

ABSTRACT

Discerning the Will of God by Following the Call of Christ Alone: A Christian Response to the Refugee Crisis

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What is a Christian response to the refugee crisis? My thesis answers this question by exposing the problematic of determining right Christian action, which is grown out of the conclusions that theologian Daniel Louw draws in his article. With Louw, I agree that right Christian action cannot bifurcate the refugee dilemma into protecting one's own or loving the stranger but, instead, must involve self-giving love. However, I find that the specifics of self-giving love cannot be legislated for all Christians. I mine Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* for resources to show that right Christian action is a matter of following the call of Christ alone and so discerning the will of God for the individual, within the church community, that he must obey in faith. This thesis will elucidate the specifics of discerning God's will by following Christ's call alone and various cases of action that this might entail.

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DISCERNING THE WILL OF GOD BY FOLLOWING THE CALL OF CHRIST ALONE: A
CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE REFUGEE CRISIS

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To Dr. Junius Johnson

A gifted academic mentor, insightful spiritual guide, and faithful friend

INTRODUCTION

The phrase ‘refugee crisis’ evokes strong emotions from both sides of the conversation. As a Christian, I have often felt a measure of guilt for not wholeheartedly opposing government decisions that seek to protect the homeland, often to the detriment of refugees; but, I also struggle with the concept of bifurcating the refugee crisis into a choice between protecting one’s own and loving the stranger. In the midst of these frustrations and questions, the heart of my thesis project was born.

However, the journey began about a year earlier during a study abroad program in Oxford, England, as I plotted a smaller thesis project with my advisor, Dr. Robert Heimburger. Dr. Heimburger helped me begin to form my interest in and knowledge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer from my tutorial on him into a workable and focused thesis project. In my Bonhoeffer tutorial with Dr. Matthew Kirkpatrick, my study of Bonhoeffer fascinated me, particularly because of his unique integration of real life experience and theological reflection, but I desired to test the practical workability of, and perhaps refine, his political theology by applying it to a current issue. The refugee crisis presented itself as the perfect test case. This initial project concluded with the observation that, although we were not able to refine Bonhoeffer’s political theology as originally intended, it is this very fact that demonstrates his theological commitment to a full expression of the Christian faith because his political theology is one that calls followers of Christ to look to Him and Him alone for the answers to all of life’s questions, both big and small.

This project continued to develop through conversations with Dr. Junius Johnson at Baylor. We discovered that I had developed the problematic but not addressed the core

issue in which I was interested: “how is the Christian, both as individual and as church, to know how to act in accordance with God’s commands when confronted with conflicting actions that both seem to fulfill God’s commands, but in different ways.”¹ Thus, this senior thesis project’s purpose is two-fold: first, this thesis exposes the problematic of ethically dubious situations. For example, is it really correct to bifurcate the refugee crisis into a choice between protecting one’s own and protecting the refugee? And, if the answer is that Christians must show self-giving love to both those at home and the stranger, then what exactly is this self-giving love supposed to look like practically? Second, this thesis develops a theological response, with the chief help of Bonhoeffer, to these ethically dubious situations. For example, if Christian action is not simply a matter of determining and legislating what is right for all people in all circumstances, then in what does a theologically sound approach to determining right Christian action consist?

So then, rather than outlining a 5-step plan of how every Christian should respond to the refugee crisis, I seek to probe the question of right Christian action itself, and present an alternative approach to legislating right Christian action for all people in all circumstances that will allow the individual Christ-follower to determine how he should live out his faith in this complex world. Seemingly simple and yet deeply profound, this thesis calls Christians to action by calling us back to the center of our faith: Jesus Christ. Only by following His call alone will we be able to act in accordance with our faith, and so in accordance with reality, in the midst of this world’s complexity.

¹ Junius Johnson, personal email, June 29, 2016.

CHAPTER ONE

The Refugee Dilemma and the Need for Self-Giving Love

South-African theologian Daniel Louw recently published an article that tackles the issue of the “refugee dilemma.”² This article offers several helpful ideas that establish him as a critical conversation partner for my thesis project. Louw’s primary contribution to my project is twofold: first, Louw establishes that the refugee dilemma is an immense political issue that we cannot fully resolve and, second, that Christians must show compassion in the face of this difficult situation. However, Louw’s article is only helpful for my thesis up to a point, namely up to part 4. There, I believe that Louw presents exactly the type of solution to the refugee dilemma that he earlier states that Christians should not seek. So then, the final portion of this chapter problematizes part four of Louw’s argument and, as a result, motivates the remaining chapters of this project.

First, we must define what is meant by the refugee crisis or dilemma. Although refugees have and continue to flee to the United States and other countries in the West from a variety of countries, Louw’s article, and subsequently this thesis, is primarily written in response to the recent influx of refugees from Syria due to the war occurring there. As Louw notes in his article, there has been a “constant migration” of refugees for the past “30 decades,” but “suddenly it has become a cascade and tsunami” of refugees as

² Louw, Daniel. “The Refugee Dilemma and Migrant Crisis: ‘Charity Begins at Home’ or ‘Being Home to the Homeless’? The Paradoxical Stance in Pastoral Caregiving and the Infiltration and Perichoresis of Compassion.” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 72: 2 (2016), pp. 1-11.

“[m]ore than 600,000 people have entered Europe so far in 2015.”³ Simply speaking, the fact of the current refugee crisis is that “the Syrian war has driven worldwide displacement and global dislocation to a record high.”⁴ Thus, although refugees are not a new phenomenon, the immensity and impact of the recent refugee movement, particularly from Syria, is what merits the attention of Louw’s article and this thesis.

The heart of the issue of the refugee crisis begins with the political dilemma that Lowe establishes in part one of his argument: “should countries close their borders and maintain a position of exclusive self-defense and internal security, or should they open their borders and maintain a polity of inclusive hospitality and compassionate outreach to the stranger?”⁵ Although the threat of terrorism and the need for self-defense and security have been global realities and concerns in the past, recent events have solidified the reality of terrorism and significantly increased the concern for self-defense and security. Pointing specifically to Paris, Louw says that after the terrorist attack on November 13, 2015, “Paris has become the epitome of a global networking of fear and unqualified anxiety.”⁶ With regards to the political dilemma, then, the key element is “a global networking of fear.”⁷ This is a term in Louw’s article that is interchanged and equated with the term “collective paranoia.”⁸ These interchangeable terms break down into two pieces that work together to define this phenomenon: the first piece consists of “fear” or “paranoia”

³ Louw, “The Refugee Dilemma,” p. 4.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Louw, p. 2.

⁶ Louw, p. 1.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. Louw equates these terms in the following portion of text through a parenthetical: “[t]he global network of fear (collective paranoia).”

and the second piece consists of “global networking” or “collective.”⁹ Thus, we must define the two pieces of these interchangeable terms to understand the phenomenon that lies at the center of the political dilemma.

First, “fear” or “paranoia” is defined as the concern that anyone at anytime could potentially be touched by terrorism and thus potentially physically dislocated from their home, and certainly emotionally and psychologically displaced from their previous situation of safety and security: “[t]here is no safe place on earth anymore” that does not experience the potential threat of terrorism.¹⁰ Second, the “global networking” or “collective” piece is used to define this fear and paranoia as wide-spread, in the sense of being “international and intercultural.”¹¹ Fear and paranoia are geographically and culturally wide-spread because ““terrorism does not recognize any religion, any race, any nation or any country,”” which is to say that no one of these things keeps you safe from terrorism.¹² In fact, terrorism usually targets exactly these things. But there is another element to this “global networking” or “collective” piece:¹³ not only have most places and people around the world experienced terrorism first-hand, most places and people are closely connected to the reality of terrorism, even if it has not yet occurred in their backyard, through the advent of technological communication (social media, smart phones, laptops, etc). Because of the “vast network of communications systems,” fear and paranoia spread internationally and interculturallly and create a “systemic network” of fear and paranoia.¹⁴ So

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 1-2.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 2.

¹² Louw, p. 2.

¹³ Ibid, p. 1.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 2.

then, even if terrorism has not occurred locally in a region of the world, fear and paranoia still exist in the regions with access to technology because the communication network ensures that a “systemic network of panic and fear” develops.¹⁵

So, as stated earlier, this jarring awakening to the current realities of terrorism now presents countries around the world with a dilemma: should we welcome the stranger or defend our own territory?¹⁶ Again, this political dilemma is at the heart of the refugee crisis, but why, exactly? The reality of civilian terrorism now presents a greater fear that the stranger in our community could, in fact, be our deadly enemy and, because of the refugee crisis, the stranger with whom this dilemma is concerned is the refugee. The problem is that “[t]he prejudice of a possible threat is becoming a global tag spread over many Syrians: refugees are also suspects of terrorism, dangerous outsiders and outcasts.”¹⁷ Significant fuel to the fire was added when “the holder of a Syrian passport, found near the body of one of the gunmen who died in Friday night’s attacks in Paris...was registered as a refugee in several European countries.”¹⁸ No definite ties between the deceased Syrian refugee and the deceased gunman were found, and yet, the close proximity of these dead bodies caused great speculation and concern regarding the potential involvement of refugees in terrorist activity. Could terrorists be exploiting the refugee crisis by infiltrating other countries under the guise of helpless, harmless refugees? This is precisely the concern that places the political dilemma between welcoming and defending at the heart of the refugee crisis.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 1.

¹⁷ Louw, p. 2.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Furthermore, similar to the question of open or closed borders for the state, the question for the church becomes: “Should caregiving grant unqualified compassion to all, or is there a place for a selective approach?”¹⁹ Louw answers this question by saying that Christian caregiving does not allow for a selective approach because Christian action is grounded in and determined by Christ’s action. Christians do not merely claim to follow Christ in word but also follow him in deed. But does following Christ in deed, here, necessarily mean that Christians must “grant unqualified compassion to all”? Louw says yes, precisely because of Christ’s work on the cross. Christ’s compassion was not selective, but instead “[h]is vicarious suffering took place...once for all.”²⁰ Louw describes this understanding as a “theology of compassion.”²¹ A “theology of compassion” may be defined as an approach that understands the nature of compassion as “a way of life and new state of being” that is grounded in Jesus’ Christ’s “vicarious suffering.”²² The driving force of a theology of compassion, then, is the “fact that Christ exercises compassion,” which thus determines our “sympathy and compassion.”²³ So, a theology of compassion leads the church to an unconditional morality that “exchange[s] fear for the stranger [xenophobia] into *philoxenia*: the mutuality of ‘brotherly’ love.”²⁴

After establishing this political dilemma, which lies at the heart of the refugee crisis and affects both the state and the church, Louw concludes in part two of his argument that the global village displays competing, simultaneous goals. Now, what does Louw

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 8.

²¹ Louw, p. 8.

²² Ibid, pp. 8-9.

²³ Ibid, p. 8.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 9.

mean by the term “global village?”²⁵ He means the idea that “people are connected by easy travel, mass media and electronic communications, and have moulded into a single mode of sameness.”²⁶ Because of the global village phenomenon, “all human beings, whether one is living in Paris, New York or Cape Town, are involved in this global paranoia.”²⁷ So then, what are these competing, simultaneous goals that the global village displays? The global village may be roughly divided into two parts: those whose goal is a safe, secure, and peaceful life and those whose goal is to effect acts of terror. In other words, one part of the global village is unified by their paranoia, as victims or onlookers of terrorism, while another part of the global village is unified by their violence, as perpetrators of this terrorism. Moreover, the opposite goals of safety and terror are competing in that each group desires their own goal to dominate the landscape of the global village, and are simultaneous in that they occur at the same time. Thus, because of these competing, simultaneous goals, the global village constantly experiences a tension between “war and peace.”²⁸

In order to approach this difficult political dilemma, which reveals competing, simultaneous goals in the global village and a resulting tension between war and peace, Louw suggests in part three of his argument that we begin to “shift from complication thinking to complexity thinking.”²⁹ Although a clear definition of complication thinking

²⁵ Ibid, p. 3.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Louw, p. 3.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 5.

is not presented in this article, we may infer a definition from this text: “[c]omplexity refers to the fact that because of networking, civil societal issues are not complicated in the sense that logical answers are possible.”³⁰ If complexity thinking concludes that logical answers are not possible, then we may infer that complication thinking concludes that logical answers *are* possible. So complication thinking may be defined as the view that “logical answers”³¹ are possible in a situation because the difficulties can be “reduced to solvable parts.”³² As opposed to complexity thinking, complication thinking sees that “contradictory, essentially conflicting ideas” *can* “be eliminated or resolved.”³³ So then, although “one should admit that an immediate solution is not possible,” the goal of complication thinking is to discover “answers and solutions.”³⁴

One of the great dangers of complication thinking is that it “easily falls prey to compassion confusion.”³⁵ This is the dilemma between showing compassion to those at home and showing compassion to the refugee victims of terrorism.³⁶ Put another way, “developed nations within the global village live in a kind of catch 22 situation: they should become home to the homeless but what about internal political tensions, poverty, economic difficulties and unemployment within their own borders [sic]?”³⁷ So, compli-

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Nilson quoted in Louw, p. 6.

³³ Louw, p. 6.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 5.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 2.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 4.

cation thinking comes full circle because the conclusion presents us with the original difficulty, namely the dilemma between welcoming the stranger and protecting one's own with which we began this discussion.

On the other hand, complexity thinking involves the “infiltration of compassion despite paradox and contradiction.”³⁸ Complexity thinking, then, involves both apparent contradiction and actual contradiction.”³⁹ Apparent contradiction is defined as paradox: two elements that act “at the same time” and seem to be conflicting but are actually not conflicting,⁴⁰ while actual contradiction is the presence of “essentially contradicting ideas [that] cannot necessarily be eliminated or resolved.”⁴¹ But how can both apparent contradiction and actual contradiction exist within the same framework? Could not all apparent contradiction, in reality, be actual contradiction or vice versa? This seems to be quite complex, but this is precisely the point. The presence of paradox and contradiction within complexity is allowable because the goal of complexity thinking is not to “try to come up with answers and solutions.”⁴² Rather, the task of complexity thinking is “to point out that fear, paranoia and compassion are interconnected within a systemic interrelatedness.”⁴³ In other words, the reality of people's fear and paranoia regarding their neighbors exists alongside the Christian necessity to show unconditional love and hospitality to their neighbors. The goal is not to find a solution to this complex situation but rather to alter the situation by shifting people's basic dispositions and attitudes.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 5.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Louw, p. 6.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

Finally, part four asks what a “possible solution” might look like, and yet this is problematic because the last section concluded with the claim that finding solutions is not the goal.⁴⁴ In this final section, Louw goes on to offer five ways of “practical level caregiving” that define a theology of compassion.⁴⁵ These 5 ways of caregiving practically entail 1) “an unqualified grassroots encounter with all stakeholders in the refugee and migrant dilemma,” 2) “mutual understanding and interpretation beyond the hermeneutics of suspicion and prejudice,” 3) a promotion of “negotiation with all parties involved” that “alters social structures of exclusive participation to inclusive participation,” 4) the application of “a pastoral polity of presence: a compassionate being with them, where they are” and 5) a practice of “an hospitable infiltrating and osmotic perichoresis of making room or home for the homeless.”⁴⁶ However, the problem is that these five recommendations for practical action constitute exactly the solution that Louw just finished saying we should not seek. Therefore, rather than merely present the final section of Louw’s argument, I will systematically critique this last section in order to show the need for a different approach.

So, what exactly is the possible solution to which Louw refers? Louw first advocates for the alteration of attitudes and dispositions of people “in the light of overarching values that enhance human dignity.”⁴⁷ In other words, we may not have a “fix-all” solution, but we do have the ability to effect positive change within the individual parts of the complex whole by re-shaping attitudes according to Christian virtues, rather than natural

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 9.

⁴⁶ Louw, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 7.

human fears. Then Louw explains that our basic attitude and disposition toward the refugee dilemma, now aligned with Christian virtues, must be one of being home to the homeless, or “compassionate pastoral caregiving.”⁴⁸ According to Louw, this re-alignment of attitudes and dispositions “can contribute not to a solution, but to creating space and place for dislocated human beings: on becoming home for the homeless and dislocated.”⁴⁹

And yet, in actuality, Louw goes on to say that these realigned attitudes and dispositions contribute to the five principles of “practical level caregiving.”⁵⁰ Indeed, these five principles specify practical action on the part of all people, such as meeting face-to-face with refugees and “all parties involved” in the refugee crisis to discuss issues at hand.⁵¹ Rather than merely creating space for the homeless, as Louw previously states, it appears that these attitudes and dispositions realigned in light of Christian virtues really do contribute to a solution, constituted by five principles of care-giving on a practical level. So then, Louw sets out to present an alteration or shift in the individual parts of the complex problem, but ends up presenting a solution instead.

Furthermore, Louw sets out to present a method of complexity thinking, but this really reduces to a method of complication thinking by the end of his argument. Instead of recognizing the complexity of the issue and our inability to find solutions that will work for all people in all cases, Louw falls back into the false dichotomy of complication

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 9.

⁴⁹ Louw, p. 7.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 9.

⁵¹ Ibid.

thinking: either we must protect those at home or we must show compassion to the refugees. From the perspective of complexity thinking, this is a false dichotomy because the issue cannot be reduced to two opposing options. Because Louw concludes that we must interact with refugees on a face-to-face level, even hosting refugees in one's own home, Louw seems to both present a solution and side with the refugees in the false dichotomy of complication thinking. In other words, Louw presents a complicated solution instead of a complex alteration.

In contrast to Louw, this thesis seeks to give a true complex solution to the issue of the refugee crisis. This complex solution consists in an individual discerning God's will for one's life and circumstances, rather than a list of five practical ways of care-giving. Although I do not agree with Louw's presentation of five practical ways of care-giving that define a theology of compassion, I do agree with his conclusion that a theology of compassion leads the church to an unconditional morality that "exchange[s] fear for the stranger [xenophobia] into *philoxenia*: the mutuality of 'brotherly' love."⁵² So, with Louw, I agree that the expression of self-giving love is a valid and universal Christian commitment that must be expressed in a Christian response to the refugee crisis.

Now, this true complex solution is not a quick and easy solution that will resolve all issues in the refugee crisis. However, it does solve the dilemma for the church regarding right action. Right action is not a matter of choosing either to defend and protect your own people or to welcome your stranger, but instead right action is listening to God, hearing his call, and obeying him accordingly. Although the necessity for Christians to display self-giving love towards their neighbor has been established, questions regarding

⁵² Louw, p. 9.

the practical right action of this self-giving love can only be solved by discerning God's will for an individual. But, finally, why is this true complex solution considered 'complex'? This solution preserves the complexity of the situation rather than reducing to complication because the individual discernment process with God leaves intact all the dynamics of the individual Christian life and the call on those individual Christian lives. The following chapters will further explicate and defend the claim that a true complex solution to the refugee crisis consists in individuals discerning the will of God for their own lives.

CHAPTER TWO

Setting up the Problematic of Practical Right Action

In the previous chapter we established “the necessity of Christians displaying self-giving love towards their neighbor” in response to the refugee crisis; yet, “questions regarding the practical right action of this self-giving love” still remain. In actuality, what should the practical right action of this self-giving love look like? Is there only one option that constitutes a proper display of Christian self-giving love in light of the refugee crisis? Or, if there is more than one option, then how is one to determine the proper right action for oneself? These are the questions that motivate this chapter. So, the goal of this chapter is to expose the problematic of the practical right action of self-giving love. Although these motivating questions are not yet fully answered in this chapter, they are further explicated to ensure a clear understanding of the nature of the problem. One cannot discuss how the practical right action of self-giving love should look until one precisely understands the nature of the difficulty surrounding this question. One should also note that the problematic exposed in this chapter will be limited to difficulty regarding an individual Christian’s right action, although a later chapter will discuss conflict regarding individual action and state action.

So then, if it is necessary for Christians to display self-giving love towards their neighbor, then what exactly does this mean with regards to practical, right action? Myriad possible responses exist from the most intensive, hands-on response (which entails sponsoring a refugee family or allowing a family to stay in your home) to the least intensive,

hands-off response (which entails sending aid money to a Christian organization or host family). Naturally, plenty of other options exist between these two extremes. For example, one could participate in short-term refugee relief mission trips or provide physical support for refugees or host families by sending necessities to a Christian aid organization or providing child-care for a host-family as they navigate the waters of radical hospitality.

It is clear, then, that many options for Christians to display self-giving love towards their neighbor exist. But taking these vast and varying optional responses into consideration, how is a Christian to determine *his* right action? Perhaps the greatest difficulty a Christian faces when determining his right moral action, in any situation, is reconciling himself, a limited and flawed human being, with the call to follow the perfect example of Jesus Christ. How are we, as Christ followers, to embody Christ's vicarious suffering on the cross? In other words, when contemplating these matters, is it the case that one type of engagement more fully exemplifies what it means for a Christian to embody Christ's vicarious suffering than another type of engagement does? If Christ suffered the ultimate suffering of death on a cross for our sake, then is it not the duty of a Christian to follow his footsteps and suffer the ultimate suffering on behalf of these refugees, many of whom are our brothers and sisters in Christ?

The difficulty of determining right action in the case of the refugee crisis, as in other instances of determining right moral action, is that individual Christians are different and have varying circumstances. For example, two individual Christian women may possess the same strong desire to engage the refugee crisis, and yet each finds herself in

radically different circumstances. One woman might be a young, single mother who receives money from the government to provide her own children with daily food, and yet desires to help refugees because she has recently become a believer in Jesus Christ and takes seriously the call to help others, especially those in great need. This woman's difficulty might be determining what, if any, resources she has left physically, emotionally, or financially to help refugees. On the other hand, another woman might be a middle-aged, wealthy doctor's wife who has incredible financial resources, advanced education, free time, and personal connections, and desires to share with others these gifts with which God has blessed her. This woman's difficulty, quite oppositely, might be determining where and in what way to utilize her great amount of physical, emotional, and financial resources. Because of these women's differing circumstances, instructing these women to display self-giving love towards their neighbor in the same way would not recognize the specific call of God on these individual Christian lives.

It could also be the case that two men possess exactly the same circumstances, with regard to such things as age and socio-economic status, but do not possess exactly the same personal gifting or personal capacity. One man could be a lawyer who is gifted in music and the arts but who is prone to anxiety and depression, which lessens his ability to take on responsibility and his endurance for social-interaction and high-stress situations. This man's difficulty might be finding a way to utilize his physical and emotional gifts in a manner that does not rob him of all of his internal reserves so that he is left with nothing more to give. Now, another man could be a lawyer who is gifted in organization and possesses a high stamina for tasks, seeming to have an endless supply of physical re-

sources. This man's difficulty might be finding a way to utilize his personal, physical resources in the most effective and efficient way possible, as well as determining how much of his resources to give. These two men do have similar circumstances; yet, they are still unique individuals and, once again, experience circumstances that differ enough to make it illogical to instruct both individuals to display self-giving love towards their neighbor in the same way. Therefore, from these enumerated hypothetical situations of varying circumstances, it becomes clear that a blanket statement or even a list of specific right actions that must apply to all Christians would not be possible, nor would it be wise.

Now, it has been established that 1) there are varying circumstances among Christians and that 2) all Christians cannot be told to show compassion in the same way. In other words, it has been established that the 'can' of Christian right action is diverse and difficult to discern. But is it the case that by evaluating an individual's given circumstances and determining how that individual 'can' use his gifts and resources most effectively that this 'can' automatically equates to the right action that this Christian 'should' take?

For example, what if the young, single mother mentioned above is an incredible seamstress and makes virtually all of her children's clothes. This woman determines that she can show compassion to the refugees by sewing the type of clothing traditionally worn by their culture in order to make them feel more at home in a foreign environment. This woman has the talent to make these clothes, and Christian charities have even offered to provide her with the raw materials necessary to complete this task. But 'should' this woman sew these clothes just because she 'can' sew these clothes? This sewing process will certainly take time away from other areas of her life, such as working at her

church, making clothes for her own children, and getting sleep. As a poor single mom with children, this woman is incredibly short on time and resources. Making these clothes is conceivably within this woman's capacity, and yet it is also a large sacrifice. Nevertheless, the difficulties that acting in this way might cause this woman do not necessarily imply that she should not act in this way. Thus, on what grounds 'should' this woman show compassion through making clothes?

This 'can' would necessarily be 'should' if this was the only possible way that this woman, given her personal circumstances, could show compassion to the refugees. We have established that Christian right action is to show compassion; so, if it is the case that there is only one possible way in which an individual can accomplish showing compassion to the refugees then this individual must take this action. However, multiple 'can' options for showing compassion always exist. For example, as Christians, prayer is always considered to be right Christian action. On what basis, then, 'should' this woman sew these clothes instead of praying fervently for the refugee crisis or for particular refugees? This woman 'can' even start and host an intercessory prayer group for the refugee crisis at her church. Is not fervent, intercessory prayer showing compassion just as much as hand sewing authentic clothing?

However, an objection might be posed to the statement that prayer constitutes a 'can' option for showing compassion. All Christians are called to and held responsible for praying individually and communally, at all times and in all circumstances. Therefore, some might argue that prayer, in and of itself, is not considered to be a sufficient Christian right action in response to the refugee crisis. On the other hand, one might counter this objection by arguing the following: yes, this does apply to all Christians, above and

beyond an individual's given circumstances; and yet, on what basis 'should' a person take another, more tangible compassionate action that they 'can' do, rather than simply committing to pray?

But also, it could be the case that this woman's individual circumstances present her with an option to choose between multiple, equally possible and effective 'can' options for showing compassion. For example, this woman could pick up Christian charity workers' children from school so that the charity workers can spend longer hours at their charity helping with the refugee crisis. Although this action more indirectly shows compassion to the refugees, it certainly still shows compassion. This woman's human limits clearly do not allow her to show compassion in all of the ways that she 'can,' so on what basis must she determine what Christian right action she 'should' take?

From the Christian point of view, the ultimate goal is to embody Christ's vicarious suffering on the cross. However, apart from specific divine revelation and guidance, there appears to be nothing on which an individual can base the 'should' of taking one right Christian action of which he is capable over another right Christian action. So then, to proceed with our investigation of right Christian action in response to the refugee crisis, we must further investigate the what, why, and how of receiving specific divine revelation and guidance.

CHAPTER THREE

The Call of Christ Alone and the Responsible Life

In the previous chapter we established that one must receive specific divine revelation and guidance to determine right action. So then, this chapter seeks to further investigate the what, why, and how of receiving specific divine revelation and guidance. Put simply, the key to receiving this revelation and guidance is following the call of Christ alone. One must follow the call of Christ alone and not merely the law of God because Christ may call one of his followers, in His divine wisdom and sovereignty, to transgress the law. Nevertheless, the letter of the law will only be transgressed in order to preserve the spirit of the law and so affirm the law anew. Although there is no set formula for how a follower of Christ is to follow the call of Christ alone, which may entail transgressing the letter of the law, we may nevertheless discuss a few aspects of this concept.

We will begin our discussion of determining right action with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, in which he formulates the Christian ethic in relation to an individual's responsibility to live life according to Jesus Christ.⁵³ First of all, this is to say that individual followers of Christ have a responsibility to live life according to Jesus Christ because of the bond that individuals have to God and human beings through Christ.⁵⁴ Now, individual Christ-followers only have this bond to God and other human beings through Christ because of the vicarious representative action of Christ.⁵⁵ We may define the vicarious representative action of Christ as the acts that Christ did on our behalf when

⁵³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Edition (DBWE)*, Vol. 6. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 378, 254. "the only possible subject matter of a 'Christian ethic'" is "the 'commandment of God'" and the "commandment of God is the total and concrete claim of human beings by the merciful and holy God in Jesus Christ" (378). So then, if the Christian ethic is about the claim of human beings by God in Jesus Christ then "[t]his life, lived in answer to the life of Jesus Christ...we call 'responsibility'" (254).

⁵⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Edition (DBWE)*, 258. "The structure of the responsible life is determined...by life's bond to human beings and to God..."

⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 257.

we could not act for ourselves; namely, Christ became incarnate, took on humanity's sin and guilt and was crucified, and redeemed sinful humanity through His resurrection.⁵⁶ So because of Christ's vicarious representative action, Christ-followers have the responsibility to live their lives in response to the life of Jesus Christ.⁵⁷ We understand that Christ has given his life for us that we may have life, and so it is now our responsibility to give our lives for him. Life is not a matter of *what* we do but *whom* we follow and for whom we live.⁵⁸ Thus, the vicarious representative action of Christ creates a bond between God and the Christ-follower because redeemed humanity is able to commune with the holy God and receive the power of Christ to give their lives to Him in gratitude and in acknowledgement of His lordship over their lives.

But Christ's vicarious representative action also creates a bond between Christ-followers and other human beings. Just as Christ gave His life for us, we too are to follow His example and give our lives for others. However, following the example of Christ must not be turned into an "ethic of Jesus"⁵⁹ because "[a]ction in accord with Christ does not originate in some ethical principle, but in the very person of Jesus Christ."⁶⁰ That is to say that we as human beings are not to do all that Christ did, turning the life and actions of Christ into an ethic itself, but we are to follow his example as the "responsible human being par excellence" who "concretely enacts God's love."⁶¹ In other words, we follow Christ's example and so are responsible human beings by discernment of and

⁵⁶ Steve Bezner, "Bonhoeffer and Vicarious Representative Action," *The Calvinist International*, April 17, 2017.

⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 254.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 250.

⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 229.

⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 231.

⁶¹ Ibid, 232.

obedience to the way in which He calls us as individuals to participate in God's love becoming real in the world.⁶²

Secondly, this "bond of life to human beings and to God"⁶³ and the responsible life that proceeds from it is in "accordance with reality," because reality is Jesus Christ himself.⁶⁴ In other words, "[t]he origin of action that is in accord with reality is...the God who became human, Jesus Christ, who took on humanity and who has loved, judged, and reconciled humanity, and with it the world."⁶⁵ Jesus Christ "bore and experienced in his own body the essence of the real" and has spoken "out of knowledge of the real like no other human being on earth." So then, because Jesus Christ alone showed human beings who they truly are and what reality truly is, life in accord with Jesus Christ is life in accord with reality. Jesus Christ is the "Real One" and so "the origin, essence, and goal of all reality."⁶⁶ Jesus Christ "himself is the lord and the law of the real."⁶⁷

However, our responsible human action "in accord with reality is *limited by our creatureliness*"⁶⁸ because we are not the God-man himself but only follow Him. This is to say that "because God in Christ became *human*...we as human beings are permitted and called to live and act before God and the neighbor within the confines of our limited human judgement and knowledge."⁶⁹ And yet, "because it was *God* who became human, responsible action...can never prematurely judge its own origin, essence, and goal, but

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, 257.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 263.

⁶⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 263.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 267.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 268.

must completely surrender such judgement to God.”⁷⁰ This is to say that we as imperfect humans cannot be perfectly certain of the origin, essence, and goal of our responsible action and so must surrender our responsible action to God, who alone can judge our responsible action’s origin, essence, and goal. Thus, the “deed that is done after responsibly weighing all personal and factual circumstances, in light of God becoming *human* and *God* becoming human, is completely surrendered to God the moment it is carried out.”⁷¹ In other words, responsible people “place their action into the hands of God and live by God’s grace and judgement.”⁷²

But also, our responsible human action in accord with reality is limited by our neighbor himself and his responsibility as a human being.⁷³ Here, responsible action is distinguished from violating action by the fact that those for whom one is responsible are also responsible persons with their own responsibility.⁷⁴ For example, “[t]he responsibility of a father...finds its limit in the responsibility of the child,” which means that the father must make his child aware of his or her own responsibility and so strengthen the child’s responsibility.⁷⁵ This is to say that a father’s responsible action ends where his child’s responsible action begins. In all cases of responsible action limited by our neighbor, God alone must be the judge of this boundary. Thus, God and the neighbor are both

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid, 268-9.

⁷³ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 269.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

the origin and the limit of responsible action.⁷⁶ Once again, responsible action is “sheltered in Christ” in “its origin, essence, and goal.”⁷⁷

Thirdly, the responsible life lived in answer to Christ’s vicarious representative action, in accordance with reality, involves the element of accepting and taking on guilt.⁷⁸ Just as Christ took on our guilt through vicarious representative action, so we as followers of Christ must be willing to take on the guilt of others.⁷⁹ Jesus Christ was sinless, and yet because of his “love for real human beings” he “enters into human guilt” and takes it upon himself.⁸⁰ Following Christ’s example, we must be willing to take on another’s guilt and so enter “into community with the guilt of other human beings for their sake.”⁸¹

Moreover, “Jesus Christ has become my conscience” as a Christ-follower and so my “conscience that has been set free from the law will not shy away from entering into another’s guilt for that person’s sake.”⁸² Even though all human responsible action is “always contaminated by original sin...it does participate indirectly in the action of Jesus Christ...[and] is thus characterized by something like a relative sinlessness.”⁸³ For example, if I was asked by a murderer if my friend was hiding in my house, then I must be willing to violate the principle of truthfulness for the sake of my friend.⁸⁴ I must be willing to “take on and bear [the] guilt [of lying] out of love for my neighbor” because this is

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 287.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 288.

⁸⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 275.

⁸¹ Ibid, 276.

⁸² Ibid, 279.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 279-80.

“my responsibility grounded in reality.”⁸⁵ Therefore, responsible action is the “entire response, in accord with reality, to the claim of God and my neighbor” instead of the “partial response of a conscience bound by principles.”⁸⁶

Finally, this bond that individuals have to God and human beings through Christ and the responsible action that springs from it is in freedom.⁸⁷ In other words, “[r]esponsibility is human freedom that exists only by being bound to God and neighbor” through Christ.⁸⁸ This bond to God and neighbor through Christ sets human beings free to act responsibly and accept accountability for their actions and concrete decisions.⁸⁹ The responsible person who acts in his own freedom is the person who acts “without the support of people, conditions, or principles, but nevertheless consider[s] all existing circumstances related to people, general conditions, or principles.”⁹⁰ At the end of the day, responsible people can only be defended by their “own action and person.”⁹¹ To act responsibly in freedom is to understand that nothing can “become a rule for their action behind which they can hide, appealing to its authority, and by which they can be exonerated and acquitted.”⁹²

But why, then, must responsible action be in freedom and so only defended by the person acting responsibly? Responsible action requires that one “must decide...between right and right, wrong and wrong...[t]his very fact defines responsible action as a free

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 280.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 258.

⁸⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 283.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

venture, not justified by any law.”⁹³ This is to say that one must decide between two different actions that may both be right or may both be wrong and thus must be prepared to make a difficult decision that is not simply a matter of distinguishing between a clearly right and clearly wrong action. Because of this, “those who act responsibly relinquish any effectual self-justification; indeed, in so doing they relinquish an ultimately dependable knowledge of good and evil.”⁹⁴ But in the face of relinquishing dependable knowledge of good and evil, the responsible person must surrender to God “the deed that has become necessary” because God is the only one who can look upon the heart, weigh the deeds, and guide history.⁹⁵ Thus, as responsible people, to be free is to be released to act for your neighbor and stand in accountability before God.

However, the key to responsibility is the union of obedience and freedom, which necessitate one another.⁹⁶ Obedience needs freedom so that it does not become slavery, just as freedom needs obedience so that it does not become arbitrary action.⁹⁷ Responsible human beings are free human beings, and yet these responsible, free human beings “surrender themselves and their action to God” in obedience.⁹⁸ This is to say that responsible human beings cannot be merely free or merely obedient; responsibility must preserve “this inner tension”⁹⁹ between freedom and obedience.

⁹³ Ibid, 284.

⁹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 284.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 287.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 288.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Having defined the responsible life, comprised of the above elements, we must now discuss how the the responsible life is realized in the Christ-follower's vocation.¹⁰⁰ To be clear, we understand the vocation of the Christ-follower as the place at which he responds to Christ himself and so lives responsibly.¹⁰¹ Although a given task within one's vocation may be limited, one's responsibility to the call of Christ knows no limit.¹⁰² We must first understand that the call of Christ involves "the call to belong to Christ completely,"¹⁰³ while vocation involves work with things and issues as well as personal relations; it requires 'a definite field of activity.'¹⁰⁴ 'A definite field of activity' may be understood as the area in which a person carries out particular daily tasks, whether it be changing a baby's diaper in a home or arguing a legal case in a courtroom. However, vocation's 'definite field of activity' does not have "value in itself but only in responsibility to Jesus Christ."¹⁰⁵ Because vocation is "related to Jesus Christ, the 'definite field of activity' is set free from any isolation"¹⁰⁶ and so the individual fulfills his "concrete vocation in responsibility to the call of Jesus Christ" rather than in responsibility to a "definite field of activity."¹⁰⁷

Even so, "[t]he nature of free responsibility rules out any legal regulation of when and to what extent human vocation and responsibility entail breaking out of the 'definite

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 291.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 292.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 292-3.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 293.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 292-3.

field of activity.”¹⁰⁸ The responsible person will only break out of his definite field of activity after carefully considering his “immediate vocational obligations, the dangers of encroaching on the responsibilities of others, and finally the total picture of the issue at hand.”¹⁰⁹ After careful consideration of these matters, it is then the Christ-follower’s “free responsibility in response to the call of Jesus Christ that leads [him] in one direction or the other. Responsibility in a vocation follows the call of Christ alone.”¹¹⁰

So, if the vocation of the Christ-follower is the place at which he responds to Christ himself, then responding to Christ himself means that Christ exists at the center of the Christ-follower’s responsible life, rather than a set of ethical principles.¹¹¹ If Christ exists at the center of the responsible life, then life cannot be built on principles but only on the living reality of God.¹¹² This means that the Christ-follower is not divided between “[w]hat is ‘Christian’ and what is ‘worldly’”¹¹³ or between right and wrong or good and practical. The Christ-follower “has an undivided heart....[n]ot fettered by principles but bound by love for God, this person is liberated from the problems and conflicts of ethical decision, and is no longer beset by them. This person belongs to God and to God’s will alone.”¹¹⁴ To belong to God’s will alone is to both know and have God, and so it follows that “this person clings to the commandments, the judgement, and the mercy of God that

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 293.

¹⁰⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 293.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 82.

¹¹² Ibid, 81.

¹¹³ Ibid, 266.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 81.

proceed anew each day from the mouth of God.”¹¹⁵ Thus, the wise person knows that “reality can be helped neither by the purest principles nor with the best will, but only by the living God.”¹¹⁶ Principles are merely “tools in the hands of God” that “will soon be thrown away when they are no longer useful.”¹¹⁷

If Christ must exist at the center of the Christ-follower’s responsible life instead of a set of ethical principles, then the place in which this formation takes place is within Christ’s church.¹¹⁸ This is the case because the existence of the church is not concerned with religion but with the formation of human beings, or the way in which Christ takes form among a group of people.¹¹⁹ Now, this concept of Christ taking form among a group of people needs a careful explanation: “[t]he form of Jesus Christ takes form in human beings. They do not take on their own self-determined forms.”¹²⁰ And yet, these forms “are not imitations or repetitions of Christ’s form, but the form of Christ that takes form in human beings...Human beings become human beings because God became human” and showed human beings who they truly are.¹²¹ This is to say that “the form of Christ that takes form in human beings” looks different from the form of Christ himself, and so is not an imitation or repetition of Christ’s form, because Christ takes form among human beings to show them who they truly are as human beings and not to create God-men. So then, this formation of human beings that creates humanity anew in Christ means “Jesus

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 81.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 82.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 96.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 97.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 96.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Christ taking form in Christ's church."¹²² In slightly different language, "[t]he church is nothing but that piece of humanity where Christ really has taken form....The church is the human being who has become human, has been judged, and has been awakened to new life in Christ."¹²³ Thus, the first concern of the church "is not with the so-called religious functions of human beings, but with the existence in the world of whole human beings in all their relationships."¹²⁴

Now, some might argue that one could exist within a church-community and say that they have discerned the will of God by following the call of Christ alone but, in reality, be a lunatic following their own path. Granted, there could always be a lunatic type who declares that he has discerned the will of God when he has really gruesomely distorted it. However, the role of moral or virtue formation within the church is the key to protecting against the lunatic type. Thus, to be clear, the church's role in forming the individual must involve moral formation, as it proclaims the message of Christ, in order to ensure that Christ-followers are being fully and properly formed into the type of person who can humbly and honestly follow the call of Christ alone and so discern God's will.

Given this understanding of the church, we may now say that Christian ethical reflection is not a detached set of principles that are discussed and debated among church members for this would be considered a program of ethical or religious "world-formation," from which Bonhoeffer seeks to depart.¹²⁵ Instead, Christian ethics begins with

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 97.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

the body of Christ, namely, “the form of Christ in the form of the church.”¹²⁶ Through the reality of Christ existing in church-community we are able to avoid relegating Christ to an idea or abstract ethic and instead are able to speak of how “Christ may take form among us today and here.”¹²⁷

More specifically, to speak of how “Christ may take form among us today and here” is to speak of “the domain of our decisions and our encounters.”¹²⁸ Although “[t]his domain is doubtless of quite different scope for various individuals” these qualifications do not “dissipate into complete individualism” because of the fact that “we are placed objectively by our history into a particular context of experience, responsibility, and decision, from which we cannot withdraw without ending up in abstraction.”¹²⁹ Thus, “we, as historical people...stand already in the midst of Christ taking form in a segment of human history that Christ has chosen.”¹³⁰

Finally, looking only to Christ in order to live the responsible life rather than looking to Christian principles works because it is only through Christ that the reality of the world is reconciled to God.¹³¹ Without Christ, God and the world are torn apart and one’s gaze upon God and the reality of the world is divided.¹³² However, when one looks at Christ one sees God and the world together because “God and the reality of the world

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 99.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 100.

¹²⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 100-101.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 101.

¹³¹ Ibid, 82.

¹³² Ibid.

are reconciled with each other.”¹³³ Now, one can “no longer see God without the world or the world without God.”¹³⁴

Given that Christ exists at the center of the Christ-follower’s life, to follow the call of Christ alone, the follower of Christ must not separate the law of God from the God who is the giver of the law.¹³⁵ And yet, following the *call* of Christ does not necessarily mean following the letter of the law of God. We may define the letter of the law of God as that which is “revealed in the Decalogue, and the divine mandates of marriage, work, and government.”¹³⁶ The divine mandates of marriage, work, and government are “divinely imposed tasks” that “scripture names” and will be discussed further in the next chapter.¹³⁷ For now, it will suffice to say this: although following the call of Christ alone will normally align with the law of God, it must be the law giver, and not the law itself, that is followed first and foremost.

So then, to follow the *call* of Christ is to follow Christ himself. Nevertheless, following the call of Christ himself does not render the law of God void. However, the follower of Christ may experience Christ calling him to transgress the law of God in some way for the sake of Christ. For example, for the sake of “God and neighbor, which means for Christ’s sake, one may be freed from keeping the Sabbath holy, honoring one’s parents, indeed from the entire divine law.”¹³⁸ But it must be known that although the freedom allowed individuals through the vicarious representation of Christ may transgress

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 297.

¹³⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 296.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 68-9.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 297.

the law, it will only ever transgress the law in order to “affirm it anew.”¹³⁹ In other words, “[t]he suspension of the law must only serve its true fulfillment.”¹⁴⁰ In this way, then, only the *letter* of the law is transgressed so that the *spirit* of the law may remain and affirm the *letter* of the law anew.

In order to follow the call of Christ alone, discerning the will of God will employ an “entire array of human abilities,” and yet, there is “no room for torment from being confronted with insoluble conflicts or arrogance of mastery of conflict.”¹⁴¹ There is no room for torment or arrogance because there may only be faith, given to those who humbly ask and seek God’s will, that “God will surely make the divine will known.”¹⁴² After this process of “all such serious discernment,” the follower of Christ must then “make a real decision,” acting freely in confidence “that it is not the human but the divine will that is accomplished through such discernment.”¹⁴³

To put this concept of discernment another way, rather than approaching a difficult situation from the perspective of a human judge, possessing knowledge of good and evil, human beings must submit to God’s will and nature as the “gracious judge” who stands above and beyond all human knowledge.¹⁴⁴ Although determining good from evil seems to be the goal of all ethical reflection, the central goal of Christian ethical reflection is to supersede the knowledge of good and evil that human beings possess as a result

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 324.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 326.

of the fall.¹⁴⁵ In the moment of entertaining the serpent's question, asking, "did God really say...", Eve fell because she entered into a position of judgment over God's commands rather than humble submission to them. The knowledge of good and evil splits the world in two, evidenced by the false dichotomy that complication thinking presents between protecting one's own and the stranger, and corrupts the unity that exists only in God and complete submission to his commands.

Moreover, when Jesus is asked 'either-or' questions in the New Testament regarding what is good and evil, he rejects this disjunction and choice among possibilities and replaces it with the unified will of God.¹⁴⁶ Jesus "demands that knowledge of good and evil be overcome by unity with God."¹⁴⁷ And yet in rejecting the dichotomy of good and evil and requiring men to accept the unified will of God, Jesus shows the impotence of human beings and their need for Him.¹⁴⁸ Humans can only overcome the knowledge of good and evil, and thus reject the role of judge in order to obey the will of God, through the power of Jesus Christ.

Finally, when following Christ himself and His call alone, the nature of this commandment of God is God's "concrete speech to concrete human beings."¹⁴⁹ This is to say that His commandment is either clear or not God's commandment.¹⁵⁰ There is no option

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 299.

¹⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 313.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 314.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 327.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 378.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 379.

for interpreting or judging God's commandment, but only the option of obedience or disobedience.¹⁵¹ In the same vein, the commandment is not an abstract idea speaking 'about' someone but only a concrete speaking 'to' someone.¹⁵² Rather than merely marking off the boundaries of what is and is not permissible,¹⁵³ as is the case with most ethical thinking, the commandment of God embraces the fullness of life and exists at the center of life.¹⁵⁴ The commandment of God brings "freedom of movement and activity" and so gives the human being "permission to live before God as a human being."¹⁵⁵ Therefore, the commandment of God enables human beings to truly be human beings and does not confine human beings to mere students of ethical principles.¹⁵⁶

This chapter has sought to establish that what, why, and how of receiving specific divine revelation and guidance in the pursuit of right Christian action, and yet there is still much to be said regarding the actual commandment of God that one is to obey by following the call of Christ alone. However, the continued discussion of God's commandment involves the lengthier discussion of God's divine mandates, which entails detailing the divine mandates of church and government. Thus, the Christ-follower's obedience to God's commandment by following the call of Christ alone will be further elucidated through a discussion of the divine mandates in the following chapter.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid, 381.

¹⁵³ To be clear, "merely marking off the boundaries of what is and is not permissible" does not mean that there are no absolute truths or principles. As stated earlier, God uses principles but discards of them when they are no longer needed. Christ, and not principles, is at the center of a Christ-follower's life.

¹⁵⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 381.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 382.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 383.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Divine Mandates

In the previous chapter, we briefly noted that following the “*call* of Christ does not necessarily mean following the letter of the law of God,”¹⁵⁷ and that this law of God is defined as the Decalogue and the divine mandates of marriage, work, and government.¹⁵⁸ This previous chapter explained that following the call of Christ alone, indeed following Christ himself, may cause one to transgress the letter of the law of God for the sake of the spirit of the law. And yet, this is not the norm. God has established order in his world and thus following Christ alone will normally entail living within this order. In other words, following Christ himself will normally entail following the letter of the law of God. So then, although the Decalogue is revealed in scripture, we must now discuss how Bonhoeffer defines the divine mandates in order to fully understand the law of God, or the order within which followers of Christ will normally live.

To further understand how an individual Christ-follower follows the call of Christ alone by obeying God’s commandment, we must understand the large forms in which the commandment of God encounters us, namely the “divine mandates.”¹⁵⁹ However, for the purposes of this thesis, we will discuss only two (church and government) of the four divine mandates (church, marriage, work, and government).¹⁶⁰ So then, in what way are the

¹⁵⁷ Ch. 3, p. 34.

¹⁵⁸ Ch. 3, p. 34, footnote 84.

¹⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 388.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

church and government divine mandates? To say that an “earthly institution,” such as the church or government, possesses a divine mandate is to say that this institution is divinely authorized and legitimized “to declare a particular divine commandment.”¹⁶¹ This divine authority is a “concrete divine commission” that is “grounded in the revelation of Christ and the testimony of scripture,” and yet, this divine authority does not entail a “divine sanctioning of all existing orders per se.”¹⁶² In other words, just because the institutions of the church and government are divinely commissioned to declare God’s commandment does not mean that the human beings within these institutions always acknowledge this fact or act according to it. It may also be the case, then, that particular governments as a whole are not sanctioned because the individuals within these governments are not acting according to the divine mandate of government.

Nevertheless, the divine mandates of the church and government are institutions that are “implanted in the world from above as organizing structures—‘orders’—of the reality of Christ.”¹⁶³ This is to say that through the organized structures of the church and the government, “the reality of God’s love for the world and for human beings that has been revealed in Jesus Christ” is displayed.¹⁶⁴ So because these organizing structures are “implanted in the world from above,” it is clear that the church and government are not “earthly powers” but instead “divine commissions” that in no way can be described as a mere product of history.¹⁶⁵ As a divine commission, then, the “bearers of the mandate,”

¹⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 389.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 390.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 390.

or the church and government, do not execute and represent “particular expressions of the collective will of human beings” but instead exist only as “God’s commissioners” or “stand-ins” who execute and represent His will.¹⁶⁶

Finally, these divine mandates must work “with-one-another,” “for-one-another,” and “over-against-one-another,” to “communicate the commandment of God as it is revealed in Jesus Christ.”¹⁶⁷ Because the divine mandates are implanted from above to display the reality of Christ, both the church and the government must ultimately “depend solely on God’s *one* commandment as it is revealed in Jesus Christ.”¹⁶⁸ This *one* commandment of God is adherence to the reality that is revealed in Jesus Christ, and so it is in this person that the divine mandates find their unity of purpose. Thus, the divine mandates can only fulfill their true and unified purpose of displaying the reality of Christ by working with, for, and over-against one another.

Although all of the divine mandates are bound to and unified by the Christ-reality, the church is a unique divine mandate in that it is the specific place at which the individual Christ-follower is formed into one whose center of life and action is Christ: “the divine mandate of the church is the commission of allowing the reality of Jesus Christ to become real in proclamation, church order, and Christian life.”¹⁶⁹ Being formed into this type of person within the church community, the Christ-follower’s actions, regardless of the specifics, will naturally and normally fall within the bounds of the divine mandates and can confidently be declared to be God’s will. Moreover, the law of God is defined as

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 390-91.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 393.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 390.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 73.

the Decalogue and the divine mandates of marriage, work and government; so, as long as God's will for the individual Christian does not transgress the Decalogue or the laws within the divine mandate of government, the individual is living according to the law of God.

Now, we may ask if it is correct to assume that the Decalogue covers any and all laws that would be involved in the divine mandate of the church, which exists to proclaim Jesus Christ. This assumption seems to be correct because, when defining the law of God, Bonhoeffer does not list the divine mandate of the church, but only lists the Decalogue and the divine mandates of marriage, work, and government.¹⁷⁰ However, Bonhoeffer also discusses the body of "intrinsic law"¹⁷¹ found in all objects or subject matter, such as corporations, states, or families. Seemingly in this vein, Bonhoeffer says that the law found within the "corporate entity" of the church [the intrinsic law] is not synonymous with "the rule of Christ's commandment over all created being."¹⁷² Although the church's divine mandate is to proclaim the rule of Christ's commandment over all created being, it is this "word of God, proclaimed by the divine mandate of the church" that rules the world and not the law within the corporate entity of the church that rules the world.¹⁷³ In other words, the divine mandate of the church is unique in that "the proclamation of Christ's lordship over all the world needs to remain distinct from the 'law' of the church

¹⁷⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 296.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 271.

¹⁷² Ibid, 403.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 404.

as a corporate entity,” and yet, “the church as a corporate entity cannot be separated from the office of proclamation.”¹⁷⁴

So then, if the “message of Christ” is “*unlimited*” while the “domain of the church-community” is “*delimited*,” under which heading do we understand the Decalogue, as a part of God’s law, as well as the law of the corporate church entity?¹⁷⁵ The law of the corporate church entity is clearly a part of the divine mandate of the church, and yet, when Bonhoeffer mentions the law of God he only mentions the Decalogue and the divine mandates of marriage, work, and government, which seems to exclude the other laws inherent in the divine mandate of the church and its order.

Perhaps we must differentiate between the “Commandment of God revealed in Jesus Christ” that “encounters us concretely” in the different forms of the divine mandates which “find their unity only in the commandment itself,”¹⁷⁶ that is the Christ-reality, and the “revealed will of God” found in the “Law of God,” that is the Decalogue.¹⁷⁷ The problem with this differentiation is that Bonhoeffer also includes in the “revealed will of God” found in the “Law of God” the divine mandates of marriage, work, and government, in addition to the Decalogue.

Furthermore, Bonhoeffer states that: “the commandment of Jesus Christ rules church, family [or marriage], culture [or work], and government. But it does so by simultaneously setting each of these mandates free to exercise their respective functions.”¹⁷⁸ Given this, then, where might we place the Decalogue? It is indeed a part of God’s law,

¹⁷⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 404.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 405.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 388.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 296.

¹⁷⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 402.

along with the mandates of marriage, work, and government, and yet it is not synonymous with the reality of God revealed in Jesus Christ, or the one commandment of Jesus Christ that rules over all creation and divine mandates.

Simply speaking, we might say that because God's commandment is only found "where there are divine mandates which are grounded in the revelation of Christ,"¹⁷⁹ and the proclamation of Jesus Christ through scripture in the sermon is a part of the divine mandate of the church,¹⁸⁰ the Decalogue, generally speaking, sums up the law of God found within the divine mandate of the church even though other parts of the body of intrinsic law found within the divine mandate of the church remain.

But perhaps more importantly, this discussion of the confusion in Bonhoeffer's thought regarding the relationship between the Decalogue and the divine mandates has sufficiently provided for the following conclusion: as discussed in chapter 3, the spirit (rather than the letter) of the law is of primary importance, and so we might say that the spirit of the Decalogue is that in which all of the divine mandates are grounded so as to ensure that the divine mandates carry out their given functions. If the church is the divine mandate that is charged with proclaiming from the scriptures the Lordship of Christ over all the divine mandates, then it seems logical to conclude that the spirit of the Decalogue, which Christ proclaims in Matthew 22:36-40 in the scriptures, is the standard by which all of the other divine mandates are judged to determine their fulfillment of their true individual purposes. This conclusion will be further elucidated in the following final chapter.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 388.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 394-5.

Now that we have discussed the divine mandates in general, and the particularities of the unique divine mandate of the church, how are we to understand the particular interaction between the divine mandate of the church and the divine mandate of government? We must first define the specifics of the divine mandates of government and the church. The divine mandate of government is defined as “divinely ordained authority to exercise worldly dominion by divine right.”¹⁸¹ In other words, government “does not proceed from society, but it orders society from above.”¹⁸² In the same vein of ordering society from above, the divine mandate of the church is defined in terms of the “spiritual office,” as opposed to the “congregation or the Christians,” and it is this spiritual office that “is the divinely ordained authority to exercise spiritual dominion by divine right.”¹⁸³ Thus, both of these mandates exercise dominion by divine right, although one is in a worldly and another in a spiritual sense.

So then, how do these institutions that exercise worldly dominion and spiritual dominion co-exist with one another? The task of government is to exercise “the worldly power of the sword and of justice” which entails both “maintaining an outward justice by means of the sword” and educating “for outward justice or righteousness.”¹⁸⁴ This educating for outward justice “consists in allowance being made in every action of government for the ultimate purpose, namely, the service of Jesus Christ.”¹⁸⁵ The task of the

¹⁸¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, (London: SCM Press, 1955), 297. This edition of *Ethics* is used here because it is the only edition containing the “State and Church” article. This edition will henceforth be referred to as “*Ethics* (SCM)” in the footnotes.

¹⁸² Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (SCM), 297.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 298.

¹⁸⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (SCM), 305.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

church is to summon “the whole world to submit to the dominion of Jesus Christ.”¹⁸⁶ Together, then, the government “has the divine task of preserving the world, with its institutions which are given by God, for the purpose of Christ” and the church “calls upon the persons who exercise government to believe in Christ for the sake of their own salvation.”¹⁸⁷

This does not mean that the church “should pursue a Christian policy” or “enact Christian laws,” but it does mean that the church should support the government in being “true government in accordance with its own special task.”¹⁸⁸ By the same token, “the persons who exercise government ought also to accept belief in Jesus Christ, but the office of government remains independent of the religious decision.”¹⁸⁹ In other words, although government “should protect the righteous” and “support the practice of religion,” the “office of government as such remains religiously neutral and attends only to its own task.”¹⁹⁰ In this way, then, these mandates retain both their distinct tasks and their united purpose in displaying the reality of Christ.

Now with regard to the individual Christian, how should we understand his responsibility, living within the divine mandates of government and the church? The individual Christian has a duty to obey the government “until government directly compels him to offend against the divine commandment, that is to say, until government openly

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 311.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 312.

¹⁹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (SCM), 312.

denies its divine commission.”¹⁹¹ But when in doubt, the Christian should obey the government.¹⁹² However, “if government violates or exceeds its commission at any point,” such as dictating what the congregation of the church must believe, “then at this point, indeed, obedience is to be refused, for conscious [sic] sake, for the Lord’s sake.”¹⁹³ Nevertheless, generalizations cannot be made from any one particular case of disobedience because disobedience “can never be anything but a concrete decision in a single particular case.”¹⁹⁴ In other words, disobedience can only be a free “venture undertaken on one’s own responsibility.”¹⁹⁵

But why does an individual Christian have a duty to obey the government? He has a duty to obey the government because in “his obedience to government the Christian is obedient to Christ. As a citizen the Christian does not cease to be a Christian, but he serves Christ in a different way.”¹⁹⁶ This is to say that the citizen serves Christ by being a good citizen because Christ is Lord of all creation, and indeed the divine mandates, and is the one whom citizens ultimately serve when living obediently within the order that he has created and authorized in the world. Because Jesus is “Lord of all government,”¹⁹⁷ the government should “never lead the Christian against Christ” but should only help “him to serve Christ in the world.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 307.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 308.

¹⁹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (SCM), 311.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 303.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 311.

More generally, does the individual Christian have a “political responsibility,” or responsibility to “life in the *polis* [society]”? The individual Christian is certainly not “responsible for the actions of government, and he must not make himself responsible for it.”¹⁹⁹ However, the individual Christian is responsible for “his own calling and for the sphere of his own personal life, however large or however small it may be.”²⁰⁰ In other words, for the Christian, there is a “responsibility of every individual for preserving the purity of his office and mission in the *polis*.”²⁰¹ The responsibility of the individual Christian “arises from obedience to the Lord of both Church and government” and so will ultimately serve the divinely given purpose of government, regardless of the specifics of the Christian’s action, as long as this responsibility is “fulfilled in faith.”²⁰²

So then, the Christ-follower must follow the call of Christ alone in order for his responsibility to be “fulfilled in faith.”²⁰³ This responsibility will most likely entail obeying the law of God as it is revealed in the Decalogue and the divine mandates of marriage, work, and government, but it may also entail disobedience to this law of God, as described in both the previous and current chapters. Therefore, this dynamic responsibility of the Christ follower will be further elucidated in the work of the next and final chapter, which will present a true complex solution to the refugee crisis by applying our understanding of the individual Christ follower’s obedience to the call of Christ alone.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 314.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 315.

²⁰² Ibid, 314-15.

²⁰³ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (SCM), 314.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Call to Action

The first four chapters of this thesis have been setting up the problematic. This final chapter is purposed with outlining a call to action, given the last four chapters. Although a brief summary of the ground already covered is necessary to determine where we are going, the bulk of this chapter will be synthesis work, as opposed to the largely analytical work of the previous chapters. We established early on that specific right Christian action cannot be legislated and, thus, this thesis seeks to present a different approach. So then, the call to action in this final chapter will outline how a Christ-follower may discern his individual right Christian action so that he may act as a responsible person: indeed, a person living in response to Christ.

We begin our brief summary of the ground already covered in chapter one, in which we used Louw to establish the immense political issue of the refugee crisis and the necessity of Christian compassion in the face of this dilemma, as well as the inadequacy of a complicated solution. In the face of the refugee dilemma and the need to show Christian compassion, Louw concludes that we must interact with refugees on a face-to-face level, even hosting refugees in one's home. However, Louw's conclusion fails to recognize the complexity of the issue and our inability to find solutions that will work for all people in all cases because he presents a solution that sides with the refugees in the false dichotomy of complication thinking: protect your own or show compassion to the stranger. Instead of a *complicated* solution, a true *complex* solution, which this thesis

seeks to present, understands both the need to show Christian compassion and God's role in showing the individual Christian what this Christian compassion should look like within his given life and circumstances.

Having generally introduced the problem and the type of solution needed in chapter one, we delved deeper into the specifics in chapters two, three and four. In chapter two, we exposed the problematic of the practical right action of self-giving love, or Christian compassion, and established the need for a complex solution to the refugee crisis. When faced with multiple options for Christian right action, there is no basis on which an individual can base the 'should' of taking one right action over another. Thus, a complex solution is needed that involves an individual receiving specific divine revelation and guidance to determine right Christian action. In chapter three, we established that the key to receiving specific divine revelation and guidance is following the call of Christ alone, which may involve transgressing the letter of the law of God for the sake of the spirit of the law. Lastly, in chapter four, we explained that, although the letter of the law of God may be transgressed, following the call of Christ alone will normally entail the individual Christian following the law of God as it is revealed in the Decalogue and the divine mandates of marriage, work, and government.

So then, a true complex solution to the refugee crisis entails individual Christians showing *self-giving love* in various ways by following the call of Christ alone and so *discerning the will of God* for the individual Christian's *responsible life*; this normally involves living *according to the law of God* (the Decalogue and the divine mandates of marriage, work, and government) but sometimes involves *transgressing the letter of the*

law of God for the sake of the spirit of the law. First and foremost, a Christian call to action must involve a display of *self-giving love* that is grounded in Christ's vicarious representative action. Because Christ gave his life for us, acting as the vicarious representative for all people, we are called as Christ-followers to give our lives to God and for others through unconditional self-giving love.²⁰⁴ However, to determine exactly how this self-giving love should look in an individual circumstance, the Christ-follower must *discern the will of God* as he follows the call of Christ alone.

Moreover, the will of God for an individual circumstance can only be discerned by following the call of Christ alone because only the person of Christ himself, and not the letter of the law of God, can speak the will of God in every circumstance. At times, the letter of the law may be transgressed for the sake of the spirit of the law so that the letter of the law may be affirmed anew. Only the person of Christ can ensure that the spirit of the law of God is kept, and so the person, and not the law, is the center of the life of the Christ-follower who speaks the will of God in every circumstance.

Now, normally, the discerned will of God for the Christ-follower, following the call of Christ alone, will be action *in accord with the law of God*, namely the Decalogue and the divine mandates of marriage, work, and government. So then, what might it look like for an individual Christian, following the call of Christ alone, to discern a right Christian action in response to the refugee crisis that is *in accord with* the law of God? With regard to the poor single mom mentioned in chapter two, choosing a 'should' action among multiple 'can' options, such as sewing clothes for refugees or praying fervently, is a matter of personal discernment with God. All of these 'can' options are within the

²⁰⁴ Ch. 1 pp. 7-8; Ch. 3 pp. 23-24.

bounds of the the law of God, and so this mother's right Christian action in response to the refugee crisis is only a matter of discerning the will of God as she follows the call of Christ alone, within the church community. In fact, all of the hypothetical situations in chapter two are simply matters of personal discernment with God. The main point to recognize here is that a wide swath of opportunity for right Christian action exists before the call of Christ is considered to transgress the law of God.

Moreover, discerning the will of God as one follows the call of Christ alone must occur within the church community because this is the place in which one is continually formed into the person whose life has Christ at its center. Discerning the will of God as one follows the call of Christ alone, while entailing an individual relationship with the person of Christ, does not entail a completely individualistic experience in which an individual declares that whatever he personally thinks, believes, or hears is the will of God that he has discerned by following Christ alone. The will of God has been revealed to us in the person of Christ, and this new Christ-reality, or the one commandment of Jesus Christ, encounters us through the divine mandates. So because of this, one discerns the will of God, as one follows the call of Christ alone, through the church community that exists within the divine mandate of the church.

Sometimes, however, the discerned will of God for the Christ-follower, following the call of Christ alone, will be action that *transgresses the letter of the law of God* for the sake of the spirit of the law. It is true that God established boundaries in the law, and yet the responsible person, or one living in response to the life of Christ, does not "separate the law from its giver" and so recognizes that 1) Jesus Christ is "the ultimate reality to

whom it is responsible” and 2) that Jesus Christ is precisely the one through whom the responsible person is “freed from the law for the responsible deed.”²⁰⁵ The Christ-follower who discerns Christ calling him to transgress the letter of the law for the sake of the spirit of the law and re-affirmation of the letter of the law is the person who, out of “[e]xtraordinary necessity appeals to the freedom of those who act responsibly,” or those who follow the call of Christ alone.²⁰⁶

But to further explain this transgression of the law, it must be stated that this action that springs from “responsibility” is shown to be truly responsible and not cynical when the person acting in freedom recognizes and bears the “objective guilt one incurs by breaking the law” and when “by the very act of breaking it the law is truly sanctified.”²⁰⁷ On the other hand, this responsible action is compared to action that springs from “cynicism,” which can be seen as the very opposite of responsible action: “the objective guilt one incurs by breaking the law” *is not* “recognized and borne” and the law *is not* truly sanctified “by the very act of breaking it.”²⁰⁸ A person’s action that arises from cynicism springs from a flippant and skeptical attitude towards the law and, as a result, this person does not recognize or bear, in the sense of consciously shouldering, the objective guilt one incurs by transgressing the law. So then, because this transgression of the law is not made for the sake of a deeper affirmation of the law, the law is not truly sanctified by this transgression.

²⁰⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 297.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 274.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 297.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

Thus, the will of God is only “sanctified in the deed that arises out of freedom” when the Christ-follower acts responsibly by trusting the call of Christ alone, even when Christ calls his follower to transgress the letter of the law.²⁰⁹ In other words, transgressing the letter of the law, at times, preserves the spirit of the law of God and so sanctifies the will of God. The “exhortations” of scripture always “remain bound to the call of Jesus Christ, and so they are not legalistic restrictions against exercising free responsibility toward this call.”²¹⁰

So then, what might it look like for an individual Christian, following the call of Christ alone, to discern his right Christian action in response to the refugee crisis that *transgresses* the law of God? Again, all of the enumerated hypothetical situations in chapter two entail living according to the law of God and require the individual Christian to personally discern, as he lives within the church community, God’s will for his ‘should’ rather than ‘can’ right action. However, an individual may discern that God is calling him to transgress the Decalogue and/or the divine mandates, for the sake of Jesus Christ and the re-affirmation of the law of God.

For example, a Christ-follower may discern that he is being called to disobey the divine mandate of government because the government is commanding him to go against the commandment of God. An American citizen may discern that God is calling him to smuggle his parents into the United States from a Muslim country during a travel-ban because of the danger posed to them. This American citizen may believe that not doing so would be to not honor his father and mother, and thus, God is calling him to transgress

²⁰⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 297.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 296.

the law of government that the law of God in the divine mandate of government may ultimately be affirmed anew.

Now, because the divine mandate of government, purposed with expressing the commandment of God, is transgressed for the sake of preserving this true purpose, we may say that all of the divine mandates are grounded in the Decalogue. It is true that God's law is expressed in both the Decalogue and divine mandates, and yet the spirit of the Decalogue is the standard by which the divine mandates are judged to determine whether or not the divine mandates are remaining true to their purpose, namely, to express the commandment of God in the world.

In a similar vein, a Christ-follower could also discern that he is being called to disobey God's commandment in the Decalogue to not lie for the sake of Jesus Christ. For example, the CEO of a Christian non-profit organization could discern that he is being called to lie to the federal government so that this organization can continue their work with refugees in the United States and not have their refugees deported back to their homeland. This CEO may believe that allowing these refugees to be deported back to their homeland is not how Christ is calling him to love his neighbor, and thus God is calling him to transgress the law of God so that it may be affirmed anew. In fact, the law of loving your neighbor as yourself is how Jesus sums up the second table of the Decalogue in the New Testament, and so by appealing to the ultimate spirit of the law and opposing the letter of the law, the letter of the law is affirmed anew.

But regardless of the reason why the individual Christ follower believes that Christ is calling him to transgress the law of God, this action of disobedience must be un-

dertaken as a free venture in one's own responsibility. This is to say that the Christ follower, acting responsibly in freedom, is fully accountable before God for his actions and cannot rely upon any person or principle to justify his actions. As discussed in chapter 3, the responsible person acting in freedom understands that nothing can "become a rule for [his] action behind which [he] can hide, appealing to its authority, and by which [he] can be exonerated and acquitted."²¹¹ Instead, when called to transgress the law for the sake of Christ, the responsible person acting in freedom must accept the guilt that he objectively incurs by transgressing the law and humbly stand before God in accountability for his action.

Finally, then, how is this call to action a fulfillment of the initially sought true complex solution? First, this call to action is a solution in that it solves the dilemma for the Christian regarding right action. Right action is not a matter of choosing between protecting your own and loving the stranger, but instead, a matter of listening to the call of Christ alone and obeying the discerned will of God. Second, this call to action is complex, rather than complicated, in that it sees the conflict and paradox but does not seek immediate resolutions or create a false dichotomy between one's own and the stranger; instead, this call to follow the call of Christ alone and so obey the discerned will of God keeps intact all of the dynamics of the individual Christian life and therefore acknowledges that logical answers are not possible without abandoning all hope or reducing right action into two opposing options. This true complex solution is possible because the issue is not tackled by the human mind alone but is released to the infinite wisdom and sovereignty of the God of the universe. Thus, right Christian action with regards to the refugee

²¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics (DBWE)*, 283.

crisis, and truly with regards to any situation, is not a matter of the Christian *determining his right action* but a matter of the Christian *discerning the will of God* and humbly obeying in accountability before the Lord of all creation.

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