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Matthew Puffer
Valparaiso University

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the Theology of Karl Barth

—By Matthew Puffer

LITTLE SPECULATION IS REQUIRED to discern what “Karl Barth in conversation with Dietrich Bonhoeffer” might look like. Their numerous interactions during the tumultuous years from 1931 to 1942 are both preserved in personal correspondence and noted extensively, particularly in Bonhoeffer scholarship. The significant indebtedness of Bonhoeffer’s theology to Barth’s is widely recognized. It is apparent during his student years in Tübingen and Berlin, in the final extant chapters for his *Ethics* foreshortened by his arrest, as well as in Bonhoeffer’s prison theology where dependence and divergence are simultaneously evident. Comparisons of Eberhard Bethge’s and Eberhard Busch’s respective biographies of Bonhoeffer and Barth—or of almost any work on Barth’s theology and nearly any on Bonhoeffer’s—bears out that Barth was of tremendous import to Bonhoeffer’s theology.¹ A significant void remains, however, in that little consideration has been given to the opposite trajectory—that is, to the influence of the younger theologian upon his esteemed mentor.

The suggestion that Bonhoeffer influenced Barth will strike some as implausible. Certainly Barth appreciated Bonhoeffer’s ecumenism and opposition to National Socialism, but it is widely recognized that Barth was unimpressed by the “fragmentary” prison writings, confounded by the suggestions of a “positivism of revelation,” and found the discussion of

1. Pangritz’s work offers the most detailed examination of Barth’s influence upon Bonhoeffer to date. He assesses their relationship in response to interpretations of Bonhoeffer’s charge that Barth’s theology exhibits a “positivism of revelation”: cf. Pangritz, *Karl Barth*, and Pangritz, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer.”

“mandates” in *Ethics* as “arbitrary,” “inadequate,” and suggestive of “a North German patriarchalism.”² In a letter to Bethge—not only Bonhoeffer’s biographer, but editor of his posthumous publications, closest friend, and nephew—Barth offers a seemingly devastating assessment of Bonhoeffer’s theology: “very softly I venture to doubt whether theological systematics (I include his *Ethics*) was his real strength.” Given such critical evaluations from Barth’s own pen, skepticism toward claims regarding substantive contributions from Bonhoeffer is surely appropriate.

Of course Barth can be as generous in praise as adamant in opposition. His engagement with interlocutors often becomes more critical, rather than less, when he holds them in high regard. Thus, it is not entirely inexplicable that Barth appraises Bonhoeffer’s *Sanctorum Communio* as a “theological miracle,” his *Discipleship* as “the best that has been written” on *imitatio Christi*, and *Ethics* as “brilliant.”³ Understood within the context of their relationship and respective theologies Barth’s critical assessments, negative and positive, illumine rather than discredit a reciprocal indebtedness between Barth and Bonhoeffer.

Still, Barth’s critical assessment of Bonhoeffer presents a challenge to understanding his importance to Barth’s theology. And numerous complicating factors contribute to a dearth of attention given to the young theologian’s contributions. For one, their writings have often been appropriated for apparently distinct and sometimes divergent purposes in academic, theological, and popular discourses—the Death of God theology, universalism, pietism, liberalism, socialism, conservatism, dogmatics, social ethics, pacifism, justification of assassination, etc.⁴ Not only can secondary discourse lead to diverse reductive oppositions, a textual study attentive solely to Barth and Bonhoeffer’s publications tells an equally distortive and distinctly counterintuitive story about their mutual influence. For in Bonhoeffer’s publications, one finds only highly critical explicit engagement with Barth in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, and the elder theologian goes unmentioned in Bonhoeffer’s last four books—*Creation and Fall*, *Life Together*, *Discipleship*, and *Ethics*. In *Church Dogmatics* 3 and 4 alone, on the

2. CD 3.4:22.

3. Godsey, *Theology*, 21n6; Barth, CD 4.2:533, and 3.4:4.

4. Jüngel offers another explanation shared by numerous scholars when he observes that Bonhoeffer’s compelling biography has inhibited criticism of his thought. Jüngel recalls, “Heinrich Vogel was the only teacher in the course of my studies whom I heard express critical words and reservations with respect to Bonhoeffer. It does not say much for the state of Protestant theology that he was the only one. Probably because of Bonhoeffer’s life and its violent end, an aura of theological unassailability has come to rest around his work, which has done a great disservice to this work itself. For Bonhoeffer’s sake, the aura needs to be destroyed” (Jüngel, “Mystery of Substitution,” 153).

other hand, Barth makes explicit reference to four of Bonhoeffer's books, offering extensive positive critical assessments, even where he disagrees, quoting from Bonhoeffer at length in numerous instances.

Appreciating Bonhoeffer's contributions to Barth's theological project, then, requires that one attend to Barth's appraisals and appropriations both in his correspondence and in his dogmatics. A reconsideration of Bonhoeffer's importance to Barth's theology not only holds promise for a greater appreciation of Bonhoeffer and better understanding of Barth, but more importantly, it discloses places where constructive conversations might advance the theological and ethical insights to which Barth and Bonhoeffer gave considerable attention.

1. Barth and Bonhoeffer: Life Together

Bonhoeffer imbibed Barth's early writings during his student years in Tübingen and Berlin (1924–27). Studying under Barth's former professor and recent sparring partner, Adolf von Harnack, Bonhoeffer experienced Barth as a "liberation" through the lecture notes he collected from family members and friends who were Barth's students in Göttingen and Münster. Still, Bonhoeffer's dissertations, *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, voice critical assessments of the seemingly exclusive emphasis upon God's transcendence in Barth's early theology.⁵ In 1931, as a young Berlin University theology lecturer, Bonhoeffer spent three weeks in Bonn where the two theologians became acquainted. Barth was "delighted" when his visitor quoted one of Luther's witticisms in a seminar, launching a friendship that would last until Bonhoeffer's death.⁶ Bonhoeffer wrote of these weeks in Bonn, "I don't think I have ever regretted anything I have failed to do in my theological past so much as the fact that I did not come here earlier . . . I have

5. Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 169–70n28; Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 83–87, 98–100, 124–26.

6. Bonhoeffer is said to have interjected, "The curses of the godless sometimes sound better to God's ear than the hallelujahs of the pious" (Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 176). Luther's text reads "*cum tales blasphemie, quia sunt violenter a diabolo hominibus invitis extorte, aliquando gratiores sonent in aure dei quam ipsum Alleluja vel quecumque laudis iubilatio*" (Luther, *Vorlesung über den Römerbrief*, 2:227, quoted in Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 160n31). According to Bethge, the lectures by Barth that Bonhoeffer attended in July of 1931 were on ethics: cf. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 181. However, Barth's ethics seminars were held the previous two semesters. Barth's 1931 summer seminar read Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* and his lectures were on "Prolegomena to Dogmatics," i.e., *CD* 1.1. Barth also gave a seminar on natural theology in the winter semester for which Erich Przywara was a guest lecturer. Cf. *CRDT*, 415–16.

been even more impressed by my discussions with him than by his writings and his lectures. For he is really all there. I have never seen anything like it before and wouldn't have believed it possible."⁷ The two discussed ethics and natural theology, and—in all likelihood—their assessments of Przywara's *analogia entis*, about which both had previously written.⁸

In the years of the *Kirchenkampf* Barth and Bonhoeffer labored together and exchanged notes about developments, until Bonhoeffer—exasperated with the Confessional Church's cautiousness, the watered-down Bethel Confession, and Barth's reticence to proclaim a *status confessionis*—took up a pastorate in London. Barth responded to a letter of explanation from Bonhoeffer with words neither would soon forget:

Get back to your post in Berlin straightaway! . . . you need to be here with all guns blazing! . . . standing up to these brethren along with me . . . Why weren't you there pulling on the rope that I, virtually alone, could hardly budge? Why aren't you here all the time? . . . Just be glad I do not have you here in front of me, because then I would find an entirely different way of putting it to you . . . that you are a German, that your church's house is on fire, that you know enough, and know well enough how to say what you know, to be able to help, and in fact you ought to return to your post by the next ship! . . . If you did not matter so much to me, I would not have taken you by the collar in this fashion.⁹

When Bonhoeffer returned to direct a non-sanctioned seminary in the spring of 1935, Barth had already been forced to resign both his professorship and his leadership role in the Confessing Church. With Barth's return to Basel the two corresponded less frequently, though they remained important to each other, personally and intellectually.¹⁰

7. Bonhoeffer, *Testament to Freedom*, 383.

8. Given Barth's polemics against the *analogia entis* during this period, it is little surprise to find Bonhoeffer's 1933 lectures—published as *Creation and Fall*—positing an *analogia relationis* and renewing the opposition to Przywara already present in *Act and Being*; cf. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 62–65; *Act and Being*, 27, 73–76, 138.

9. Bonhoeffer, *London*, 39–41.

10. Numerous fascinating aspects of their relationship are revealed in their subsequent correspondence—discussions about justification and sanctification, Barth's skepticism about the monastic tendencies of Bonhoeffer's seminary and anxieties about Bonhoeffer's conspiratorial activities, as well as Bonhoeffer's procurement of the proofs for *CD* 2.2. On one occasion in 1941, the Swiss border police refused to let Bonhoeffer cross, since he was a civilian employee of the German Military Intelligence Agency. Bonhoeffer had them phone Barth, who agreed to vouch for his old friend.

2. Bonhoeffer's *analogia relationis* and Barth's Doctrine of Creation

As Bonhoeffer was reading *Church Dogmatics* 2.2 and writing letters from prison, Barth was working through Bonhoeffer's 1933 lectures, published as *Creation and Fall*, and developing his theological anthropology. Published shortly after Bonhoeffer's death, Barth's exegesis of Gen 1:26–27 in *Church Dogmatics* 3.1 inaugurates Barth's public engagement with Bonhoeffer's theology. He appropriates Bonhoeffer's *analogia relationis* as the manner in which human persons bear the *imago Dei*, reaffirming his opposition to the *analogia entis*.¹¹ Barth's reflections on the *analogia relationis* prove generative for the exposition of his christological-trinitarian anthropology in the first three part-volumes of his *Doctrine of Creation*.

In *Creation and Fall* Bonhoeffer argues that human persons bear the Creator's likeness in their freedom, not as an inherent quality, but as "a relation between two persons."¹² "The 'image that is like God' is therefore no *analogia entis* in which human beings, in their existence in-and-of-themselves, in their being, could be said to be like God's being."¹³ No person exists alone, divine or human, and to perceive God or a human being is to perceive a person in relation.¹⁴ In place of the *analogia entis*, Bonhoeffer argues that an *analogia relationis* is a preferable rendering of Gen 1:26–27. The human person's created likeness to God entails two relations that image God's relations. First, in her freedom *for* [für] God and other human persons she reflects God's freedom for her and for others. Second, in her freedom *from* [von] the creation, in dominion, she reflects the divine aseity, God's freedom from the creation.

Rejecting numerous alternative interpretations of the *imago Dei*, Barth affirms Bonhoeffer's analogy of freedom for God and for one-another. Barth

11. It is curious that Barth does not specifically comment on Bonhoeffer's *Act and Being* here or elsewhere. Barth's copy has an inscription: "In great gratitude and admiration, Dietrich Bonhoeffer." Balthasar employs Bonhoeffer's critiques of Barth and Przywara in his analysis: cf. Balthasar, *Theology of Karl Barth*, 365.

12. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 63.

13. *Ibid.*, 64–65.

14. Bonhoeffer identifies God's freedom only in relation to human persons and creation, explicitly denying this freedom in the relations between the persons of the Trinity: "[I]t is the message of the gospel itself that God's freedom has bound itself to us, that God's free grace becomes real with us alone, that God wills not to be free for God's self but for humankind." Barth will say God is free *not only* for God's self, but truly for God's self *and also* for humankind. For Bonhoeffer, like Barth, freedom is never autonomous, but always in relation to another: "Because God in Christ is free for humankind, because God does not keep God's freedom for God's self, we can think of freedom only as 'being free for'" (*ibid.*, 63).

writes, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers us important help in this respect . . . In this relationship which is absolutely given and posited there is revealed freedom and therefore the divine likeness. As God is free for man, so man is free for man; but only inasmuch as God is for him, so that the *analogia relationis* as the meaning of the divine likeness cannot be equated with an *analogia entis*.”¹⁵ Following Bonhoeffer, all else that might be said to comprise the *imago Dei* of the human person—dominion, intellect, reason, morality, conscience, structures, dispositions, or any other attributes or capacities—is either excluded, denied, or a consequence of God’s determination to relate to humanity in repetition of God’s self-relation.¹⁶ “The image of God is such that, as the *analogia relationis*, it can never cease to be God’s work and gift or become a human possession.”¹⁷ A “solitary” person, one not in relation to God and others, would be incapable of expressing God’s image.¹⁸ Barth does not merely affirm this analogy of relation as he finds it, however, but develops several christological-trinitarian dimensions.

First, Barth’s exposition proposes that God’s own freedom for Godself occurs in the trinitarian “loving co-existence and co-operation, the I and Thou, which first take place in God Himself.”¹⁹ For Barth, the original relation or prototype to which the *imago Dei* corresponds is not God’s relation

15. *CD* 3.1:195. Barth makes fairly clear in this part-volume that he borrows the term *analogia relationis* from Bonhoeffer. However, the indexes for 3.1 and the *Church Dogmatics* as a whole do not list the occurrences of *analogia relationis* in 3.1 or 3.3, but only those in 3.2. Because Bonhoeffer is not mentioned in 3.2 or 3.3, but only 3.1, scholars have at times overlooked Bonhoeffer’s relevance to Barth’s discussions of the *imago Dei*. For example, Price gives careful attention to the discussion of the *analogia relationis* in 3.2, arguing that this concept “may one day prove to be his most lasting contribution to modern theology.” Price, *Karl Barth’s Anthropology*, 132. Focusing as he does on the anthropology of 3.2, Price does not consider the development of the *analogia relationis* from 3.1 and does not mention that the term is drawn from Bonhoeffer.

16. Hunsinger makes much the same point, drawing explicitly from Barth and Bonhoeffer: “When Christians appeal to the image of God . . . they are pointing to the ultimate meaning of human life. From Bonhoeffer through Barth to recent Catholic theology, the doctrine of the *imago Dei* has been reconceived in terms of relationality instead of the traditional rationality. It is human relationality as such that stands in analogy to the Holy Trinity, and therefore to the ultimacy of community. For the Trinity is itself a holy communion of love and freedom, joy and peace” (Hunsinger, “Torture,” 68).

17. *CD* 3.1:201.

18. Cf. *CD* 3.1:290.

19. *CD* 3.1, 196. “Not without genuine astonishment at the diversity of man’s inventive genius,” Barth considers and then rejects proposals from Late Antiquity (Ambrose, Athanasius, Augustine, Philo), the Reformation (Luther and Calvin), and his Modern interlocutors (Hegel, Seeberg, Troeltsch, Delitzsch, Jacob, von Rad, G. Kittel). Cf. *CD* 3.1:192–94.

to humankind *ad extra*, but “the relationship and differentiation between the I and the Thou in God Himself.”²⁰ It is this original triune relation that is imaged in God’s relation to the human Jesus, Jesus Christ’s relation to humanity in general, and human persons’ relations to one-another.²¹

Second, to Bonhoeffer’s concept of human existence in freedom for God and human persons, Barth adds that the real human person exists in a threefold by-for-with [*von-zu-mit*] orientation and dynamic relation precisely in her freedom for [*für*] God and others. Jesus Christ reveals the true human person as one who is determined “by God for life with God.”²² He is the true human person who serves as God’s covenant-partner in his humanity and, also, as humanity’s covenanting-partner in his divinity. Jesus’ *humanity* consists in his existence as the human person for [*für*] his fellow human persons. His *divinity* consists in his existence as sent by God for this purpose, to be this human person for [*für*] God. Jesus Christ actualizes God’s twofold triune-*ad intra*-relating and triune-*ad extra*-relating, as well as the corresponding faithful human action for God and for his fellow human persons.

Third, Barth adds, not only does the humanity of Jesus evidence life in relationship with humanity—by, for, and with others—and not only does his history constitute God’s actualization of the covenant-relationship—from, to, and with humanity—but his humanity reveals, indirectly, God’s own inner divine essence. “If ‘God for man’ is the eternal covenant revealed and effective in time in the humanity of Jesus, in this decision of the Creator for the creature there arises a relationship which is not alien to the Creator, to God as God, but we might almost say appropriate and natural to Him. God repeats in this relationship *ad extra* a relationship proper to Himself in His inner divine essence.”²³ Jesus’ human existence for [*für*] humanity—his determination by humanity, his living for humanity, and his solidarity with humanity—corresponds to his existence for [*für*] God—his determination by [*von*] God for [*zu*] life with [*mit*] God. These two relationships, equally true of Jesus’ humanity, are repetitions, images, or analogues of the relations

20. *CD* 3.1:198.

21. Cf. Jüngel, “Möglichkeit theologischer Anthropologie, 541–42.

22. *CD* 3.2:203. By “orientation and dynamic relation” I mean to collect two aspects of Barth’s *von-zu-mit* prepositional collocation that are difficult to render consistently in English. *Von-zu-mit* is translated variously as by-for-with and from-to-with in §45.1. The latter formulation better captures Barth’s actualistic conception of divine and human existence in dynamic relation. Unfortunately, rendering *von-zu-mit* as from-to-with generates rather awkward English constructions capturing even less of Barth’s meaning than by-for-with—e.g., “determination from God to life with God.”

23. *CD* 3.2:218.

in God's eternal existence. In God's essence, in the inner being of God, God is not alone but exists in active relation from, to, and with Godself.

With these modifications, Barth thoroughly reconfigures Bonhoeffer's *analogia relationis*. In Jesus' humanity the relationship of free and loving interaction recur between God and humanity. It is this pattern of relating—for God and humanity in one's *by-for-with* determination—as opposed to a correspondence of being, to which the image of God refers.

This is the positive sense of the term 'image'—there is a correspondence and similarity between the two relationships. This is no correspondence and similarity of being, no *analogia entis* . . . Between these two relationships as such there is—and in this sense the second is the image of the first—correspondence and similarity. There is an *analogia relationis* . . . The Father and Son are reflected in the man Jesus and his fellow-humanity. There could not be a clearer reference to the *analogia relationis* and therefore to the *imago Dei* in the most central, namely, the christological, sense of the term.²⁴

The *analogia relationis*, the active relating by human persons in correspondence to God's own active-relating (to Godself and all that is not God), is the *imago Dei*. To image God is to relate as God relates. Jesus' human history is the specific time, place, and event in which God's eternal inner divine relating is revealed. It is through Jesus' activity, the history in which he interacts with God and humanity as the God-human, that human beings learn not only what humanity is, but who God is.

For Bonhoeffer, the analogy reflects a twofold relation: first, in freedom for God and human persons—a freedom of service—and, second, in freedom from the creation—a freedom of dominion. The structure and dynamics of Barth's *analogia relationis* image the hypostatic union and processions and missions of Chalcedon and Nicaea. For both theologians, the *analogia relationis* invalidates any *analogia entis* and, for both, it bears directly upon ethics.

Barth writes, "When God and man meet as revealed in the Word of God, then definite spheres and relationships may be seen in which this encounter takes place . . . The one will of God and his one command embrace his work as Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer . . . Similarly, the action of the one man is his action on the three corresponding planes"²⁵ For Barth, "all

24. *CD* 3.2:220–21, rev. Cf. *KD* 3.2:262.

25. *CD* 3.4:29. Barth allows that the different elements might be called spheres, relationships, planes, fields, even orders or ordinances, so long as they are understood as the different forms of the relation between God and humanity wherein the ethical event

ethical activity consists in discerning the will of God and bearing witness to it” as it is encountered by human persons within the framed reference of these three relations through which God relates to human persons.²⁶

Like Barth, Bonhoeffer maintains that discerning the relationship in which one stands vis-à-vis God and neighbor is essential to faithfully responding to God’s will. He affirms that God relates to human persons as Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer. But, emphasizing concrete social institutions, Bonhoeffer adds that the church, Christ existing as community, relates to worldly institutions through christological-eschatological realities given concrete expression in the divine mission here and now. Criticizing the historical justifications given for the orders of creation, Bonhoeffer’s representation of Luther’s estates finds its basis in Scripture’s witness to Christ’s eschatological relations: Marriage and Family witness the relations of Christ to the church-community, of God the Father to the Son of God and Son of Man, and of Jesus Christ as brother to humankind; Work manifests “the creative service of God and Christ toward the world and of human beings toward God”; Government points to Christ’s lordship over the heavenly city.²⁷ In, with, and under these three mandates, the Church, a fourth mandate, presences Christ in the concrete social form of the church community. The worldly mandates bear witness to the promised heavenly kingdom precisely in their concrete encounters with the church-community. Bonhoeffer’s Lutheran commitments are evident in his appropriation of the estates and implicit *genus majestaticum* seen in the church’s role as the present body of Christ in relation to the worldly mandates. These encounters give provisional and temporal expression to eternal divine-human relations, foreshadowing and indicating here and now, the original and prototype existing in eternity.

Bonhoeffer’s divine mandates, like Barth’s “spheres and relationships,” reflect eternal dimensions of the divine-human relating revealed through Scripture’s witness to Jesus Christ. Favoring Bonhoeffer’s approach to the ethics of Althaus, Brunner, and S e, Barth writes, “It is along these lines that we certainly have to think, and we may gratefully acknowledge that Bonhoeffer does this, even though it may be asked whether the working out of his view does not still contain some arbitrary elements . . . The God who works and is revealed in His Word, in Jesus Christ, characterizes Himself

occurs—that is, human obedience or disobedience. They are not laws, prescriptions, or imperatives, but “the reality of the event in which [divine command and human action] meet” (CD 3.4:31). Knowledge of these spheres makes possible “ethics as a formed reference to the ethical event,” that is, “well-founded and legitimate witness” (32).

26. CRDT, 278.

27. Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment*, 549–50.

(in accordance with His inner trinitarian being) as Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer.”²⁸ Here, again, Barth offers critical modification to Bonhoeffer’s insights on divine-human relationships through reflection upon God’s trinitarian existence. Throughout *Church Dogmatics* 3 the reader finds Barth critically appropriating Bonhoeffer’s insights with significant implications for his own theological anthropology and special ethics.²⁹

3. “Seeing Around Corners” in Barth’s Doctrine of Reconciliation

While publicly opposing “cheap grace” in *Church Dogmatics* 4.1, Barth privately writes to P. W. Herrenbrück responding to questions about Bonhoeffer’s theology and the enigmatic prison writings. Although the letters from prison leave him “disturbed . . . embarrassed . . . confused,” and “a lessening of the offence he has provided us is the last thing I should wish,” Barth nevertheless notes reservations. “As always with Bonhoeffer one is faced by a peculiar difficulty. He was—how shall I put it?—an impulsive, visionary thinker who was suddenly seized by an idea to which he gave lively form, and then after a time he called a halt (one never knew whether it was final or temporary) with some provisional last point or other. Was this not the case with *Discipleship*? Did he not also for a time have liturgical impulses—And how was it with the ‘Mandates’ of his *Ethics*, with which I tussled when I wrote III/4?” On the theme of imitation in *Discipleship*, Barth indicates “it has long been clear to me that I will have to devote a lot of room to this matter in the *Church Dogmatics*.” And, again, “I always read his early writings, especially those which apparently or in reality said things which were not at once clear to me, with the thought that—when they were seen round some corner or other—he might be right.”³⁰ Barth seems to have seen around additional corners during his supervision of John Godsey’s dissertation on Bonhoeffer’s theology as he was working out his doctrine of sanctification in *Church Dogmatics* 4.2.³¹

28. *CD* 3.4:22, 25.

29. In this volume Barth singles out Bonhoeffer’s theological and ethical proposals as superior to the alternatives in discussions of the *imago Dei* (*CD* 3.1:195), ethical method (*CD* 3.4:23), and the borderline case of suicide (*CD* 3.4:404). The analogy of relation recurs in various contexts throughout *Church Dogmatics* 3 and 4; cf. *CD* 3.2:222–23, 243, 324, 341, 438; *CD* 3.3:51, 102, 419; *CD* 4.4, 78.

30. Barth, “From a Letter,” 89–92.

31. This dissertation was published as Godsey, *Theology*.

Barth expresses his appreciation for *Discipleship* in §66 on “The Sanctification of Man.” Barth describes the book’s opening chapters with effusive commendation.

Easily the best that has been written on [*imitatio Christi*] . . . the matter is handled with such depth and precision that I am almost tempted simply to reproduce them in an extended quotation. For I cannot hope to say anything better on the subject than what is said here by a man who, having written on discipleship, was ready to achieve it in his own life, and did in his own way achieve it even to the point of death. In following my own course, I am happy that on this occasion I can lean as heavily as I do upon another.³²

Barth proceeds to propose four main points: grace takes the form of a command that requires the particular action of following as the only proper response; the call to discipleship binds the disciples not to a principle but to the person who calls others to follow, obey, and believe; the call requires a first step of obedience in faith; and the call entails a break that is achieved not by the individual’s decision but by the calling, the divine action which demands a corresponding human act of faith. In expounding each of these points Barth develops the central claims from *Discipleship*’s first five chapters.

In the next paragraph, §67 on “The Holy Spirit and the Upbuilding of the Christian Community,” Barth offers another high commendation, this time in reference to Bonhoeffer’s *Sanctorum Communio*—the work he referred to as a “theological miracle.”³³

If there can be any possible vindication of Reinhold Seeberg, it is to be sought in the fact that his school could give rise to this man and this dissertation, which . . . makes far more instructive and stimulating and illuminating and genuinely edifying reading today than many of the more famous works which have since been written on the problem of the Church . . . [M]any things would not have been written if Bonhoeffer’s exposition had been taken into account. I openly confess that I have misgivings whether I can even maintain the high level reached by Bonhoeffer, saying

32. *CD* 4.2:533–34.

33. Godsey, *Theology*, 21n6. Barth’s comment was made in a private conversation. It appears on the dust jacket of the 1963 English translation of *Sanctorum Communio*, titled *Communion of Saints*.

no less in my own words and context, and saying it no less forcefully, than did this young man so many years ago.³⁴

As with the *analogia relationis* and *imitatio Christi*, Barth proceeds to incorporate Bonhoeffer's exposition of the creedal *communio sanctorum*, this time expanding upon the concept of "upbuilding" as essential to the church's being in action.

From *Church Dogmatics* 3.1 to 4.2 Barth draws inspiration from Bonhoeffer's *Creation and Fall*, *Discipleship*, *Sanctorum Communio*, and *Ethics*. By the time he delivers the lectures that would become 4.3 and 4.4, even the prison writings he had described as a "particular thorn" in 1952 may have grown less objectionable. In their respective readings of §69 on "The Glory of the Mediator," Andreas Pangritz and Kevin Hart point to passages where *Letters and Papers from Prison* appears to provide inspiration for Barth's discussions of "secular parables" of the kingdom and his "doctrine of lights" in other religions.³⁵ Barth's exposition of lying and un-truth in §70 on "The Falsehood and Condemnation of Man" offers yet another instance with its striking parallels to the younger theologian's phenomenological representation of truth-telling as a disclosive practice in "What is Meant by Telling the Truth?"³⁶

The prison writings continue to echo in the questions taken up in the posthumous publication of Barth's ethics of reconciliation lecture fragments, *The Christian Life*. "Had the world first to become mature in order that in its own way the Church should become mature in a positive sense?"³⁷ It comes as little surprise to find congruence with Bonhoeffer in Barth's conclusion: the church is "free for the secular world." Barth reiterates this point where an extended quote could easily have been taken from Bonhoeffer's "Outline for a Book": "[The Christian's] job, then, is to usher in a kind of Christian secularism or secular Christianity . . . thinking, speaking, and acting in the expectation that he can most fittingly serve the gospel of God among children and citizens of the world by the closest possible approximation and assimilation to their attitude and language and even their thought forms, so that in his own person he will set before them the fact of God's love . . . Christians have the freedom . . . to take seriously their solidarity with those outside."³⁸ At this point Barth acknowledges, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer possibly

34. *CD* 4.2:641.

35. Cf. Pangritz, *Karl Barth*, 134; K. Hart, "Bonhoeffer's 'Religious Clothes,'" 190.

36. These reflections were written after Bonhoeffer had read and embraced Barth's ethics in *CD* 2.2.

37. *ChL*, 21.

38. *ChL*, 200.

had something of this view in his last years when he made certain rather cryptic statements.”³⁹ As Barth’s dogmatics lectures come to a close, Barth affirms even those aspects of Bonhoeffer’s writings that trouble Barth most as overlapping with his own conceptions of secular Christian possibilities.

4. Bonhoeffer’s Lasting Impression

Bonhoeffer remained important to Barth long after aspirations of completing the *Church Dogmatics* had been set aside. In 1967 Barth wrote Bethge regarding his “masterpiece” on Bonhoeffer, “I have learned many things about Bonhoeffer for the first time,” including “the fact that in 1933 and the years following, Bonhoeffer was the first and almost the only one to face and tackle the Jewish question so centrally and energetically. I have long since regarded it as a fault on my part that I did not make this question a decisive issue, at least publicly in the church conflict. Only from your book have I become aware that Bonhoeffer did so from the very first. Perhaps this is why he was not at Barmen nor later at Dahlem.”⁴⁰ Bethge’s biography reminds Barth that Bonhoeffer’s opinions on the Aryan Clause and his isolation on these matters were, in part, what brought tension to the relationship between Bonhoeffer and the nascent Confessing Church movement, leading to his departure for London in 1933. He sees in Bonhoeffer one who shared the convictions he held at the time “when I left theological Liberalism,” including the trajectory “from Christian faith to political action.”⁴¹ In the years of their acquaintance, “there was a genuine need in the direction which I now silently took for granted or emphasized only in passing . . . and the need to fill [this gap], Bonhoeffer obviously saw very keenly from the first . . . [H]e became a martyr, too, for this specific cause.”⁴² This apprecia-

39. Although Barth likely refers to *Letters and Papers from Prison*, his observations regarding Christ’s relation to the secular or worldly are similarly apparent in *Ethics*: cf. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 168–70, 339–51.

40. Barth, *Letters 1961–1968*, 250. In the decades since Barth made these comments to Bethge, Bonhoeffer scholarship has become increasingly ambivalent regarding his legacy of resistance, his participation in the *Abwehr*, and the motivations for his opposition to National Socialism. Cf. Holmes, *Bonhoeffer Legacy*; and Dramm, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. On other hand, in conversations and in *Unter dem Bogen*, Busch conveys that Barth’s recollection of his own engagements downplay the extent of his early opposition to National Socialism. According to Bethge, it was not primarily Barth’s reticence to pronounce a *status confessionis* but more so his experience drafting the Bethel Confession that so frustrated Bonhoeffer in 1933 and led to his departure for England.

41. Barth, *Letters 1961–1968*, 251.

42. *Ibid.* Barth expresses distaste for the diverse ways the prison fragments have been used to lay claim to Bonhoeffer’s legacy—by middle-class Liberalism, East

tive and somewhat self-deprecating letter also expresses the “doubt” that systematic theology was Bonhoeffer’s “real strength”—a point to which we will return. First, however, a last reference to Bonhoeffer among the final correspondences we have from Barth merits mention.

In a letter dated October 1, 1968, two months before his death, Barth declines Hendrikus Berkhof’s request that he advise their mutual friend, J. Boulon. He writes, “To direct him to remain in Beirut—which, purely theoretically, would be best—I could not take responsibility: I already have in my memory the advice that I once gave Bonhoeffer to return from London to Germany, upon the execution of which he wound up in Flossenbürg.”⁴³ In this personal aside we discern the residual regret lingering thirty-five years after Barth’s scathing letter exhorting Bonhoeffer’s return, “you need to be here with all guns blazing!”⁴⁴ Barth’s own final letters and papers suggest Bonhoeffer’s impact upon the elder was no less personal than it was theological.

5. Barth and Bonhoeffer in Differentiation and Relationship

While Barth was wrestling intensely with the epistemological and ontological conditions of possibility for Christian theology and witness in *Church Dogmatics* 1 and 2, Bonhoeffer was writing and acting upon conclusions to which *Church Dogmatics* would not give expression until volumes 3 and 4—creation and cosmology, theological anthropology, special ethics, justification and sanctification, discipleship, the communion of saints, and secular Christianity—namely, the lived experience of Christian discipleship in the church-community. As Paul Lehmann rightly points out, Barth’s “specific attention to these concerns did not emerge until . . . it was too late for further exchange on these matters,” at least not in person.⁴⁵

German ideologues, and High Lutheranism. Barth is well aware of “all the things, or most of the things, that the experts have made of [the ‘positivism of revelation’] right up to Heinrich Ott,” and conveys more puzzlement than offense. He appreciates that Bonhoeffer was capable of “the most astonishing evolutions” analogous to his own theological development, and he sympathizes, “I hate to think of what people might have made of me if I had suffered a natural or violent death after the first or second *Romans* or after the first volume of my *Christian Dogmatics* in 1927. What I would not have wanted in such a case I would rather not see inflicted on Bonhoeffer, least of all in the way it has been done most recently by H. Ott” (252).

43. Barth, *Briefe 1961–1968*, 505; author’s translation.

44. Bonhoeffer, *London*, 39.

45. Lehmann, “Concreteness of Theology,” 68.

If Bonhoeffer is passed over as an important interlocutor for Barth's mature theology, it is in spite of, not because of, Barth's engagement with Bonhoeffer's thought. Barth develops Bonhoeffer's contributions in each part-volume of *Church Dogmatics* 3 and 4 and in *The Christian Life*. Given the widely recognized trajectory of influence from Barth to Bonhoeffer, closer attention to the historically overlooked influence in the other direction is overdue. If we take Barth at his word in *Church Dogmatics*, significant elements of his theology and ethics in volumes 3 and 4 would have gone missing had Bonhoeffer's influence not exerted itself. Theologians constructively engaging Barth's later theology should expect to find additional insights productive for their own reflection in Bonhoeffer's writings that were not available to Barth.

It yet remains to reconcile Barth's extensive use of Bonhoeffer's thought in *Church Dogmatics* 3 and 4 with the "doubt" Barth expressed to Bethge, "whether theological systematics (I include his *Ethics*)" was Bonhoeffer's strength. Barth himself may provide the greatest help on this question. In *Church Dogmatics* 1.1 Barth draws a distinction between regular and irregular dogmatics that pivots on the completeness and consistency with which one attends to constellations of theological loci. Regular dogmatics aim at completeness (e.g., Origen, Thomas, Calvin, Dorner). However, Barth notes that the early church, Athanasius, Luther, and Kutter performed irregular dogmatics, theological reflection which "will be, and will mean to be, a fragment."⁴⁶ Barth himself aims to engage in regular dogmatics without demeaning the irregular approach, "a little of which all of us secretly do and which we ought to do boldly."⁴⁷ For Barth, "the ultimate question cannot be whether we are doing regular or irregular dogmatics." Rather, "what finally counts is whether a dogmatics is scriptural."⁴⁸ On this basic commitment, Barth and Bonhoeffer are of a like mind.

This distinction between regular and irregular dogmatics, consistent versus fragmentary (yet equally provisional), helpfully illuminates Barth's seemingly devastating appraisal of Bonhoeffer in an otherwise effusive letter to Bethge.⁴⁹ Barth's assessment differentiates his own self-consciously regu-

46. *CD* 1.1:277.

47. Barth, *Göttingen*, 38.

48. *CD* 1.1:287.

49. That Bonhoeffer works erratically in relation to Barth bears on this point as well—beginning his theological writings with *Sanctorum Communio*, a treatise on the church; jumping to prolegomenal matters of epistemology and ontology in *Act and Being*; to *Creation and Fall*; followed by *Discipleship*, a book on works, grace, the Sermon on the Mount, justification, and sanctification; then his "special" *Ethics*; and a theological critique of religion in *Letters and Papers*. The disparity between the organized flow

lar dogmatics from Bonhoeffer's theological writings, which he gives high praise in *Church Dogmatics* as elsewhere. It explains how Barth is able to laud Bonhoeffer's insights while submitting them to extensive revision—*Ethics* is “brilliant” even as it is “fragmentary and provisional.”⁵⁰ For him, the form of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* had to do not only with its unfinished state (Barth's *Church Dogmatics* had been in a similar unfinished and non-progressing state for some years when he made this comment of Bonhoeffer's *magnum opus*), but specifically with the lack of systematic perspective from which Bonhoeffer had approached his *Ethics* which left a disorganized, unpolished result.⁵¹

Barth's appraisal and incorporation of Bonhoeffer's irregular and often fragmentary writings evidence that he found in them not only nascent indicators but seminal insights he could develop in ways productive for his own distinctive theology. Barth's reformulation of the *analogia relationis* for his theological anthropology extends far beyond Bonhoeffer's original concept. Similarly, Barth's insistence that the Creator, Reconciler, Redeemer relations constitute the threefold form of God's active-relating as “Commander” critically opposes and embraces aspects of Bonhoeffer's divine mandates that serve as the relational form, or “framed reference,” in which the encounter with God's command always takes place.⁵² It is not only theological anthropology and the relational domains of ethical frameworks, nor only *imitatio Christi* and the *communio sanctorum*, that warrant further consideration as possibilities for conversation between Barth and Bonhoeffer. Attention to their respective conceptions of vicarious representative action as accordance and obedience as correspondence, re-presenting the truth and giving witness, borderline cases of euthanasia and suicide, and the difference election makes to ethical discernment, are but a few potential convergences where their theological-ethical visions might be brought into constructive dialogue.⁵³

Barth and Bonhoeffer shared the conviction that analogy entails both differentiation and relationship, correspondence of the unlike, and so it proves fitting to close noting a central shared commitment. As both

of the *Church Dogmatics* and Bonhoeffer's writings could hardly be more pronounced.

50. *CD* 3.4:4.

51. Three editions of *Ethics* include different manuscripts, chapter titles and headings, and orderings of the various manuscripts included: cf. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 477.

52. Cf. *CD* 3.4:22.

53. Greggs and Ziegler are among a growing number of scholars who, in the spirit of Jüngel's *God as the Mystery of the World*, are constructively dialoguing with Barth and Bonhoeffer's theological criticisms of religion: cf. Greggs, *Theology against Religion*; Ziegler, *Doing Theology*. Also indebted to Jüngel, Webster finds harmony in the reading of Scripture as basic to Barth and Bonhoeffer's theological commitments: cf. Webster, “Reading the Bible.” Ellis offers an excellent comparison of Barth and Bonhoeffer's divine command ethics: cf. Ellis, “Moral Action.”

theologians came to know the loneliness of forging new paths, resisting cultural norms of their day, seeking for themselves not popular appeal but faithful witness to the Word of God, they took seriously the Baptist's saying, "He must become greater, I must become less."⁵⁴ And at least one specific practice resulted from and informed their often shared and uncommon vision, sustaining them in the midst of busyness, solitude, and crisis. Bonhoeffer wrote after seven months in prison, "in addition to daily Bible study, I have read the Old Testament two and a half times through and have learned a great deal."⁵⁵ The result was his essay, "What Does It Mean to Tell the Truth?" in which new insights on relational truth-telling and guilt redress his account of lying in *Ethics*.⁵⁶ Similarly, in the midst of exegetical preparations for his ethics of reconciliation in *Church Dogmatics* 4.4 Barth wrote to his son Markus, the New Testament scholar, that he had again read "the New Testament from A to Z and word by word."⁵⁷ His sacramentology followed. Those who travel with or beyond these two theologians may discover that analogous disciplines prove necessary for sustaining their corresponding vocations.⁵⁸

Response to Matthew Puffer on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Influence on Karl Barth

—By Andy Rowell

FIRST, I WOULD LIKE to affirm Matthew Puffer's attempt to trace the ways Bonhoeffer influenced Barth. Though it is a difficult task, it has the potential to yield significant theological dividends. Second, I would like to briefly identify six types of evidence that Puffer explores. Third, I would like to underline the severe strain placed on both Barth and Bonhoeffer under the

54. John 3:30 (NIV).

55. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 181.

56. Cf. Bonhoeffer, "What Does It Mean to Tell the Truth?," 601–8; *Ethics*, 279–80.

57. *ChL*, xv.

58. I wish to thank the Karl Barth Blog Conference organizers for their invitation, the participants for their helpful comments, and Andy Rowell in particular for his thoughtful response. I am also grateful to Daryl Ellis, Tim Hartman, Keith Johnson, and Chad Wellmon for their corrections, contributions, and criticisms.