffer taught several courses over his two years at the University of Berlin: Twentieth-Century Systematic Theology, Ecclesiology, Christian Ethics, Creation and Fall, Christology, and a seminar on Hegel.<sup>43</sup> Most of the notes from these courses have been lost or destroyed, but substantive portions re-

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<sup>41</sup> Yoder, *Politics*, 89-92.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 13-16 describes this project of the church as an alternative to the government, and it echoes the writings begun in Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) in which Hauerwas argues for a constructive way of the church's engagement with culture in light of the gospel of peace.

<sup>43</sup> Eberhard Bethge, 212.

main from two of the courses—“Creation and Sin” and “Christology.” In the following sub-sections, I shall demonstrate how Bonhoeffer uses each of those courses to substantiate his Christology and its relationship to theological anthropology and how that relationship stems from his reading of Scripture within the church-community.

### Creation and Fall: *Reinterpreting the Völkisch Movement*

A central aspect of 1930s National Socialist propaganda centered upon the nationalistic concept of *Volk*—viewing the German people as a unified and racially special group.<sup>44</sup> The concept’s exact origins are unknown, but several World War II scholars attribute its genesis to German Romantic<sup>45</sup> writings of the nineteenth century, particularly those of Richard Wagner.<sup>46</sup> While the extent of Romantic influence upon the Nazi interpretation of the concept has been debated,<sup>47</sup> by the time of Hitler’s ascension to the Chancellorship, the National Socialists created a *völkisch* movement hinging upon the national and racial supremacy of the German people, commonly referred to as the Aryan race in Nazi communications. The *völkisch* movement seized upon nationalistic attitudes

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<sup>44</sup>For an explanation of the racially-charged propaganda that created the myth of *Volk* in Nazi Germany, cf. Joel Carmichael, “The Satanizing of the Jews: Origin and Development of Mystical Anti-Semitism,” in *A Holocaust Reader: From Ideology to Annihilation* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), 10-18.

<sup>45</sup>The premier pastor of nineteenth century Germany, Friedrich Schleiermacher, plays to this popular sentiment in his most famous writings. Cf. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H.R. Mackintosh (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 15, 23, for his thankfulness that one can be dependent upon the State and his *On Religions: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, ed. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1996), 9, for his generalizations about the “islanders” (British), the French, and the German populations.

<sup>46</sup>For example, Ian Kershaw, *Hitler* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson, 1991).

<sup>47</sup>Brian Vick, “The Origins of the German *Volk*: Cultural Purity and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Germany,” *German Studies Review* 26:2 (May 2003), 241-56 argues that the Romantic influence upon the Nazi interpretation and usage of *Volk* has been greatly exaggerated.

among grassroots German groups, highlighting German expertise in “heroic leadership” and advocating a German “expansion movement.”<sup>48</sup>

From a theological perspective, the *völkisch* movement represented a fracturing of the nation’s historical alignment with Christianity, finding messianic hope in leadership and race in post-Versailles Germany. As a result, religion and politics came together for many Germans, creating a new language of salvation. Ian Kershaw, the Hitler biographer, explains:

Among the broad spectrum of political and psychological forces which contributed to the shaping of the ‘heroic’ leadership idea, the pseudo-religious colouring is worthy of note. Partially derived from traditional acceptance of authority, partly too from the secularization of Christian belief in salvation —particularly among German Protestants, whose attachment to the Church was dwindling, but who were traditionally brought up to accept authority, particularly that of the State, the leadership idea being propagated by the *völkisch*-nationalist Right offered a kind of secularization of belief in salvation.<sup>49</sup>

Consequently, the German political scene of 1932 and 1933 was consumed with a fusing of the religious and the secular, with the German *Volk* finding an almost mystical identification with one another *en masse*. This collective person—to borrow Bonhoeffer’s phrase from *Sanctorum Communio*—of nationalistic fervor found its identity in the State, something Kathryn Tanner notes had been developing over time.<sup>50</sup> Further blending the political and the religious, “a wing developed in which *völkisch* political ideas

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<sup>48</sup>Peter Fritzsche, *Germans Into Nazis* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1998) describes the historical factors that created the *völkisch* movement in Germany, particularly Chapter Four, 139-161.

<sup>49</sup>Ian Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 18..

<sup>50</sup>Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 1997), 9, notes that in Germany the idea of “culture” almost always carried nationalistic tones and that the German notion of culture worked to “secure a sense of themselves as a distinct people.”

were blended in an unholy mixture with Christian revivalism.”<sup>51</sup> Kershaw explains that the Nazis promised a Christian renewal once political salvation was achieved under a true leader.<sup>52</sup> Bethge tells a similar story. He relates that once the Nazis had achieved a cult-like status in Berlin that one Sunday worshipers at Magdeburg Cathedral were greeted by an altar surrounded by swastika flags. The cathedral dean, Ernst Martin, explained: “It has simply become the symbol of German hope. Whoever reviles this symbol is reviling our Germany.”<sup>53</sup> In 1932, as Bonhoeffer prepared to offer his lectures on Genesis at the University of Berlin, the question of human identity in relation to government, particularly that of Germans, was of utmost importance.

Unsurprisingly, Bonhoeffer’s lectures deal extensively with the theological answers to the question of human identification through a close reading of the first three chapters of Genesis. *Creation and Fall*—originally titled “Creation and Sin”—represents Bonhoeffer’s first extensive work of theological exposition of Scripture.<sup>54</sup> The style is similar (though not identical) to Karl Barth’s theological commentaries on the Bible; Bonhoeffer likely patterned his book somewhat after Barth’s, while adopting his own style.<sup>55</sup> In each chapter, Bonhoeffer interprets a section of Genesis 1-3 theologically, em-

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<sup>51</sup> Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth,’* 18-19.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>53</sup> Eberhard Bethge, 257.

<sup>54</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 3, ed. John W. deGruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997). Bonhoeffer’s original title of the lectures, “Creation and Sin,” was changed in order to avoid confusion with another book of the same title. The lectures were published at the request of Bonhoeffer’s students.

<sup>55</sup> At the time of *Creation and Fall*’s publication, Barth had already written three theological commentaries on the Bible: *The Epistle to the Romans*, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, and *The Epistle to the Philippians*.

phasizing a theological reading of the passage of Scripture. Bonhoeffer taught these lectures during the Winter Semester of 1932-33, as Hitler and the National Socialist party were gaining popularity in Berlin. Prior to the conclusion of these lectures, Hitler had been named Chancellor and the *völkisch* movement was sweeping across Germany. Consequently, while *Creation and Fall* stays close to the biblical text and its *perennial* theological task of church-centered Scriptural exposition, the *timely* project of subtle theological hermeneutics remains just below the surface. Unlike *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, *Creation and Fall* does not make one single, sustained theological argument *per se*. It does, however, further develop Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology, exploring human identity in Christ over against any other reality. In doing so, it seemingly takes the opportunity to cast the person of Christ and the church-community as a redeemed reality in contrast to earthly governments, emphasizing the Lordship and primacy of Christ against the *völkisch* movement.

While reading and interpreting Genesis, Bonhoeffer employs the language of story (yet another precursor to narrative theology)<sup>56</sup> in order to posit his theological anthropology as substantiated by the Genesis story: *beginning, middle, and end*.<sup>57</sup> He indicates his intention to do so at the start of *Creation and Fall*: "The church of Christ witnesses to the end of all things. It lives from the end, it thinks from the end, it acts from the end, it proclaims its message from the end."<sup>58</sup> The end is clear for those who are in

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<sup>56</sup>Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, "A Story-Formed Community: Reflections on *Watership Down*," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 171-199.

<sup>57</sup>This seems to be an early version of Bonhoeffer's penultimate and ultimate—categories that become quite important in his *Ethics*.

<sup>58</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 21.

the church and it gives clarity to the remainder of the story; the church is an eschatological reality, with, as McClendon says, “one vision, one faith, one hope.”<sup>59</sup> Bonhoeffer’s theological task in *Creation and Fall* lies in reading the story of creation and fall (with its particular emphasis upon *beginning*) and allowing that story to be *informed by the end* of the story as testified by the Scripture. It is here that his new appreciation and method of reading the Bible comes to the forefront: “The church of Holy Scripture . . . lives from the end. Therefore it reads the whole of Holy Scripture as the book of the end, of the new, of Christ.”<sup>60</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s emphasis upon the structure of story and his insistence upon the church’s reading from the end of that story marks the introduction of eschatology into his thought. Prior to *Creation and Fall*, eschatology is not explicitly discussed in his writings. Bonhoeffer’s new approach to Scripture, however, also shifts his theological approach, allowing the eschatological aspects of the church’s existence to take a greater role. This eschatological emphasis informs his theological interpretation, not only in his pastoral years, but also during his time in the resistance. Later theological categories of Bonhoeffer’s like “penultimate” and “ultimate” also emphasize the eschatological nature of the church, literally translating as “things before the last” and “last things.” While the

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<sup>59</sup>McClendon, *Doctrine*, 69. McClendon’s volume on doctrine *begins* with eschatology, for he argues that the church must understand how God’s rule will look if they are to embody it in the here and now. Much like Bonhoeffer, McClendon believes the present part of the story must be informed by the end of the story.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.



terminology changes, Bonhoeffer continues to grapple with the tension between present and future realities for the church.<sup>61</sup>

Because the church interprets reality based upon the end of the story of Scripture, it must read all of Scripture in this light. It can do this, he argues, for the “Bible is after all nothing other than the book of the church. It is this in its very essence, or it is nothing.”<sup>62</sup> Bonhoeffer intends to read the beginning of the story with the end in mind. He does this with confidence because the Bible’s story, and thus the story of humanity, belong to Christ. As McClendon puts it, “The Bible is a book whose explanation centers in the one upon whom it centers—Jesus, and the God whose gospel Jesus preached.”<sup>63</sup> Consequently, Bonhoeffer interprets the Bible theologically for the very reason that the Bible is the church’s book. “This is its presupposition, and this presupposition constitutes its method.”<sup>64</sup> Bonhoeffer intends to examine the story of the beginning of humanity as found in Genesis, while viewed from its end in Christ.

The *beginning of the story of humanity*, however, is difficult to ascertain. The Bible’s beginning is hard to understand, for it starts “where our own most impassioned waves of thinking break, are thrown back upon themselves, and lose their strength in spray and foam.”<sup>65</sup> The best human thinking about the beginning of human time and existence is foiled, Bonhoeffer says, because it cannot find the ultimate starting point. As

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<sup>61</sup> Bonhoeffer employs the terms “penultimate” and “ultimate” in his *Ethics* as he examines the difference between the present and the future and their relationship to Christ. These terms roughly correlate to his use of “middle” and “end” here in *Creation and Fall*.

<sup>62</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 22.

<sup>63</sup> McClendon, *Doctrine*, 38.

<sup>64</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 22.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

humanity asks “Why?” in order to move closer to the origin, the answer only provides another “Why?” Consequently, he argues, “where thinking looks to itself as the beginning, it posits itself as an object, as an entity over against itself, and so again and again withdraws behind this object.”<sup>66</sup> Such thinking eventually is futile, Bonhoeffer asserts, for “It is therefore impossible for thinking to make this final pronouncement about the beginning.”<sup>67</sup> Confirming the conclusions Marsh makes<sup>68</sup> regarding *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, he asserts that “[o]nly the church, which knows of the end, knows also of the beginning.”<sup>69</sup> Because the church knows the end centers upon the death and resurrection of Christ, it also knows that the beginning is in Christ “because it believes in Christ and in nothing else.”<sup>70</sup>

While Bonhoeffer does not explicitly say so, by positing that the beginning of humanity lies inseparably with Christ, he seemingly tackles the *völkisch* idea of identity and origin in nationalism. Where Nazi ideology might suggest an origin in race and the collective person of Germany, Bonhoeffer instead argues that such identification is evil. The evil one, he asserts “will say: I am the beginning, and you, O humankind, are the beginning. You were with me from the beginning.”<sup>71</sup> Human identity at the beginning can only be found in Christ. Bonhoeffer argues, “No one can speak of the beginning but the

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> As I noted in the previous chapter, Marsh argues that, for Bonhoeffer, any form of knowing must allow for revelation and/or transcendence from God—outside of humanity.

<sup>69</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 22.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 28.

one who was in the beginning”—Christ.<sup>72</sup> Thus for Bonhoeffer, human identification and origin lies squarely with Christ. The beginning of the story is found with him; any other version of the story that posits a different origin for humanity is a misrepresentation of the story and, therefore, evil.

*The middle of the story*, Bonhoeffer argues, is the present. While he spends relatively little space explaining the beginning, the majority of *Creation and Fall* explores the middle of the story—human existence today. He writes, “Humankind no longer lives in the beginning; instead, it has lost the beginning. Now it finds itself in the middle, knowing neither the end nor the beginning.”<sup>73</sup> Without the primal knowledge of beginning or end, humanity is adrift. Only those who know the story of Scripture are able to find their bearings and properly interpret existence—this middle where humanity finds itself. Thus the story, the word spoken by God, is for Bonhoeffer an essential directive for those living in the middle. As he says, “In the beginning God created...This word, spoken and heard as a human word, is the form of a servant in which...God encounters us and in which alone God wills to be found.”<sup>74</sup> Human existence in the middle finds its mooring with the word of God found in the story of Scripture. With the story, humans are able to actually understand the middle *as the middle*—hearkening back to the ecclesial knowing from chapter two—where they find themselves and live appropriately. This concept of middle is quite similar to what Bonhoeffer will suggest in his *Ethics* regarding the category of the “penultimate.”

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 30.

Appropriate living for those in the middle, according to Bonhoeffer, stems from the understanding of humanity as creature. Our “creatureliness,”<sup>75</sup> as he calls it, contains a duality of freedom and dependence (concepts he later fleshes out in *Ethics*<sup>76</sup>); as Jean Bethke Elshtain writes, for Bonhoeffer, we are free in love and action, but we are simultaneously dependent upon others and God.<sup>77</sup> Despite the human tendency to search for the truth of God among the abstract and mathematical,<sup>78</sup> Bonhoeffer argues our creatureliness depends upon our freedom *for* one another and our freedom *from* the rest of the created world.<sup>79</sup> Recalling his theological anthropology from *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, he again asserts that we are free in our relationships, but that those relationships are ultimately defined by being-free-for one another. Elshtain says, “Being free means ‘being free for the other,’ because the other has bound me to him.”<sup>80</sup> Such relational freedom for the other and from the rest of creation is modeled after God’s own freedom; it constitutes the *imago dei* in Bonhoeffer’s reading of Genesis.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Bonhoeffer uses the term “creatureliness” multiple times throughout *Creation and Fall*, the first instance being on page 64.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 6, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Scott (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 163-ff.

<sup>77</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Who Are We?: Critical Reflections and Hopeful Possibilities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 15-22, does an excellent job of unpacking Bonhoeffer’s understanding of creatureliness.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Bonhoeffer’s discussion of mathematics on pp. 52-ff. “Numbers are not the truth of God itself,” *Creation and Fall*, 53.

<sup>79</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 66.

<sup>80</sup> Elshtain, 15.

<sup>81</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 60-ff.

In the Fall, this relational freedom and responsibility morphs from the image of God into humanity striving to be like God. In Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve eat of the fruit of the tree, they reject their relational harmony with one another and with God. In doing so, they reject the *imago dei* in favor of becoming what Bonhoeffer calls *sicut deus* (like God). When humanity chooses to rebel against God and reject its *imago dei* and become *sicut deus*, the *imago dei* can only be restored by one who is both *imago dei* and *sicut deus*—the *agnus dei* (lamb of God): Jesus Christ. Thus for Bonhoeffer, in order for humans to live in *imago dei* within the middle of the story—the penultimate—will eventually require them to embrace the sacrifice of Jesus. Only in embracing this sacrifice can they fully embrace their humanity.<sup>82</sup>

The middle of the story, as Bonhoeffer reads it, can be seen as a radical departure from the *völkisch* movement and its interpretation. As Bonhoeffer well knew, a theological concept known as “orders of creation” gained influence among the *völkisch* movement, arguing that God had particularly created different groups of people so that some might rule over others, thus propagating the Nazi myth.<sup>83</sup> Martin Rüter and Ilse Tödt point out that the German theologian Wilhelm Stählin subscribed to precisely this position, prompting Bonhoeffer to respond to the fallacious theory of “orders of creation.”<sup>84</sup> This theological concept attempts to rearrange and reinterpret the Genesis account, moving the *imago dei* from freedom in relationships. *Creation and Fall* utilizes its interpretation of *imago dei* and the middle of the story and reinterprets the “orders of creation,”

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 113.

<sup>83</sup>Cf. Eberhard Bethge, 215, 217, 219.

<sup>84</sup>Martin Rüter and Ilse Tödt, “Editors’ Afterword to the German Edition,” in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 148.

instead positing that they should properly be understood as the “orders of preservation.” Bonhoeffer argues that every aspect of creation is subservient to God: “None of these orders, however, has in itself any eternal character, for all are there only to uphold or preserve life.”<sup>85</sup> This theme of preservation, as Barry Harvey notes, “continues to pervade Bonhoeffer’s thinking,” battling the tendency for a static created order, instead creating room for Christ to preserve those things in the creation that are initially turned toward him—what he later calls “the natural” in the *Ethics*.<sup>86</sup> Creation is preserved *by* Christ so that it might be preserved *for* Christ when it reaches its end. The middle of the story, Bonhoeffer argues, is preserved by Christ so that it might one day have the proper ending.<sup>87</sup>

*The end of the story* can be seen, Bonhoeffer says, when the curse arrives in Genesis 3. Adam, the source of life, fathers Cain, the soon-to-be murderer. Death is about to spring forth from among humanity; death is an eventual aspect of the story. So for Bonhoeffer, from the perspective of the church reading the story, “the end of all history is Christ on the cross, the murdered Son of God.”<sup>88</sup> Despite this murder, Christ lives, so the “trunk of the cross becomes the wood of life” from which redemption and wholeness springs.<sup>89</sup> It is an odd ending, Bonhoeffer admits. He says, “What a strange para-

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<sup>85</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 139.

<sup>86</sup> Harvey, 78.

<sup>87</sup> Bonhoeffer no longer uses the term “orders of preservation” after *Creation and Fall*, but does continue to argue for creation’s preservation by the work of Christ in his later work, particularly his *Ethics*. Cf. Harvey, 64-82.

<sup>88</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 145.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

dise is this hill of Golgotha, this cross, this blood, this broken body.”<sup>90</sup> Human existence finds its end in knowing that death is conquered through Jesus Christ; the death of God’s Son gives freedom and paradise.<sup>91</sup> Here theological anthropology is recast through the suffering and death of Jesus, a theme considered more completely in *Discipleship*.

Bonhoeffer’s final hermeneutical exercise redefines the end of the story, seemingly implicitly engaging his contemporary situation. Where the *völkisch* movement argues for an end in which power is central, Bonhoeffer argues that the acknowledgment of death on a cross and the resurrection of Jesus provides completion. They are starkly contrasting metaphors: the “expansion movement” of the *Volk* and the odd paradise of Golgotha’s broken body. In suggesting such an end, Bonhoeffer echoes classic readings of Christian eschatology, but he also positions his Christology towards weakness, possibly anticipating his Christological formulations of the prison writings articulated in the “suffering God.”<sup>92</sup> In any case, *Creation and Fall*’s reading of Genesis provides a restating of Bonhoeffer’s theological anthropology tied closely to the biblical narrative. By reading Genesis in this manner, Bonhoeffer not only continues his project of theological interpretation but moves Christology and Scripture into more central roles, furthering his conception of the church-community and anticipating later developments of narrative theology.

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Bonhoeffer’s telling of the end of the story here in *Creation and Fall* acts as a predecessor to his later meditations on suffering and their effects on anthropology written in his prison letters.

<sup>92</sup>Bonhoeffer’s prison writings center on a Christology grounded in weakness and suffering. I shall deal more extensively with that approach in chapter four.

## Christ the Center: *Reinterpreting the Führer Concept*

Part of the Nazi mythology centered upon the concept of *Führer*—that of ultimate leader. For Wagner, the *Führer* was human as an individual, but as the leader of the *Volk*, he achieved a semi-immortal, demigod status.<sup>93</sup> With this concept of a heroic, demigod-type leader in its conceptual background, German politics often swarmed around the search for a charismatic leader, not unlike the anticipation of a Messiah. As Kershaw notes, “[‘Heroic’ leadership] can justifiably be regarded as one of the central ideas of the anti-democratic movement in the Weimar Republic and one of its indispensable articles of faith.”<sup>94</sup> Because of the idea’s genesis in Wagner and the Romantics<sup>95</sup> and its perpetuation through the Weimar Republic, the “idea and the image of a ‘*Führer* of the Germans’ had therefore already been moulded long before it was fitted to Hitler, and for years existed side by side with the growth of Nazism without it being obvious . . . that Hitler himself was *the* leader for whom they had been waiting.”<sup>96</sup> Hitler, it seems, was opportunistic enough to seize the title at the right moment in history.<sup>97</sup>

With the *Führer* concept already embedded in the culture of German politics, Hitler worked to position himself more and more as the charismatic leader around whom Germans could rally. Kershaw states, “A prominent Nazi declared in 1934 that in the

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<sup>93</sup>Peter Robert Edwin Viereck, *Metapolitics: From Wagner and the German Romantics to Hitler* (Edison, NJ: Transaction, 2003), 110-11.

<sup>94</sup>Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’*, 13.

<sup>95</sup>For example, Friedrich Schleiermacher. See footnote #45.

<sup>96</sup>Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’*, 13, emphasis Kershaw’s.

<sup>97</sup>Richard von Weizsäcker, *From Weimar to the Wall: My Life in German Politics*, trans. Ruth Hein (New York: Broadway, 1997), 42-51, describes how even life-long politicians were surprised by the ease with which the *völkisch* movement swept Germany with the *Führer* concept.



Third Reich it was ‘the duty of everybody to try to work towards the *Führer* along the lines he would wish.’”<sup>98</sup> Hitler worked to make that propaganda a reality, creating a cult of personality embodied in what was commonly referred to as the “charismatic community.”<sup>99</sup> The charismatic community extended beyond close friends and allies out to the ordinary citizens of Germany, those who would be bound “by the bonds of personal loyalty of an archaic, quasi-feudal kind, deriving from their recognition of his ‘mission’ and his ‘achievements,’ and reciprocated by Hitler.”<sup>100</sup> The reciprocation manifested itself in recognition, thus further fueling the charismatic community and its symbols.

Soon after being named Chancellor, Hitler capitalized on this symbolic notion of *Führer* with the prominent salute of, “*Heil, Hitler!*” Ron Rosenbaum notes that the *Heil* salutation fed the *Führer* concept with its public prominence and continued the fusion of the holy and secular in the persona of the *Führer*. The German term *Heil* is a derivative of the word “holy,” making the proclamation of the *Heil* salutation essentially a statement of the *Führer*’s god-like status. Thus the sign is “[l]ess a salutation than a prayer.”<sup>101</sup> Because National Socialism had swept the nation, and because the German political *ethos* had been looking for an ultimate leader since Wagner, there was substantial social pressure to subscribe to the Hitler personality cult, even if one had reason to oppose it. Consequently, Kershaw claims, those who were only “lukewarm” supporters of Hitler but

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<sup>98</sup>Kershaw, *Hitler*, 8.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 13. Ron Rosenbaum makes an excellent case that Hitler was an extraordinarily charismatic individual complete with characteristics so maniacal and odd that many members of the charismatic community bought into Hitler’s claim to be *Führer* because he was so odd. Cf. Ron Rosenbaum, *Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil* (New York: Random House, 1998), 165.

<sup>100</sup>Kershaw, *Hitler*, 13.

<sup>101</sup>Rosenbaum, 165.

continued to display the *Heil* salutation due to social pressure “objectively contributed to the enhancement of the ‘charismatic’ *Führer* cult.”<sup>102</sup> This is somewhat ironic since Bethge relates a story where both he and Bonhoeffer offered the obligatory salute after France’s surrender to Germany:

While we were enjoying the sun, suddenly the fanfare boomed out of the cafe’s loudspeaker, signaling a special announcement: the message that France had surrendered. The people around the tables could hardly contain themselves; they jumped up, and some even climbed on the chairs. With outstretched arms they sang “*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*” and the *Horst Wessel* song. We had stood up, too. Bonhoeffer raised his arm in the regulation Hitler salute, while I stood there dazed. “Raise your arm! Are you crazy?” he whispered to me, and later: “We shall have to run risks for very different things now, but not for that salute!”<sup>103</sup>

Bonhoeffer obviously would take issue with the assertion that he was propagating the Hitler myth by offering the *Heil* salutation. While he may have offered the regulation salutation from time to time, his project of theological hermeneutics clearly worked to undermine the *Führer* myth. Meanwhile, the German church was co-opted by the Nazis in 1933, and those who followed both Christ and Hitler took the name German Christians. The German Christians openly professed their allegiance to Hitler in confession form, claiming, “As He has for every people, the eternal God has also created a unique law for our people. It has taken form in the *Führer* Adolf Hitler and in the National Socialist State formed by him,” with the climactic proclamation, “One People! - One God! - One Reich! - One Church!”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Kershaw, *Hitler*, 13.

<sup>103</sup>Eberhard Bethge, 681.

<sup>104</sup>“Richtlinien der Kirchenbewegung ‘Deutsche Christen’ in Thüringen (vom 11 Dezember 1933) über die ‘Deutsche Christliche Nationalkirche’,” in *Der Nationalsozialismus: Dokumente 1933–1945*, ed. Walther Hofer (Frankfurt an Main: Fischer, 1962), 131. Passage translated by Barry A. Harvey.

The *Führer* concept was of increasing concern to Bonhoeffer as it gained popularity in Berlin. In February 1933, he delivered a radio address at the Potsdamerstrasse *Voxhaus* (broadcasting house), entitled, “The Younger Generation’s Altered View of the Concept of the *Führer*.” The radio address provided a warning to the *Führer*, cautioning him to be careful that his leadership not degenerate into that of *Verführer* (“seducer”). The transmission of Bonhoeffer’s broadcast was cut off before he finished.<sup>105</sup>

With Bonhoeffer’s concern already documented in his radio broadcast, and with the rise of the German Christian movement serving both Christ and *Führer*, Bonhoeffer chose Christology as the topic of his Summer 1933 lectures at the University of Berlin. My reading of the Christology lectures shall demonstrate that Bonhoeffer’s lectures are—like his other pastoral works—both *perennial* and *timely*. They are *perennial* in that the lectures, published posthumously as *Christ the Center*, are on one level a clear articulation of Christology.<sup>106</sup> But, much like *Creation and Fall*, I shall suggest that the Christology lectures also are *timely*—engaging in subtle theological hermeneutics, interpreting the *Führer* concept through the lordship of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer achieves this goal, I argue, by examining theological anthropology in an extended manner. Where *Creation and Fall* concerns itself heavily with constructive theological anthropology, *Christ the Center* shifts the focus, examining theological anthropology as it relates to the lordship of Christ. In both works, that anthropology centers in the church-community.

Consequently, the opening statements of the lectures can be read in a dual fashion. In his preliminary remarks, Bonhoeffer asserts, “Teaching about Christ begins in

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<sup>105</sup>Eberhard Bethge, 259.

<sup>106</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

silence.”<sup>107</sup> Citing Kierkegaard, Cyril of Alexandria, and Luther, Bonhoeffer asserts that those who know Christ must begin in a position of silence before God’s Word in order to understand him. On one hand, this is a *perennial* theological assertion. On the other hand, this insistence upon silence in learning seems to be a thinly veiled reference to the political climate of his day. The Nazi propaganda strategy centered on a mob mentality, encouraging large and boisterous gatherings to celebrate the victories of Germany. For example, on January 30, 1933, the day of Hitler’s ascension to the Chancellorship, an impromptu parade was held, with the crowds called out into the street in jubilant expectation.<sup>108</sup> “As the parade set in motion ‘at exactly eight o’clock,’” according to the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, “the roars of the crowds were deafening.”<sup>109</sup> This parade began a pattern of behavior, and the Nazis continued to regularly parade and noisily assemble, declaring their greatness. Contrary to this noise, Bonhoeffer asserts that teaching—and learning—about Christ begins in silence. The outset of his lectures, it seems, intends to contrast and undermine the myth of *Führer* and replace it with the reality of Christ. In order to go about this, Bonhoeffer decides to focus his Christology primarily upon the question of Christ’s identity. For Bonhoeffer, *who* Christ is takes precedence over *how* he is and *what* he does.<sup>110</sup>

In order to examine Christ’s identity, Bonhoeffer uses chronological language in his Christology lectures similar to the metaphorical language of narrative structure in

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<sup>107</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ*, 27.

<sup>108</sup> Fritzsche, 137-140.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>110</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ*, 32-33, 38-39.

*Creation and Fall*. But rather than structuring his argument around the concepts of beginning, middle, and end, he centers his discussion around three ideas: *the present Christ*, *the historical Christ*, and *the eternal Christ*. *The present Christ* seemingly corresponds to the middle of the story referred to in *Creation and Fall* and the penultimate from *Ethics*. But where *Creation and Fall* focuses on human existence in the present, *Christ the Center* accentuates how Christ is *really present in the here and now*. The starting point for Bonhoeffer's Christology is viewing Jesus as the God-Man—the divine incarnation.<sup>111</sup> Christ is present, as such, *in the church through the proclamation of the Word, the administering of the sacraments, and the actions of the congregation*.<sup>112</sup> Each of these manifestations of Christ's presence in the present world, represent a *pro me* structure, as Bonhoeffer calls it, one that exhibits Christ's true purpose in being present. He states, "The structure of his person must be outlined more clearly and unfolded as the *pro me* structure (that is, the structure I can relate to) of the God-Man Jesus Christ. Christ is Christ, not just for himself, but in relation to me."<sup>113</sup> This relation, as Bonhoeffer calls it, echoes the social ontology of *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*—namely *being-for-each-other*. Through the Christology lectures, Bonhoeffer argues that Jesus embodies the being-for-each-other within the church-community he proposed during his dissertations.

The fact that Christ exists for the other rather than simply himself serves as a theological foundation for Bonhoeffer's Christology. "That Christ is *pro me* is not an his-

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid. All three of these aspects reflect a consistent position from his dissertations, particularly *Sanctorum Communio*. The church-community is effectively the church-community when it preaches the Word (Christ), when it administers the sacraments (the presence of Christ), and when it gathers (in the congregation).

<sup>113</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 46.

torical, nor an ontic statement, but an ontological one. Christ can never be thought of as being for himself, but only in relation to me.”<sup>114</sup> Just as humans exist for one another within the church-community as posited in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer argues that Christ himself is ontologically relational, existing for others. This *pro me* existence of being-for-each-other extends to all of the manifestations of his presence: Word, sacrament, and church-community. In each of those manifestations, Christ exists *pro me*—for the other. As the Word, Christ serves to address the members of the community in order to speak truth.<sup>115</sup> As sacrament, “Christ is by our side as creature, among us, brother with brother.”<sup>116</sup> And as the church-community, the Word and sacrament bring Christ’s presence into the church-community so that “Christ existing as Church is the whole person, the one who is exalted and who is humiliated.”<sup>117</sup> These three manifestations of Christ’s presence represent the *pro me* nature of Christ within the church-community over against the “sinful flesh” of Adam, further reflecting the argument of *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*.<sup>118</sup> This ecclesial-centered Christology recasts humanity within the church-community, giving it an identity separate from the rest of the world, much like later narrative theologies. As Hauerwas puts it, “The church doesn’t have a social strategy, the church *is* a social strategy.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 43.

Bonhoeffer uses the manifestations of Christ's presence within the church-community to demonstrate the *pro me* nature of Christ in relation to humanity. Bonhoeffer explains, "At this place, I cannot stand alone. At this place stands Christ, between me and me, the old and the new existence. Thus Christ is at one and the same time, my boundary and my rediscovered centre."<sup>120</sup> Bonhoeffer argues Christ furthers his *pro me* status by serving as three important centers for humanity: the center of human existence, the center of history, and the center between God and nature. As human existence, Christ enacts his *pro me* by "standing where man has failed before the law."<sup>121</sup> As the center of history, Christ is *pro me* since history "is tormented of fulfilling corrupt messianic promises"—a thinly veiled reference to human governments.<sup>122</sup> And as the center between God and nature, he represents the new creation that is to come for nature when it is freed.<sup>123</sup> With each of these centers, Bonhoeffer further argues for the *pro me* nature of Christ in the present. His argument is quite simple: Christ exists for the other, even in aspects beyond the human other like history and nature.

If my assertion is correct that *Christ the Center* is also participating in subtle engagement with National Socialism, the *pro me* nature of Christ stands in stark contrast to the *Führer* concept. Where Christ exists for others and stands with others at the center of their being, the Nazis demanded complete allegiance to Hitler, arguing that each German should work in the best way for the *Führer*. Consequently, while Christ stands as Lord

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<sup>120</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 60. This is reminiscent of something Bonhoeffer says in his *Letters and Papers From Prison*, "I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but at the center, not in weaknesses but in strength," 282.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 64. Here Bonhoeffer continues to develop his eschatological framework.

over creation in Bonhoeffer's estimation, thus requiring obedience, his lordship is one of relationship with consideration for the other. With Hitler, his demand for obedience was complete, propagating his ascension to power as that of a demigod. It seems clear that Bonhoeffer's opening assertions that Christ is the only God-Man because of the Incarnation undermines the Nazi claim of god-like status for the *Führer*. Further, by asserting Christ's presence in Word, sacrament, and the congregation of the church-community, Bonhoeffer further argues that the church already has a God-Man presently serving as Lord and has no need of another. Thus the swastika-draped altars of the German Christians described earlier by Bethge are rebuffed as he argues for Christ to be singularly present within the church-community. In other words, for Bonhoeffer, humanity is defined by its relation to the church-community and the collective person of Christ, not its relationship to the State.

The second part of Bonhoeffer's lectures, *the historical Christ*, focuses more attention upon correctly understanding the Incarnation. Bonhoeffer refuses to get bogged down in many of the theological questions of the Incarnation, but he does address some of the historical heresies of the doctrine in this section. More importantly, however, he argues that *the identity of Jesus must be ascertained from the story of Scripture in particular*.

Bonhoeffer's theological discussion begins with the scholarly search for the historical Jesus. He states his opinion at the beginning: "The present Christ of whom we have spoken so far is the historical Christ. But this historical Christ is Jesus of Nazareth in history."<sup>124</sup> On one hand, Bonhoeffer wants to move beyond the search for the histori-

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<sup>124</sup>Ibid., 69.



cal Jesus, arguing that theologically any attempt to separate Jesus of Nazareth from the Pauline Christ will result in failure. On the other hand, Bonhoeffer refuses to abandon historical-critical methodology in studying the Scriptures, for such study teaches believers invaluable knowledge about how to read the Bible. He says, “[The Bible] must be read and interpreted. It will be read with all the help possible from historical and philosophical criticism.”<sup>125</sup> But with this critical reading methodology in hand, the Bible must also be trusted as the source by which humanity knows the God-Man Jesus, “because the witness of Jesus Christ to himself is none other than that which the Scriptures deliver to us and which comes to us by no other way than by the Word of the Scriptures.”<sup>126</sup> As Hans Frei—perhaps the father of narrative theology—quipped, “the doctrine is not the meaning of the story but rather the story is the meaning of the doctrine.”<sup>127</sup>

Because Bonhoeffer relies on the Scriptures to relay the story of Jesus, his positive Christology revolves less on understanding heresy and more on emphasizing Jesus’ identity as revealed by the narrative of Scripture, much like Frei suggests. His reading of the Scripture emphasizes two aspects of Jesus’ identity: his being incarnate and his being simultaneously humiliated and exalted. As the Incarnate One, Jesus speaks God’s blessing on humanity, for the “incarnation is the message of the glorification of God, who sees his honor in becoming man.”<sup>128</sup> The incarnation furthers the *pro me* of Jesus, as Jesus understands humanity by becoming human. As the one who is both humiliated and ex-

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<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 73.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid.

<sup>127</sup>Hans Frei, quoted in William C. Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 15.

<sup>128</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 105.

alted, Bonhoeffer acknowledges that through the crucifixion and living “incognito, as a beggar among beggars, as an outcast among outcasts, as despairing among the despairing, as dying among the dying” that Jesus completely understands sin.<sup>129</sup> By this understanding, he is able to overcome sin and become glorified by God through the resurrection. Through Jesus’ humiliation, he is *pro me*; through his exaltation, he is *pro me*. In this aspect, the historical Christ corroborates the present Christ by relating to the other. In both humiliation and exaltation, humanity is tied to Christ, and thus back to the church-community.

By accenting the story of Scripture, Bonhoeffer apparently works further at timely engagement to undermine the Nazi myth of *Führer* by insisting that the story of Scripture is reliable. For Bonhoeffer, the story of Scripture testifies to the Incarnate One: Jesus. Jesus differs from Hitler in that he embraces his humanity, and his humanity makes him accept and identify with the common person. Karl Barth puts it this way: “Jesus Christ is in His one Person, as true *God*, *man*’s loyal partner, and as true *man*, *God*’s.”<sup>130</sup> Conversely, Hitler’s humanity was almost ignored as he propelled to demigod status. Additionally, by accenting Jesus’ acceptance of humiliation, he contrasts the lordship of Jesus with that of Hitler. Rather than seeking power, Jesus embraced humiliation and death; this tells the story of God’s divine glorification and exaltation. Hitler, however, sought power and fame. The *pro me* nature of Christ is similarly emphasized in this section as well, further distancing Christ from *Führer*. In each case, Bonhoeffer’s Christology stands in sharp relief from the Nazi *Führer* and its mythology.

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 107.

<sup>130</sup>Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1960), 46.

No extant notes remain from Bonhoeffer's final section of his Christology lectures: *the eternal Christ*.<sup>131</sup> Given the first two sections, however, it seems clear that Bonhoeffer's Christology intends to emphasize the *pro me* aspect of Christ, even into eternity, providing justification for humanity. Conversely, Bonhoeffer might have extrapolated on the temporal nature of the world or perhaps simply noted that only Christ can provide eternal life. He might have chosen to further develop the eschatological story of the church, talking of the end of the story from *Creation and Fall* and looking forward to the "ultimate" in his forthcoming *Ethics*. Given the central role of Christology in Bonhoeffer's late writings, particularly the *Ethics* and his prison letters, one wonders if the lectures on the eternal nature of Christ would point toward later aspects of Bonhoeffer's Christology, namely vicarious representation from *Ethics* or "Christ in a world come of age" from the prison writings.<sup>132</sup> Both of those themes present Christ present and active in the world, both in the present, but also for all of eternity. Given that Bonhoeffer reaches back toward his being-for-one-another social ontology, it seems reasonable that these lectures might look forward toward his last writings, anticipating his theological developments. In any case, one can be certain that his examination of Christology would have inevitably turned back toward the church-community—the most enduring of all his theological themes.

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<sup>131</sup>The course may never have been completed or may have been completed in a cursory fashion so that copious notes are not available. The German edition of the lectures provides no textual clues, but it titles the final section "*Positiv Christologie*" rather than "The Eternal Christ." The English version entitled *Christ the Center* simply states, "There is no trace of any notes on the third part of this lecture series. It is thought that it was never completed," (p. 117). Bethge's biography adds, "Only at the end did he attempt to develop a positive Christology, for which he had little time left. But he made suggestions and formulations that he recalled ten years later when he began to revise his theology," (p. 220).

<sup>132</sup>I shall discuss both of these concepts in chapter four.

### *Concrete Community: Church Formation Within the Third Reich*

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that Bonhoeffer's pastoral phase hinges on a two-part theological maneuver. Where the previous section emphasized the first part—theological anthropology rooted in Christology—this section will detail the second half of the theological maneuver. I shall argue that Bonhoeffer's pastoral works, particularly *Discipleship*, posit a theology in which *humanity redeemed in Christ can live out a re-deemed reality in contrast to earthly politics by obeying the commands of Scripture in the church-community*.<sup>133</sup> In order to do this, I shall briefly highlight Bonhoeffer's biographical journey at this juncture in his life, noting how concrete community and the Sermon on the Mount emerged as crucial to his thought. Then I shall examine *Discipleship* in light of this biographical information, pointing out how the exegesis of Scripture, emphasis on obedience, and the Sermon on the Mount allow him to posit an alternative community.

#### *Reading the Scripture Plainly: Bonhoeffer in London*

In October 1933, Bonhoeffer began serving as pastor to two German-speaking congregations in London. Meanwhile, the official German church was taken over by the German Christians, so those who dissented—known as members of the Confessing Church—were forced to search for ways to live out their faith without the support of the government-supported church. Bonhoeffer was an active participant in this church struggle, as it came to be known, even while in London. While there he began to envision liv-

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<sup>133</sup>Due to space constraints I shall focus the bulk of the remainder of the chapter on *Discipleship*. There are clear connections between Bonhoeffer's other pastoral writings (*Life Together*, *Prayerbook of the Bible*, and *Spiritual Care*) and his project of theological hermeneutics, and I will reference those where appropriate, but they are not the center of this chapter's focus.

ing in an intentional Christian community, perhaps stylistically similar to Mahatma Ghandi's *ashram*, as a way for the church to exist in the world. This communal living, he believed, would begin with a close reading of the Bible, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. In researching this project, he became acquainted with Hardy Arnold, son of Eberhard Arnold—the founder of the Bruderhof community. The Bruderhof, an Anabaptist community begun in Germany, focused their lives around following the teachings of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount, both of which intensely interested Bonhoeffer.<sup>134</sup>

During a second meeting with Hardy Arnold, Bonhoeffer purchased a set of books edited and published by the Bruderhof entitled *Quellen*, or *Sources*.<sup>135</sup> The first book in the set was a compendium of Nicolaus Ludwig Zinzendorf's writings—founder of the Anabaptist movement known as the Moravians. The book explains the *Losungen*—daily readings and meditations of Scripture—used in the Moravian community. Bonhoeffer soon discovered that both the Moravians and the Bruderhof practiced a reading of the New Testament that focused on the plain sense of Scripture, similar to the style Bonhoeffer employed upon his return from New York City and his time at Abyssinian Baptist Church, and later described by James McClendon.<sup>136</sup> It is unknown if Bonhoeffer's experience with Abyssinian Baptist Church influenced his decision to inspect other communities with free church tendencies, but it does seem significant that Bonhoeffer embraced

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<sup>134</sup>Hardy Arnold recounts this desire in letters to his father. Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *London, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 13, ed. Keith Clements, trans. Isabel Best (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 158-60. Bonhoeffer was also quite interested in visiting Ghandi's *ashram* in India to learn more about communal life, but circumstances in Germany prevented that from taking place.

<sup>135</sup>Markus Baum, *Against the Wind* (Farmington, PA: Plough, 1996), 166.

<sup>136</sup>McClendon, *Doctrine*, 36.

these similar outside sources as he took part in the church struggle, given that both of these communities embodied a post-Christendom theology.

Each of these outside free church influences emerge in Bonhoeffer's pastoral works to varying degrees, but they distinctly arise as he leads a Confessing Church seminary beginning in April 1935. Bonhoeffer later founded a semi-monastic community within the Confessing Church seminary he led named the *Brüderhaus* (House of Brethren), apparently a reference to the Bruderhof.<sup>137</sup> He additionally employed the daily reading of the *Losungen* with his seminary students.<sup>138</sup> But perhaps most importantly, his theological work turned to the Sermon on the Mount, the exposition of Scripture, and attempting to live as intentional Christian community in the face of chaos. In each case, a simple reading of the Scripture, and obedience to that reading, began to surface. This simple reading highlighted Christology, particularly Jesus' lordship, and obedience to the demands of that lordship. In doing so, the church-community began to take shape, further informing Bonhoeffer's hermeneutics. By the time Bonhoeffer prepared to write *Discipleship*, his theology and practice centered upon a close relationship between reading the Scripture, Christ, and obedience within the church-community.

#### *Discipleship: Envisioning an Redeemed Reality*

While leading the Confessing seminary at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer worked on a series of lectures he later published under the title of *Nachfolge*—in English, *Disciple-*

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<sup>137</sup>Geoffrey B. Kelly, "Editor's Introduction to the English Edition," in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 5 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 17-20 provide the name of the community. The connection to the Bruderhof is my own deduction.

<sup>138</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 5 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 58-9, footnote 27.

*ship*. The lectures represent several years of careful reflection upon obedience to Christ in the church and a thorough exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. In many ways the lectures are a continuation of the work done in *Creation and Fall* and the Christology lectures: they envision a theological reality which implies that obedience to Christ and obedience to National Socialism are incompatible. Even further, though, *Discipleship* explains in Bonhoeffer's terms what a Christian theological anthropology lived in faith looks like, in relation to the individual life, the Bible, and the church-community. In my reading of *Discipleship*, I shall highlight three focal aspects of the work that further demonstrate Bonhoeffer's theological themes and his developing *redeemed reality for the Christian: sacrificial obedience to Christ, Scripture, and the church-community*. In each case I shall demonstrate how Bonhoeffer's emphasis on these aspects works to interpret his situation, eventually positing a new reality for those within the church-community. And while critique against Nazism is not explicitly stated in the text, I will also point out how Bonhoeffer's conclusions further interpret his situation while simultaneously developing his ecclesially-centered theological hermeneutics.

*Sacrificial Obedience to Christ.* *Discipleship* is divided into two parts. The first part of the book explores the concept of discipleship and its bearing upon the individual Christian. It is here, with discipleship rooted in sacrificial obedience, that the *redeemed reality of the Christian* begins for Bonhoeffer. In what is probably his most well-known passage of writing, he describes the problem of discipleship using the now-famous phrase "cheap grace." Cheap grace, he explains, is "the mortal enemy of the

church.”<sup>139</sup> It is the accepting of grace without the obedience that should partner with it. “Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without repentance; it is baptism without the discipline of community; it is the Lord’s Supper without confession of sin; it is absolution without personal confession.”<sup>140</sup> As Bonhoeffer sees it, it is possible for grace to be misconstrued and even abused. If one grants grace to oneself through a variety of empty gestures, then one has not received true grace. He argues that one cannot reap the benefits of grace without simultaneously committing oneself to the life of discipleship that should mark the follower that has been graced. As he states, “Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without the living, incarnate Jesus Christ.”<sup>141</sup> Grace is impossible if it is divorced from Jesus, Bonhoeffer argues, for it is Jesus himself that provides grace. And since the presence of Jesus is identified with the church-community, one cannot receive grace apart from the church-community, or apart from intentionally following Christ. By following Christ, the church-community further models itself after Christ, and, just as in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, Christ exists as church-community.

Bonhoeffer argues that costly grace—the grace of a life of discipleship—opposes cheap grace. In both cases one that follows Jesus will oppose cheap grace. Costly grace, Bonhoeffer argues, is the grace that is found in a life of following Jesus. He writes, “It is costly, because it calls us to discipleship; it is grace, because it calls us to follow *Jesus*

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<sup>139</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 4, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 43.

<sup>140</sup>*Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>141</sup>*Ibid.*



*Christ.*”<sup>142</sup> Just as grace cost Jesus his life, Bonhoeffer argues that grace costs the Christian greatly; the Christian pays with her life lived in obedience to Jesus. The theme of obedience to Christ runs throughout *Discipleship*, but it is particularly prevalent through the first five chapters, reflecting the influence of the Bruderhof. In these chapters Bonhoeffer explores the concept of discipleship, defining it as obedience to Christ. He explains that obedience *to* Christ is tied to one’s faith *in* Christ. As he writes, “*only the believers obey, and only the obedient believe.*”<sup>143</sup> While the first half of that statement makes sense, Bonhoeffer argues, the second half proves difficult to understand. He claims that a “concrete commandment has to be obeyed in order to come to believe.”<sup>144</sup> Without obedience to the commandment, one essentially rejects the command and the one that issues that command—in this case, Christ. To reject the command is to reject Christ, and, consequently to reject belief.

The temptation, Bonhoeffer argues, is to find ways to explain away or avoid obedience. Those who would avoid obedience would hear Jesus differently; they would say, “Jesus is making a specific commandment; that’s true. But when Jesus commands, I should know that he never demands legalistic obedience. Instead, he has only one expectation of me, namely, that I believe.”<sup>145</sup> Such a position, Bonhoeffer argues, is a clear misunderstanding of discipleship, for obedience and faith are closely tied together. Attempts to make such obedience an example of legalism are faulty, he states, since the

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<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 45, emphasis Bonhoeffer’s.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 63, emphasis Bonhoeffer’s.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 78.

“struggle based on principle against legalism is itself the most legalistic attitude.”<sup>146</sup>

Bonhoeffer is no supporter of legalism, but he argues that disobedience to Christ is often disguised as the fight against legalism. True obedience, he claims, comes with an embracing of Jesus’ call to discipleship and simple following of his commands, even when they seem difficult.<sup>147</sup> Here Bonhoeffer echoes McClendon and his insistence upon emphasizing the simple sense of Scripture, arguing that discipleship follows from reading and acting on the Bible plainly.

Bonhoeffer’s terminology demonstrates his predilection for not only obedience, but especially *sacrificial* obedience to Christ. Given his historical context, the semantic decision makes sense. As German Christians multiplied and Hitler appointed an official Reich bishop, more and more believers embraced the Nazi ecclesiastical authority and turned their obedience to the *Führer* rather than Christ.<sup>148</sup> Just as lordship was at the forefront of Bonhoeffer’s thinking in his Christology lectures, it also plays a large role in the formation of *Discipleship*. As in the Christology lectures, Bonhoeffer does not specifically name the challenge to the singular authority of Christ, but it seems that the command to obey Christ (particularly in light of the Christology lectures) might further undermine the *Führer* myth and elevate Christ’s lordship. A reality where Christ’s lord-

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<sup>146</sup>Ibid., 81.

<sup>147</sup>Paul Lehmann, Bonhoeffer’s friend from Union Theological Seminary, echoes this conclusion in his *Ethics in a Christian Context* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 288, as he states, “In this area, the aims and the direction, the motivations and the decisions, the instruments and the structures of human inter-relatedness are forged into a pattern of response—a *style of life*—according to which the *liberation of obedience* has become the characteristic ethical fact.”

<sup>148</sup>Ludwig Müller was named Reich bishop by Hitler in 1933. Cf. Theodore S. Hamerow, *On the Road to the Wolf’s Lair: German Resistance to Hitler* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1999), 148.

ship is elevated and obedience is carried out faithfully begins the conception of an alternate reality — namely, the church-community.

*The Story of Scripture.* Concurrent with the theme of sacrificial obedience, Bonhoeffer emphasizes a distinctive manner of reading and interpreting the Scriptures within the church-community. If obedience is about following Christ's commands, as Bonhoeffer argues, one must properly read and interpret the Scriptures, for they contain the very commands Christians are called to obey. The *redeemed reality of the Christian* is grounded in this Scriptural story and its commands — a narrative theology of sorts. The proper way to read and interpret, according to Bonhoeffer, is closely tied to the attitude of obedience. When approaching the Scriptures, one must consider Jesus himself. When reading the Bible, believers should ask, "What did Jesus want to say to us? What does he want from us today? How does he help us to be faithful Christians today?"<sup>149</sup> By seeking to hear directly from Jesus through the Scriptures, believers no longer concern themselves primarily with "what this or that church leader wants," but rather with "what Jesus wants."<sup>150</sup> Christians should approach the story of Scripture looking for Jesus and his demands upon the life of the believer.

Reading the Bible in such a manner — expecting Jesus to make commands that are to be obeyed — ties the task of discipleship closely to Bible reading and interpretation. Bonhoeffer notes that reading the Scripture *without* a predisposition toward "simple obe-

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<sup>149</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 37. This line of thinking anticipates the famous question from the prison writings: "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?"

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

dience introduces a principle of scripture foreign to the Gospel.”<sup>151</sup> By introducing such an outside principle, the focus of the Scripture story shifts from the commands and desires of Jesus to the interpretive preferences of the reader. With the relationship between obedience and Scripture so close, Bonhoeffer notes that the “problem of following Christ shows itself here to be a *hermeneutical problem*.”<sup>152</sup> The issue of interpreting the story of Scripture is not simple, he asserts, because “we cannot simply identify ourselves directly with those called by Jesus.”<sup>153</sup> He further states, “Simple obedience would be misunderstood hermeneutically if we were to act and follow as if we were contemporaries of the biblical disciples.”<sup>154</sup> With this proclamation, Bonhoeffer differentiates himself at least somewhat from his free church influences. Both Powell and Arnold, for example, encouraged their congregations to essentially identify themselves with the members of the biblical narrative.

This Baptist (or “baptist”) way of reading the Bible in which the readers identify themselves with the members of the narrative is documented as part of the “baptist vision” by McClendon in his *Systematic Theology*.<sup>155</sup> McClendon emphasizes that Baptists have historically identified with the “plain sense” of Scripture, something Bonhoeffer advocates in his embrace of obedience, but also employ a “this is that” and “then is now” reading strategy that identifies the Christian with the biblical narrative. Bonhoeffer here

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid. Bonhoeffer uses the term “hermeneutical” in the context of biblical interpretation rather than cultural interpretation (i.e., theological hermeneutics).

<sup>153</sup>Ibid.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid.

<sup>155</sup>McClendon, 44-6.

draws distinction between his reading of Scripture and those included in McClendon's baptist vision. He finds the strategy of Powell and Arnold (and McClendon) to be too simple. For Bonhoeffer, one cannot simply identify oneself with the members of the narrative; rather one must approach the narrative of Jesus as those who formerly approached Jesus: with questions.

Bonhoeffer argues that "question and answer together must be proclaimed as the word of scripture."<sup>156</sup> The questions that the disciples of Jesus brought to him determined his answer, so their question must be factored into that answer. Obviously contemporary readers of Scripture can bring the same question to Jesus, in that their question "could also be our own question."<sup>157</sup> But it is also possible to misconstrue the response of Jesus to our own context in such a way that our response to Jesus would not be obedience to him but something else entirely. As Bonhoeffer explains, one might give away wealth, but it would not necessarily be obedience to Christ simply because one has done so. He writes, "It could be that such a step would not be obedience to Jesus at all, but instead, a free choice of one's own lifestyle. It could be a Christian ideal, a Franciscan ideal of poverty."<sup>158</sup> Such action would not necessarily be wrong, but it would also not necessarily be obedience to Christ. Consequently, Bonhoeffer argues that the simple obedience of Christ in Scripture must also be coupled with a willingness to examine "every word he says" and "to follow Christ by the entire word of scripture."<sup>159</sup> Obedi-

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<sup>156</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 82.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 82.

ence to Jesus cannot be determined from one question of a disciple to Jesus; one must read the entire Bible and follow Christ based on all of its teachings and commands. The Christian, according to Bonhoeffer, lives by the story of the Scripture and that story alone.

Bonhoeffer follows his own insistence that the entire Bible serves as the grounds for obedience, citing the Scripture some five hundred times through the course of *Discipleship*. In the center of the book, Bonhoeffer exegetes the Sermon on the Mount, the section of the Bible he has had in mind since his trip to New York. Employing a style similar to his *Creation and Fall* lectures, Bonhoeffer slowly explores the teachings of Jesus and their implications for discipleship and obedience. While a complete summary of his exposition is outside the parameters of my project, regarding his theological hermeneutics, one specific passage comes to the forefront.

Bonhoeffer discusses Jesus' commands regarding violence and retribution found in Matthew 5:38-42: "You have heard it said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also." As part of this discussion, Bonhoeffer meditates on what it means to "not resist an evildoer." Taking great care to note that Jesus is not talking about evil as a principle, but rather a "person who is evil,"<sup>160</sup> Bonhoeffer argues that violence in response to evil simply "inflamm[s] it even more."<sup>161</sup> He instead argues for nonviolence in response to the face of evil, supporting Jesus' command. The reference to the evil person seems to be a thinly veiled reference to Hitler—the most obvious antecedent to "evil per-

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<sup>160</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid., 133.

son” in Bonhoeffer’s context. By suggesting nonviolence, Bonhoeffer claims that the “voluntary renunciation of counterviolence confirms and proclaims our unconditional allegiance to Jesus as his followers.”<sup>162</sup> This decision exemplifies Bonhoeffer’s reading of Scripture and its emphasis upon simple obedience.

Bonhoeffer’s insistence upon Scripture’s story in the Christian life works within his project of church-centered theological hermeneutics, but it can also be read in light of the Nazi propaganda. Hitler’s chief propaganda officer, Joseph Goebbels, worked tirelessly to communicate the superiority of the National Socialist platform.<sup>163</sup> Much of the Nazi story played upon the *völkisch* ideas discussed earlier in the chapter, arguing for the purity of Germany and the superiority of the Germanic race.<sup>164</sup> In the face of this propaganda, many Germans embraced the new story of their heritage and abandoned the story of Scripture and its resulting obedience to Jesus. *Discipleship* further demonstrates Bonhoeffer’s commitment to engage and reinterpret his culture, particularly in his interpretation of Jesus’ commands of nonviolence. By arguing that the believer was not to resist an evildoer, Bonhoeffer simultaneously inferred Hitler to be evil and proclaimed the proper response was one of peace, as commanded by Jesus. Simultaneously, Bonhoeffer supported his argument for obedience to Christ over the *Führer* and prepared the way for his final concept: the church-community.

*Church-Community.* At the beginning of this chapter, I stated I would argue that Bonhoeffer’s pastoral phase uses the ecclesial concept of acting in obedience to Christ

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<sup>162</sup>Ibid.

<sup>163</sup>Fritzsche, 141, 192.

<sup>164</sup>Tanner, 9, notes the historicity of this trend in Germany.

through faithful proclamation of Scripture to envision the church-community. My readings of *Creation and Fall*, the Christology lectures, and *Discipleship* have demonstrated both the prevalence of Scripture and obedience to it in Bonhoeffer's thought and its resulting ecclesiology. I also mentioned a secondary goal in the opening paragraph of this chapter: I want to argue that Bonhoeffer's pastoral phase moves toward imagining the church as an *alternative political community* of sorts. Viewing the church in this fashion furthers the *redeemed reality* of humanity redeemed in Christ discussed thus far in *Discipleship* rooted in obedience to Christ and the story of Scripture, and it furthers him down the path of post-Christendom thought that both Barnett and Harvey see emerging in his thought.<sup>165</sup> This particular theme is not as obvious as Scripture and obedience in this phase, but I shall close this chapter by noting two specific sections of *Discipleship* that point toward Bonhoeffer's seeming desire to distance the church from nationalism and toward its own political reality.

The first example is part of Bonhoeffer's extended discussion on resisting an evil-doer I examined in the previous subsection. This particular command, Bonhoeffer asserts, represents the followers of Jesus surrendering their right to retribution. Where "Old Testament law puts the claim to rights, or justice, under the protection of divine retribution," Jesus takes "up this will of God and affirms the power of retribution to convict and overcome evil."<sup>166</sup> As Bonhoeffer reads it, followers of Jesus give up their right to retribution as promised in the Old Testament and surrender it to Jesus. Consequently, by not resisting an evil person, they are in turn practicing surrendering their retributive rights.

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<sup>165</sup>Cf. footnote #1.

<sup>166</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 132.



Doing so, Bonhoeffer argues, means that Jesus “releases his community from the political and legal order, from the national form of the people of Israel, and makes it into what it truly is, namely, the community of the faithful that is not bound by political or national ties.”<sup>167</sup> The church, it seems, has its own political reality in Bonhoeffer’s reading of the New Testament; in rescinding its rights to Jesus, it also gains a unique status in its relationship to political and national realities, becoming something separate, anticipating much of contemporary reflection on the proper relationship between church and state.<sup>168</sup>

The second example echoes the first. The previous example is a passing statement in the context of a separate argument. Near the conclusion of *Discipleship*, however, Bonhoeffer more fully explains the church’s relationship to the governing authorities. He states that “the community of disciples is no longer subject to this world.”<sup>169</sup> Instead, the church-community is separate because it has taken on the holy nature of God, a holiness that was transferred through Jesus Christ onto the church.<sup>170</sup> Through the incarnation, God’s holiness is manifest in Jesus. Jesus provides justification for those in the church-community, and thus they receive his holiness, as well. This holy nature means that the church-community “will manifest itself *in a clear separation from the world*,” as sealed by God through the Holy Spirit.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Aside from Yoder, McClendon, and Hauerwas, William T. Cavanaugh also argues along these lines in his book, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.)

<sup>169</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 253.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 261, emphasis Bonhoeffer’s.

Being sealed by the Spirit, Bonhoeffer argues, means that “its ‘political’ character is an inseparable aspect of its sanctification.”<sup>172</sup> This ‘political’ character means “that world be world and community be community, and that, nevertheless, God’s word goes out from the church-community to the world, as the proclamation that the earth and all it contains is the Lord’s.”<sup>173</sup> This separate nature corroborates with Bonhoeffer’s interpretation of Romans 13 and its directives towards Christians and their relationship to the governing authorities. Contrary to popular German Christian interpretations that would read Hitler’s governing authority as “some form of ‘divine authorization,’” Bonhoeffer asserts that Romans 13 does not provide “divine authorization of their conduct in office.”<sup>174</sup> The Pauline instructions, Bonhoeffer argues, do “not intend to instruct the Christian community about the tasks of those in authority, but instead *only deals with the tasks of Christian community toward authority.*”<sup>175</sup> Thus the church-community obeys the authorities and follows the law, but while doing so (“as far as it depends on you”<sup>176</sup>), it retains its separate nature and lives in complete obedience to the commands of Jesus. In doing so, the church lives out something of an alternative political reality of speaking the word of God

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<sup>172</sup>Ibid.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., 262. This stance takes concrete fashion in the Confessing seminary Bonhoeffer leads at Finkenwalde but also develops further conceptually and theologically in the *Ethics* and prison writings. The community speaking the word of God to the world may be a precursor to the development of *Stellvertreter* in *Ethics* where the church-community vicariously acts on behalf of the world and the prison writings where Bonhoeffer advocates prayer and righteous actions in the world as the most effective means of existing as a church-community. I shall develop these thoughts further in the next chapter, but it serves my thesis that all of Bonhoeffer’s theological hermeneutics are consistent from one phase to the next.

<sup>174</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 242. Cf. footnote 58, also.

<sup>175</sup>Ibid.

<sup>176</sup>Romans 12:18.

to the world while remaining within and at peace with those in authority.<sup>177</sup> This separate nature reflects the free church influence in Bonhoeffer's thought; from the Hutterites to Yoder, free church theologians have advocated a church separate from government.<sup>178</sup> The manifestation of such ideas in Bonhoeffer serves to support my assertion that the pastoral phase moves toward a post-Christendom understanding of the church.

Bonhoeffer's conception of the church-community and its relationship to the government is grounded in his reading of the Bible, and his conviction that the church-community centers on the sacraments. The last section of *Discipleship* deals with the visible church-community, and a good deal of the discussion centers on Scripture and sacraments as formative practices for the church-community. Bonhoeffer asserts that "all Christian community exists between word and sacrament" and that the church "awaits the final banquet with the Lord in the kingdom of God."<sup>179</sup> This space between word and sacrament is the "*living space* [*Lebensraum*] of the visible church-community," one defined by the story of Jesus in the Bible and re-enacted through the Lord's Supper and baptism.<sup>180</sup> This *Lebensraum* between Scripture and sacrament seems to be an implicit reference to the Nazi propaganda of *Lebensraum* whereby Hitler argued that Germany must expand its border for "living space."<sup>181</sup> By arguing instead that the church is grounded in the space between story and sacrament of Christ, Bonhoeffer situates the

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<sup>177</sup> James Wm. McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume One* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 197-98, notes, "[A]lready in these Finkenwalde days, being a Christian, a *Nachfolge*, meant 'political' conflict. Only there were still the qualifying quotation marks; it was still 'political,' not just political."

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Yoder's exegesis of Romans 13 in *Politics of Jesus*, 193.

<sup>179</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 233.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 232, emphasis Bonhoeffer's.

<sup>181</sup> Kershaw, *Hitler*, 18, 102.

church-community's allegiance squarely under the lordship of Christ, despite governmental or political forces. Eucharist, rather than power, determines church practice.<sup>182</sup> In other words, for Bonhoeffer, the Lord's Supper carries not just *spiritual* significance but also *political* significance. This sacramental grounding is consistent with the sacramental discussion from *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, and it anticipates the centrality of the "secret discipline" Bonhoeffer describes in his prison ecclesiology.<sup>183</sup>

Both of these examples serve as a reminder that, for Bonhoeffer (at least at the time), "The real issue is: Germanism or Christianity."<sup>184</sup> For him, the church-community can only live obediently if it was willing to turn its rights over to Jesus Christ, allowing him to intercede on its behalf. While the German Christians were conflating their *völkisch* story with the teachings of Jesus, Bonhoeffer began interpreting his context in such a way that the church could be faithful to Jesus yet simultaneously live in the world. His thought led him to envision the church as a *separate* reality of sorts, one that found its ultimate rule under the story of Scripture and the commands of Christ. As he worked toward this position, all of his theological works carefully interpreted his context, positing a Christian reality within the world. That reality manifests itself in a post-Christendom context in the church-community, where Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology takes

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<sup>182</sup> Bonhoeffer's thought here serves as a sort of predecessor to the work of William T. Cavanaugh. Cavanaugh focuses on the intersection of church and State. Cf. William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (New York: Blackwell, 1998).

<sup>183</sup> The "secret discipline" (*Arkandisziplin*) and its connection to the administration of the sacraments will be discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>184</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Berlin, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, Volume 12 (Berlin: Christian Kaiser Verlag), 118.

further shape as believers obey the commands of Christ, live out the story of Scripture, and order their lives by the sacraments.

Bonhoeffer attempted to live out these principles through a Confessing Church seminary at Finkenwalde, but it was eventually closed by order of the Gestapo. In the coming years, the Third Reich continued to gain strength and alienate the Confessing Church, and Bonhoeffer's thought turned toward how a Christian could live in the midst of such a world, vicariously acting on its behalf.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Resistance Phase: Church-Community as the World's Vicarious Representative

“If I find myself at the bottom of a pit with a broken arm, what I want and urgently need is a Rescuer with a very bright light and a long ladder, full of strength, joy and assurance who can get me out of the pit, not a god who sits in the darkness suffering with me.”

—Joan Northam, “The Kingdom, The Power, and the Glory”

#### *Thesis*

In chapters two and three I demonstrated how Bonhoeffer's *consistent* project of *theological hermeneutics* developed its *ecclesial focus* by constructing a theological anthropology based upon perennial theological concerns and timely reflection. In this chapter, I shall show how Bonhoeffer's final phase—that of resistance—further develops his theological hermeneutics with an increased focus on the theme of vicarious representative action (*Stellvertretung*). During this period Bonhoeffer increasingly recognizes that the world of Christendom is crumbling in Germany, and so he begins to envision a church apart from the trappings of government centered on *Stellvertretung* and move toward a post-Constantinian ecclesiology. I shall argue that in this final phase Bonhoeffer *employs the ecclesial concept of the church's participation in Christ through vicarious representative action to present a new pattern of Christian engagement with reality, one grounded in theological categories he terms the penultimate and the ultimate.*

I shall begin my argument by examining the scholarly interest his final writings generated, noting their dependency upon Christological interpretation and their drift from the centrality of the church-community. Once I have done so, I shall examine the biography from Bonhoeffer's final period, noting how vicarious representative action emerged

from reflections upon his context. Then I will demonstrate how the theme of vicarious representative action *consistently* threads throughout Bonhoeffer's writings, beginning with *Sanctorum Communio*. Next I shall examine the *Ethics*,<sup>1</sup> exploring how vicarious representative action relates to Bonhoeffer's conception of penultimate and ultimate, providing a framework for his *theological hermeneutics*. Finally I shall read the prison writings and attempt to show how its theology is connected to the thought found in *Ethics*, also centering on vicarious representative action in relation to the penultimate and the ultimate culminating in what Bonhoeffer refers to as "religionless Christianity."

### *Academic Response to Bonhoeffer's Resistance Phase*

In chapter two I asserted that Bonhoeffer's student phase work—*Act and Being* and *Sanctorum Communio*—is among the most ignored in Bonhoeffer scholarship. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the final phase of Bonhoeffer's work, particularly *Letters and Papers From Prison* (the most widely read collection of Bonhoeffer's prison writings) receives the greatest amount of scholarly attention. Initial readings of the prison writings in the English-speaking world<sup>2</sup> argued that Bonhoeffer's late theology marked a radical departure from his Christ and church-centered thought, interpreting "re-

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<sup>1</sup>Because Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* was published posthumously, it must be noted that the book is not complete, but is rather a collection of manuscripts that have been ordered in various arrangements depending on the editor. The difference in manuscript order between the most recent, critical edition of the *Ethics* and its prior English edition are significant, not based on the argument that is made, but simply in what order the argument takes shape. Cf. Clifford J. Green, "Editor's Introduction to the English Edition," in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume Six*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 25-34.

<sup>2</sup>*Letters and Papers From Prison* was first translated into English in 1953. The collection's release in Germany was received with little fanfare, although Bonhoeffer's friend Karl Barth did confess his inability to understand Bonhoeffer's theological intentions, simply acknowledging that perhaps Bonhoeffer had been able to "peer around the corner." The release of the prison writings in English, however, caused much more furor on the theological scene, particularly with the writings of John A.T. Robinson.

ligionless Christianity” as Bonhoeffer’s support of the “God is dead” movement.<sup>3</sup> These initial responses prompted some readers to categorize Bonhoeffer inaccurately, perhaps most drastically, when Alasdair MacIntyre referred to Bonhoeffer as an atheist.<sup>4</sup> The phrase “religionless Christianity” moved throughout theological circles, and some attempted to construct theologies without religion, thinking they might be following Bonhoeffer’s line of thinking.<sup>5</sup>

After this initial reading of Bonhoeffer’s prison writings, however, the bulk of Bonhoeffer scholarship refuted reading Bonhoeffer as an atheist, or even as one who would want to do away with the liturgy. Just after *Letters and Papers From Prison* was translated into English, a German scholar named Gerhard Ebeling began the work of connecting Bonhoeffer’s prison theology with his preceding works when he asserted that Bonhoeffer’s “non-religious interpretation” was best understood as Christological interpretation.<sup>6</sup> Ebeling’s article started a shift in Bonhoeffer scholarship, and when it was eventually translated into English in 1963, scholars of Bonhoeffer’s writings employed it as the “smallest common denominator” in both German and English approaches

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<sup>3</sup>The most famous proponent of reading Bonhoeffer as a supporter of the “God is dead” movement is John A.T. Robinson in his *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1963); new ed., (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006). Similarly, William Hamilton, “A Secular Theology for a World Come of Age,” *Theology Today* 18 (1962): 435-459, develops Bonhoeffer’s thought as “secular theology,” though he does not support the notion that God is dead. Hamilton instead argues that Bonhoeffer’s last theology is founded almost completely on living within the world and suffering within it; liturgy is no longer part of Bonhoeffer’s vision in his estimation. Both of these works began a steady stream of interpretation that dominated Bonhoeffer’s reputation in the English-speaking world for years. Not until Clifford Green and John Godsey’s did that reputation begin to change.

<sup>4</sup>Alasdair MacIntyre, “God and the Theologians,” *Encounter* 21 (Nov. 1963): 3-10, footnote #3.

<sup>5</sup>Like Hamilton’s “A Secular Theology for a World Come of Age,” cf. footnote #3.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Gerhard Ebeling, “Die ‘nicht-religiöse Interpretation biblischer Begriffe,’” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* (1955): 296-360.



to Bonhoeffer's work.<sup>7</sup> Several of the consequent summaries of Bonhoeffer's theology cite Ebeling's article or similarly follow his conclusions that Bonhoeffer's "religionless Christianity" is centered in Christological interpretation, including John Godsey, Clifford Green, Ernst Feil, John Phillips, and an article by Bonhoeffer's best friend—Eberhard Bethge.<sup>8</sup> By citing Christological interpretation, these readers link the prison writings back to Bonhoeffer's earlier theology, particularly the writings of the pastoral phase.

In the wake of Ebeling's argument that "non-religious interpretation" is better understood as Christological interpretation and the resulting summaries of Bonhoeffer's theology mentioned in the previous paragraph, two other scholars offer fresh perspectives on Bonhoeffer's late theology. Ralf K. Wüstenberg's book, *A Theology of Life*, attempts to define what Bonhoeffer means by "religionless Christianity," a phrase he believes serves as the basis for the prison theology. In order to do this, Wüstenberg scours Bonhoeffer's corpus for clues as to the meaning of "religion," (he finds no consistent usage in Bonhoeffer's work), arguing that Bonhoeffer's understanding of "non-religious interpretation" is a combination of the thought of Karl Barth and William Dilthey.<sup>9</sup> Wüstenberg argues that this concept of "non-religious interpretation" is indeed Christological inter-

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<sup>7</sup>Ebeling's article was first published in English as "The Non-Religious Interpretation of Biblical Concepts," *Word and Faith* (1963): 98-161. Ralf K. Wüstenberg claims that Ebeling's article created a new "smallest common denominator" in Bonhoeffer studies, pushing serious Bonhoeffer scholars toward Christological interpretation in their readings of the prison theology. Cf. Wüstenberg, *A Theology of Life: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Religionless Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 163, endnote #18.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. John Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 263; Clifford J. Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 122, 259, 292; Ernst Feil, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Martin Rumscheidt (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); John A. Phillips, *The Form of Christ in the World: A Study of Bonhoeffer's Christology* (New York: Collins, 1967); Eberhard Bethge, "Bonhoeffer's Christology and His 'Religionless' Christianity" *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 23/1 (1967): 61-77.

<sup>9</sup>Wüstenberg, 99.

pretation (as argued by Ebeling), but it is a “life-christological interpretation relating Christian faith and life come of age to one another.”<sup>10</sup> Wüstenberg reads Bonhoeffer’s late theology in a fashion similar to the manner I have read Bonhoeffer thus far: “*To live as to believe* means believing through ‘participation in Jesus’ being’ *as life* in ‘being for others.’” For Wüstenberg, however, the prison theology focuses on the individual life lived for others; the church-community does not serve a significant purpose in his argument.

Similar to Wüstenberg, Andreas Pangritz has argued for a Christological reading of Bonhoeffer’s late theology. In his book, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Pangritz asserts that the secret discipline that preserves the mysteries of the Christian faith to which Bonhoeffer refers in the prison letters should be “regarded as the ‘*cantus firmus*’ of the prison letters.”<sup>11</sup> For Pangritz, “The interpretation of Bonhoeffer’s theology stands or falls with proper discernment of this *cantus firmus*.”<sup>12</sup> Pangritz, however, argues the secret discipline should not be identified too closely with the secret discipline of the ancient church (namely liturgy and sacrament).<sup>13</sup> In a separate, later essay, Pangritz claims that the *cantus firmus* identified by the secret discipline in Bonhoeffer’s writings is best understood as Christological interpretation, apparently as embodied in an individual’s life. Pangritz shifts the focus of Bonhoeffer’s late theology away from Christ

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 157.

<sup>11</sup> Andreas Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 5. Pangritz further develops that thesis in his earlier book, *Dietrich Bonhoeffers Forderung einer Arkandisziplin—eine unerledigte Anfrage an Kirche und Theologie* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein Verlag, 1988). Pangritz borrows the *cantus firmus* phrase from Bonhoeffer’s letters. Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 303.

<sup>12</sup>Pangritz, *Karl Barth*, 5.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

existing as church-community, stating that in the prison writings “the earlier, sometimes almost compulsive identifications of Christ and community . . . are relaxed and finally liquefied by a new conception which . . . can communicate with consummate ease in a Christological interplay.”<sup>14</sup> Pangritz, much like Wüstenberg, moves the focus of the late theology away from the church-community (although he grants Bonhoeffer is searching for some sort of “social concreteness”) and toward an encounter with Christ.<sup>15</sup> Wüstenberg’s thesis that the late theology is characterized by living as believing, seems closely related to Pangritz’s conclusion that Bonhoeffer’s late theology is determined by “Christological interplay.” In both cases, emphasis is placed upon Christology, but in a manner that moves it away from the ecclesial theme of Christ existing as church-community.

Perhaps most interesting is the fact that while the bulk of contemporary Bonhoeffer scholarship argues that the late theology is in some manner a continuation of the student and pastoral phases through Christological interpretation, there is still a marked division in several approaches to *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers From Prison*. In one respect, this makes sense: *Ethics* is an effort at formal theological reflection while the prison writings are essentially correspondence. For example, Clifford Green sees the prison letters as an extension of Bonhoeffer’s theology of sociality, but he separately addresses the *Ethics* as a theological coda that “has an integrity of its own and a certain independence from the body of the piece.”<sup>16</sup> Green emphasizes the individual’s actions in his reading of *Ethics*, somewhat separating it from the theology of sociality he sees present in the prison

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<sup>14</sup> Andreas Pangritz, ““Who is Jesus Christ, for us, today?”” in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1999), 151.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Green, 301.

writings. Similarly, Wüstenberg emphasizes the continuity of Christological interpretation in Bonhoeffer's writings, but he argues that the prison writings mark a shift toward the individual. Likewise, Pangritz does not see a connection between Bonhoeffer's search of "social concreteness" and the church-community. Despite Ebeling's 1955 article that pushed interpretation of the prison writings toward Christology, this Christological interpretation does not necessarily involve ecclesiology.

On the one hand, I want to build upon the consensus that Christological interpretation is central to understanding the prison writings. I shall use vicarious representative action and its role in Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics to argue that the late theology cannot be understood apart from Christology. However, my approach shall differ from Wüstenberg and Pangritz in at least two ways. First, I want to join my interpretation of the prison writings *with* my reading of the *Ethics* rather than approaching them separately. It is my contention that they are bound by the theme of vicarious representative action along with concern for the penultimate and the ultimate. Second, and more importantly, since my argument focuses on the consistency of Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics, I shall argue that both the *Ethics* and the prison writings have an ecclesial—rather than strictly individual—focus, and that the church acting vicariously for the world is at the center of both. In order to make this argument, I shall demonstrate how the last phase of Bonhoeffer's life moved him to reflect further on vicarious representative action—that of Jesus and, consequently, the church—and how such action might manifest concretely. To that final phase of his life I now turn.

### *Resistance, Imprisonment, Execution*

Once the Confessing seminary at Finkenwalde was closed by the Gestapo in 1937, Bonhoeffer's students engaged in several pastorates throughout the Pomeranian countryside, while Bonhoeffer wrote his reflections on community life in *Life Together*. As the church struggle grew more dire and the National Socialists gained more power, Bonhoeffer faced difficult decisions. Because of his participation in illegal theological education, he was forbidden to teach at the University of Berlin; likewise his church status had been revoked by the government. Additionally, the political environment in Germany was growing increasingly militant, as the Jewish Question became a matter of public discussion and well-known dissenters began to fear for their safety.

As the German situation deteriorated, Bonhoeffer left for the United States at the urging of Paul Lehmann, a friend from Union Seminary. Lehmann arranged for Bonhoeffer to make theology lectures at several colleges and universities in the United States, providing him ample time to escape the danger and live abroad. Almost immediately upon his arrival in the United States, Bonhoeffer had great misgivings about his decision. In a letter to Reinhold Niebuhr he explained his position:

Sitting here in Dr. Coffin's garden I have had the time to think and to pray about my situation and that of my nation and to have God's will for me clarified. I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war *if I do not share the trials of this time with my people*. My brethren in the Confessing Synod wanted me to go. They may have been right in urging me to do so; but I was wrong in going. Such a decision each man must make for himself.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "From Bonhoeffer's Letter to Reinhold Niebuhr as Recalled in *Christianity and Crisis*, June 25, 1945," in *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 504, emphasis mine.

Thinking of his role in Germany's future, Bonhoeffer believed that his ability to one day lead depended greatly upon his sharing in the trials of his people. This sharing in trials seems to embody *Stellvertretung*; the most Christian thing to do, Bonhoeffer believed, was to suffer alongside those whom he loved. Bonhoeffer returned to his home country in July 1939. Shortly thereafter, Bonhoeffer undertook two activities that would shape his final phase. First, Bonhoeffer began living a double life. On the surface, he was a pastor and ecumenical supporter. He occupied much of his time traveling to churches, speaking in conferences, and teaching various groups. In reality, however, Bonhoeffer joined an underground political movement against Hitler and the Nazis. Upon his return from the United States, Bonhoeffer began to think about how a Christian might live in a world struggling against evil. His brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, was part of the underground resistance movement against Hitler and talked often of it at family gatherings. He eventually recruited Bonhoeffer to be part of the group, despite Bonhoeffer's lack of political or military experience.<sup>18</sup> As Bonhoeffer's involvement in the resistance movement increased, he joined the *Abwehrstelle*—German military intelligence—as a double agent. As a member of the *Abwehrstelle*, he was afforded travel freedoms that he consequently used to support the Confessing Church in its work and to shuttle information to different parties for von Dohnanyi.<sup>19</sup> Part of Bonhoeffer's involvement

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<sup>18</sup>Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, Revised Edition, ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 623-25.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

in the resistance movement includes helping endangered families escape from Germany into Switzerland, a program code-named “Operation 7.”<sup>20</sup>

During the Spring 1942, von Dohnanyi’s resistance movement (along with the aid of some Germany military officials) decided to plan an assassination attempt on Hitler. Bonhoeffer’s role in the plot itself was minimal, but he continued to participate in the resistance movement through Operation 7 and helping the Confessing Church. His membership in the *Abwehrstelle* was initially misunderstood by some of his friends, believing he had somehow joined the National Socialist party and begun supporting their mission. Karl Barth was among those confused by his involvement, and Bonhoeffer wrote an extensive letter asking Barth plainly, “May I let you know once more that you truly have no need to mistrust me?”<sup>21</sup> Upon Bonhoeffer’s arrival at Barth’s home in Basel, Barth and Bonhoeffer spoke frankly about his trip to Switzerland and Bonhoeffer “spoke openly of the plans for Hitler’s removal and of the attempts to create a new government and to struggle for a peace plan.”<sup>22</sup> With his intentions made clear, Bonhoeffer continued his participation in the underground resistance and Operation 7. By participating in the resistance movement, Bonhoeffer took a great deal of risk, willingly accepting guilt so that he might engage his context. By taking on guilt, he further embodied *Stellvertretung*.

The other important activity that occupied Bonhoeffer during this time was his *Ethics*—his theological magnum opus. With *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer demonstrated his

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<sup>20</sup>Operation 7 is detailed in Bethge’s biography of Bonhoeffer, 804-818. Letters describing Bonhoeffer’s involvement can be read in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment: 1940-1945*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 16, ed. Mark S. Brocker, trans. Lisa E. Dahill (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 230-34.

<sup>21</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment*, 279.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 278, footnote #3.

renewed interest in the concrete and how Christian life took form in the concrete; this theme carried over into the *Ethics* as he meditated on ethical living for Christians in the midst of difficult situations—with his own situation presumably the inspiration for such a book. As Clifford Green puts it, “Although the work is incomplete and was published posthumously, it is nevertheless the rich result of mature reflection during a decade of Christian resistance to National Socialism.”<sup>23</sup> He commenced work on *Ethics* in October 1940 and soon began an intensive writing period housed at a monastery in Ettal, Germany, where he received a warm welcome. He wrote to Bethge, “I eat in the refectory, sleep in the hotel, can use the library, have my own key to the cloister, and yesterday had a long and good conversation with the abbot. In short, I have everything that one could desire.”<sup>24</sup> Bonhoeffer was already involved with von Dohnanyi and the resistance movement by the time he took up residence in Ettal, and the *Ethics* reflect a concern with traditional ethical issues (life, truth-telling, etc.) alongside more particular concerns such as the Christian relationship to the government. During this period of writing, Bonhoeffer courted and became engaged to Maria von Wedemeyer, a young woman whom he met during his time at Finkenwalde.

Bonhoeffer worked diligently on his *Ethics* in five phases between 1940 and 1943, but he never had the opportunity to complete them. In Spring 1943, two assassination attempts on Hitler failed, and the Gestapo arrested von Dohnanyi, confiscating sections of his journal before it could be destroyed. They retrieved information from the

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<sup>23</sup> Clifford J. Green, “Editor’s Introduction to the English Edition,” in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume Six*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 86.



journal naming those involved with the resistance, including Operation 7. Bonhoeffer was implicated in the journal, and was consequently arrested on April 5, 1943 and transported to Tegel prison in Berlin. The *Ethics* remained important to Bonhoeffer, however. Despite his inability to finish them, he would write to Bethge from prison: “I sometimes feel as if my life were more or less over, and as if all I had to do now was finish my *Ethics*.”<sup>25</sup> It is in the *Ethics* that Bonhoeffer offered his final version of *Stellvertretung*, explaining vicarious representative action as a central aspect for those who follow Christ in the world.

Bonhoeffer was imprisoned from April 5, 1943 to April 10, 1945, when he was executed for treason. During that time he wrote numerous letters, some poetry and drama, and began work on another book.<sup>26</sup> Throughout his prison writings, however, his concern with the concrete world remained, and he continued to reflect on Christian response within and to the world. The prison writings, particularly several of Bonhoeffer’s letters to Eberhard Bethge, give insight into Bonhoeffer’s theological reflections from that time. During these letters Bonhoeffer’s theological reflections continued to move forward, and he coined and utilized theological phrases such as “religionless Christianity,” “non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts,” “discipline of the secret,” and “Christ in a world come of age.” I shall examine the prison writings in greater depth later

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<sup>25</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Touchstone, 1971), 163.

<sup>26</sup>The bulk of Bonhoeffer’s writings from prison can be located in four volumes: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Touchstone, 1971); Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Maria von Wedemeyer, *Love Letters From Cell 92: The Correspondence Between Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Maria von Wedemeyer, 1943-45*, ed. Ruth-Alice von Bismarck and Ulrich Kabitz, trans. John Brownjohn (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Fiction From Tegel Prison*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 7, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000); and Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment*.

in the chapter, but it should be noted at this point that the cryptic theological phrases from Bonhoeffer's prison writings demonstrate a continuing maturity and adaptation in his work, while drawing attention to significant new avenues, despite the fact that he was never able to complete them. Even in prison, however, the notion of guilt and suffering—both aspects of *Stellvertretung*—surfaced in his letters and writings. As I shall now demonstrate, vicarious representative action had been with Bonhoeffer from his earliest phase, and it soon blossomed into a key component of his final vision of ecclesial theological hermeneutics.

#### *Developing Stellvertretung From Sanctorum Communio to the Ethics*

From the outset of this dissertation I have argued that Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics develop consistently with an ecclesial focus. Part of that focus centers on the ecclesial theme of vicarious representative action and its presence and development throughout Bonhoeffer's writings, particularly in his late phase. In this section I shall demonstrate how the theme of vicarious representative action is present in many of Bonhoeffer's important theological works, and how that theme develops over time to its version in the *Ethics*. Later in this chapter I shall demonstrate how ecclesial vicarious representative action surfaces in the prison writings through Bonhoeffer's discussion of the "suffering God" and his "Outline for a Book." By doing so, I shall not only support my argument for *consistency* within Bonhoeffer's work, but I shall also provide an ecclesial connection between the *Ethics* and the prison writings in addition to the Christological interpretation discussed earlier in the chapter.

As I mentioned in chapter two, Bonhoeffer probably first encountered the concept of *Stellvertretung* under his doctoral advisor, Reinhold Seeberg. But as I also demon-

strated, Bonhoeffer's use of the concept in *Sanctorum Communio* is no incidental homage to his *Doktorvater*. *Stellvertretung* is a critical component of Bonhoeffer's budding theological anthropology, tying directly to the concept of being-for-each-other. In *Sanctorum Communio*, vicarious representative action constitutes the work of Jesus in a substitutionary/participatory fashion, arguing that Jesus stands in for and participates alongside those who are members of his collective person. Consequently, members of the church-community take on the characteristics of *Stellvertretung*, vicariously acting on behalf of one another *within the church-community*.<sup>27</sup> Upon completion of *Sanctorum Communio* Bonhoeffer presented the concept of *Stellvertretung* as part of his Graduation Theses at the University of Berlin, noting that the church-community is able to "transcend" "all possible types of social association" through "vicarious representation."<sup>28</sup> In both *Sanctorum Communio* and his Graduation Theses, vicarious representative action is confined within the church-community; members of the church-community act on behalf of those within the same church-community.

Vicarious representative action does not play as obvious a role in Bonhoeffer's next work—*Act and Being*—given the fact that Bonhoeffer does not use the term *Stellvertretung* throughout the book. That having been said, there is at least one example of *Stellvertretung* just below the surface. In his discussion of the necessity of revelation to ontology, Bonhoeffer explains that individuals need other individuals in order to fully ex-

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<sup>27</sup>This is a summary of the argument I detail in chapter two in the subsection entitled, "Vicarious Representative Action."

<sup>28</sup>The Graduation Theses were presented after the dissertation in order to demonstrate theological competency. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 9*, ed. Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 440.

perience reality. He writes, “Reality is ‘experienced’ in the contingent fact of the claim of the ‘others.’ Only what comes from ‘outside’ can direct people to their reality, to their existence. In ‘taking on’ the ‘claim of the other’, I exist in reality, I act ethically.”<sup>29</sup> Such language indicates Bonhoeffer’s concept of being-for-each-other at play in his argument; only by engaging and taking on the claim of the other does Bonhoeffer imagine a possible anthropology. This “taking on the claim of the other,” as Bonhoeffer puts it, ties closely to vicarious representative action, in which the individual takes the place of and participates with the members of the church-community. Although Bonhoeffer does not use the term *Stellvertretung* at this point in his argument, he clearly is borrowing the concept as he understood it and its anthropological implications from *Sanctorum Communio*.

Those same anthropological implications undergo a bit of a shift during Bonhoeffer’s pastoral phase. Bonhoeffer does not employ vicarious representative action as widely during those writings, but two uses of the concept in *Discipleship* demonstrate its further development. When discussing Christ’s sufferings on the cross, Bonhoeffer states that Jesus participates in God’s sufferings, and in so doing, overcomes suffering. In a seemingly paradoxical statement, Bonhoeffer concludes that “suffering is overcome by suffering.”<sup>30</sup> Such suffering, Bonhoeffer argues, “is how Christ suffers as vicarious representative for the world. Only his suffering brings salvation.”<sup>31</sup> Christ suffers for and with the world in order to bring salvation to the world. Borrowing from *Sanctorum*

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<sup>29</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 2*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., trans. H. Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 87.

<sup>30</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume Four*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 90.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

*Communio* the conclusion that Christ exists as church-community, Bonhoeffer further posits that the church-community will also suffer for and with the world. For him, “in following Christ, this suffering falls upon it [the church-community], and it bears the suffering while being borne by Christ. The community of Jesus Christ vicariously represents the world before God by following Christ under the cross.”<sup>32</sup> Thus Bonhoeffer expands the purview of vicarious representative action here in *Discipleship*. Whereas vicarious representative action was restricted to members of the church-community in the student phase writings such as *Sanctorum Communio*, here Bonhoeffer argues that if Christ does indeed exist as church-community, then the church-community must also embrace the suffering that Christ does for and with the world.

Bonhoeffer further clarifies this suffering for the world later in *Discipleship* when he explains that Jesus “has already accomplished all the vicarious suffering necessary for our redemption” but simultaneously, “his sufferings in this world are not finished yet.”<sup>33</sup> Consequently, while the work of redeeming humanity is complete, Christ still suffers for the world “in this last period before his second coming”—phraseology reminiscent of “the middle” from *Creation and Fall* and anticipating “the penultimate” in *Ethics*. Whether called “middle” or “penultimate” or “this last period,” Bonhoeffer means the same thing by each phrase—the present. This present suffering is not done by Christ alone, however. Christ, in “his grace, he has left something unfinished in his suffering, which his church-community is to complete.”<sup>34</sup> , Bonhoeffer argues this suffering is

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 222.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

beneficial for the church-community for such “vicariously representative action and suffering, which is carried out by the members of the body of Christ, is itself the very life of Christ who seeks to take shape in his members.”<sup>35</sup> As was the case earlier in *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer explains that suffering identifies the church-community with Christ (more Christ existing as church-community) and calls the church-community to suffer in the world, for the world. In both examples from *Discipleship*, the concept of vicarious representative action expands from an activity limited to the confines of the church-community to become *Stellvertretung* for those outside the church-community as well.

By the time Bonhoeffer writes *Ethics*, however, he has expanded the concept of vicarious representative action even further, this time closely tying the concept to *a willingness to bear guilt* for the recipient of vicarious action. The willingness to bear guilt comes from the category Bonhoeffer terms “responsible action” in the *Ethics*. Simply put, responsible action is ethical action. This responsible action consists primarily of two concepts: being bound to the other and being free to act as an individual.<sup>36</sup> For Bonhoeffer, “Jesus Christ is the very embodiment of the person who lives responsibly,”<sup>37</sup> for he acts selflessly for humanity out of complete freedom. By doing so, his “entire life, action, and suffering is vicarious representative action.”<sup>38</sup> Jesus is able to live in such a manner because he is “concerned exclusively with God’s love for human beings.”<sup>39</sup> Con-

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 6*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 257.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 231.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., emphasis Bonhoeffer’s.

sequently, Bonhoeffer argues that responsible action for the other is an act grounded in love. Jesus' love for humanity "is why he is able to enter into human guilt, *able to be burdened with their guilt*."<sup>40</sup> For Bonhoeffer, Jesus acts on behalf of all of humanity—both those within and outside of the church-community—and he is able to do so because he accepts their guilt willingly by acting out of love.

Bonhoeffer argues that Jesus is still sinless; he has done no wrong against God. Yet in spite of his sinless nature, he nevertheless becomes guilty because he acts on behalf of humanity out of his concern for God's love of guilty humanity. As he explains, "In this guilty yet sinless Jesus Christ all vicarious responsible action has its origin."<sup>41</sup> And again, "Instead, this unity exists solely in the person of Jesus Christ, in whom God became human, acting in vicarious representative responsibility and entering out of love for the real human being in to the guilt of the world."<sup>42</sup> Even further: "[T]he structure of responsible action involves...*willingness to become guilty*."<sup>43</sup> Jesus' vicarious action on behalf of humanity is not, for Bonhoeffer, an action that is distant and detracted. Rather, this action enters into the world of humanity completely, embracing it, willingly becoming guilty so that it might concern itself completely with God's love for humanity. It is precisely because Jesus freely loves humanity that he willingly embraces guilt, and that guilt is a necessary component of vicarious representative action.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 233.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 234.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 238, emphasis Bonhoeffer's.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 275.

Bonhoeffer's development of *Stellvertretung* to include guilt does not seem accidental; while he posited Jesus' willing embrace of human guilt, Bonhoeffer himself accepted guilt by participating in the resistance against Hitler despite his earlier statements regarding peace from Matthew 5. From reading the *Ethics* it seems that Bonhoeffer's involvement in the resistance movement was not a direct rejection of his interpretation of Jesus' peace commands in the Sermon on the Mount from *Discipleship*. Instead, I maintain *it was a knowing acceptance of guilt, grounded in his conviction that the best way to demonstrate his love for humanity was to bear guilt on behalf of the world*. As Bonhoeffer says himself, "Those who act responsibly take on guilt—which is inescapable for any responsible person—place this guilt on themselves, not on someone else."<sup>44</sup> This guilt does not necessarily mean divine condemnation, as the responsible person "hope[s] only for grace" before God, but the responsible person embraces this guilt nonetheless.<sup>45</sup> This willing embrace of guilt on Bonhoeffer's part manifests itself theologically as he argues that the church-community's identification with Christ (through Christ existing as church-community) means that the church-community should also willingly become guilty for the world by acting vicariously on the world's behalf.

The willingness to accept guilt, from Bonhoeffer's perspective, arises from the same *concern for the other* that was present in *Sanctorum Communio*. Responsible action grounded in vicarious representation is *also* grounded in a selfless nature. As he explains, "Only those who are selfless live responsibly, which means that only selfless peo-

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 282.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 283.



ple truly *live*.”<sup>46</sup> Bonhoeffer does not mean this to “absolutiz[e] . . . my own self or the other person,” so that neither person becomes a higher priority than “my responsibility before God,” but he is careful to maintain that responsible action cannot begin from a selfish posture.<sup>47</sup> Concern for the other—echoing being-for-one-another—grounded in love of God and humanity is the reason that an individual might be willing to accept guilt on behalf of another. And while Bonhoeffer does not explicitly say so, it seems appropriate that his explanation of selflessness would provide a further justification for his decision to participate in the resistance movement.

Bonhoeffer was executed before he could finish the *Ethics*. Nevertheless, the manuscript he left behind clearly expands the scope of *Stellvertretung* from its origins in *Sanctorum Communio*. Where that early dissertation argued that members of the church-community could intercede and act vicariously for other members within the church-community, the *Stellvertretung* of the *Ethics* is a vicarious representative action not just for those within the church-community but for the world. This willingness to act for the world is grounded in a *selfless willingness to bear guilt* for the world, in the same way that Jesus did—and does presently through the church-community. Thus, at the conclusion of the *Ethics* manuscript entitled “The Concrete Command and the Divine Mandates,” we read Bonhoeffer’s thoughts on the church-community acting for the world, arguing that *Stellvertretung* defines what the church does in the world most clearly. He writes, “The Christian community stands in the place in which the whole world should stand. In this respect it serves the world as vicarious representative; it is there for the

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 259.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

world's sake.”<sup>48</sup> For Bonhoeffer, since Christ exists in the world as church-community, the church-community willingly embraces his actions in the world—including that of vicarious representative action. But by willingly participating in Christ's sufferings, and by willingly bearing guilt, the question of how Bonhoeffer's thought relates to God's suffering and mutability arises, particularly its relationship to contemporary theologies of suffering. Before I examine how Bonhoeffer imagines this engagement with the penultimate, I shall discuss how *Stellvertretung* moves beyond mere suffering.

### *Excursus: Beyond Simply Suffering*

This final theme in Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics, vicarious representative action—where the church-community willingly bears guilt in order to act on behalf of the world—was quite revolutionary at the time the prison writings were first published. This vicarious representative action manifests itself in two different forms in Bonhoeffer's writings, primarily existing as “responsible action” in *Ethics* and then moving more closely to the suffering of Christ in the prison writings. But, as I have already argued, in both cases, the church-community encounters the world in order to enact the ultimate within the penultimate, and by doing so, embodies vicarious representative action. In this section I want to show how Bonhoeffer's understanding of vicarious representative action is different than several of the “suffering God” theologies that have emerged in subsequent theologies.

The notion of God's suffering has gained prominence in some late twentieth-century theological circles in recent years, from voices in both liberation, European, and American theology. These theologies are too numerous to examine with any detail, but I

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 404.

shall note some examples. Gustavo Gutiérrez, in his *A Theology of Liberation*, advocates a type of economic suffering by the church when he argues that the church should practice a “solidarity *with the poor*” as a “protest *against poverty*.”<sup>49</sup> As part of his argument, Gutiérrez cites Bonhoeffer, arguing that Bonhoeffer’s vision of a world come of age provides a model by which a transforming of economic and political structures can be engaged precisely by embracing the worldliness described by Bonhoeffer.<sup>50</sup> Eberhard Jüngel’s *God as the Mystery of the World* notes the centrality of Bonhoeffer’s suffering God as a key component to understanding God’s identity in the world, although Jüngel’s project attempts to work beyond that suffering.<sup>51</sup> Jürgen Moltmann’s *The Crucified God* builds upon Bonhoeffer’s prison writings, using the notion of God’s suffering as central in the development of his Christology.<sup>52</sup> Asian-American theologian Andrew Sung Park argues that Christian suffering related to the Korean shaman concept of *han* best describes God’s identity in Christ.<sup>53</sup> Most recently, William Placher’s *Narratives of a Vulnerable God* has reframed Christology by focusing upon the sufferings of God in Christ, citing Bonhoeffer along the way.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, ed. and trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagle (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1971), 172, emphasis Gutiérrez’s.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>51</sup>Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Dispute Between Theism and Atheism in the Theology of the Crucified One* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 57-63.

<sup>52</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. John Bowden and John R.A. Wilson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), xi, 28, 47, 55, 63, 77.

<sup>53</sup>Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Doctrine of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

<sup>54</sup>William C. Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster James Knox, 1994), 6, 18, 25-26, 155, 185.

Each of these thinkers use Bonhoeffer's prison Christology in their own work, particularly emphasizing his passage describing how God is pushed out of the world and onto the cross.<sup>55</sup> In doing so, they advocate a suffering God. Their theologies view God as a fellow-sufferer of sorts, understanding the plight of humanity completely. Consequently, they embrace Bonhoeffer's Christological picture of suffering. Unfortunately, while several theologians have seized upon the concept of suffering and its role in Bonhoeffer's Christology, little has been done to develop how the church-community participating in the sufferings of Christ can become concrete vicarious representative action *on the world's behalf*. For while Bonhoeffer does indeed speak of God's suffering through the person of Christ, he also speaks of Christ acting for humanity. God does not *merely* suffer; God also acts in the world. Bonhoeffer differentiates himself from subsequent theologies of suffering by postulating how vicarious representative action done by the church-community—while participating in the sufferings of Christ in the world—might accomplish the ultimate good.

Of those mentioned previously, Gutiérrez comes closest to understanding how the church-community might act on the world's behalf, but he does so only through social action for the poor. Obviously Bonhoeffer's prison writings indicate that the church of the future must care about the poor, since he advocates the church giving away its possessions and engaging in a "secular" calling.<sup>56</sup> But Bonhoeffer's vicarious representative action is not limited to political and economic action. Instead, his prison writings and *Ethics* indicate a sphere of action where the church-community models its life after Christ

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<sup>55</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 360.

<sup>56</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 382.

by demonstrating to the world what it means to exist for the other. Consequently, Bonhoeffer describes the coming church in terms beyond economics:

It must tell men everywhere of what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others. In particular, our own church will have to take the field against the vices of *hubris*, power-worship, envy, and humbug, as the roots of all evil. It will have to speak of moderation, purity, trust, loyalty, constancy, patience, discipline, humility, contentment, and modesty.<sup>57</sup>

In describing a church that exists for others through participation in the sufferings of Christ, Bonhoeffer distinguishes himself from contemporary theologies that attempt to employ suffering as a path toward God's mutability. Bonhoeffer seems to reject such a move, instead arguing that the world can only be understood through the lens of Christ—a hermeneutical maneuver depending upon the steadfast nature of God. Where theologians like Moltmann or Jüngel argue that God's sufferings make God passible, Bonhoeffer's assertion that the church conforms to the likeness of Christ seems to demonstrate a conviction that God is unchangeable *and* suffering. These two realities are not mutually exclusive, but are instead the paradoxical reality made manifest in the triune God through Jesus the Son and God the Father. By allowing the church-community to participate in God's sufferings and simultaneously to remain convinced of God's steadfast nature, Bonhoeffer seems to look toward Herbert McCabe's later conclusion that God can be both immutable *and* suffering.<sup>58</sup>

Given the suffering of God *and* Christ's existing for others, Bonhoeffer argues that the coming church-community must not only concern itself with political and eco-

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 383.

<sup>58</sup>Herbert McCabe, "The Involvement of God," *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), 41. McCabe cleverly notes that to force a false either/or upon God is unnecessary. His implication is clear: a third way may be possible. Both Bonhoeffer and McCabe here seem to follow the impassible suffering Christology originally posited by Cyril of Alexandria as developed in Paul Inhwan Kim, *Apatheia and Atonement*, PhD Dissertation, Baylor University, 2008.

nomic justice, but it must also model the person of Jesus Christ to the world. As he notes, the church “must not under-estimate the importance of human example . . . it is not abstract argument, but example, that gives its word emphasis and power.”<sup>59</sup> Consequently, the church-community Bonhoeffer envisions will certainly participate in the sufferings of God in the world, but it will not do so without a goal in mind. By imitating the story of Christ, the church-community will model a new social ethic and humanity for the world, one where the virtues listed by Bonhoeffer are the rule, not the exception.

When Bonhoeffer speaks about the church-community willingly bearing guilt on the world’s behalf in order to serve as its vicarious representative, it is easy for contemporary readers to connect this sentiment with his involvement in the plot to overthrow Hitler. By participating in the plot, Bonhoeffer knowingly disobeyed Jesus’ peace commands, thus willingly bearing guilt on the world’s behalf. It is somewhat more difficult to imagine what vicarious representative action might look like in today’s context. While sharing in the suffering of the poor surely is one place where such vicarious representative action will begin, there are surely other arenas the church-community in which it might act on the world’s behalf. It seems that future considerations of Bonhoeffer’s project of theological hermeneutics must engage those possibilities, as well.

### *Participation in the Penultimate*

Having demonstrated that vicarious representative action is *not* synonymous with suffering, I now shall turn to exactly *where* Bonhoeffer envisions this participation in the person of Christ taking place. In the *Ethics* manuscript “Ultimate and Penultimate Things,” Bonhoeffer explains two theological categories that become central

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

to understanding both the *Ethics* and the prison writings: ultimate and penultimate. By envisioning the world in such a way, Bonhoeffer employs an important hermeneutical maneuver, arguing that the world is in a “between” phase of sorts; he views the world in transition between ultimate and penultimate from a Christian perspective. Ultimate and penultimate are eschatological in scope, literally translating from the German as “last things” (*Letztes*) and “things before the last things” (*Allerletztes*).<sup>60</sup> As Victoria Barnett has noted, by describing the world in eschatological terms, Bonhoeffer frames the theological discussion for a church preparing to engage a post-Christendom world.<sup>61</sup> Bonhoeffer seems to have anticipated this development in a post-Nazi Germany, particularly given his prison writings.

For Bonhoeffer, that which centers upon “the event of justification of a sinner is something ultimate”—it is the end or goal of human existence.<sup>62</sup> This ultimacy is grounded in the fact that it “is not what a person is per se, but what a person is in this event, that gives us insight into the Christian life.”<sup>63</sup> When a person is changed by what takes place through justification, that person is affected by something “ultimate that cannot be grasped by anything we are, or do, or suffer.”<sup>64</sup> This justification is not synonymous with a traditional Lutheran interpretation of justification, however, because Bonhoeffer argues that justification is not simply an eschatological and spiritual matter; it also

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 146, editorial note #1.

<sup>61</sup> Victoria J. Barnett, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Relevance for Post-Holocaust Christian Theology,” *Studies in Christian Jewish Relations* 2:1 (2007), 53-67.

<sup>62</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 149.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

affects the present world. Consequently, Bonhoeffer is able to write of the ultimate entrance of God into a person's life to cause an interpretive shift in the Christian. They "recognize God and their neighbors for the first time"; they "become free for God and for one another."<sup>65</sup> The ultimate, it seems, is God's word made manifest in Jesus Christ and the grace that is presented through him in order to provide justification. The ultimate is separate from that which comes before the ultimate, because justification involves a "complete break with everything" (language that is reminiscent of the church being separate from the world in *Discipleship*) that is not ultimate.<sup>66</sup> As Bonhoeffer argues, Christians strive to "be like Christ himself," according to the "content of the Christian message."<sup>67</sup> By doing so, one works toward the ultimate in life and reality.

But the ultimate is not simply an eternal/eschatological category; the ultimate is *temporal*, since the ultimacy of justification is preceded by something else. That which precedes the ultimate: "some action, suffering, movement, intention, defeat, recovery, pleading, hoping"—all of that Bonhoeffer terms as the penultimate; it precedes the last. These penultimate actions make up a span of time that is punctuated at the end with the ultimate, when the justification of an individual takes place. The penultimate, according to Bonhoeffer, can be understood only once one has seen the ultimate; the ultimate defines what is penultimate. Consequently, for Bonhoeffer, anything that is not defined by its participation in justification by grace is penultimate. The ultimate in the life of a

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid. Bonhoeffer's description of justification being part and parcel of the temporal world and not merely an eschatological reality runs counter to popular Lutheran thought of his day. But his thought seems to corroborate with a close reading of Martin Luther's essay, "The Freedom of the Christian."

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 149.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 150.



Christian, however, does not do away with the penultimate, for the Christian must live each and every day within and around the penultimate, sometimes even choosing between ultimate and penultimate responses to situations.<sup>68</sup>

Bonhoeffer's discussion of the Christian response to the penultimate is one of the defining characteristics of his *Ethics*. In his development of *Stellvertretung* in *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer balances Christian action between the poles of freedom and love. By doing so, he eschews principle-based ethics and instead situates his ethical theory in the concrete person of Jesus Christ. Similarly, the discussion of the penultimate and the ultimate rejects the ethics of principles and instead centers on the person of Jesus Christ and his interaction with the penultimate. Bonhoeffer does not believe that the penultimate should be rejected out of hand; instead he claims that "the penultimate must be preserved for the sake of the ultimate."<sup>69</sup> Indeed, he notes that if the Christian is to base behavior on Jesus' interaction with the world, then one must note that Jesus interacted with the penultimate, even while preparing it for the ultimate.

Clifford Green points out that Bonhoeffer uses the triad of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection repeatedly through the *Ethics*, not unlike a litany, in order to communicate Jesus' interaction with the world.<sup>70</sup> Bonhoeffer calls upon that triad in describing the fact that Jesus does not seek to abolish the penultimate, but rather to engage it. Through the *incarnation*, Bonhoeffer argues, "God enters into created reality, that we

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 152.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 160. The language of preservation originates in *Creation and Fall*; there he employs orders of preservation to combat Nazi use of the orders of creation. Here he uses a similar path of reasoning, claiming that the penultimate is to be *preserved*, but should not be seen as ordained as it presently stands.

<sup>70</sup>Green, "Editor's Introduction," 7.

may be and should be human beings before God.”<sup>71</sup> Even greater, he argues that humanity cannot be understood from a strictly penultimate perspective, but must also be read from the ultimate point of view. As he explains, “[O]nly from the perspective of the ultimate can we recognize what being human is, and therefore how being human is based on and determined by being justified.”<sup>72</sup> By living in and among humanity as a human, Jesus simultaneously condemns our sin, yet provides a path for individuals to become truly human. For Bonhoeffer, when individuals live by allowing themselves to be formed by Christ, they enter into a true state of humanity; they become human beings as they were intended.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, “Jesus lets human reality exist as penultimate, neither making it self-sufficient nor destroying it.”<sup>74</sup> In doing so, Jesus creates a path for humanity to become humans justified by grace, thus able to embrace the ultimate.

Through the *crucifixion*, Bonhoeffer argues that Jesus proclaims God’s judgment over all of humanity, and that the “rejection of the whole human race without exception is included in the rejection of God on the cross of Jesus Christ.”<sup>75</sup> However, Bonhoeffer claims that this judgment and rejection of the human race does not mean that creation and

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<sup>71</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 157.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 160

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 96. According to Green, Bonhoeffer contrasts this idea with the patristic notion that God became human so that humans could be “divinized.” Cf. editorial note #86. In my opinion, however, Green misreads the patristic sources he believes Bonhoeffer to be countering. A charitable reading of Athanasius and Augustine would recognize that neither one believes that humans become “gods,” as Green asserts, but rather that they embrace their divinity by becoming a human as intended by God and modeled in the person of Jesus Christ. From my perspective, Bonhoeffer here is not attempting to counter Athanasius and Augustine but is instead supporting their position that Jesus is the one True Human and that contemporary human beings can only become fully human by patterning their lives after him. In this respect, Karl Barth’s *The Humanity of God* follows Bonhoeffer’s theological conclusions.

<sup>74</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 158.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

humanity are destroyed. Instead it means that humanity endures and lives under the sign of the crucifixion, “living on toward judgment when they despise it, but living on toward salvation when they accept it.”<sup>76</sup> The cross is the sign of the ultimate in the midst of the penultimate. By being crucified, Jesus speaks of the ultimacy of justification while simultaneously judging the sin of humanity.

Finally, in the *resurrection*, “God, in love and omnipotence, makes an end of death and calls a new creation into life.”<sup>77</sup> The resurrection marks a new beginning for humanity, meaning that those who have encountered and been called by the ultimate word of justification through Christ have an understanding of humanity that is unlike their old humanity. Despite this new humanity, however, the resurrection of Jesus does not mean that God does away with the penultimate. Instead, “the resurrection does not abolish the penultimate as long as the earth remains; but eternal life, the new life, breaks ever more powerfully into earthly life and creates space for itself within it.”<sup>78</sup> For Bonhoeffer, the resurrection enables the redemption of humanity *within the* penultimate and creates space for the ultimate *within the* penultimate, but it does not destroy the penultimate in its creating space for the new, redeemed humanity.

Thus Bonhoeffer’s Christocentric triad is marked with a continuous engagement with the penultimate: in the *incarnation* God enables penultimate humanity to embrace the ultimate and become truly human; in the *crucifixion* God speaks judgment upon humanity’s sin, but allows humanity to live under the cross so as to work toward the ulti-

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

mate; and in the *resurrection* God provides a new humanity and life in and among the penultimate. As I mentioned prior, Bonhoeffer argues that it is “only from the perspective of the ultimate” that humanity can be understood within the penultimate.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, it becomes clear throughout Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics* that his interpretation of Jesus’ engagement with the penultimate world is not one of avoidance or abolition. On the contrary, Bonhoeffer insists that Jesus intentionally encounters the penultimate.

Given his pattern of Christians forming their lives to the pattern of Christ, it is unsurprising that Bonhoeffer argues that the life of the Christian must also encounter the penultimate, just as Christ does. He explains:

Concerning the relationship to the penultimate, it can be concluded that Christian life neither destroys nor sanctions the penultimate. In Christ the reality of God encounters the reality of the world and allows us to take part in this real encounter. It is an encounter beyond all radicalism and all compromise. *Christian life is participation in Christ’s encounter with the world.*<sup>80</sup>

It is here that Bonhoeffer arrives at his description of how Christians live out the concept of *Stellvertretung* willingly accepting responsibility and guilt grounded in love for the world. They do so because they participate in Christ’s encounter with the world. Just as Jesus Christ through his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection engages the penultimate and simultaneously creates a path toward and a language for the ultimate, the Christian must also engage the penultimate. The Christian does so by *participation* in Christ’s encounter with the world, borrowing from concepts Bonhoeffer has already developed thus far in his theological hermeneutics. As I noted in chapter two, Bonhoeffer has used the language of participation before, namely in the creation of his theological

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 160.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 159, emphasis mine.

anthropology. There he discussed how the church-community participates in the collective person of Christ and how participating in that collective person enabled the possibility of vicarious representative action. Here, in the *Ethics*, vicarious representative action has already been introduced, and now the concept of participation with Christ surfaces. With such intersecting themes, it certainly seems as if the theological foundations crafted in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* are now resurfacing as praxis. In both cases, vicarious representative action and participation are tied to one another.

Participation in Christ's encounter with the penultimate, it seems, will follow the Christological triad of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. In each aspect of the triad, Bonhoeffer argues that Jesus encounters the penultimate by allowing access to the ultimate. For example, in the incarnation, God becomes human so that penultimate humanity might see what it means to live as a human justified, thus living according to the ultimate. Thus Bonhoeffer uses the language of "preparing the way" to describe the way in which Christians are to open a path from the penultimate to the ultimate in their specific context. Bonhoeffer argues that Christians live as humans aware of and under the ultimate, and that they do so within the penultimate. This manifests itself in feeding the hungry, providing shelter to the homeless, and giving community to the lonely, to be sure,<sup>81</sup> but it also comes from an awareness "that we ourselves can never prepare the way," but that "only the coming Lord can prepare the way."<sup>82</sup> Thus by participating in his work and encounter, Christians help prepare the way while simultaneously knowing

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 166-67.

that true preparation for the ultimate only comes through the work that can only be done by Jesus Christ.

Christians are able to prepare a way for Christ within creation, Bonhoeffer argues, for there are certain aspects of creation that God leaves open toward Christ, even after the fall. Bonhoeffer does not argue that these aspects of creation are without blemish; they, too, are sinful. However, Bonhoeffer terms those aspects of sinful creation that are open to the coming of Christ as the “natural.” Likewise, that part of fallen creation that is no longer open to the coming of Christ is “unnatural.”<sup>83</sup> That which is natural, Bonhoeffer argues, is truly penultimate, pointing toward the ultimate—the last things. As Barry Harvey notes, natural and unnatural are, for Bonhoeffer, “mediating categories” that he uses “typologically, as anticipations and refusals, respectively, of justification.”<sup>84</sup> These mediating categories allow Bonhoeffer to imagine the church-community’s interaction with the world without complete acceptance or condemnation of the penultimate world. Instead, Bonhoeffer argues that the church-community must prepare the way for the ultimate within the penultimate and that it does so through those parts of the creation that are open to the coming of Christ’s justification—what he calls the natural.

To this point, Bonhoeffer has not explicitly tied the church-community to the concept of participation as he does *Stellvertretung*. Thus far participation in the ultimate has been described as individuals participating in the penultimate through preparing the way

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 173.

<sup>84</sup>Barry A. Harvey, “Preserving the World for Christ: Toward a Theological Engagement with the ‘Secular,’” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61:1 (2008): 71. Harvey’s reading of Bonhoeffer, as I have noted, centers on the concept that Bonhoeffer sees the church in a post-Constantinian age, no longer operating from a position of power and privilege. Consequently, these mediating categories allow the church-community to interact with the penultimate by embracing its lower status in the world.

rather than through the church-community's actual encounter with the penultimate.<sup>85</sup> At this juncture, I want to return to the concluding paragraph from the previous section; there I referenced the concluding manuscript of the *Ethics*—"The Concrete Command and the Divine Mandates." In that concluding manuscript Bonhoeffer continues his critique of "orders of creation" by positing the ways in which the commands of Christ are made manifest in the world: church, marriage and family, culture, and government.<sup>86</sup> As with *Stellvertretung*, it is here that Bonhoeffer brings the church-community into the picture of participation.

For Bonhoeffer, in "Jesus Christ the word of God and the community-of-God are inextricably bound together."<sup>87</sup> Consequently, for Bonhoeffer, wherever Jesus is, the church-community is there also, for "where Jesus Christ is proclaimed according to the divine mandate, there is also always a church-community."<sup>88</sup> Just as the church-community is tied to the *presence* of Jesus, it is also tied to the *activity* of Jesus, as well. Bonhoeffer notes that the church-community is "oriented toward effectively proclaiming Christ to all the world—which means that the church-community itself is merely an instrument, a means to an end" but is also the "goal and center of all that God is doing," for it is the *presence* of Jesus in a penultimate world, and it *participates* in the activity of Je-

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<sup>85</sup>James Wm. McClendon, Jr. notes that Bonhoeffer's later life was marked by an absence of community, particularly as a Confessing pastor that decided to engage in the underground resistance movement against Hitler. This lack of community no doubt plays into the fact that the church-community is less prevalent in the *Ethics* manuscripts. Cf. McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume One* (Nashville: Abingdon: 1986), 206-08.

<sup>86</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 388-ff. One could debate the effectiveness of this strategy, arguing that it seemingly recreates the "orders of creation" that he argued against in *Creation and Fall*. However, that discussion is outside the scope of my project.

<sup>87</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 403.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

sus by proclaiming his ultimate word of justification.<sup>89</sup> This understanding of the church-community's participation in Jesus' encounter with the penultimate should be coupled with previous sections that argued the church-community's manner of following Jesus was to act as a vicarious representative for the world.

Consequently, I argue that Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* describes a pattern of engagement with reality for the church-community through the language of participation in the work of Christ, which he describes through the triad of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, together engaging the penultimate by providing a way to encounter the ultimate. The church-community participates in this same triad by allowing Christ to take form in the church-community and preparing the way for the ultimate within the penultimate. By living in the penultimate without condoning or condemning it, the church-community prepares the way for the ultimate through proclamation of the word of God. However, the central component of preparing the way is through vicarious representative action with a willingness to embrace guilt, embodied by Jesus in his life, and now enacted by the church-community through the Spirit on behalf of the world. This pattern of engagement maintains a Christocentric and ecclesial focus, and in doing so provides a way to interpret reality theologically. Having argued that the *Ethics* is indeed built on an ecclesial project of interpretation grounded in vicarious representative action, I now shall argue that the prison writings continue that same project.

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid, 404.



*Religionless Christianity: Stellvertretung and Penultimate  
Participation in the Prison Writings*

Earlier in this chapter I noted that several scholarly approaches to Bonhoeffer's prison writings, particularly those collected in the volume *Letters and Papers From Prison*, attempt to separate them from Bonhoeffer's previous work, even the *Ethics*. In this section I shall argue that Bonhoeffer's prison theology is, in several respects, a continuation of the theological hermeneutics outlined in *Ethics*, specifically the pattern of engagement with reality described through participation in the penultimate through vicarious representative action. In order to make this argument, I shall demonstrate how *Ethics* connects to the prison writings in two ways. First, I shall argue that what Bonhoeffer calls "penultimate" in *Ethics* can be understood—at least partially—as "world come of age" in *Letters and Papers From Prison*. Second, I shall argue that vicarious representative action, while not specifically mentioned in the prison writings, remains an underlying theme in *Letters and Papers from Prison* because of Bonhoeffer's concern for others. Once I have made these two connections, I shall argue that the much-debated term "religionless Christianity" from *Letters and Papers from Prison* is Bonhoeffer's description of the church-community engaging reality as vicarious representative in a world come of age.

*World Come of Age as the Penultimate*

In Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, penultimate means all that has preceded the ultimate act of justification. As I demonstrated earlier in the chapter, this means the world, apart from the justification of grace by Jesus Christ is in a penultimate state. By the time Bonhoeffer completes his *Ethics*, the penultimate serves as one of the primary theological concepts in

the work, providing the church-community with a pattern for engagement with reality. Despite its importance in the *Ethics*, however, the term only appears once in the prison writings—a brief mention in a letter to Eberhard Bethge dated April 30, 1944. In that letter Bonhoeffer begins describing the concept of religionless Christianity.<sup>90</sup> I shall discuss religionless Christianity at length later in the chapter, but in this letter Bonhoeffer argues that such nonreligious identity depends upon Christ’s identity in the world, one where “Christ is no longer an object of religion, but something quite different, really the lord of the world.”<sup>91</sup> Attempting to ascertain Christ’s new religionless identity in the world, Bonhoeffer rhetorically asks whether “the difference (which I have suggested to you before) between penultimate and ultimate, take[s] on a new difference here?”<sup>92</sup> Bonhoeffer does not answer his question in this same letter, although he continues to develop the notion of religionless Christianity during this same discussion. Only one other time does he refer to the penultimate, claiming that Christians cannot talk of the last until they talk of the penultimate.<sup>93</sup> These brief mentions of penultimate—almost an aside to the larger question of Christ’s identity as part of religionless Christianity—are the only times the concept appears in the prison writings.<sup>94</sup>

Just as Bonhoeffer *stops* using the term “penultimate” to describe the status of the world in relation Christ’s identity, *a new phrase emerges* in his correspondence with

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<sup>90</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 278-81.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>94</sup> Aside from the *Ethics* manuscripts, the term “penultimate” appears twice more in Bonhoeffer’s writings. On both occasions the word appears in letters written to Bethge from a monastery in Ettal while writing the *Ethics* manuscripts. Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment*, 88, 92.

Bethge, one that I argue is Bonhoeffer's new way of communicating the theological category of the penultimate in the prison theology, albeit in a slightly different way. In another letter written to Bethge a little over a month later (June 8, 1944), Bonhoeffer uses the phrase "a world come of age" to describe the world's relationship to Christ. As Ralf Wüstenberg has noted, one likely reason for the phrase's emergence in Bonhoeffer's writing is that while in prison he spent a good deal of time reading William Dilthey's *Weltanschauung und Analyse*, where the phrase "world come of age" also appears. Wüstenberg documents Bonhoeffer's reading and use of Dilthey extensively, arguing that Bonhoeffer borrows the phrase "world come of age" exclusively based on his reading of Dilthey. With Dilthey's phrase at hand, Bonhoeffer ceased using "penultimate" and set about describing what the "world come of age" looks like.

Upon encountering "world come of age" in Dilthey's philosophy of life, Bonhoeffer begins using the phrase with increasing regularity in his letters to Bethge. In the letter dated June 8, 1944, Bonhoeffer explains what the world come of age means and looks like. He tells Bethge that the world no longer needs the "tutelage of 'God,'" using quotation marks to indicate he is referring to God as a category of sorts, not the God revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>95</sup> The world no longer needs 'God,' Bonhoeffer asserts, for this 'God' is only necessary in the "so-called ultimate questions" of life—for example, death and guilt.<sup>96</sup> Consequently, Bonhoeffer asserts, the world has become self-confident, no longer needing a God that serves as a *deus ex machina* or "working hypothesis."<sup>97</sup> Bonhoeffer

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<sup>95</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 326.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Bonhoeffer uses this phrase many times in the prison writings. Cf. *Letters and Papers*, 325, 360, 381.

argues that a time is approaching when humanity will address even the ultimate questions without 'God' as a working hypothesis, and that the church-community must imagine a new way to encounter this world.

Additionally, the world come of age does not, Bonhoeffer argues, view itself as in need of an intervention of any kind, particularly from 'God.' Rather, the world come of age only contains a "small number of intellectuals . . . who regard themselves as the most important thing in the world, and who therefore like to busy themselves with themselves" that might sense a need for some sort of intervention, possibly from philosophy or psychology, but for the most part is made up of ordinary people quite content with life.<sup>98</sup> This ordinary person, "who spends his everyday life at work and with family, and of course with all kinds of diversions," has no need for 'God,' for this person "has neither the time nor the inclination to concern himself with existential despair, or to regard his perhaps modest share of happiness as a trial, a trouble, or a calamity."<sup>99</sup> Most of the people in the world come of age, Bonhoeffer argues, live without 'God,' yet they are happy, confident, and content in their lives.

Thus the world come of age, for Bonhoeffer, is a world that exists and acts without 'God,' confident in its own abilities and content with its own happiness. Bonhoeffer does not condemn such secularity; on the contrary, he argues it is part of the natural development of the world,<sup>100</sup> noting that Jesus Christ claims this world come of age,<sup>101</sup> and

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<sup>98</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 326-7. Aside from this particular passage, Bonhoeffer has negative things to say about psychotherapy throughout the prison writings. Cf. *Letters and Papers*, 318, 326, 341, 345-6.

<sup>99</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 327.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 342.

that the godless nature of the world is a step beyond confusing Christ “with a human law.”<sup>102</sup> Simultaneously, however, Bonhoeffer does not state that the world come of age is without flaw. He says that the world come of age is “godless,”<sup>103</sup> that it is consumed with power and strength (and the sins that derive from power and strength),<sup>104</sup> and that humanity come of age now faces its greatest challenge in the fact that it cannot get beyond itself and its own flaws.<sup>105</sup> In summary, Bonhoeffer *neither seeks to bless nor condemn the world come of age*. He instead describes the situation as he observes it, noting how the place of ‘God’ has changed in this self-confident and changing world.

Bonhoeffer’s attitude toward and description of the world come of age in his letters from prison bears striking similarity to the theological category of the penultimate as described in *Ethics*. Describing Christian attitude toward the penultimate in *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer states that “it can be concluded that *Christian life neither destroys nor sanctions the penultimate*.”<sup>106</sup> The Christian does not sanction, for the penultimate is imperfect and not yet completed in the ultimacy of God’s word in Christ; simultaneously, the Christian does not destroy, for in “Christ the reality of God encounters the reality of the world and allows us to take part in this real encounter.”<sup>107</sup> Since God has decided to allow the penultimate to keep its characteristics in its encounter with Jesus Christ, so, too, must the

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 327.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 361.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 345.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 380.

<sup>106</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 159, emphasis mine.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

church-community encounter the world in its penultimate state, neither attempting to destroy nor sanction it.

Connections between the world come of age and the penultimate emerge in this comparison. In both the *Ethics* and the prison writings, Bonhoeffer describes how God encounters reality through the person of Jesus Christ. Additionally, Bonhoeffer argues that the world is imperfect in both works, describing the world as godless in the prison writings and as apart from grace in the *Ethics*. Perhaps most importantly, Bonhoeffer argues in both places that this imperfect world is able to retain its characteristics in the encounter with God in Jesus Christ. He does not argue that the world must be changed prior to the encounter, nor does he argue that the encounter will destroy the concrete world. Thus, while the language changes between *Ethics* and the prison writings, the essential plan for God to encounter reality through Jesus Christ without destroying or sanctioning the world remains the same, describing a reality that is to encounter the ultimate grace of Jesus Christ but simultaneously maintaining an integrity of its own. In addition to these similarities, as I noted earlier, Bonhoeffer begins using “world come of age” in his letters only after ceasing to use “penultimate,” as if he intended to change the semantics of his argument intentionally.

However, there is at least one central difference between the prison writings and the *Ethics* regarding this concept. While Bonhoeffer uses the concepts of the four mandates (work, church, marriage, and government) to describe the ways in which God binds humanity together and for Christ in *Ethics*, he abandons such language in the prison writings. The mandates are central to the *Ethics* as Bonhoeffer “decisively rules out any suggestion of an autonomous secular sphere that lies beyond the authority of God’s self-

disclosing activity in Christ.”<sup>108</sup> But in the prison writings the mandates are mentioned only once, in passing, and then cast in a negative light.<sup>109</sup> Instead, Bonhoeffer begins to emphasize the freedom of humanity, suggesting that an ethical person finds enjoyment of the world difficult while the Christian does not.<sup>110</sup> The mandates disappear from the prison writings, it seems, so that Bonhoeffer might more completely allow the Christian to engage and encounter the world on its own terms, while simultaneously maintaining the perspective of Christ.

Given this shift between mandates toward freely encountering the world, it seems Bonhoeffer hopes to communicate some sort of difference between the penultimate and the world come of age. His previous terminological consistency makes it unlikely for him to suddenly employ a new term without a new connotation. So it seems that world come of age has at least a partially unique meaning, although the timing of its usage indicates it is still somehow connected to the penultimate. Barry Harvey argues that Bonhoeffer’s decision to cease using language of the theological mandates in the prison writings indicates a recognition (albeit partial) that a new era of post-Christendom Christianity is imminent after World War II.<sup>111</sup> Perhaps Bonhoeffer decides to further develop the concept of the penultimate by arguing the church-community engages the world as it is without artificial divisions. In doing away with the concepts of the mandates, Bonhoeffer envisions a present world where the sacred and the secular can no longer be neatly di-

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<sup>108</sup> Harvey, 75.

<sup>109</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 193.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Harvey, 75-77.

vided and separately understood. Instead, Bonhoeffer posits a world come of age, where the secular is only understood in light of the sacred. The Christian, acting from freedom rather than ethical behavior, is allowed to engage, encounter, and interpret the world as it is, without forcing the language of mandates upon it. Under this perspective, world come of age is a new term replacing penultimate, just as penultimate serves to replace the concept of the middle from *Creation and Fall*. With these theological connections and similarities in mind, it seems reasonable to assert that the penultimate reality in the *Ethics* is connected to the world come of age in the prison writings, albeit somewhat different.

#### *Stellvertretung in the Prison Writings*

With this similarity in mind, in this section I shall argue that the primary ecclesial theme from the *Ethics*—*Stellvertretung*—is also part of the theological hermeneutics of the prison writings. Earlier in this chapter I demonstrated how Bonhoeffer developed *Stellvertretung* in *Discipleship* through the use of suffering. In short, I argued that *a central component of vicarious representative action for Bonhoeffer is found in the church-community participating in the sufferings of God through Jesus Christ's encounter with reality*. It seems significant, then, that the motif of the church-community participating in God's sufferings plays a central role in the theology of the prison writings. While Bonhoeffer does not use the term *Stellvertretung*,<sup>112</sup> the concept of suffering and the church-community's participation in that suffering surfaces repeatedly. I argue that this recurring theme of God's suffering and participation in that suffering is a continuation of vicarious

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<sup>112</sup>The term only appears once in the prison writings as Bonhoeffer tells Bethge that they “experience our different fates for each other in a kind of vicarious way.” Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 191.



representative action—a theme I earlier demonstrated is present in several of Bonhoeffer's major works.

For Bonhoeffer, God's identity as one who suffers in and with the world gains further prominence in the prison writings. While the notion of God's suffering was initially discussed at length in *Discipleship*, it is here in the prison writings that he more completely discusses suffering, arguing that God's weakness within the world is a central concept in the identity of Jesus, and consequently, the church-community. Bonhoeffer states that God should no longer be thought of in terms of power; such thought patterns belong to the working hypothesis 'God' that the world come of age has rejected. Instead, Bonhoeffer argues, the God of the Bible "is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us."<sup>113</sup> God's weakness is made manifest in the crucifixion, and so "God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross."<sup>114</sup> It is the weakness of God incarnate in Jesus that helps humanity, "not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering."<sup>115</sup> Bonhoeffer argues that when the weakness of God is juxtaposed against a *deus ex machina* concept of God—which the world come of age has rejected—then the possibility "opens up a way of seeing the God of the Bible, who wins power and space in the world by his weakness."<sup>116</sup> Consequently, Bonhoeffer argues that the identity of God is inseparably tied to the sufferings of Jesus on the cross.

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<sup>113</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 360.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 360-61.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 361.

By focusing upon Jesus' sufferings in the world and on the cross, Bonhoeffer opens the door to the church-community participating in those sufferings, since, for him, Christ exists as church-community. Such participation "is a reversal of what the religious man expects from God;" it is not a pain-free existence under God's blessing. As Bonhoeffer states, to view God as one that forbids human suffering "deprives suffering of its element of contingency as a divine ordinance."<sup>117</sup> On the contrary, Bonhoeffer argues that in the New Testament, "the cross includes the blessing,"<sup>118</sup> meaning that joining Christ in his sufferings in the world is the way to freedom. For Bonhoeffer, through suffering, "the deliverance consists in our being allowed to put the matter out of our own hands into God's hands."<sup>119</sup> When humans embrace participation in the sufferings of God in Christ in the world, they step toward a freedom knowing that human outcomes are in the hands of God. Consequently, Bonhoeffer argues that it is precisely by participating in suffering that humanity begins to understand who God is and what God is about in the world come of age.

Bonhoeffer only provides a rudimentary description of the church-community's participation in the sufferings of Christ; he never completely explained his thoughts on the matter prior to his death. He says that a Christian must "really live in the godless world, without attempting to gloss over or explain its ungodliness in some religious way or other."<sup>120</sup> By living in the godless world and living a "secular' life," the Christian

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 374.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 375.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 361.

participates in the “sufferings of God in the secular life.”<sup>121</sup> Such living and participation forces one to not think about “one’s own needs, problems, sins, and fears,” but it instead allows one “to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ, into the messianic event.”<sup>122</sup>

Bonhoeffer argues that participation in the messianic sufferings of God is demonstrated throughout the characters of the New Testament. It manifests itself in the “call to discipleship,” in “conversions,” in the “healing of the sick,” in the shepherds and wise men, in the “centurion of Capernaum (who makes no confession of sin) and the eunuch.”<sup>123</sup> These characters are extremely diverse, yet they each respond to Christ in their own context. For Bonhoeffer, the “only thing that is common to all these is their sharing in the suffering of God in Christ. That is their ‘faith.’”<sup>124</sup> As Rowan Williams writes, these encounters “are events in which people are concretely drawn into a share in the vulnerability of God, in to a new kind of life and a new identity.”<sup>125</sup> Consequently, Bonhoeffer argues that Christians must not reject the world, but rather live squarely within the world, and in doing so, “we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world—watching with Christ in Gethsemane.”<sup>126</sup>

As part of these preliminary thoughts on the church-community’s participation in the suffering of Christ, Bonhoeffer focuses on another theological concept from his pre-

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 41.

<sup>126</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 370.

vious writings<sup>127</sup>—concern for the other. In an “Outline for a Book” he sketches while in prison, Bonhoeffer argues a current weakness of the church is that it does not take risks for others.<sup>128</sup> Later in the outline, he notes that “Jesus is *there only for others*,” that his “‘*being there for others*’ is the experience of his transcendence,” and that his “‘*being there for others*’ maintained till death, is the ground of his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.”<sup>129</sup> He follows that description of Jesus’ identity by arguing that “[f]aith is *participation* in this being of Jesus,” and that Christians must live for the other, since Jesus has done so.<sup>130</sup> Consequently, Bonhoeffer argues that the “church is the church only when it exists for others.”<sup>131</sup> As the themes of suffering, participation in that suffering, and living for the other come together, it seems clear that Bonhoeffer’s ecclesial theme of vicarious representative action is at play here in the prison writings, despite the fact that it is not called by name.

The underlying question is why Bonhoeffer decides not to use the term vicarious representative action in the prison writings. Unlike the distinctive uses of penultimate and world come of age, there is no term that can be used in the prison writings as a foil against which to compare *Stellvertretung*. Bonhoeffer simply uses the language of being for others and participating in the sufferings of Christ to describe what he has referred to as vicarious representative action since *Sanctorum Communio*. Because there is no sig-

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<sup>127</sup>This concept is prevalent in the theological anthropology of *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* discussed in chapter two.

<sup>128</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 381.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

<sup>130</sup>*Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, 382.

nificant theological difference in usage, it seems unlikely that Bonhoeffer desires to do away with the concept. Simultaneously, the fact that he does not use the term leads to speculation as to what would lead him to avoid using a word so central to his theology since he was a student. Unfortunately, his writings do not provide a substantial clue. We simply see two aspects of vicarious representative action—suffering and being for others—used repeatedly in a manner consistent with his previous writings. Lacking any textual evidence of a theological shift at play, I argue that the prison writings are connected to *Ethics* through participation in the sufferings of Christ for the other.

#### *Religionless Christianity as Engagement with Reality*

Having demonstrated that *Ethics* and the prison writings are at least tacitly connected through vicarious representative action and the transition from penultimate to world come of age, I now shall turn toward the concept of “religionless Christianity” described in the prison writings. In this section I shall argue that *Bonhoeffer’s “religionless Christianity” can be understood as the church-community’s vicarious representative action for the other in the world come of age*. Consequently, the pattern of engaging reality for the church-community described in the prison writings is quite similar to that of the *Ethics*, although it employs different terminology. Where *Ethics* argues for vicarious representative action on behalf of the world by willingly taking on guilt, the prison writings carry that theme forward by the church-community suffering with Christ for the world come of age. These similar strategies are described in what Bonhoeffer terms “religionless Christianity” in his prison writings.

As I mentioned earlier, Wüstenberg has already demonstrated that Bonhoeffer does not use the term “religion” with any conceptual synonymity throughout his

writings.<sup>132</sup> However, Wüstenberg also notes that Bonhoeffer uses religion in two primary ways in the prison writings—to describe what he calls “inwardness” or “piety,” and to describe religion as a metaphysical construct.<sup>133</sup> I agree with Wüstenberg’s thesis that Bonhoeffer does not develop a clear concept of religion throughout his writings, although I believe that Bonhoeffer’s use of religion should be understood as a combination of piety and metaphysics. For Bonhoeffer, it seems, the problem with piety is its attempt to manipulate the metaphysical religious concept of ‘God,’ and thus approach God from a position of power, rather than one of weakness. The prison writings seem to indicate that, for Bonhoeffer, any question of individual religion is moot, as he claims that the “question about personal salvation [has] almost completely left us all” and the new focus is the “righteousness and the Kingdom of God on earth.”<sup>134</sup> This sort of personal piety attempts to turn the biblical God into a ‘God’ that only cares about the individual metaphysical state, rather than the world itself. For Bonhoeffer, the world is central, and the Bible indicates that engagement with the world is impossible to avoid for the Christian. An inward conception of religion avoids the world, and disconnects Christ from engagement with the world through the church-community, thus prompting Bonhoeffer to reject such a model. Consequently, when reading the term “religion” in Bonhoeffer’s prison writings, the concepts of piety and metaphysics are at play.

When Bonhoeffer talks of Christianity becoming religionless in the prison writings, then, he should be read wanting to do away with extraneous piety and unnecessary

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<sup>132</sup> Wüstenberg, 29.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 22-26.

<sup>134</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 286.

metaphysical systems—particularly those that attempt to wield any sort of power over God. Since Bonhoeffer clearly asserts that the God of the Bible incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ is best understood in participating in suffering, any framework that attempts to control or exercise power over God inherently misunderstands God’s identity from Bonhoeffer’s perspective. Bonhoeffer desires to rid Christianity of religion, I believe, for he sees religion as a constructed metaphysical system that attempts to control the working hypothesis ‘God,’ and such a system does not understand participation in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Thus Bonhoeffer speaks of embracing humanity and worldliness in sometimes surprising terms as he describes this religionless state. He argues that Christianity can no longer be on the fringes of the ultimate questions. He writes, “I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but at the centre; not in weaknesses but in strength.”<sup>135</sup> Religious practices that attempt to control God move the discussion to the boundaries—to the so called ultimate questions, away from the center. Thus, for Bonhoeffer, “God’s ‘beyond’ is not the beyond of our cognitive faculties. God is beyond in the midst of our life.”<sup>136</sup> This takes shape when Christianity ceases to view itself as individual metaphysics<sup>137</sup> and instead concerns itself with “this world as created and preserved, subjected to laws, reconciled, and restored.”<sup>138</sup> Religionless Christianity is intended to “exist *for* this world,” Bonhoeffer argues, not in the “anthropocentric sense of liberal, mystic pietistic,

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

ethical theology, but in the biblical sense of the creation and of the *incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection* of Jesus Christ.”<sup>139</sup> This triad of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection is at the center of participation in the *Ethics* and is often mentioned in connection with vicarious representative action in *Ethics* and in the prison letters as participating in the sufferings of God in Christ. Religionless Christianity, I argue, is Bonhoeffer’s de-emphasis upon personal piety and an increased emphasis upon participating in Jesus’ being for others through his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Bonhoeffer intimates how this religionless Christianity—a Christianity focused on engaging the world—might manifest itself in two significant passages in the prison writings. In the baptismal sermon written for Bethge’s son, Bonhoeffer explains that the current church is “incapable of taking the word of reconciliation and redemption to mankind and the world.”<sup>140</sup> Because of this, he argues that the church must change, so that Christians can once again speak the word of God to the world. This language, he says, “will be a new language, perhaps quite non-religious, but liberating and redeeming—as was Jesus’ language.”<sup>141</sup> But because words have currently lost their force in the world come of age, Bonhoeffer describes a church where “our being Christians today will be limited to two things: prayer and righteous action before men. All Christian thinking, speaking, and organizing must be born anew out of this prayer and action.”<sup>142</sup> For Bonhoeffer, the

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., emphasis mine.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.



church must move toward being *in* the world and *for* the world by acting on its behalf, thus invoking *Stellvertretung*.

Later in the prison writings, in the “Outline for a Book,” Bonhoeffer echoes these same sentiments as he writes that the “church is the church only when it exists for others.”<sup>143</sup> He describes a church-community where it gives away its wealth to those in need, where the clergy live solely on free-will offerings and by engaging in a “secular calling,” where “not dominating, but helping and serving” are the norm, where the church tells “men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others.”<sup>144</sup> This religionless church, Bonhoeffer argues, will follow the human example of Jesus and by participating in his being, shall provide that same example to the world. This move away from religion, sounds quite a bit like the free church influences Bonhoeffer has encountered along the way. The free-will offerings indicate a move toward a post-Christendom understanding of the faith, indicating that the church is separate from the government, and that it is in *diaspora*, living as an alien community in the world.

Despite the term “religionlessness,” however, I do not maintain that Bonhoeffer intends to do away with worship and the sacraments. To the contrary, just as in his previous theological writings, the prison letters detail a theology that is made up of the engagement of the church-community with the world. It seems that perhaps Bonhoeffer hopes to rescue the sacraments from being understood as a religious act and interpret them as a political act, signifying allegiance to Christ over any other authority. Bonhoeffer’s religionless Christianity is not an individualistic enterprise focused on individual

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<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 382.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., 382-83. Thus Bonhoeffer writes his parents from prison regarding his belongings, “*In short, give away whatever anyone might need, and don’t give it another thought,*” 401.

salvation. Instead, it is a Christianity where the church-community participates in Jesus' presence within the world. Bonhoeffer does not provide complete details as to how the sacraments are preserved in this "church's form [that] will have changed greatly," but he provides enough clues for the reader to infer that worship and the sacraments will maintain prominence in his theology.<sup>145</sup> He refers three different times to the "secret discipline" (*Arkandisziplin*) which "must be restored whereby the *mysteries* of the Christian faith are protected against profanation."<sup>146</sup> The secret discipline—an ancient church practice of catechism by which the sacraments and mysteries of the church were communicated apart from unbelievers—might have taken a different form in Bonhoeffer's future theology, as Pangritz suggests,<sup>147</sup> but Bonhoeffer's use of the term leaves little doubt of his intention to preserve such mysteries in any future church-community. Additionally, Bonhoeffer refers to the "cultus"—perhaps referencing the sacraments themselves—in his "Outline for a Book," presumably as a foil to the mistrusted concept of "religion."<sup>148</sup> Additionally, Bonhoeffer mentions the preservation of Scripture reading and the Apostles' Creed in his "Outline," further supporting the claim that he did not intend to do away with worship, although the church-community's function would have undoubtedly changed in his future theological writings.<sup>149</sup> Given the prominence of the administration of the sacraments in *Sanctorum Communio*, *Act and Being*, and *Discipleship*, and Bonhoeffer's tendency toward theological consistency, it is highly unlikely that the sacra-

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 286, emphasis Bonhoeffer's. Cf. also 281, 300.

<sup>147</sup> Pangritz, *Karl Barth*, 5.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 382.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 383.

ments and worship would have suddenly disappeared from his theology. It is much more likely that he would recast them as something other than religious acts, for they are not individual acts but are instead acts that belong to the church-community.

Thus Bonhoeffer's religionless Christianity does not do away with the church-community or its sacraments, but it instead imagines those sacraments as model for participation in the person of Jesus Christ in the middle of human life. Just as Jesus exists for the other, the church-community, in administering the sacraments, participates in Jesus' being, thus preparing to exist for the other. This church-community, Bonhoeffer argues, will no longer emphasize personal metaphysics, but it will instead serve the world and engage in its problems alongside the person of Jesus Christ. By doing so, Bonhoeffer argues that the working hypothesis 'God' can be eliminated, and the world can encounter the biblical God in Jesus Christ in his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. This is the new manner in which the church shall engage the world, the untimely conclusion to Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics.

Upon reading the prison writings and the *Ethics*, it becomes clearer that in this final phase of Bonhoeffer's life, his theological hermeneutics are just as concerned with the church-community participating in Christ's encounter with the world as were his previous two phases. While the terminology is more fluid in this final phase ("penultimate" becomes "world come of age" and "vicarious representative action" becomes "participating in the sufferings of Christ for the world"), the central concept remains. From Bonhoeffer's student writings to his final work leading up to his execution at the hand of the Nazis, he intended to engage and interpret reality from the perspective of the church-community participating in the person of Jesus Christ. Throughout the project of inter-

pretation, Bonhoeffer has remained essentially consistent in his work, all except for the notable question of his position on nonviolence.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Understanding the World Better Than It Understands Itself: Bonhoeffer's Perspective(s) on Nonviolence as a Case Study

“But the incarnate Son of God needs not only ears or even hearts; he needs actual, living human beings who follow him. That is why he called his disciples into following him bodily. His community with them was something that everyone could see.”

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*

#### *Thesis*

Writing Eberhard Bethge from his Tegel prison cell, Bonhoeffer criticizes Paul Tillich's theological project by claiming that Tillich “sought to understand the world better than it understood itself,” but ultimately failed because “the world felt completely misunderstood” in Tillich's project.<sup>1</sup> “Of course,” Bonhoeffer continues, “the world *must* be understood better than it understands itself, but not ‘religiously’ as the religious socialists wanted.”<sup>2</sup> It is not the project of attempting to interpret and understand the world Bonhoeffer critiques; he simply argues that one cannot do so based on any form of individual metaphysics or inward piety as I demonstrated in the previous chapter. To the contrary, Bonhoeffer claims that when one has begun to interpret and engage the world by participating in the *Stellvertretung* of Jesus in the world, then the world's coming of age “is now really better understood than it understands itself, namely on the basis of the gospel and in the light of Christ.”<sup>3</sup> For Bonhoeffer, understanding the world better than it

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<sup>1</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Touchstone, 1971), 327-28.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 328.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 329.

understands itself means engaging and interpreting the world from an ecclesial framework including the three themes discussed in the previous chapters: Christ existing as church-community, obedience to Christ through faithful proclamation of Scripture, and vicarious representative action on behalf of the world. When the church-community embodies these three concepts, Bonhoeffer claims that the church-community can simultaneously understand and engage the world “on the basis of the gospel and in the light of Christ.”<sup>4</sup> As I argued in my opening chapter, for Bonhoeffer, the church *is* the hermeneutic.

Given this understanding of Bonhoeffer’s theological hermeneutics, *in this concluding chapter I shall examine the soundness of such a hermeneutic using as a case study the practice of nonviolence by the church-community and how such nonviolence brings together each of Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutical themes.* Nonviolence makes sense for two reasons: First, this issue bears further examination since Bonhoeffer seems to have embraced nonviolence during his pastoral years while writing *Discipleship*, but apparently contradicts that position by joining the resistance against Hitler toward the end of his life. Second, the prevalence of violence in our society will provide ample opportunity to examine whether an ecclesial-centered hermeneutic like Bonhoeffer’s can function in today’s context. In order to do this, I shall focus on interpretations of Bonhoeffer’s work by three interrelated theologians: John Howard Yoder, James McClendon, and Stanley Hauerwas. I will focus my examination on one of Yoder’s conference papers, a biographical chapter on Bonhoeffer by McClendon, and two essays in Hauerwas’s *Perform-*

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

*ing the Faith*.<sup>5</sup> By examining how these theologians read Bonhoeffer with relation to the practice of nonviolence, I will demonstrate how to move beyond their readings by emphasizing the centrality of Bonhoeffer's other ecclesial themes in his theological hermeneutics, particularly vicarious representative action.

### *Bonhoeffer and "baptists"*

In chapter two, I briefly noted Bonhoeffer's similarities to the theological project of Radical Orthodoxy through participatory ontology; chapter four pointed out Bonhoeffer's effect on many who employ suffering Christology in their theologies. In chapter three, I regularly pointed toward connections between Bonhoeffer and narrative interpreters of the Bible; in this chapter, I will go beyond brief mentions of places where Bonhoeffer's theology tangentially connects with contemporary strains of thought and instead embark upon a more extended engagement with one school of Bonhoeffer's readers, noting how they read him and, more importantly, how Bonhoeffer might, in turn, respond. These thinkers—John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and James McClendon—each utilize Bonhoeffer as part of their own theological programs to varying degrees. In particular, I shall read each of these theologians with an eye toward the issue of nonviolence—the practice of which Yoder, Hauerwas, and McClendon support. I shall reflect on the practice of nonviolence as it relates to Yoder, Hauerwas, and McClendon and their interaction with Bonhoeffer to see if my reading of Bonhoeffer thus far can provide any further insights to their projects. By so doing, I shall note how Bonhoeffer's methodol-

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<sup>5</sup>John Howard Yoder, "The Christological Presuppositions of Discipleship," presented to the Bonhoeffer Group at the American Academy of Religion, 1987; James McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume One* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 187-208; Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 13-72.

ogy creates a solid theological hermeneutics that can provide a framework for theological reflection in our contemporary context.

Neither Yoder, Hauerwas, nor McClendon would term themselves Bonhoeffer scholars. Nevertheless, each of them in different instances reads Bonhoeffer's work and attempts to interpret it. While these three theologians are not identical in their conclusions, they each represent a similar school of thought—a school McClendon terms “baptist”—a school one might refer to as Narrative Anabaptists.<sup>6</sup> These three “baptist” thinkers are bound together by a common understanding of the Bible—each is a narrative theologian, intensely interested in the story of Scripture, its interpretation in Jesus, and its implications for the church. Additionally, they find common ground in their theologies around the relationship the church is to have with the state, adopting a posture of post-Christendom, one described by Yoder in his book, *The Priestly Kingdom*.<sup>7</sup> For Yoder, much of the world has returned to a place prior to the advent of the Roman emperor Constantine, requiring “exceptional conviction to be a Christian,” and thus requiring a church to be visible and active within the world.<sup>8</sup> Both Hauerwas and McClendon follow this traditionally Anabaptist assertion, providing a second point of connection for the group. These touchstones of Scripture and post-Constantinian Christianity are also central to Bonhoeffer's work, making these thinkers relevant dialogue partners.

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<sup>6</sup>McClendon provides this descriptor for those who subscribe to a similar reading of the Bible and free church practice in his *Doctrine*. Yoder, a Mennonite, would most definitely have labeled himself as Anabaptist. McClendon came from Southern Baptist roots, graduating from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; but he gradually came to identify himself in the more “radical” wings of the Baptist tradition. Hauerwas, a Methodist theologian, has referred to himself as a “high church Mennonite” but comfortably associates himself with Yoder and McClendon.

<sup>7</sup>John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 135-149.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 136.



### *Christological or Jesulological?*

Given all of these points of interest and intersection between Bonhoeffer and the aforementioned theologians, it is somewhat surprising that, for the most part, Yoder's assessment of Bonhoeffer tends to be negative—at the very least, Yoder works to distance Bonhoeffer from Anabaptist thought. Yoder never provides precise reason why he does so; perhaps he is attempting to distance Bonhoeffer's participation in the conspiracy from the Anabaptist tradition. Whatever the reason, Yoder does not engage Bonhoeffer in an extended fashion in any of his monographs, making a cursory reference to him in *The Politics of Jesus*, noting that Bonhoeffer's use of the cross in *Life Together* discusses "the renunciation of pride and self-will."<sup>9</sup> The only other place Yoder mentions Bonhoeffer in *Politics* is in a footnote where he provides faint praise to Bonhoeffer's version of discipleship: "Despite the identity of language," Yoder writes, "when Dietrich Bonhoeffer uses the term 'discipleship' it carries a different shade of meaning. The accent falls less on sharing the Master's way or nature, and more on the unquestioning willingness to obey."<sup>10</sup> Yoder reads Bonhoeffer as emphasizing *obedience to Christ* above conforming oneself into the *likeness of Christ*, or so it seems from this singular mention.

Yoder further expounds on his problems with Bonhoeffer in a 1987 paper he presented to the Bonhoeffer Society entitled "The Christological Presuppositions of Discipleship." Yoder's paper argues that Bonhoeffer's vision of discipleship, while thoroughly biblical and Christocentric, employs a different Christology than the discipleship envisioned by Anabaptist forefathers. Where Anabaptists employ a radical allegiance to the

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<sup>9</sup>Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 129.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 113, footnote #3.

person of Jesus in discipleship, Yoder suggests that Bonhoeffer's discipleship philosophy is not, to use Yoder's term, "jesulological."<sup>11</sup> Yoder believes that Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* and *Discipleship* might best be described as "legal" or "mystical," but not as books that are fully focused on the person of Jesus.<sup>12</sup> Yoder states, "As [Bonhoeffer's] Christological preoccupations were more dogmatic than exegetical or historical, he was not driven either to concreteness about the pre-passion Jesus nor to any abiding challenge to the axioms of Constantinian political ethics."<sup>13</sup> In short, Yoder is dissatisfied with Bonhoeffer's picture of discipleship, because, in Yoder's opinion, Bonhoeffer's Jesus is not focused on "his life, his decisions, and his fate," but instead upon "the Master's words, or on the creed's words about him."<sup>14</sup> To draw from a familiar dichotomy, Yoder accuses Bonhoeffer of following the Christ of faith rather than the Jesus of history.

Yoder outlines his dissatisfaction with Bonhoeffer's picture of discipleship by focusing on four key arguments (paraphrased here): First, Yoder believes Bonhoeffer's discipleship focuses on devotion and piety, while Anabaptist discipleship focuses on Jesus' obedience, i.e., history. Second, Yoder finds Bonhoeffer's discipleship centering on the Master's words, while Anabaptist discipleship focuses on Jesus' life, decisions, and fate. Third, Yoder believes Bonhoeffer's discipleship cannot accept exclusion from secular sovereignty, while Anabaptist discipleship can. And finally, Yoder sees Bonhoeffer's discipleship as holding the incarnation to be a concept of God's ratification of human activ-

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<sup>11</sup> John Howard Yoder, "The Christological Presuppositions of Discipleship," presented to the Bonhoeffer Group at the American Academy of Religion, 1987, 23.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 24.

ity in the world, while Anabaptist discipleship sees the incarnation as an event that serves as a model for humanity.<sup>15</sup>

### *Bonhoeffer as Jesulogical*

Given my assessment of Bonhoeffer's writing thus far, I shall contend against Yoder's reading of Bonhoeffer, by arguing that Yoder has, in fact, misinterpreted Bonhoeffer on multiple counts, especially regarding the relationship between Christology and discipleship as well as Yoder's assessment that Bonhoeffer has no abiding interest in post-Constantinian ethics. I have demonstrated my understanding of Bonhoeffer's position on each of these issues at different places in the dissertation, so here I shall bring my reading of Bonhoeffer into dialogue with that of Yoder by addressing each of his concerns.

Yoder's initial charge against Bonhoeffer that Bonhoeffer's perspective on discipleship centers too strongly upon devotion and piety rather than obedience is problematic in at least two ways. To begin, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, Bonhoeffer's prison writings attempt to do away with any picture of religion centering upon the "working hypothesis of God,"<sup>16</sup> which tends to center on individual conceptions of metaphysics and piety. Bonhoeffer hammers away relentlessly at such post-earthly and pietistical notions of God, for they attempt to control God through power and manipulation rather than encountering God through his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Thus Bonhoeffer explains that Christianity must stand against the "anthropocentric sense of liberal, mystic pietistic, ethical theology," and instead stand with "the biblical sense of the crea-

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 23-4.

<sup>16</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 360.

tion and of the *incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection* of Jesus Christ.”<sup>17</sup> Bonhoeffer rejects any manifestation of Christianity that is inward or private, opting instead for a concrete faith made real in the church-community.

Bonhoeffer’s critique of piety also occurs earlier than the prison writings, especially in the text Yoder most consulted when crafting this paper on Bonhoeffer—*Discipleship*.<sup>18</sup> In *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer refers to piety as an enemy standing in the way of allegiance to Jesus;<sup>19</sup> he later claims that disciples of Jesus are indeed commanded to maintain the practices of piety, but they are to do so with an element of “hiddenness” so as to not draw attention to themselves or the act.<sup>20</sup> So while Bonhoeffer does indeed argue that piety is an instrumental act in discipleship in order “to make disciples more willing and more joyous in following the designated path and doing the works required of them,”<sup>21</sup> he also warns against “the retreat into a sphere of human ‘piety.’”<sup>22</sup> Bonhoeffer employs piety as an aspect of discipleship, but not as the initial formative activity. For Bonhoeffer, discipleship and formation happen primarily in the church-community; and piety remains an individual act. So while piety is possible to help along the way, it is no substitute for the formative practices of the church-community, such as the sacraments.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., emphasis mine.

<sup>18</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 4, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 138.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 158.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 158.

<sup>22</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Letter to Karl Barth—October 14, 1936,” in *The Way to Freedom*, 120, cited in Martin Kruske and Ilse Tödt, “Editors’ Afterword to the German Edition,” in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 4, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 306.

The second problem with Yoder's argument is that it runs counter to his assertion in *Politics*. There Yoder claims that Bonhoeffer's version of discipleship is too bound to obedience; here he claims that it is too bound to piety. Granted, Bonhoeffer employed pious practices in *Discipleship* and in the Confessing Seminary he founded in Finkenwalde. And, yes, Bonhoeffer is quite insistent upon obedience as well in *Discipleship*—something I demonstrated quite clearly in chapter three. But each of those emphases misses the central component of discipleship for Bonhoeffer—obedience to Jesus and his church.

Noting the centrality of Jesus in Bonhoeffer's version of discipleship, I shall engage the second and fourth contentions Yoder mentions: namely, that "Bonhoeffer's discipleship centers on the Master's words, while Anabaptist discipleship focuses on Jesus' life, decisions, and fate," and that "Bonhoeffer's discipleship as holding the incarnation as a concept of God's ratification of human activity in the world, while Anabaptist discipleship sees the incarnation as an event that serves as a model for humanity."<sup>23</sup> These two concerns are different in one respect, but they hinge on a similar misunderstanding of Bonhoeffer's thought. Through both, Yoder essentially echoes his claim that Bonhoeffer is not "jesulogical" enough—not focusing on the actions of Jesus as a model for humanity. This is a curious accusation, particularly given Bonhoeffer's penchant for focusing upon the triad of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Yoder probably makes these assertions based upon Bonhoeffer's central organizing principle of obedience. "Obedience" is referred to almost forty times in the index of *Discipleship*, and the third chapter

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 23-4.

of the book is an exposition of the concept. With such a focus upon simple obedience, it is reasonable that Yoder would read Bonhoeffer as legalistic.

Nevertheless, this claim is so baffling it is difficult to know where to begin. As each of chapters two, three, and four have demonstrated, the person of Jesus is central to each phase of Bonhoeffer's theological development. Even if Yoder is granted the distinction he wants to make between christological and jesulogical, I still believe there is ample evidence from Bonhoeffer's corpus that he does, indeed, take into account the actions of Jesus as a model for humanity. As I demonstrated in chapter three, Bonhoeffer's insistence upon obedience is intended to emphasize the Lordship of Jesus in the life of the church-community, not place an outside principle of obedience upon the Scripture. In fact, Bonhoeffer rejects any reading strategy that places an outside "hermeneutical principle" over the Scripture in order to facilitate reading it. He explains that doing so introduces an interpretive key that "would not be the living Christ himself in judgment and grace, and using the key would not be according to the will of the living Holy Spirit alone."<sup>24</sup> Bonhoeffer does not wish to place obedience—or legalism, as Yoder sees it—over the story of Scripture at all. On the contrary, in *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer simply sees obedience as the intended product of the story itself; the Scripture is given, written, and proclaimed so that the church-community might live it faithfully before the world. This is not legalism for Bonhoeffer; in fact, he believes legalism is overcome only "by genuine obedience to Jesus' gracious call to follow him."<sup>25</sup> Because obedience is central to the reading strategy of Anabaptists who influenced him—particularly the Bruderhof

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<sup>24</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 82.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 81.

and Zinzendorf—it makes sense that Bonhoeffer would emphasize the centrality of obedience in the writing of *Discipleship*.

In further response to Yoder's accusations of a lack of conformity to the actions of Jesus, *Discipleship* emphasizes the formation of the individual disciple to the "image of Christ."<sup>26</sup> Through this category, Bonhoeffer argues that only through the person of Jesus Christ can humanity recover its "God-like essence" in which alone people become "truly human."<sup>27</sup> The model for this return to true humanity is in the person of Jesus Christ and in modeling his image. Such conformity does not emphasize simply one aspect of the person of Jesus, Bonhoeffer claims, but instead he writes that our "goal is to be shaped into the entire *form* of the *incarnate*, the *crucified*, and the *risen one*," much as he later claims in *Ethics* and his prison writings.<sup>28</sup> By emphasizing each aspect of Jesus' existence, Bonhoeffer claims that members of the church-community can recover their true humanity. This happens through participation in the being and actions of Christ through the church-community, enabling the church-community to participate in the sufferings of Christ in the world or, as Bonhoeffer later puts it, the believer can "be caught up into the messianic sufferings of God in Jesus Christ."<sup>29</sup> Each of these comments reflects the centrality of conformity to the example and person of Jesus on the path to true humanity since, for Bonhoeffer, the "follower of Jesus is the imitator of God."<sup>30</sup> By envisioning Christology in such a manner, it seems plain that Bonhoeffer's understanding of disciple-

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 281-ff.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 282.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid, 285.

<sup>29</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 362.

<sup>30</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 288.

ship and many aspects of theology are not as far from Anabaptist thought as Yoder originally claims.<sup>31</sup>

### *Church and Separateness*

The distance between Bonhoeffer and Anabaptist thought continues to close upon inspection of Yoder's third complaint against Bonhoeffer—that his form of discipleship cannot accept exclusion from secular sovereignty. In order to engage this final argument, I shall turn to one of Yoder's closest readers—Stanley Hauerwas—and employ his reading of Bonhoeffer to demonstrate that Bonhoeffer's view of government is much closer to an Anabaptist understanding than Yoder realizes. In this essay, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Political Theology,"<sup>32</sup> Hauerwas argues that Bonhoeffer believes in the visible nature of the church in a post-Constantinian world over against an ecclesiology of invisibility and inwardness—much as Yoder claims.<sup>33</sup> In order to make this argument, Hauerwas examines Bonhoeffer's reading of Romans 13 and its theological implications for the church-community.

Hauerwas finds that Bonhoeffer's position "closely parallels Yoder's account,"<sup>34</sup> pointing to Bonhoeffer's lectures on Romans 13 at Finkenwalde as his first piece of evidence, noting that Bonhoeffer concludes that because "Luther confirms Constantine's covenant with the church" the "existence of the Christian became the existence of the

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<sup>31</sup>In addition, Bonhoeffer explicitly rejects using the incarnation to ratify the here and the now in *Ethics*, 157, instead opting for the church to be caught up in the messianic sufferings of Christ, as I argued in the previous chapter.

<sup>32</sup>Hauerwas, *Performing*, 33-54.

<sup>33</sup>I find it immensely amusing that Hauerwas cites Yoder in order to support his reading of Bonhoeffer after Yoder himself attempts to distance his position from Bonhoeffer. Cf. *Performing*, 43.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*



citizen.” In so doing, Bonhoeffer believes that because “the New Testament message was fundamentally misunderstood, inner-worldliness became a principle.”<sup>35</sup> Bonhoeffer further argues in that same piece that the church must embrace its visible nature, serving as the city on a hill which the world is to see as “the witness of the New Testament.”<sup>36</sup> Thus Hauerwas applauds Bonhoeffer’s decision to embrace the church-community’s “alien nature” and to embrace the role of the cross and suffering within the community.<sup>37</sup> This embracing refutes Yoder’s claim that Bonhoeffer’s vision of the incarnation ratifies all of humanity. Consequently, Hauerwas concludes that, for Bonhoeffer, the church’s politics center on the practice of sanctification within the church-community in the practice of the sacraments. This is only possible when the church-community embraces its separate nature from the world. Hauerwas says, “Put as starkly as possible, Bonhoeffer clearly saw that the holiness of the church is necessary for the redemption of the world.”<sup>38</sup>

At this point, however, Hauerwas has trouble with Bonhoeffer’s theology. While he believes that Bonhoeffer’s work attempts to move past the traditional Lutheran understanding of two kingdoms, Hauerwas argues that Bonhoeffer eventually fails since he could not “escape from the limits of the habits that have long shaped Lutheran thinking on these matters,”<sup>39</sup> namely, some sort of attempt to think through a “Christian

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<sup>35</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, ed. Edwin Robertson, trans. John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 324, cited in Hauerwas, *Performing*, 43.

<sup>36</sup>Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 324.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup>Hauerwas, *Performing*, 44.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 51.

civilization.”<sup>40</sup> Hauerwas sees in Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics* an attempt to move beyond the category of “orders of creation” toward “orders of preservation,” much as I discussed in chapter four. This, he believes, is a good attempt; but since Bonhoeffer returns to the language of mandates (marriage, work, family, and government) in *Ethics*, Hauerwas thinks that Bonhoeffer is not quite ready to move beyond a world where church and state are closely inter-related—at least not in *Ethics*. And, with that particular instance in mind, it seems that Hauerwas could be correct. Coincidentally, Yoder makes a similar move in *Politics of Jesus*, arguing that under “orders of creation” “rarely, if ever, has it been possible under this heading to combine with such clarity and precision the simultaneous recognition of humankind’s fallen condition and the continuing providential control.”<sup>41</sup>

However, Hauerwas also acknowledges that Bonhoeffer’s later thought opens up the possibility of moving “away from any Christendom notions” and can “at least put him in the vicinity of trying to imagine a non-Constantinian church.”<sup>42</sup> These late developments where Bonhoeffer describes the church in the “world come of age” which must “take the field against . . . the vices of *hubris*, power-worship, envy, and humbug, as the roots of all evil”<sup>43</sup> and instead model “the importance and power of example”<sup>44</sup> open a new realm of opportunity in Hauerwas’s opinion. Thus while Hauerwas “cannot say if Bonhoeffer would have . . . forever left Constantinianism behind,” he remains convinced

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>41</sup> Yoder, *Politics*, 144.

<sup>42</sup> Hauerwas, *Performing*, 53.

<sup>43</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 383, cited in Hauerwas, *Performing*, 54.

<sup>44</sup> Hauerwas, *Performing*, 54.

that “Bonhoeffer’s attempt to think through what the recovery of the visible church entails” at least points his work, and consequently those who follow him, in that direction.<sup>45</sup>

I agree with each of Hauerwas’s assessments of Bonhoeffer’s work; but I want to add that if Hauerwas had examined Bonhoeffer’s reading of Romans 13 in relation to the peace commands of Jesus near the conclusion of *Discipleship*, he might have become even *more* convinced that he was correct. For as I argued in chapter three, Bonhoeffer more fully explains the church’s relationship to the governing authorities. He states that “the community of disciples is no longer subject to this world.”<sup>46</sup> Instead, the church-community is separate because it has taken on the holy nature of God, a holiness that was transferred through Jesus Christ and onto the church.<sup>47</sup> Through the incarnation, God’s holiness is manifest in Jesus. Jesus provides justification for those in the church-community, and thus they receive his holiness as well. This holy nature means that the church-community “will manifest itself in a clear separation from the world” as sealed by God through the Holy Spirit.<sup>48</sup>

Being sealed by the Spirit, Bonhoeffer argues, means that “its ‘political’ character is an inseparable aspect of its sanctification.”<sup>49</sup> This “political” character means “that world be world and community be community, and that, nevertheless, God’s word goes out from the church-community to the world, as the proclamation that the earth and all it

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 253.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 255.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 261, emphasis Bonhoeffer’s.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

contains is the Lord's.”<sup>50</sup> This separation of the church from state control corroborates Bonhoeffer's interpretation of Romans 13 and its directives towards Christians and their relationship to the governing authorities. Contrary to popular German Christian interpretations that would read Hitler's governing authority as “some form of ‘divine authorization,’” Bonhoeffer asserts that Romans 13 does not provide “divine authorization of their [the Aryan Christians'] conduct in office.”<sup>51</sup> The Pauline instructions, Bonhoeffer argues, do “not intend to instruct the Christian community about the tasks of those in authority, but instead *only deals with the tasks of Christian community toward authority*.”<sup>52</sup> Thus the church-community obeys the authorities and follows the law; but while doing so (“as far as it depends on you”<sup>53</sup>), it retains its separate nature and lives in complete obedience to the commands of Jesus. In doing so, the church lives out its alternative political reality of speaking the word of God to the world while remaining within and at peace, insofar as possible, with those in authority. This separatist understanding reflects the Anabaptist influence in Bonhoeffer's thought; since free church theologians have advocated a church separate from government, drawing Bonhoeffer ever closer to many of the positions Yoder initially claims Bonhoeffer rejects.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 262.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 242.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Romans 12:18.

<sup>54</sup>Cf. Yoder's exegesis of Romans 13 in *Politics of Jesus*, 193.

### *The Tragedy of Bonhoeffer*

By reading Yoder and Hauerwas and their interpretations of Bonhoeffer and then responding to those interpretations, I have demonstrated that Bonhoeffer is not as far from Anabaptist thought as Yoder claims. This is important, for there is little doubt that Bonhoeffer's arrival at a position of nonviolence in his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount in *Discipleship* is due to free church influence in his life. So while Bonhoeffer's interaction with Jean Lasserre at Union Seminary may have begun his thinking about peace, it seems certain that Bonhoeffer's limited time with the Bruderhof community hastened him along that path. Consequently, by the time Bonhoeffer writes *Discipleship*, he believes that those who follow Jesus must "*renounce violence and strife*."<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, by 1940, Bonhoeffer seems to have rejected that original position and embraced violence, given his participation in the conspiracy against Hitler. Based on my argument that Bonhoeffer's work is marked with consistency, this certainly deserves more attention.

James McClendon's biographical sketch of Bonhoeffer in his *Ethics* offers a reasonable explanation—one that accentuates the ecclesial center of Bonhoeffer's thought. McClendon points out that Bonhoeffer undertook a life-long effort to create a community of faith in his native Germany, culminating with his writings in *Discipleship* and the *Brüderhaus* he founded in the Finkenwalde seminary. Through these disciplined activities, Bonhoeffer "had brought *Nachfolge* [discipleship] into reality, however briefly."<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, McClendon argues, Bonhoeffer was never able to make one trip that he

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<sup>55</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 108.

<sup>56</sup> McClendon, *Ethics*, 206.

intended to make: “He had three times projected a trip to India, where he had hoped to learn much from Mohandas Ghandi including the discipline and techniques of *satyagraha*, nonviolence.”<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately, McClendon notes, Bonhoeffer never had the opportunity to learn the practice of nonviolence from Gandhi, and Bonhoeffer’s community of faith—the Confessing Church—soon began to come under pressure.

At exactly the time when Bonhoeffer believed most strongly in nonviolence and when his community of faith needed to understand the practice of *satyagraha*, his community dissolved. As McClendon notes, “But when the communities, small and large, whose practices he shaped and shared crumbled under government pressure, he no longer had a resource for *Christian* resistance.”<sup>58</sup> Bonhoeffer recognized, perhaps through his study of Gandhi’s work, that nonviolent resistance depends upon a community acting together. Thus when his communities dissolved, McClendon argues that Bonhoeffer turned to another form of practices. Instead of *satyagraha*, he turned to the *Putsch*—the violent means of resistance and coup d’état practiced by so many other German political groups, including Hitler, as they attempted to rise to power. McClendon argues that rather than shortening Hitler’s regime, Bonhoeffer’s activity in the resistance may have actually lengthened it, since from Hitler’s perspective, past “failures could now be blamed on the traitor generals; with their elimination, German arms could be expected to prevail at last.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 207.

McClendon sees Bonhoeffer's life as a tragedy, not simply because of his untimely and grisly death, but also because his work and life represented a hopeful possibility of Christian community being formed in the midst of an otherwise violent context. With his participation in the resistance, Bonhoeffer not only died too young, McClendon claims, but he also was "an element in the greater tragedy of the Christian community of Germany."<sup>60</sup> Because the Christian community of Germany crumbled under the pressure of the Nazi regime, no "structures, no practices, no skills of political life existed that were capable of resisting, christianly resisting, the totalitarianism of the times."<sup>61</sup> For McClendon, this is tragic since Bonhoeffer seemed to be the one member of the Christian community in Germany capable of meeting such challenges. Yet, "he could not in any case have met the need alone."<sup>62</sup>

Some readers of Bonhoeffer would no doubt disagree with McClendon's assessment, claiming instead that he clearly knew the consequences of the actions that he planned to take, particularly given his words—apparently referring to his political context—that if he saw a car striking down pedestrians that it "would be as much my responsibility as anyone's *to stop that car*."<sup>63</sup> Certainly Clifford Green reads *Ethics* in such a way, arguing that the theological concept of *Stellvertretung* and its underlying corollary of "corresponding to reality" indicate Bonhoeffer's intentions to justify a tyrannicidal

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald Gregor Smith, *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Käthe Gregor Smith (London: William Collins Sons, 1973), 82.

plot.<sup>64</sup> Green seems to interpret Bonhoeffer in a rather Niebuhrian fashion, claiming that Bonhoeffer's seeming rejection of pacifism is not a rejection of the peace commands of Jesus, but is simply the result of thinking that has moved "from disembodied principles to the concrete situation: confronting the life-destroying warmonger and the murderer of the Jews who had to be stopped."<sup>65</sup> Green reads Bonhoeffer as though he were a situational ethicist modeled after Joseph Fletcher, and Bonhoeffer's decision to participate in the plot against Hitler is, for Green, the most compelling evidence. Green thus uses the participation in the plot to interpret Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* as focusing on "responsible action" and "appropriateness" as tied directly to the earthly context, reading Bonhoeffer's insistence on acting in accordance with reality in a manner I find inconsistent with Bonhoeffer's own writings.

### *Christ Is Reality*

There are two central problems with Green's assessment of Bonhoeffer. To begin, Hauerwas, in my opinion, definitively demonstrates that Bonhoeffer is, in fact, *not* a situational ethicist in the second essay from *Performing the Faith*—"Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Truth and Politics."<sup>66</sup> As part of an essay that argues that the church's truthful proclamation of the gospel is its gift to politics,<sup>67</sup> Hauerwas also argues against Joseph Fletcher's situational interpretation of Bonhoeffer, going so far to as say, "Fletcher's de-

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<sup>64</sup>Clifford J. Green, "Editor's Introduction," in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 6*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 11-14.

<sup>65</sup>Green, "Editor's," 16.

<sup>66</sup>Hauerwas, *Performing*, 55-72.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.



scription of Bonhoeffer is so far off the mark I am tempted to call him a liar.”<sup>68</sup> Hauerwas grants that Fletcher may have been misled by Bonhoeffer’s statement that “‘telling the truth’ may mean something different according to the particular situation in which one stands,” but Hauerwas goes on to argue that Bonhoeffer’s conception of truthfulness is not simply rooted in a situation but instead “is determined by [Bonhoeffer’s] understanding of reality.”<sup>69</sup> Hauerwas argues that this reality is determined by “not only what is ‘out there’ but our relation to what is ‘out there.’”<sup>70</sup> In so reading Bonhoeffer, Hauerwas argues that Bonhoeffer is not a situational ethicist, since he is seeking to act in accordance with reality, not simply one particular situation. In other words, it is reality that determines how the Christian responds in a situation, not vice versa.

In order to illustrate this point, Hauerwas uses an example from one of Bonhoeffer’s ethical essays, “What Is Meant By Telling the Truth?”<sup>71</sup> In the essay Bonhoeffer relates the story of a teacher who asks a child in front of the class if his father comes home drunk every night. The child denies this, but it is, in fact, true; the father does come home drunk each night. As Hauerwas notes, Bonhoeffer finds that the child rightly lies in this instance “to a question that never should have been asked in a classroom.”<sup>72</sup> In an ideal world, Hauerwas continues, the child would have had the opportunity to an-

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>71</sup> This essay is published in the English edition of *Ethics* that directly precedes the critical edition I employ throughout this dissertation. It is now featured in a separate volume and published as follows: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “What Does It Mean to Tell the Truth?” in *Conspiracy and Imprisonment: 1940-1945*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 16*, ed. Mark S. Brocker, trans. Lisa E. Dahill (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 601-608.

<sup>72</sup> Hauerwas, *Performing*, 63.

swer this question “in a manner that would have protected the family as well as the rule of the school.”<sup>73</sup> However, in lying, the child’s answer “is more in accordance with reality than would have been the case if the child had betrayed his father’s weakness in front of the class.”<sup>74</sup> Hauerwas points out that it is not the situation that determines ethical behavior, but it is instead this desire to act in accordance with reality.

It is here that the second problem with Green’s argument surfaces. Green argues that Bonhoeffer employs the concept of appropriateness and acting in accordance with reality in determining ethical action. He is correct, but only to a degree. Likewise, while I agree with the interpretation of Bonhoeffer that Hauerwas provides, I find that he does not completely describe what, in fact, Bonhoeffer means by reality. The tendency of Green and Fletcher to read Bonhoeffer as a situational ethicist stems from their understanding that Bonhoeffer looks at the immediate, earthly situation as the determining factor for ethical action. Hauerwas attempts to undermine their assertions by arguing that it is not the situation but instead reality that determines ethical action, arguing that reality is “not only what is ‘out there’ but our relation to what is ‘out there.’”<sup>75</sup> I believe that Hauerwas is closer to Bonhoeffer’s position, but I fear that he has not completely grasped Bonhoeffer’s view of reality; and I certainly would make that same argument with Green and Fletcher.

In the opening manuscript of *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer clearly articulates his understanding of reality and how it relates to a view of the ethical. He begins by claiming that

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 63.

the “subject matter of a Christian ethic is God’s reality revealed in Christ becoming real among God’s creatures.”<sup>76</sup> So, for Bonhoeffer, just as doctrinal theology is the truth of God’s reality revealed in Christ, ethics centers on that reality of God in Christ manifesting itself in the world. Bonhoeffer initially seems to argue that there are two realities, since he claims that in “Jesus Christ the reality of God has entered into the reality of this world.”<sup>77</sup> However, since Bonhoeffer then claims that the reality of the world does not stand independent from the reality of God, and since the world’s reality is that of creatureliness; its very existence depends upon God’s reality. As a result, Bonhoeffer eventually claims, “There are not two realities, but *only one reality*, and that is God’s reality revealed in Christ in the reality of the world.”<sup>78</sup> With this singular reality established, Bonhoeffer eventually concludes that for a Christian, “[W]hat matters is *participating in the reality of God and the world in Jesus Christ today*.”<sup>79</sup> In order to participate in reality, one must recognize that reality is that of God, particularly as revealed in Jesus Christ and made manifest in the world. Earthly situations that face the Christian, then, must be interpreted with this singular reality in mind. Consequently, Bonhoeffer advocates the importance of the world, but he simultaneously argues that the world must be engaged, recognizing that it is part of the larger reality of God and that human participation in that reality is intended to be participation in the person of Jesus Christ, much as he originally describes in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*. Green is refuted both by Hauer-

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<sup>76</sup>Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 49.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 58, emphasis Bonhoeffer’s.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 55, emphasis Bonhoeffer’s.

was and by Bonhoeffer himself; appropriateness and acting in accordance with reality is not determined by an earthly situation; reality is that reality of God in Jesus Christ and his action in the world. Even later, in his prison writings, Bonhoeffer would claim as much, arguing that the church shouldn't flee from the human world, but instead "engage [it] with God at his strongest point."<sup>80</sup>

Given this understanding, Bonhoeffer may have believed at some point that acting against Hitler through the conspiracy was in accordance with the reality of God. Certainly his description of vicarious representative action in *Ethics* seems to indicate so, particularly given his inclusion of willingness to bear guilt for humanity.<sup>81</sup> This might be confusing, given that one manuscript of the *Ethics* indicates that one is to participate in the reality of God in Christ while the next might be interpreted as a defense of violent action. However, given the fact that *Ethics* was never finished, remains fragmentary, and seems to have been begun and laid aside on multiple occasions, one cannot be too surprised that the argument is not completely polished. If there is any point where Bonhoeffer's theology displays an inconsistency, this issue of nonviolence might be it. But the inconsistency, it seems, is short lived.

I say this because Bonhoeffer never defends his participation in the attempted *Putsch* in his prison writings. Instead, his theology echoes the posture of *Discipleship* in many respects, particularly the passages reflecting on the suffering of Christ and the church's participation in that suffering. If Bonhoeffer believes strongly in the use of violence and force in order to destroy evil in the world, much of his prison writings make

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<sup>80</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 346.

<sup>81</sup> I described this in the previous chapter. Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 282-83.

little sense. Instead of writing about the need to stand up in violent opposition to evil, he writes that the church must act “in participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life.”<sup>82</sup> It is here that Bonhoeffer reminds us that Christ “is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us.”<sup>83</sup> And even further, he claims that the Bible “makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering.”<sup>84</sup> As part of participating in the sufferings of God in the world, Bonhoeffer culminates his argument by stating that the church-community is “taken up into the messianic sufferings of God,”<sup>85</sup> seeming to indicate that the church-community in Bonhoeffer’s theology is far from a community of aggression but is, instead, one that is willing to suffer on behalf of the world if such suffering will more effectively model the “human example” of Jesus Christ.<sup>86</sup>

Given the concluding directions of Bonhoeffer’s theology, particularly with regard to the church-community’s willingness to suffer on behalf of the world, it seems apparent that Bonhoeffer’s final position regarding the practice of nonviolence is much closer to the Anabaptist position than Yoder claims. Granted, Bonhoeffer’s own actions during the resistance initially seem to contradict this conclusion. But given McClendon’s assertion that the lack of Christian community made nonviolent resistance impossible for Bonhoeffer and the fact that, as I demonstrated, Bonhoeffer’s final writings turned back

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<sup>82</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 361.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 360-61.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 383.

toward a mode of peace, I argue that Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics should ultimately be read in support of nonviolent resistance—but perhaps with an asterisk that such resistance is only possible with a church-community.

I place this asterisk quite intentionally, particularly in light of my reading of Bonhoeffer throughout this dissertation. As part of the discussion of nonviolence, two of the three ecclesial themes central to Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics have already plainly surfaced. Interpretation of and obedience to Scripture initially emerge with regard to Jesus' peace commands and the enactment of those commands through the narrative of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Additionally, vicarious representative action surfaces as the question of the church-community's participation in the sufferings of Christ ties into Bonhoeffer's understanding of peace. But perhaps less explicitly mentioned thus far, but ultimately just as important, is the original, foundational theme in Bonhoeffer's theological hermeneutics: Christ existing as church-community.

As McClendon notes, nonviolence—particularly in a pressure-laden situation—is only possible when a Christian community stands together. Bonhoeffer learned this in tragic fashion. As Bonhoeffer describes, when the church-community rightly gathers around the Word and sacraments, in their presence Christ is also present. Such an understanding is central to the practice of nonviolence, for the church-community must recognize that its actions are, as Bonhoeffer argues, the actions of Christ. As he says, the church-community is participating in the collective person of Christ. The church-community recognizes that Christ is present in their midst; and they act accordingly, following the faithful reading and proclamation of Scripture and acting vicariously for the world. To put it plainly: for the rightly gathered church-community, the question shifts

from, “What *would* Jesus do?” to instead, “What *is* Jesus doing through our actions?” Only with all three themes acting together does the practice of nonviolence prove to be possible, thus demonstrating the soundness of Bonhoeffer’s theological hermeneutics.

### *Possibilities of Praxis: The Church and Immigration*

The asterisk I placed next to my conclusions provides further direction for the contemporary church-community, particularly as it enters into what may be the most violent century in human history. Each day, in places with names like Darfur and Baghdad, violence rages against those that are powerless to stop it. While governments and military powers use their strategies to police such actions, the church-community, taking a cue from the life of Bonhoeffer, must come to grips with how it will interpret and engage such situations. If Hauerwas’s reading of Bonhoeffer is correct with his assertion that the church’s best gift to any politics is a truthful proclamation of the gospel,<sup>87</sup> the church-community must create ways to faithfully proclaim the gospel in manners that are in stark contrast to the methods of power and violence. In so doing, the church witnesses a new reality to the world, the reality of God in Jesus Christ taking form in his church in the here and now.

In describing how the church can use nonviolence to achieve peace in the world at an ecumenical conference in Fanø in 1933, Bonhoeffer argued that most modern attempts at peace through political treaties, investments, or rearmament agreements eventually fail; for “in all of them peace is confused with safety.”<sup>88</sup> He argues that peace and safety are

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<sup>87</sup>Hauerwas, *Performing*, 55.

<sup>88</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *London: 1933-1935, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 13* ed. Keith Clements, trans. Isabel Best (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 308.

not synonymous; one cannot make the world safe enough and then ensure a peaceful outcome. Indeed, one might argue along similar lines regarding talk of peace in our contemporary situation; the most common method of peacekeeping typically involves a measure of counter-violence. Such thinking inevitably creates a cycle of violence where each party involved feels the need to offer retribution for the most recent violent upsurge intended to “keep the peace.” Bonhoeffer instead claims that “peace must be dared. It is the great venture. It can never be made safe. Peace is the opposite of security. To demand guarantees is to mistrust, and this mistrust in turn brings forth war.”<sup>89</sup> His interpretations of peace demand that a premium be placed upon trust in others and that the church takes the lead in seeking peace.

Consequently, a church-community attempting to embody Bonhoeffer’s vision of theological hermeneutics will not only need to embrace the commitment to nonviolence; it will also need to recognize that, in doing so, it is not necessarily embarking upon a safe activity. Rather it is, as Bonhoeffer claims, participating in something that is the opposite of security. Ron Sider, founder of Evangelicals for Social Action, puts it succinctly: “Nonviolent intervention is dangerous.”<sup>90</sup> Thus Jesus’ command for his followers to be peacekeepers is not to be construed as a movement that remains ignorant of danger or makes a cowardly response to a dangerous world. On the contrary, nonviolent resistance demands an extraordinary amount of courage and faith, for it asks the followers of Jesus to place security aside and risk physical harm while committing to do no harm to another.

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 309.

<sup>90</sup>Ronald J. Sider, “Courageous Nonviolence,” *Christianity Today* (December 2007), <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/2007/december/27.44.html> (accessed March 31, 2008). Given Bonhoeffer’s appreciation of Mohandas Ghandi, Ghandi’s assertion, “There are many causes I am willing to die for, but there are none I am willing to kill for,” seems particularly apropos.



Such an interpretation of peace, as Bonhoeffer asserts, is quite the opposite of security; and it absolutely places trust of the other in high regard. A church-community that faithfully participates in the messianic sufferings of Christ through nonviolence will inevitably face danger.

As a pastor and theologian residing in Texas, one issue seems to me particularly relevant for peace and nonviolence embodied by the church-community—that of illegal immigration—namely the influx of Hispanic individuals from Mexico and Latin America into the United States. From a strictly nationalistic perspective, the issue of immigration is approaching emergency status, with the Pew Hispanic Center reporting just over eleven million illegal immigrants residing in the United States as of 2005.<sup>91</sup> The conversation regarding illegal immigrants typically centers on economic costs placed upon American taxpayers: medical costs, education costs, jobs lost, and the like. In other words, the discussion is typically framed as an act of economic violence done against the American people. Consequently, the vast majority of responses proposed and enacted by government entities and proposed by politicians center on violent or semi-violent responses, ranging from deportation to a border fence to incarceration. In the eyes of many Americans, the decision seems quite clear: amnesty or deportation.

Meanwhile, church-communities are left to wonder how best to respond. In my own community the Hispanic population expanded so that, over a decade, the demographics of the local schools shifted to almost 50 percent Hispanic.<sup>92</sup> Over that same

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<sup>91</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, Data Factsheet, <http://pewhispanic.org/topics/index.php?TopicID=16>, accessed March 31, 2008.

<sup>92</sup> Kaufman Independent School District demographic statistics, 1995-2005, obtained through the Kaufman ISD administration offices.

period of time, the neighborhood where my congregation's building is located shifted to become an almost exclusively Hispanic neighborhood. As of 2000, our church's response had been one of isolation; we did not engage one another except as necessity dictated. But after an extended period of study and discussion our church-community decided that there might be a third way beyond the choices of deportation or amnesty. We opted to embrace a practice of hospitality toward our new neighbors, attempting to embody a non-violent response to the situation.

The question of legality was the primary concern in our congregation in our initial attempt to extend hospitality to the Hispanic population in our community, many of whom we suspected were illegal immigrants. The congregation struggled with honoring the laws of the land while simultaneously honoring the mission of Jesus; we hoped to practice hospitality without being forced to serve as involuntary Border Patrol agents. After wrestling with this dilemma for some time, the congregation decided to base its response around two theological principles. The first one is the hospitality command recorded in Exodus 23:9 (and later supported by the New Testament): "Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt." The Bible calls believers to practice *xenophilia* rather than *xenophobia*,<sup>93</sup> and thus the church must embody this love of the stranger. We decided that it was an imperative to the Jesus narrative to open our homes and resources as the church-community in a loving fashion to our neighbors, neighbors from a particular place with a particular story.

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<sup>93</sup>Cf. Hebrews 13:2. Cf. also Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007); and Andrew E. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Early Christian Hospitality in Its Mediterranean Setting* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005). Both Newman and Arterbury explore the biblical origins of the practice of hospitality, with Arterbury focusing on the historical aspects and Newman fleshing out the practical implications to greater detail.

Eugene Peterson emphasizes the centrality of offering meals in the practice of hospitality; “Hospitality and meals are complex acts that require attention to detail and involve persons who are for the most part named.”<sup>94</sup> Accordingly, the congregation decided to act in accordance with Dorothy Day’s assertion that to love God, we must “love each other, and to love we must know each other.”<sup>95</sup>

Once the initial principle of obedience to the hospitality principle from the Bible was decided upon, the second principle followed closely thereafter. Our congregation adopted a method of reading and interpreting Romans 13 not unlike that of Yoder and Bonhoeffer with regard to the laws surrounding illegal immigration. Both Yoder and Bonhoeffer concluded that the biblical commands to obey the government do not revoke the commands of Christ. In similar fashion, we agreed that we would be under the laws of the land, but, if pressed to choose between obedience to Christ and obedience to the government, we would choose the practice of hospitality in the name of Christ. When the federal government considered a law in 2005 requiring churches to discover if an individual is an illegal immigrant prior to providing assistance, Cardinal Roger Mahony of the Los Angeles Diocese reached a conclusion similar to our own church. In a scathing letter to the White House, Mahony claims, “It is staggering for the federal government to stifle our spiritual and pastoral outreach to the poor, and to impose penalties for doing

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<sup>94</sup>Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 215. Peterson’s work is one of “spiritual theology,” as he calls it, but proves to be a rich resource and dialogue partner for academic theology, as well. Peterson is a pastor, and his work demonstrates as such, but his insistence on concrete practices within the church and the embodiment of hospitality matches up well with theologies written from the academic perspective. For instance, Ralph C. Wood, *Contending for the Faith: The Church’s Engagement with Culture* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2003) makes many of the same assertions as does Peterson.

<sup>95</sup>Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1952), 285.

what our faith demands of us.”<sup>96</sup> In so doing, we agreed to accept whatever legal penalties might be assessed against us without resorting to violent conduct so that we might embody the nonviolent practice of hospitality to the stranger.

Once the congregation reached these conclusions, it adopted the Bonhoefferian position of being Christ’s presence in the community and tangibly practicing hospitality. Over the last three years this has manifested itself in a variety of ways: bilingual worship, neighborhood *asados* (barbecue parties), legal advice for those seeking a visa, medical attention, Bible study, and a soccer tournament. More recently, our church has hired a full-time bilingual pastor and has committed to a missional partnership with a small town in Mexico that is the original homestead of over 75 Hispanic families in our community. We plan to build bridges between our communities so that we can more effectively preach and live the narrative of Jesus within the world. In doing so, our hope is that we are participating in God’s work in a nonviolent manner within a situation that is potentially explosive, not only in our town but in other cities, states, and nations. Additionally, by embodying Bonhoeffer’s insight that peace is not synonymous with safety but is instead grounded in trust, we hope that in embodying this small example, we demonstrate how peace might be achieved through local congregations practicing nonviolent responses.

The preceding example, of course, is only one way that Bonhoeffer’s project might play out in the world. The central lesson we learn from the life of Bonhoeffer and his own theological conclusions is that a theological hermeneutic must be grounded in the

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<sup>96</sup>Letter from Cardinal Roger Mahony to President George W. Bush, quoted in “Mahony: L.A. Church Won’t Enforce Immigration Laws,” cited by Pacific News Agency on [http://news.pacificnews.org/news/view\\_article.html?article\\_id=d0c023cee684ca7f45a5d2c7240ca9a6](http://news.pacificnews.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=d0c023cee684ca7f45a5d2c7240ca9a6), accessed on March 31, 2008.

church-community; without a visible place to embody theological interpretations, one can fall into to a tragedy similar to Bonhoeffer's. But by existing as the church-community in the midst of the world concerned and consumed with things other than Christ, the church serves as a voice of God's person and priorities within the world. One might suggest a number of other possible ways in which the church might encounter, interpret, and then live a new future within the world. Such encounters and interpretations might center on Western culture's addiction to consumer spending or our fascination with the celebrity phenomenon or, more importantly, how we treat one another. In each encounter, the church interprets the world and then lives according to its interpretations. There are infinite possibilities for the church as it interprets the world through its theological lens. In doing so, it carries forward Dietrich Bonhoeffer's project of understanding the world better than it understands itself. And in doing so, as he envisioned, the church is a hermeneutic.

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