

**SOLIDARITY AND SALVATION :**  
**The Relationship between**  
**Personal Transformation and Community in**  
**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

**Donald J. Shay**

**April 1991**

---

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
to the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town under the  
supervision of Professor J.W. de Gruchy.**

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

SOLIDARITY AND SALVATION: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONAL  
TRANSFORMATION AND COMMUNITY IN DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

\*\*\*\*\*

Donald J. Shay

April 1991

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts to the Department of  
Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town  
under the supervision of Professor J.W. de Gruchy.

The University of Cape Town has been given  
the right to reproduce this thesis in whole  
or in part. Copyright is held by the author.

## CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS .....	i
ABSTRACT .....	ii
PREFACE .....	iii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 1. A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: SOCIALITY IN <i>Sanctorum Communio AND Creation and Fall</i> .....	7
CHAPTER 2. REFLECTIONS ON LIFE IN COMMUNITY: DISCIPLESHIP AND COMMUNITY IN <i>The Cost of Discipleship AND Life Together</i> .....	36
CHAPTER 3. A VISION - THE CHURCH FOR OTHERS: SUFFERING, METANOIA AND RESPONSIBILITY IN <i>Ethics AND Letters and Papers from Prison</i> .....	59
CONCLUSION .....	87
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	91

## ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used in this thesis. All books are those of Bonhoeffer except where another author is listed.

- AB        *Act and Being*. Trans. by Bernard Noble, Intro. by Ernst Wolf, New York: Harper and Row, 1961.
- C        *Christology*. (Revised edition) Trans. by Edwin H. Robertson, London: Collins, 1978.
- CD       *The Cost of Discipleship*. (Revised edition), Trans. by R. H. Fuller, Trans. rev. by Irmgard Booth, New York: Macmillan, 1963.
- CF       *Creation and Fall*. Trans. by John C. Fletcher et. al., Rev. by SCM editors, London: SCM, 1959.
- DB       *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*. by Eberhard Bethge, Trans. under the editorship of Edwin H. Robertson, London: Collins, 1970.
- E        *Ethics*. (Rearranged edition following the sixth German edition, 1963) Ed. by Eberhard Bethge, trans. by Meville Norton Smith, New York: Macmillan, 1965.
- LPP      *Letters and Papers from Prison*. (Revised and enlarged 4th edition) Ed. by Eberhard Bethge, trans. revised by Frank Clarke, Reginald Fuller et. al., Trans. of additional material by John Bowden, New York: Macmillan, 1972.
- LT       *Life Together*. Trans. by John W. Doberstein, London: SCM, 1954.
- NRS      *No Rusty Swords*. Ed. and intro. by Edwin H. Robertson, Trans. by E. H. Robertson and John Bowden, London: Collins, 1965.
- SC       *Sanctorum Communio*. Trans. by Ronald Gregor Smith et. al., Published in the U.S. as *The Communion of Saints*, New York: Harper and Row, 1964.
- SCH      *The Sociality of Christ and Humanity: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Early Theology, 1927-1933*. by Clifford Green, Missoula, Montana: Scholar's Press, 1972.
- TP       *True Patriotism*. Ed. and intro. by Edwin H. Robertson, Trans. by E. H. Robertson and John Bowden, London: Collins, 1973.
- WF       *The Way to Freedom*. Ed. and intro. by Edwin H. Robertson, Trans. by E. H. Robertson and John Bowden, London: Collins, 1966.
- WTJC    *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Witness to Jesus Christ*. by John de Gruchy, London: Collins, 1978.
- ET       English translation

## ABSTRACT

The major thesis of this dissertation is that personal transformation is grounded in community existence and experience. Bonhoeffer's understanding and experience of community provide key insights into this dynamic relationship. The development of his theology, shaped by his experience of struggle and solidarity in Nazi Germany, can also provide valuable resources for the struggle for justice and peace in South Africa, especially at this transitional period in its history.

The first chapter, *A Theoretical Perspective: Sociality in Sanctorum Communio and Creation and Fall*, attempts to establish the theoretical underpinnings and centrality of Bonhoeffer's notion of 'sociality' which, it is argued, remains at the heart of his writings and praxis to the end of his life. It is in the concept of sociality that the influence of community on personal transformation is grounded. The second chapter, *Reflections on Life in Community: Discipleship and Community in The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together*, examines key issues at the heart of Bonhoeffer's struggle for justice based in the concrete experience of intentional community life at the Finkenwalde seminary. In the context of the Church Struggle (*Kirchenkampf*) the community of faith was integral to helping pastors be obedient disciples in the midst of tremendous political struggles with an evil regime. The third chapter, *A Vision - The Church for Others: Suffering, Metanoia and Responsibility in Ethics and Letters and Papers from Prison*, explores the implications of personal transformation for a life of responsible discipleship. There is continuity in Bonhoeffer's thinking about personal transformation and community, but his context had changed during this period resulting in more emphasis on involvement in 'the world' and taking responsibility for changing the world.

## PREFACE

I am deeply grateful to the students and staff in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town for providing new insights and tools to do theology and for the personal support in my faith struggle to appropriate the challenges of 'modernity.' Doing *contextual* theology and doing theology *committed* to peace, justice and love are two insights I will continue to use throughout my life journey.

I would like to give a special word of gratitude to my advisor, John de Gruchy, for his friendly and consistent support and guidance which meant more to me than he probably ever imagined. I would also like to thank my wife, Suellen Butler Shay, for her unfailing confidence and support without which this thesis would not have been completed.

This work is dedicated to all of those struggling for the creation of a new society which anticipates the coming reign of God, a society based on the values of shalom and justice.

"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." Luke 12:48

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Matthew 5:6

SOLIDARITY AND SALVATION: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONAL  
TRANSFORMATION AND COMMUNITY IN DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

INTRODUCTION

In the quest for a 'new South Africa', for a truly democratic, non-racial, non-sexist country, individuals will need to be 'transformed'. Attitudes need to change, relationships need to be reconciled within a context of justice for all, great tolerance for others will be required from all citizens, and everyone will need personal resources to cope with the ambiguity and uncertainty of the impending socio-political transformation. Undeniably, beyond the 'personal' level of transformation, there is the need for societal transformation - historic power relationships need to be fundamentally changed, economic structures need to be made more just and equitable, and access to education, housing, employment, health care, and other basic resources need radical reprioritising and revitalisation. Much has been written about these urgently needed socio-political changes in South Africa, and must be assumed in what follows.

One of the more confusing phenomena in South Africa is how a so-called Christian country could stray so far from the kingdom values of justice, peace, and respect for human dignity.[1] The existence of a high number of professing Christians in South Africa (approximately 78% of the population) has failed to result in just social structures for all of the population. If Christian conversion, repentance and discipleship mean anything, then the gross injustices perpetrated under apartheid should have been inconceivable. In fact, it is dubious to attempt to talk in a meaningful way about South Africa, or any society for that matter, as a 'Christian

\*\*\*\*\*

[1] See de Gruchy, J.W. *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 2nd edition, 1986 and Villa-Vicencio, C. *Trapped in Apartheid*, 1988, for the historical unfolding of this development.



society'. The discrepancies between Christian ideals and social reality in South Africa are an indictment of a church which has failed to listen to prophetic voices both within and outside the church. The discrepancies in various understandings of Christianity reflect the reality that ideological and class positions, as well as material interests, intrinsically shape our understandings of Christian faith and praxis.

This thesis will explore dimensions of 'personal transformation'. In so doing there is an intrinsic danger of falling into the trap of those forms of post-Enlightenment Christianity which have emphasised an individualistic pietism, avoiding the hard questions related to social transformation. Certainly the prevailing idea within much Christianity that 'personal' change is the root of social change has proved to be grossly simplistic and naive.[2] In reaction to this, liberation theology, inter alia, has challenged traditional, Western Christianity to broaden its horizons and take structural oppression and sin seriously. It is not surprising that the insights of Marxist analysis, which looks beyond 'personal differences' to structural and class analysis [3], have aided in this critique. Indeed, the initial impulses for socialism in the 1820's

\*\*\*\*\*

[2] Tooke, J.V. "Change of Heart and Change of Structures: An Evangelical Point of View" in Nürnberger, K (Ed.) *Ideologies of Change in South Africa and the Power of the Gospel (Capitalism - Socialism - Marxism)*, 1979:133-135. Citing work by M.W. Murphee, a 'Rhodesian' sociologist, Tooke presents a classic "conservative Evangelical" model - 1.) reconciliation between individual and God which leads to 2.) reconciliation between individual and individual which leads to 3.) reconciliation between group and group which leads to 4.) diffuse improvement in society - and contrasts it with an alternative called 'the social structure approach'. On the basis of the latter model individual reconciliation across group lines is a result of an earlier restructuring of society based on 'negotiations from strength on the basis of equality'.

[3] Nolan, A. "The Three Skills", ICT publication originating from the 1989 Lumka I conference "A Liberating Ministry to the White Community"; The three levels of social analysis suggested are 1.) personal (e.g., moral integrity, education, personality factors, sin); 2.) social group (e.g., socialisation); and 3.) structural (e.g., power relationships, class). While all have some validity in explaining people's behavior, Nolan suggests that class, while not determinative, has the strongest impact on individual behavior.

prior to Marx's writing arose out of a critique of rampant individualism, liberalism and *laissez-faire* capitalism in favor of more egalitarian and communal structures.[4] While more Platonic, dualistic and pietistic forms of Christianity reject involvement 'in the world', working to make socio-economic structures more just and equitable is undeniably an important area for Christian engagement which needs more attention. However, no matter how important it is to make social structures more just, there will always need to be corresponding changes - in attitudes, values, goals, ethical commitments - on the individual level. The two are integrally related. While not wanting to minimise the significance of either social transformation or personal transformation, or the dialectical tension between them, the motivation behind this thesis is to provide resources for pastors, activists, educators and church workers in their prophetic and pastoral roles of fostering *metanoia*, of helping people become responsible, obedient disciples of Jesus Christ. This will be done primarily by examining what could be called a 'redeemed' understanding of *personal transformation*, from a strongly relational and ethical perspective, in the life of the German theologian and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Our major thesis is that personal transformation is grounded in community existence and experience. Bonhoeffer's understanding and experience of community provide key insights into this dynamic relationship. The development of his theology, shaped by his experience of struggle and solidarity in Nazi Germany, can also provide valuable resources for the struggle for justice and peace in South Africa.

While the historical details vary in significant ways, the 'Church Struggle' (Kirchenkampf) in Germany and the 'church struggle' in South

\*\*\*\*\*

[4] Leatt, J., Kneifel, T. & Nürnberger, K. (Eds.) *Contending Ideologies in South Africa*, 1986:194.

Africa share some common ground.[5] Both are attempts to be faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ in response to distorted understandings of Christianity (Nazism and apartheid) which have led to devastating social consequences.[6] Both are attempts to 'do' contextual theology - to reflect critically on circumstances in the light of Christian faith and then to act accordingly. Rather than pretend there is unity in the church, or working for a 'false' peace, one of the most daunting challenges facing the Christian community is making commitments and taking sides with truth and justice, and therefore with the poor and oppressed. Bonhoeffer's uncompromising example of standing for truth and with the oppressed can provide guidance to the Christian community in South Africa.

The church in South Africa is undeniably a site of struggle - a struggle over theological 'truth'; over personal and societal liberation; over obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ; over authoritarian and patriarchal church hierarchies and structures. In the theological dimension of this struggle Paul Gifford, following Gregory Baum, has argued that "the division of Christianity into ... utopian and ideological forms is now the most significant division within Christianity", replacing denominational differences.[7] The church as a 'community of influence'

\*\*\*\*\*

[5] See de Gruchy, J.W. *Bonhoeffer and South Africa*, 1984.

[6] The Church has reacted in each context with important theological responses to injustice. The most significant one in Germany was the 1934 Barmen Declaration. In South Africa some of the more important prophetic theological responses have been the 1960 Cottlesloe Consultation resolutions, the 1968 "Message to the People of South Africa", the 1985 Kairos Document, and the 1990 Rustenburg Declaration, to name but a few.

[7] Gifford, P. *The Religious Right in Southern Africa*, 1988:83-86. The discussion revolves around the role or function of religion in society. "Ideological religion legitimates the existing social order, defends the dominant values, enhances the authority of the dominant group, and is calculated to preserve the existing society. Utopian religion, however, reveals the limitations of the existing social order, questions the dominant values of society, challenges the authority of the dominant group, and seeks to improve the current social order." Gifford depends heavily on Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, who follows Karl Mannheim. The typology is oversimplistic, but helpful and descriptive.

has tremendous power in shaping the theological understanding and corresponding praxis of its members. The influence that churches have on their members must be used responsibly and intentionally.

Another dimension of the 'struggle' within the church is the extent to which the concept 'community of faith' or 'church' is understood. While recognising the autonomy and social reality of each congregation of believers, this thesis attempts to challenge the myopic vision of a church which fails to recognise the wider social body, the majority of whom, in South Africa, are black. In rejecting the idolatrous nationalism of Nazi Germany Bonhoeffer rang a warning bell that applies equally today for over-zealous forms of Afrikaner nationalism, English colonialism, and even Black nationalism. In his 1935 article "The Confessing Church and the Ecumenical Movement" Bonhoeffer wrote, "Under the onslaught of new nationalism, the fact that the Church of Christ does not stop at national and racial boundaries but reaches beyond them, so powerfully attested in the New Testament and in the confessional writings, has been far too easily forgotten." [8]

Moving to more specific dimensions of the thesis, the first chapter, "A Theoretical Perspective: Sociality in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Creation and Fall*", attempts to establish the theoretical underpinnings and centrality of Bonhoeffer's relational and ethical notion of 'sociality' which, it is argued, remains at the heart of his writings and praxis to the end of his life. It is in the concept of sociality that the influence of community on personal transformation is grounded. The second chapter, "Reflections on Life in Community: Discipleship and Community in *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*", examines key issues at the heart of

\*\*\*\*\*

[8] NRS:326

Bonhoeffer's struggle for justice based in the concrete experience of community life at the Finkenwalde seminary and House of Brethren. The challenge of engaging the world with a radical, obedient discipleship was shaped and fed by that understanding of community life. In the context of the Church Struggle (Kirchenkampf) the Finkenwalde community of faith became integral to helping pastors be obedient disciples in the midst of tremendous political struggles with an evil regime. The third chapter, "A Vision - The Church for Others: Suffering, Metanoia and Responsibility in *Ethics and Letters and Papers from Prison*", explores the implications of personal transformation for a life of responsible discipleship. There is continuity in Bonhoeffer's thinking about personal transformation and community, but his context had changed during this period resulting in more emphasis on involvement 'in the world' and taking responsibility for changing it.

#### Methodology

This thesis is theoretical and has primarily used a thematic method, while respecting the importance of historical and contextual methods. The major trajectory traced through Bonhoeffer's writings is personal transformation in the context of the community. There has been a concerted effort to trace the significant developments within Bonhoeffer's theology as well as to ground each major writing in the context from which it emerged. The major works chosen and the corresponding chapters represent three distinct periods of Bonhoeffer's life [9] and indicate a conscious attempt to analyse the development in his theology.

\*\*\*\*\*

[9] Bethge, E. The Chicago Theological Seminary Register, February 1961, vol. LI, no. 2, p. 1; Bethge outlined three stages as Foundation: The Quest for the Concrete Nature of the Message (dogmatic and theoretical); Concentration: The Narrow Pass for Christianity (exegetical and pastoral); and Liberation: Christianity Without Religion (ethical and political).

**CHAPTER 1: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE:**  
**SOCIALITY IN *Sanctorum Communio* AND *Creation and Fall***

**Introduction**

The focus of this chapter is Bonhoeffer's theology of sociality as developed in two early foundational works, *Sanctorum Communio* and *Creation and Fall*. More specifically, in an attempt to explore the relationship between personal transformation and community, it will address four issues. First of all, in order to better understand *personal* transformation we need to know Bonhoeffer's understanding of the person, or his anthropology. Secondly, in addressing *personal transformation* we need to probe Bonhoeffer's thoughts regarding fallenness and restoration, or his ideas on sin and sanctification. Thirdly, in investigating the *relationship* between personal transformation and community we need to discern the interrelatedness of Bonhoeffer's anthropology, christology and ecclesiology. And fourthly, in contrast to the popular romanticising of the term *community*, we need to clarify Bonhoeffer's understanding of it in terms of reality, concreteness, revelation, christology and ecclesiology. Bonhoeffer's understanding of 'personal transformation' is not explicitly stated in either work, but the implicit idea and implications are easily discernable. Clifford Green, among others, has rightly criticized the 'teleological bias' in many Bonhoeffer studies which use the writings from the last five years of his life as the hermeneutical key to the earlier theology [1]; hence this attempt to begin at the beginning, with the development of Bonhoeffer's theological roots.

**Context from Which *Sanctorum Communio* and *Creation and Fall* Emerged**

In 1927 the twenty-one year old Bonhoeffer submitted *Sanctorum*

\*\*\*\*\*

[1] SCH:7

*Communio* to the Berlin Faculty of Theology as his doctoral dissertation completed under the supervision of Professor Reinhold Seeberg.[2] Bonhoeffer described *Sanctorum Communio* as a primarily theological task in understanding the concept of the Christian community, the *sanctorum communio*, using the insights of social philosophy and sociology in the service of dogmatics, in other words, "a sociological theology of the church".[3] In the argument of *Sanctorum Communio* Bonhoeffer makes a bold attempt to ground revelation in the Church and make sociological categories a new way forward for Christianity and theology beyond the limits of Immanuel Kant, Georg Hegel, dialectical theology and existentialism. Eberhard Bethge says later critics described Bonhoeffer's endeavors as "more bold than successful".[4] Regardless of Bonhoeffer's success or failure with *Sanctorum Communio*, or his next major work *Act and Being*, for the purposes of this thesis we will concentrate on his introduction of the concept of sociality, a concept which remains an important foundation stone for the rest of his life and thought.

In looking for significant contextual clues in Bonhoeffer's development of 'sociality' it might be helpful to begin by asking 'why did Bonhoeffer choose to do his dissertation on the Church?' Several reasons could be ventured. As already mentioned he was trying to move theology forward with a polemical response to Kantian Idealism, early dialectical theology, and existentialism by grounding revelation concretely, in the church. This was also a polemic against the individualism of liberal Protestantism, a degeneration of the concept of the church within confessional Lutheranism, with its emphasis on the 'invisible' church, and the individual getting lost in the community within the Catholic tradition.

\*\*\*\*\*

[2] WTJC:43

[3] SC: Bethge in the Foreword

[4] DB:59

Bonhoeffer proposed that the fellowship of believers, the visible manifestaion of Christ in the world, be considered a third sacrament in the Lutheran tradition.[5] For Bonhoeffer, the church was not a voluntary association that came after the preaching of the Word, it was the reality of the new humanity established by Christ. Another reason for concentrating on the church was in reaction to the fact that it had been rejected by his family and minimised by influential academics. His 'discovery' of the church during his visit to Rome in spring of 1924 made a deep impact on him and stirred his deep desire for community.[6] Finally, his family experience had been one of close fellowship, support and community, leading to suggestions that that experience had more impact on his ecclesiology and the idea of 'sociality' than any other.[7]

It would be remiss not to mention some of the strong influences exerted by his instructors during his university experience, especially in Berlin. It was the neo-Hegelian Seeberg, a conservative Lutheran dogmatician, who encouraged Bonhoeffer to pursue ethics and from whom the young theologian was introduced to the concept of sociality.[8] From Karl Holl, one of the leaders of the Luther renaissance, Bonhoeffer gained a greater appreciation for Luther, especially his theology of the cross, which was to become central to Bonhoeffer's theology. Although maintaining a critical distance (see for example, the powerful appeal of Karl Barth and dialectical theology in his "The Theology of Crisis and its Attitude Toward Philosophy and Science" written for John Baillie at Union Theological Seminary)[9], Bonhoeffer was steeped in the liberal Protestantism of the

\*\*\*\*\*

[5] SC:163-171

[6] DB:38-41; 44

[7] Day, T. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Christian Community and Common Sense*, 1982:11.

[8] SCH:57; DB:59;88

[9] NRS:361 (abridged text); in WTJC:85-97



day, with its critical historicism and humanistic values, having studied under one of its leading proponents, Adolph von Harnack. Although he never formally studied under him, Barth was undoubtedly the most influential of all his teachers. Yet in one of Bonhoeffer's last letters from prison, on 3 August 1944, he made the revealing comment that while he was a 'modern' theologian, that is, one influenced by Barth, he was "still aware of the debt that he owe[d] to liberal theology. There will not be many of the younger men in whom these two trends are combined".[10]

The book *Creation and Fall* was originally presented by Bonhoeffer in the Winter semester of 1932/3 as lectures at the University of Berlin entitled "Creation and Sin, a Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3". This christological interpretation of creation was Bonhoeffer's first attempt to do theology via exegesis, and the method he used was similar to Barth's 1919 watershed commentary on the book of Romans.[11] In academic circles the book, published by Bonhoeffer only after much persuasion from his students, fell between two camps - the systematicians and the Old Testament exegetes - neither of which evaluated it positively. Moreover it did not receive much scholarly notice, though it became his first small literary success.

In *Creation and Fall* Bonhoeffer developed some of the foundational concepts from *Sanctorum Communio* in more christological and eschatological directions, thereby introducing an important theological shift from the dominant, post-Augustinian emphasis on human reason as in the *imago Dei* to

\*\*\*\*\*

[10] LPP:378; While I prefer to use inclusive language in my own writing, I have not attempted to change Bonhoeffer's or other author's language usage.

[11] Much has been written elsewhere on Bonhoeffer's exegetical method and appropriation of the Old Testament. For a brief summary see SCH:283-283, note 3. See also Harrelson, W. "Bonhoeffer and the Bible, in *The Place of Bonhoeffer*, (Ed.) Marty, M.E., 1962:113-142. See NRS:308-325 for Bonhoeffer's Finkenwalde lecture on the interpretation of the New Testament.

a more communal-relational understanding in the *analogia relationis*. In one of the important developments in *Creation and Fall*, the introduction of the idea of the 'orders of preservation', Bonhoeffer wanted to counteract the abuses and dangers in the traditional doctrine of the 'orders of creation' and thus provide resources for those opposing the theological justification of National Socialism. Furthermore, it is significant that Bonhoeffer gave prominence to the Hebrew scriptures as the book of the church "at a time when German Christians were, for anti-Semitic reasons, rejecting the Jewish roots of their faith".[12]

*Sanctorum Communio* was written before Bonhoeffer went to study at Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1930-1931, but *Creation and Fall* was written afterwards and reflects some personal developments. More will be said about this in the next chapter, but two important new elements need to be noted. Firstly, Bonhoeffer now wrote with a renewed interest in the bible, having shifted from 'phraseology to reality' [13], what Bethge describes as 'the theologian becoming a Christian'.[14] Secondly, while always critical of North American theology, Bonhoeffer had nevertheless been influenced by the socio-political and ethical dimensions of the gospel he encountered within it. Thus Bethge makes it clear that *Creation and Fall* was not escapist eschatology.

This eschatological interpretation of *Creation* represented no retreat from the world. *Creation and Fall* was aimed at the 'centre of life'. Never previously had the idea of the centre of life as against its borders and margins played such a part in Bonhoeffer's mind.

It was an ethical uneasiness that led him to devote himself to the subject of this lecture. Ten years later it was again ethical uneasiness that caused him to return to the idea of the centre of life when he said that God was to be sought in the centre and not at the borders of reality".[15]

\*\*\*\*\*

[12] WIJC:17

[13] LPP:275

[14] DB:153-156

[15] DB:163-164

## Centrality of Sociality to Bonhoeffer's Theology

Green has argued convincingly that 'sociality' is programmatic for all of Bonhoeffer's theology and serves as the key for understanding *Sanctorum Communio*. [16] This thesis has received wide acceptance among Bonhoeffer scholars, contrary to the early scholarly consensus about *Sanctorum Communio* which saw ecclesiology as the central key to understanding the work. [17] In the Preface to *Sanctorum Communio* Bonhoeffer wrote:

The more theologians have considered the significance of the sociological category for theology, the more clearly the social intention of all the basic Christian concepts has emerged. Ideas such as 'person', 'primal state', 'sin' and 'revelation' are fully understandable only in relation to sociality. [18]

These 'basic Christian concepts' are all developed in terms of sociality in the chapters of *Sanctorum Communio*, the foundational concept of the whole work being the Christian understanding of 'person' in Chapter two, followed by 'primal state' (that is, the pre-Fall creation) in Chapter three, 'sin' in Chapter four, and 'revelation' in Chapter five. The structure of *Sanctorum Communio* deals with many theological issues beyond the church, and does so in relation to the concept of sociality. According to Green,

If ecclesiology is taken as the exclusive concern of *Sanctorum Communio*, one cannot adequately explain the detailed discussion of so many subjects which fall outside the doctrine of the church, nor the elaborate and sophisticated conceptuality which is developed to deal with them in 'a Christian social philosophy and sociology'. [19]

The ecclesiology as developed in *Sanctorum Communio* is properly understood only in relation to sociality.

We shall follow Green [20] and others in asserting the importance of

\*\*\*\*\*

[16] This is the argument of SCH.

[17] See, e.g., Müller, H. *Von der Kirche zur Welt, (From the Church to the World)*, 1966; and DB:60.

[18] SC:7, Preface [19] SCH:56

[20] Green's SCH is widely recognized as the major exposition of Bonhoeffer's 'sociality'.

sociality in understanding Bonhoeffer's theology and in arguing for continuity of this concept throughout Bonhoeffer's life, although recognising different emphases depending on the particular context he was addressing. It should be acknowledged that Christology, ecclesiology, and the concreteness of revelation are obviously central to Bonhoeffer's thought, but his unique contribution to theology can only be discerned properly by understanding what he meant by sociality. As the statement by Bonhoeffer mentioned in the preceding paragraph implies, to understand his theology of sociality requires a close examination of Bonhoeffer's use of other theological concepts, particularly his theological anthropology, ecclesiology and soteriology.

#### Threads in the Tapestry of Sociality

Before analysing *Sanctorum Communio* and *Creation and Fall* in more specific detail it may be helpful to give a brief summary of what Bonhoeffer means by sociality. Such a complex concept cannot adequately be described in summary form, but attempting to elucidate the major threads will serve to focus the subsequent discussion. Some of the more important 'threads of sociality' in the larger Bonhoeffer tapestry could be labelled 1.) the interdependence of the knowledge of God, self, and the community of faith; 2.) the social-ethical-historical nature of being human; 3.) the concreteness of revelation in the church; and 4.) the vicarious action of Jesus Christ to restore the broken community of humanity.

As a further clarification and attempt at a partial summary of what Bonhoeffer meant by sociality, here is an extended excerpt from Green's *The Sociality of Christ and Humanity*:

... A consistent set of concepts, centering on the idea of person understood relationally and communally, is employed in both the Christology and anthropology of this period [SC to the 1933 Christology]. Within this basic social conceptuality there is a refining of the Christology from the understanding of Christ as *Stellvertreter* in the first work to the *theologia crucis* of Christ the Mediator in the *Christologie*; this refinement is directly related to Bonhoeffer's work on the soteriological problem of power. Likewise, the anthropology exhibits a consistent conceptuality: the concepts which comprise the category sociality and, within this, the understanding of man as *Geist* and *Natur*; by the former term (and its later equivalents, *Dasein* and *Existenz*), Bonhoeffer refers to man as an historical, willing, thinking, deciding, ethical being in his relations with other persons and in the responsibility of his corporate life. Christology and anthropology are thus intrinsically linked together in the conceptuality of sociality. Above all, the soteriological problem of power which vitiates the sociality of personal and corporate life is the point where the most intimate connection of Christology and anthropology is evident: Christ is the presence of transforming transcendence among men, liberating individual and corporate life from self-serving and dominating power so that true freedom, love and responsibility is a really new and present possibility in history. ...

In the *Letters* the new anthropological insight and question of *Muendigkeit* [to come of age] leads to a striking consummation of the central Christological and anthropological tendency of the theology of sociality. Christ as "the man for others" and the life of the Christian and the church as "being for others" are simple yet rich and pregnant formulas which epitomize in a new context the import of the early theology of sociality.[21]

There is one final word of introduction to this section. Through the concept of sociality Bonhoeffer has not only dealt with philosophical and epistemological issues; he has demonstrated a keen awareness of the human psychology involved in change, in metanoia. Becoming a person, personal consciousness, being truly human, becoming transformed, responsible obedience, costly discipleship, living for others - for Bonhoeffer all of these ideas are fundamentally social. Personal transformation inevitably has an individual character and is appropriated in personal ways, but it is inextricably tied to responsible, ethical living for others. Bonhoeffer is not denying the importance of personal relationship with God, but he does not want to limit the understanding of 'personal' to only mean individuals;

\*\*\*\*\*

[21] SCH:331-332

it also means the corporate person, the community. It is in this social context that personal transformation involves the shift from what Thomas Day calls 'egocentricity' to 'eccentricity.' [22]

The Interdependence of the Knowledge of God, Self and the Community of Faith

Early in *Sanctorum Communio* Bonhoeffer wrote that "the concepts of person, community and God have an essential and indissoluble relation to one another". [23] Much as Calvin began his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* wrestling with the inseparable questions of the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self, Bonhoeffer added ecclesiology and recognised the inseparable nature of our knowledge in each area.

In understanding the meaning of person and community, we shall also have said something decisive about the concept of God. ... It is in relation to persons and personal community that the concept of God is formed". [24]

Within a Christian framework one cannot begin to understand any one concept without at the same time asking questions and seeking understanding about the other two. Our understanding of each concept informs and is dependent on the others.

Sociality is at the heart of epistemology for Bonhoeffer; we could say it was his epistemological base. He was attempting to shift theology from dealing primarily with post-Kantian epistemological issues with their corresponding impersonal, subject-object categories to personal, I-Thou ethical relationships, a social category which emphasised relationships and ethical interdependence over reason and individualism. Bonhoeffer was not minimising the transcendence of God, as his support for Barth alone would indicate, but, as will be developed later, he wanted to ground revelation concretely in the church, in "Christ existing as the church" (*Christus als*

\*\*\*\*\*

[22] Day, 1982:13

[23] SC:22

[24] SC:22

Gemeinde existierend).[25]

The Social-Ethical-Historical Nature of Being Human - Bonhoeffer's Theological Anthropology

Chapter 2 is the cornerstone of *Sanctorum Communio*; it is here that Bonhoeffer develops his Christian understanding of the person with his emphasis on the relational and corporate nature of being. It is a profoundly communal and ethical orientation which conceptualizes the reality of the interdependence of humanity, but especially the unique community of the church in which Jesus Christ is present. But before discussing Bonhoeffer's anthropology it is instructive to outline some of the critical points of tension in the area of theological anthropology to which he was responding.

Wolfhart Pannenberg says all modern theologians must begin with anthropological questions [26] which reflects part of the philosophical and epistemological concerns of modernity which can be traced back to Kant. David Kelsey frames some of the key questions regarding anthropology that need to be addressed by theology:

What is it about finite persons that makes it possible for them to know the infinite God? And what is it about persons that makes it possible for them, while remaining persons, to undergo so profound a "fall" that it requires the sort of "redemption" to which the church witnesses? The convictions about personhood that modern consciousness brings present these theologians with this challenge: How can one affirm the autonomy, historicity, and self-constitutingness of persons as subjects and still affirm not only that they know and are redeemed by God, but that in this they are radically dependent on God?.[27]

Classically, the formulation of theological anthropology since Augustine was based on Genesis 1-3, borrowing Greek philosophical tools,

\*\*\*\*\*

[25] SC:85; For a more thorough discussion of this term see footnote 73 in chapter 1 as well as the discussion on page 28 in this thesis.

[26] Pannenburg, W. *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 1985:16.

[27] Kelsey, D. "Human Being" in Hodgson, P.C. & King, R.H. (Eds.) *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, 1985:182.

and emphasised "1.) a picture of the place ... human nature has in the unchanging structure of the cosmos God created and (2) a picture of humankind's unique capacity for communion with God - what has traditionally been called the *imago dei* (image of God)".[28] However, it was reason which was equated with human nature and not the more wholistic Hebraic understanding.[29] Moving to the modern period, Friedrich Schleiermacher was the first truly modern theologian who grappled with the post-Kantian turn of the question from that of 'human nature' into the question of 'subjectivity'; for Schleiermacher the 'religious a priori' safeguarded the objectivity of revelation.

Albrecht Ritschl, Ernst Troeltsch and Adolph von Harnack, who also believed in religious experience, although in different ways, were instrumental in the rise of an historicism within liberal Protestantism which denied metaphysical presuppositions and searched for answers about the nature of God and humans in the 'objective' science of history, resulting in a theological anthropology which ultimately attempted to determine the revelation of God. Barth, in reaction, sought to free faith in Christ from being dependent on the contingencies of historical-critical research.[30] His anthropology followed Anselm - God 'breaks in' to humanity from the outside and faith is the human response, theology being the process of human reason trying to understand God's revelation. Following the ontological philosophical tradition, Lutheran orthodoxy sought to protect revelation in the form of doctrine, and Catholicism attempted to do so in the institution of the church, grounding being in the *analogia entis*.

\*\*\*\*\*

[28] Kelsey, 1985:168

[29] Johnson, A.R. *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel*, 1949.

[30] See e.g., Barth, K. *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, 1957.



In terms of anthropology, Bonhoeffer assessed these developments in theology as a clash between the theological understanding of human existence based on two great philosophical traditions, the transcendental and the ontological,[31] and he responded by writing *Act and Being*. But the roots of his anthropology and his theology of sociality were first developed in *Sanctorum Communio*.

Bonhoeffer understood the individual concept of the person as "ultimate and willed by God".[32] The core problem Bonhoeffer wanted to address was "basic ontic relations of social existence... the metaphysic of sociality".[33] Bonhoeffer is concerned with the roots of being, the ontic nature of humanity, and he sees human existence as grounded in the social reality of a community and in relationships with others.

One can discern Bonhoeffer's concern with sociality and the social nature of being in his critique of sociology's understanding of the person. Bonhoeffer accused the sociologists of being too individualistic and atomistic because they ultimately understood individuals dualistically, with an inner unchangeable, personal core and an outer social sphere which could only be transformed in relationships with others. This resulted in "a multitude of I-centres" [34] in society whose very essence was extrinsic from relationships to others. One of the key problems this presented was that individual personalities were separated from and opposed to sociality. There remained a false dichotomy of each person being a unique, isolated individual on the one hand (a problem within liberal theology), or losing touch with their uniqueness by being 'absorbed' into a group on the other hand (a problem in the Catholic Church). Bonhoeffer saw a direct relation between the individual and sociality and for him the whole being of each

\*\*\*\*\*

[31] AB:11

[32] SC:28

[33] SC:26

[34] SC:18

person was fundamentally social.[35]

Again, the centrality of sociality is evident in his critique of various philosophical understandings of anthropology and social relations,[36] where Bonhoeffer stated that he was attempting to "establish a Christian philosophy" to give direction to a "Christian social philosophy" in an attempt to overcome "the idealist philosophy of immanence [immanent Geist]".[37] According to Day, Bonhoeffer had assessed the various influential philosophical traditions conceptualizing the individual as "either swallowed up into an apersonal whole or subordinated to some superpersonal concept of community or state".[38]

Bonhoeffer was particularly critical of the social philosophy of German idealism, rooted in Kant's dominant epistemological concept of the person as the perceiving I. For German idealism the essence of the person was in the dialectical process of ethical reasoning. But specifically here Bonhoeffer was critical; the epistemological emphasis prevented idealism from real encounter with the ethical barrier of the 'other'. In essence idealism 'overcame' the problem of the other in a kind of intellectual synthesis, by making the other an 'object of knowledge' which avoided the possibility of the real existence of alien subjects. "All idealist ways of knowledge are contained within the sphere of the personal mind, and the way to the Transcendent is the way to the object of knowledge, to grasp which I bear within me the forms of mind: thus the object remains an object, and never becomes a subject, an 'alien' I".[39]

Besides the limits of the *epistemological* emphasis in the subject-

\*\*\*\*\*  
[35] SC:35

[36] SC:22-25; The primary comparison is of four major philosophical positions - Aristotelean, Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Descartes.

[37] SC:27-28

[38] Day, 1982:12

[39] SC:28

object relationship, Bonhoeffer also declared that various forms of German idealism (specifically Hegel, Fichte, Kant, and Schleiermacher) represented a philosophy of 'immanent Geist" in which they understood the person as an instance of universal reason. Both of these limits prevented idealism from giving essential value to the individual person and from fully understanding human community.[40] In dealing with the question of transcendence Bonhoeffer wanted to move philosophy away from the limits of epistemological categories to what he saw as the more constructive and realistic potential of the social realm. Only in this way could an appropriate philosophical understanding of the ultimacy of the person and the otherness of God be obtained.

In his very critique of idealistic social philosophy, however, Bonhoeffer demonstrated his philosophical commitments to a tradition concerned with human social experience - with Hegel's "fundamental socializing of all the concepts for dealing with human experience" in his attempt to overcome the individualism and social atomism of the Enlightenment;[41] and with Seeberg who explicitly used the concept of sociality in his theology.[42]

According to Bonhoeffer,

The Christian concept of the person may now be defined as constitutive of and presupposed in the concept of Christian community; that is, in theological terms, the concept of the person as found in primal man, but in man after the Fall, and that means, not in man living in unbroken communion with God and his fellow-men, but in man who knows good and evil.[43]

Bonhoeffer challenged idealism here because, as already mentioned, it had evaded any possibility of real encounter with the 'other' by appealing to

\*\*\*\*\*

[40] SC:26-28

[41] Randall, J.H. *The Career of Philosophy*, vol.II, 1965:315.

[42] SCH:57

[43] SC:28

an intellectual epistemological-transcendental sphere, an individualistic strategy which avoided the social sphere. When Kant said "the ought implies the can" [44] he had a very high view of both reason and the ethical ability of individuals. Implicit in Bonhoeffer's Christian concept of the person stated above is the critique of idealist philosophy for failing to account adequately for human sin and for broken relationships with others. The real barrier, that is, the 'other', remained unacknowledged by idealism.

The vehicle Bonhoeffer used to express the social nature of the person was Eberhard Griesbach's newly popular "I-Thou" terminology. It provided both the concreteness and relational dimension necessary for his new approach. Bonhoeffer's Christian understanding of the person was rooted in the concrete encounter of an ethical barrier in the 'other', in a 'thou'. For Bonhoeffer "the individual exists only through the 'other.' The individual is not solitary".[45] Of course Bonhoeffer was not negating the reality of autonomous individuals' being and willing. The main point he was making was that people are relational and social - they are not *fully* human or 'whole people' except in relation to others. For Bonhoeffer, "to abstract a person from his concrete social relationships is to remove him from being a person".[46] In its *ethical* dimension this means that a person does not exist apart from responsible action in response to an encounter with an 'other'. Being is primarily a socio-ethical phenomenon rooted in concrete historical relationships.

It is a Christian recognition that the person, as a conscious person, is created in the moment when a man is moved, when he is faced with responsibility, when he is passionately involved in a moral struggle, and confronted by a claim that overwhelms him. Concrete personal being arises from the concrete situation.[47]

\*\*\*\*\*

[44] Kant, E. *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 1960:40-41.

[45] SC:32

[46] Day, 1982:13

[47] SC:31

In choosing a socio-ethical, historical approach for theology which focused on the "world of persons, communities, historical decisions, and ethical relationships" [48] Bonhoeffer placed the concept of ethical will in a fundamentally important role. The voluntarism of Seeberg and Dilthey were influential in this development.[49]

Day makes a helpful distinction between 'egocentricity' and 'eccentricity' which differentiates choosing to be 'for ourselves' (egocentric) and choosing to be 'for others' (eccentric).[50] For an egocentric person the 'other' never becomes an ethical barrier that challenges; the person may seek to 'know' or recognise the 'other', but limits the relationship to the individual's own egocentric purposes. Eccentricity describes "the personal uniqueness of people who are for each other in community and in community for others. Egocentric individuals negate their own personality by failing to acknowledge others, while people who believe in others make up eccentric communities".[51]

What is the theological basis for this historical, socio-ethical anthropology which has the I-Thou relation as the "social basic-relation"?[52].

For Christian philosophy the human person comes into being only in relation to the divine person which transcends it, opposing and subjugating it. The autonomy of the mind, in the idealist individualist sense, is unchristian, since it involves the human mind being filled with absolute value, which can only be ascribed to the divine mind. The Christian person arises solely from the absolute distinction between God and man; only from the experience of the barrier does the self-knowledge of the moral person arise. The more clearly the barrier is recognised, the more deeply the person enters into responsibility.[53]

\*\*\*\*\*

[48] Green, SCH:60            [49] SCH:91-92, note 24

[50] Day, 1982:13            [51] Day, 1982:13-14

[52] SC:36; See SCH:93, note 35 on translation problems with this term.

[53] SC:31

The transcendence and 'otherness' of God affirmed by Barth and the dialectical theologians is shared by Bonhoeffer, but his concept of transcendence maintains a distinct, concrete historical-social-ethical dimension.[54] It is in the human 'other' that we encounter the divine 'Other'. Transcendence is interpreted by Bonhoeffer in terms of sociality.

No man can of himself make the other into an I, into a moral person conscious of responsibility. God, or the Holy Spirit, comes to the concrete Thou, only by his action does the other become a Thou for me, from which my I arises. In other words, every human Thou is an image of the divine Thou.[55]

To sum up: the person in his concrete life, wholeness and uniqueness, is willed by God as the ultimate unity. Social relations must therefore be understood as built up interpersonally upon the uniqueness and separateness of persons. The basic social category is the I-Thou relation. The Thou of the other man is the divine Thou. So the way to the other man is also the way to the divine Thou, a way of recognition or rejection. In the 'moment' the individual again and again becomes a person through the 'other'. The other man presents us with the same problem of cognition as does God himself. My real relation to the other man is oriented on my relation to God. But since I first know God's 'I' in the revelation of his love, so too with the other man: here the concept of the church finds its place. Then it will become clear that the Christian person achieves his true nature when God does not confront him as Thou, but 'enters into' him as I.[56]

After beginning by setting out the concept of the person as *relational*, with the individual in relation to others in the social sphere, Bonhoeffer then moves to the concept of the collective person and talks about *corporate* dimensions of the social sphere. In the first instance (that is, individual) Bonhoeffer was influenced by the I-Thou relation used by Griesbach, but this was limited to relations between individuals. Based on Hegel's individual and corporate understanding of Geist, which Bonhoeffer had reinterpreted in terms of 'person', Bonhoeffer transformed the I-Thou concept from an individualistic one to include corporate human communities and the relation of individuals to them. "We maintain that the community can be understood as a collective person, with the same structure

\*\*\*\*\*

[54] SCH:65

[55] SC:36

[56] SC:36

as the individual person".[57] Rather than appropriating Geist in the way Hegel did, Bonhoeffer used the concept of person

... to achieve his goal of establishing a Christian social philosophy in place of the idealist philosophy of immanent Geist ... by setting the latter *within* the Christian understanding of the human person. Person ... is used to interpret Geist, not vice versa.[58]

The sociologist Peter Berger considers Bonhoeffer's development of the concept 'collective person' dubious.[59] It certainly reflects Bonhoeffer's philosophical clinging to the neo-Hegelian concept of Geist. Methodologically the concept is dangerous because it can actually serve to minimize ethical responsibility from individuals when the collective person (for example, Nazi state, Afrikaner nationalism, U.S. civil religion) takes on an ethical character of its own and makes absolute demands of people. It can serve to give ethical imperatives to institutions at the expense of individual responsibility. On an ideological level this uncritical use of Geist and collective person reinforces the conservatism of the status quo.

Sociality remains the foundation of Bonhoeffer's anthropology throughout his life but we find some new developments in *Creation and Fall*, for example, the emphasis on human freedom being rooted in God's freedom for us and the *imago dei* as *analogia relationis*. In *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer was critical of the early Barth's christological emphasis on God's freedom because he thought it failed to take the incarnation seriously.[60] According to Bonhoeffer God is free for us.[61] While this is primarily a christological issue it impinges on anthropology, our concern here. For Bonhoeffer freedom originates from God and it is fundamentally a social and ethical concept. We are not free in isolation,

\*\*\*\*\*

[57] SC:50

[58] SCH:61

[59] Berger, P. "The Social Character of the Question Concerning Jesus Christ" in Marty, M. *The Place of Bonhoeffer*, 1962:61-63.

[60] AB:85-91

[61] AB:90

but freedom is to be used for others. "In the language of the Bible, freedom is not something man has for himself but something he has for others. ... freedom is not a quality which can be revealed - it is not a possession, a presence, an object, nor is it a form for existence - but a relationship and nothing else".[62] This socio-ethical theme of human freedom being rooted in God's freedom for us Bonhoeffer sees as being at the heart of the gospel message.

... it is the message of the gospel that God's freedom has bound us to itself, that his free grace only becomes real in this relation to us, and that God does not will to be free for himself but for man. God in Christ is free for man. Because he does not retain his freedom for himself the concept of freedom only exists for us as 'being free for'. For us who live in the middle through Christ and know our humanity in his resurrection, that God is free has no meaning except that we are free for God. The freedom of the Creator is proved by the fact that he allows us to be free for him, and that means nothing except that he creates his image on earth. The paradox of created freedom cannot be eliminated. Indeed it must be made as obvious as possible. Here created freedom means - and it is this that goes beyond all previous deeds of God, the unique *par excellence* - that God himself enters into his creation.

Man is free by the fact that creature is related to creature. Man is free for man, *Male and female he created them*. Man is not alone, he is in duality and it is in this dependence on the other that his creatureliness consists.[63]

This relational understanding of freedom leads to Bonhoeffer's reinterpretation of the *imago dei* from Genesis 1:26f in a similar way - it is not an attribute or possession of humankind but a particular relationship given by God.

The likeness, the analogy of man to God, is not *analogia entis* but *analogia relationis*. This means that even the relation between man and God is not part of man; it is not a capacity, a possibility, or a structure of his being but a given, set relationship: *justitia passiva*. And in this given relation freedom is given. From this it follows secondly, that this analogy must not be understood as though man in some way had this likeness in his possession, at his disposal. The analogy, the likeness must be understood strictly as follows: the likeness has its likeness *only* from the original. It always refers us only to the original, and is 'like' *only* in this way. *Analogia relationis* is therefore the relation given by God himself and is

\*\*\*\*\*

[62] CF:35

[63] CF:35-36



analogy only in this relation given by God. The relation of creature with creature is a God-given relation because it exists in freedom and freedom originates from God.[64]

With this interpretation Bonhoeffer is consciously moving away from two elements of classical theological tradition - natural theology which exalted human reason as a sphere which distinguished humans from the rest of creation, and the individualism which resulted from emphasising human reason itself as the 'image of God'.[65] He also clearly rejects the analogy of being, *analogia entis*, as having too much of a static quality tied to existence and being, and which fails to account adequately for the social dimension of existence, of a person "being over against the other; with the other and dependent upon the other".[66] The *imago dei* ultimately has its fullest expression in *analogia relationis*, a concept Barth would later borrow to develop his theological anthropology.[67] According to Bonhoeffer God has chosen to express his freedom in relation to humankind. Humanity, therefore, is the image and likeness of God in being in a relationship of freedom - being free for God and free for others. Had Bonhoeffer ever developed a doctrine of the Trinity he could have found rich relational resources in the *analogia relationis* complementary to his theology of sociality.

This draws to a close the discussion on Bonhoeffer's anthropology in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Creation and Fall*. We have not discussed concerns raised by Green [68] and David Hopper [69] about biographical issues related to ego strength and weakness which affected Bonhoeffer's anthropology. Our concern has been to give a more descriptive and positive

\*\*\*\*\*

[64] CF:37

[65] SCH:238-239; 285, note 14

[66] CF:36

[67] Church Dogmatics III/1, p.194f

[68] SCH:194-200

[69] Hopper, D. A *Dissent on Bonhoeffer*, 1975:141-142.

appraisal of Bonhoeffer's anthropology as it affects his understanding of sociality. Our argument is that Bonhoeffer's social-ethical-historical understanding of person can be used in liberating ways. While not denying Bonhoeffer's patriarchalism and ideologically conservative methodology, he attempted to shift theological anthropology in several liberating directions: 1.) from the dominance of reason to a more wholistic understanding of person; 2.) from individualism to ethical interdependence; 3.) from individualism to the social/relational nature of being; 4.) from individualism to the need to make concrete ethical commitments to others in history; and 5.) from epistemological concerns to the need to make faith commitments.

#### The Concreteness of Revelation in the Church

'Christ existing as the community' is the often-quoted line from *Sanctorum Communio* which alludes to Bonhoeffer's desire in the book to ground revelation in the concrete reality of the church. He saw the new dialectical theology's concept of revelation as still too transcendent and unreachable. 'Potentiality' and faith itself became more important than the historical church brought into existence by the Word of God. "If ... we sought ... to understand revelation only as a beginning (potentiality) and not as at the same time consummation (reality), we should be depriving God's revelation of its decisive quality: the fact that his Word has become history.[70] Berger suggests that although Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology was traditionally Lutheran, he was responding to a degeneration within Lutheranism which posited an 'invisible church' as those who respond to the Word and the sacraments rightly administered, and thus are only known by God.[71] Bonhoeffer emphasized the church itself as the concrete locus of

\*\*\*\*\*

[70] SC:104

[71] Berger, 1962:65-74

God's revelation in Jesus Christ. "... God established the reality of the church, of humanity pardoned in Jesus Christ. Not religion, but revelation, not a religious community, but the church: that is what the reality of Jesus Christ means".[72]

It would be helpful to clarify what Bonhoeffer means by 'Christ existing as the *community (Gemeinde)*. *Gemeinde* is probably best understood as 'congregation', but 'congregation' "not as an entity in itself, but a community of persons representative of the new humanity established in and through Jesus Christ".[73] Bonhoeffer's use of words such as 'reality' and 'concreteness' can be confusing; he is operating on a conceptual level, a meta-level, as opposed to an empirical level. While he is concerned about concrete, empirical communities, the purpose of *Sanctorum Communio* is more conceptual and provides a philosophical basis for understanding the church. So Bonhoeffer can talk about the reality of revelation in the church, the *sanctorum communio*, but still fully recognise the reality of the *peccatorum communio*. Bonhoeffer is certainly not equating the church and Christ as some critics have suggested.[74] Ultimately he is attempting to find a concrete ground for revelation, his choice being the reality of the historical church where God chooses to be *for us*, in relationship with the *sanctorum communio*. Bonhoeffer's understanding of sociality is central to God's choice to covenant with humanity and be *for us*.

Both Day and Berger have accused Bonhoeffer of theological imperialism for, crudely speaking, taking his social philosophy, calling it Christian,

\*\*\*\*\*

[72] SC:111-112

[73] de Gruchy in WTJC:73; see also the note in WTJC:6 where de Gruchy suggests translating *Gemeinde* as congregation, understood not as an institution but as a 'community of persons', the translation which is followed in this thesis. See also SCH:101, note 95 and Day, 1982:16-17.

[74] DB:60

and then imposing it onto theological concepts.[75] It must be admitted that Bonhoeffer's programme in *Sanctorum Communio* is a bit clumsy and tends to confuse the conceptual level (his intention) with the historical church. This could be partially explained by his choice of sociological dialogue partners, which Berger says provided him with limited tools and methodological problems.[76] He undoubtedly failed to critically engage some of the leading sociological voices of his day, Troeltsch, Durkheim, and Weber, or the work of Marx, a limit Bethge suggests was due in part to the short time (18 months) in which the dissertation was completed.[77]

Bonhoeffer's view of the church at this point is very optimistic. By the late 1930's his view of the church became more realistic, for example, when he became disillusioned with the Confessing Church and accused it of being more interested in self-preservation than in the truth and serving others.[78]

*Creation and Fall* has a greater eschatological emphasis than *Sanctorum Communio*, but it is a Christocentric eschatology.

The church of Holy Scripture - and there is no other 'Church' - lives from the end. Therefore it reads all Holy Scripture as the book of the end, of the new, of Christ. What does Holy Scripture, upon which the Church of Christ is grounded, have to say of the creation and the beginning except that only from Christ can we know what the beginning is"?[79]

Bonhoeffer's overt Christological interpretation of the Old Testament,

\*\*\*\*\*

[75] Berger, 1962:60; Day, 1982:21

[76] Berger, 1962:58-59; Bonhoeffer chose the formalistic/systematic school of sociology (Georg Simmel, Ferdinand Toennies, Alfred Vierkandt, Theodor Litt) which emphasised phenomenological method, meaning 'the grasp of the essential elements to be found in any empirical data about society'. This school viewed sociology as a systematic discipline as opposed to an historical one. Bonhoeffer rejected the morphological/descriptive school (Durkheim and Weber) which emphasised empirical and historical sociology, and was later to become the predominant school.

[77] DB:58; SCH:60

[78] E:113-116; LPP:300; DB:590; 501-524

[79] CF:8

rather than being anti-Semitic or possessive, is better described as being a source for identification with the oppressed. His development of the concept of the 'orders of preservation' in *Creation and Fall* was an attempt to counter the abuses of the doctrine of the 'orders of creation' by the supporters of the anti-Semitic Nazi state.

Ecclesiology clearly dominated Bonhoeffer's early theology with Christology gaining centrality in the latter part of the early period. Bethge provides a helpful summary of the utility of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology at this stage in his life (after *Sanctorum Communio*).

For all its immaturity, ambiguous or mistakenly adopted concepts, this preliminary organization of his ideas served him as a bulwark against metaphysical speculation and transcendental volatilization of the idea of God. God, though distant, was close and concrete encounter with one's fellows, faith was tying oneself in the community, living a human life was possible through fellowship. ...

... But the place in which revelation manifested itself in preaching, praise, prayer, or service to one's fellows held him by its persisting greatness, even interpreted sociologically.[80]

#### The Vicarious Action of Jesus Christ to Restore the Broken Community of Humanity

To properly understand reality, the nature of human existence and the nature of the church, we must understand the reality of redemption through the vicarious action of Jesus Christ. For Bonhoeffer Jesus was the ground of reality. Revelation was not an event, but a person, Jesus Christ. This theme runs through all of Bonhoeffer's work and received particular attention again in the *Ethics*.

In chapter three of *Sanctorum Communio* Bonhoeffer wrote about the 'Primal State and the Problem of Community' which described a social understanding of the original unbroken community from a post-Fall perspective. After the Fall humanity lost immediate communion with God and

\*\*\*\*\*

[80] DB:60

therefore immediate social community.[81] One of the main points Bonhoeffer was trying to make was that sociality "belong[s] to man's original nature" which meant that "divine and human community are in some way part of the original moral and spiritual life of man, and that means, part also of his future life, in accordance with the parallel between Adam and Christ, the primal state and the last things".[82] The challenge this presented to the church was one of ongoing renewal to this original potentiality. "It is of [the church's] essence that it still bears within itself the community of sin and is real only by the constant overcoming of this community of sin".[83]

In the next chapter, 'Sin and the Broken Community', Bonhoeffer developed the idea of individual sin having a corporate nature. "The guilt of the individual and the universality of sin should be conceived of together. The individual's guilty act and the guilt of the race must be joined in our thinking".[84] Sin resulted in broken human community through the individual will asserting itself over the will of the other person or the community. And then with the concept of the 'collective person' (*Kollektivperson*) Bonhoeffer was able to equate all of humanity with Adam, with the collective sinfulness of the *peccatorum communio* represented by Adam's sin. Jesus was the second Adam, the *Kollektivperson* of the new humanity. For Bonhoeffer he was also the *Stellvertreter*, the vicarious representative; "... in Christ humanity is placed - and this is the very essence of real vicarious action - once and for all in communion with God".[85] The new humanity, the *sanctorum communio* becomes a reality in the person of Christ; Christ existing as the community of persons.

\*\*\*\*\*

[81] SC:45

[82] SC:42-43

[83] SC:38-39

[84] SC:78

[85] SC:107

... the principle of vicarious action can become fundamental for the church of God in and through Christ. Not 'solidarity', which is never possible between Christ and man, but vicarious action, is the life-principle of the new mankind. I know, certainly, that I am in a state of solidarity with the other man's guilt, but my dealings with him take place on the basis of the life-principle of vicarious action.[86]

It is important to note that this concept of 'vicarious action' played an important role throughout Bonhoeffer's theology. Persons were not just reconciled with God through the Mediator, Jesus Christ, they were also reconciled to the rest of the new humanity.

The thread between God and man which the first Adam severed is joined anew by God, by his revealing his love in Christ. ... when the primal communion with God was rent asunder, human community was rent too, so likewise when God restores the communion of mankind with himself, the community of men with each other is also re-established, in accordance with our proposition about the essential connection between man's communion with God and with his fellow-man.[87]

Besides the vicarious action of Jesus, one of the other keys to the shift between the *peccatorum communio* to the *sanctorum communio* was an awareness of God's claim on our lives and the need for repentance. "The transformation of mankind into a new community is possible only if men are aware of the deficiency of the old".[88] Earlier in *Sanctorum Communio* Bonhoeffer had rejected the classical understanding of original sin based on sexuality, or Augustine's notion of concupiscence, basing it instead on his notion of sociality and the broken community due to sin. This is reminiscent of Jerome Theisen's recent reinterpretation of the doctrine of original sin which sees 'disunity' as symbol of sin and 'community' as a symbol of grace.[89]

*Creation and Fall*, while primarily a Christological interpretation of

\*\*\*\*\*

[86] SC:107

[87] SC:106

[88] SC:109

[89] Theisen, J.P., *O.S.B. Community and Disunity: Symbols of Grace and Sin*, Collegeville, Minnesota: St. John's University Press, 1985.

creation,[90] also discussed the themes of sin, broken community, and Jesus' redemptive work. The book provided a more accessible presentation of Bonhoeffer's earlier theology of sociality. Bonhoeffer interpreted the story of the Fall as an unfolding drama of the human desire to transcend the boundary of finite existence and the ethical demand of the 'other', whether that 'other' be God, fellow human being, or nature. The story was about a power struggle fought over Adam and Eve's understanding of creatureliness and divinity, with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil at the heart of the battle. In choosing to eat of the fruit of the tree, Adam and Eve gained power, knowledge, and autonomy from God, but instead of real divinity they gained a false divinity, a pseudo-divinity, a being *sicut deus*. The new knowledge was that of alienation from God, from others and from nature, which created a serious dilemma.

God against man-like-God. God and *imago dei* man against God and *sicut deus* man. *Imago dei* - Godlike man in his existence for God and neighbour, in his primitive creatureliness and limitation; *sicut deus* - Godlike man in his out-of-himself knowledge of good and evil, in his limitlessness and his acting out-of-himself, in his underived existence, in his loneliness. *Imago dei* - that is, man bound to the Word of the Creator and living from him; *sicut deus* - that is, man bound to the depths of his own knowledge about God, in good and evil; *imago dei* - the creature living in the unity of obedience; *sicut deus* - the creator-man living out of the division of good and evil. *Imago dei, sicut deis, agnus dei*, - the One who was sacrificed for man *sicut deus*, killing man's false divinity in true divinity, the God-Man who restores the image of God.[91]

Bonhoeffer then went on to assert that the fallen creation was accepted by God, but preserved now by Christ. In making 'garments of skins' (Gen. 3:21) for Adam and Eve, the Creator had become the Preserver.

\*\*\*\*\*

[90] SCH:236-237; Although the interpretation of creation in CF is Christological, it is based on the resurrection - a sign of "the ultimate revelation of God's living freedom" - rather than the incarnation, to which Bonhoeffer shifts in the Christology of *The Cost of Discipleship*.

[91] CF:71-72



All the orders of our fallen world are God's orders of preservation on the way to Christ. They are not orders of creation but preservation. They have no value in themselves. They are accomplished and have purpose only through Christ. God's new action towards man is that he preserves him in his fallen world, in his fallen orders, on the way to death, approaching the resurrection, the new creation, on the way to Christ.[92]

The broken and sinful community of humanity, the *peccatorum communio*, ultimately finds its redemption, its restoration with God, humanity and nature, its very transformation into the *sanctorum communio*, through the vicarious action of Jesus Christ the Mediator.

### Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explore the relationship between personal transformation and community implicit in Bonhoeffer's theology of sociality. By developing such an explicitly relational and ethical anthropology Bonhoeffer helps us to understand how others, and specifically in this case the community as 'other', make ethical demands which can impact personal transformation.

Bonhoeffer's concept of sociality understood personal being as having a corporate nature, an idea captured in the Xhosa saying 'Umntu ngu umntu nga bantu' (a person is a person through other persons) or the Sotho-Tswana saying 'Motho ke motho ka batho' (our humanity finds fulfilment only in community with others). During the original conference held on Black theology in South Africa Bonganjalo Goba compared 'corporate personality' in the Old Testament and in African tradition. He said,

What we discover in the concept as it manifests itself in Israel and Africa is the unique idea of solidarity, a social consciousness that rejects and transcends individualism. Apart from this, one discovers a unique sense of dynamic community, a caring concern that seeks to embrace all, a love that suffers selflessly for others.[93]

\*\*\*\*\*

[92] CF:91

[93] Goba, B. "Corporate Personality: Ancient Israel and Africa" in Moore, B. (Ed.) *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, 1974.

It is this transcendence of individualism, which is a rejection of egocentrism, and choosing instead to stand in solidarity with the community, that allows the community to affect personal transformation. For Bonhoeffer personal transformation begins with the surrender of the will and results in the creation of a new community.

The Christian community of love means that men should surrender themselves completely to each other, in obedience to God's will. ... Thus it is precisely in several persons' complete surrender to each other that their new person becomes real and there arises a 'community of new persons'. [94]

According to Bonhoeffer the *sanctorum communio*, the community of faith, consists of the broken, sinful humanity 'in Adam' now redeemed to be the new humanity 'in Christ'. To fulfill the vision for the church 'in Christ' to be a true community requires removing our tunnel-vision and embracing the reality that the church transcends nation, class, race and gender. Bonhoeffer challenges us to meet the ethical demand of the 'other' by standing in solidarity with the global community of the church, especially those who suffer and are oppressed.

Indeed, salvation itself is a socio-ethical-historical concept and is closely linked to this solidarity with the oppressed. Gustavo Gutierrez, quoting from the 'Working Draft of the Medellin Conference', captures the relational and ethical dimensions of Bonhoeffer's theology of sociality when he writes,

Salvation - the communion of men with God and the communion of men among themselves - is something which embraces all human reality, transforms it, and leads it to its fullness in Christ: "Thus the center of God's salvific design is Jesus Christ, who by his death and resurrection transforms the universe and makes it possible for man to reach fulfillment as a human being. This fulfillment embraces every aspect of humanity: body and spirit, individual and society, person and cosmos, time and eternity. Christ, the image of the Father and the perfect God-Man, takes on all the dimensions of human existence". [95]

\*\*\*\*\*

[94] SC:125

[95] Gutierrez, G. *A Theology of Liberation*, 1973:151-152.

## CHAPTER 2: REFLECTIONS ON LIFE IN COMMUNITY:

### DISCIPLESHIP AND COMMUNITY IN *The Cost of Discipleship* AND *Life Together*

#### Introduction

This chapter will explore the concepts of discipleship and community in the second period of Bonhoeffer's actions and thought, called by Bethge 'Concentration: the Narrow Pass for Christianity'. [1] During this period Bonhoeffer himself experienced a personal transformation, became a disciple, and began living a life 'for others'. It is argued in what follows that, for Bonhoeffer, living a 'transformed' life, one on the 'narrow pass', meant living a life of radical, obedient discipleship under the exclusive Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is also argued that this type of discipleship required both challenge and support from a community of faith - the challenge of hearing the Word, confrontation, dialogue, debate, and together facing squarely the socio-political questions of the day; and the nurture and support of fellowship, prayer, worship, confession of sins, and general life together in community. At this stage of Bonhoeffer's life 'costly discipleship' meant giving up the desirable choice of being an academic for the importance of serving the community via the church struggle, and he became immersed in the struggle for peace and justice through ecumenical work and the Confessing Church. [2]

*The Cost of Discipleship* (*Nachfolge*, 1937) and *Life Together* (*Gemeinsames Leben*, 1939) are two of Bonhoeffer's most widely read and

\*\*\*\*\*

[1] Bethge, E. "The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life and Theology", in The Chicago Theological Seminary Register, Feb. 1961, v.LI, no. 2:1.

[2] DB:165; DB:192 Bonhoeffer's independent nature and strong ego had been directly challenged when the 'theologian became a Christian' (DB:153-156). By 1933 "... it was becoming increasingly clear that academic discussion must give way to action and that it was imperative to relinquish the shelter and privilege of the academic rostrum as well as 'the protected rights and duties of the ministry' if strength of weakness was to be authenticated.

But that turning-point also meant that personal initiative was under constant threat of restraint - a sore trial for a man for whom independent decision was a necessity."

popular works. *The Cost of Discipleship* was published in 1937 (ET in 1938) but it was the culmination of ideas and themes that stemmed from as far back as his first U.S. experience in 1931-32.[3] It contains a combination of lectures, exegetical studies and expositions on the Sermon on the Mount which Bonhoeffer delivered to the students at the Finkenwalde Preacher's Seminary. The major theme of the book is to distinguish between cheap and costly grace in an effort to, in one commentator's words, "counter the Lutheran tendency to separate justification by faith from costly discipleship both in theology and practice".[4] *Life Together* was published in 1939. Not really an actual account of community life, it is more Bonhoeffer's reflections on the experiment and experience of community living with the Finkewalde students and 'brethren.' In it Bonhoeffer emphasizes the centrality of Jesus Christ to true Christian community and he stresses life under the Word (worship, study of and meditation on Scripture, eucharist, confession of sins, etc.) as means of mutual support and finding strength to be of service to others.

#### Context from which *The Cost of Discipleship* emerged

Several important contextual factors lie behind the writing of *The Cost of Discipleship*, but as Bethge has conclusively shown, it is most important to understand that by November 1932 Bonhoeffer had grappled with it's key themes on a personal level, so that the political events of 1933 did not determine the book's content. "Yet 1933 was not without influence on *The Cost of Discipleship*. It undoubtedly made Bonhoeffer realize just what it was he wanted to write about and enabled him to devote himself to it with single-minded intensity".[5] In a lecture on 'Christ and Peace' at

\*\*\*\*\*

[3] WIJC:25, 156; DB:158-159; SCH:226-227, notes 96, 97 & 101.

[4] De Gruchy, WIJC:25 [5] DB:377

the Berlin S.C.M. in November 1932,[6] Bonhoeffer spoke on the themes of 1.) faith being real only in discipleship; 2.) cheap grace; 3.) the relationship between faith and obedience; and 4.) true peace arising only from God. According to Bethge, then, "... *The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together* did not arise out of the circumstances of 1933. *The Cost of Discipleship* arose out of the course of development that Bonhoeffer had been pursuing long before the political upheaval of that year".[7]

First, events related to his U.S. visit in 1931-32 were particularly significant. Prior to leaving for the States Bonhoeffer had been influenced by his good friend, Franz Hildebrandt, to an increasing personal appropriation of the bible.[8] This was one step along the way to Bonhoeffer discovering a new way of reading the bible during his stay in the U.S. As he wrote in 1936 to a girlfriend, "For the first time I discovered the Bible ... I had often preached, I had seen a great deal of the Church, and talked and preached about it - but I had not yet become a Christian".[9] And the Sermon on the Mount had an especially dramatic impact on him. In the same letter he wrote,

... the Bible, and in particular the Sermon on the Mount, freed me from that [turning the doctrine of Jesus Christ into a personal advantage]. Since then everything has changed. I have felt this plainly, and so have other people about me. It was a great liberation. It became clear to me that the life of a servant of Jesus Christ must belong to the Church, and step by step it became plainer to me how far that must go.[10]

All of this led Bonhoeffer to question the conventional Lutheran interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. Obedience to the Sermon became more important than worrying about turning it into a new law. This was the shift from the phraseological to the real. As Bethge tells us,

\*\*\*\*\*

[6] See note 3; also SCH:227, note 101. Green, following Bethge, says November 1932 is the best reconstruction possible.

[7] DB:375-378; DB:158-159; LPP:369; see note 3 [8] DB:101f

[9] DB:154 [10] DB:155

In his personal life something occurred during these months that it is hard for us to see clearly, though its effects are plain. He himself would never have called it a conversion. But a change took place in him that led to all that was to follow during this phase of his life - *The Cost of Discipleship*, the experiment in community living at Finkenwalde, his attitude to the ecumenical movement and the church struggle. It marked the beginning of a phase in his life which continued right up to 1939.[11]

Another significant influence during his studies at Union Theological Seminary was the friendship with the French pacifist, Jean Laserre. While it is debatable whether Bonhoeffer ever became a full-fledged pacifist, he undeniably underwent a 'conversion' to, at the very least, being sympathetic with the pacifist position.[12] It has been suggested that Bonhoeffer, rather than making pacifism a principle, became committed to *active peacemaking* at this time and this meant taking on differing strategies depending on his context.[13]

During this phase of his life Bonhoeffer became actively involved in the ecumenical movement and was a strong proponent of peace and disarmament. Of particular note are his speech on "A Theological Basis for the World Alliance" in Czechoslovakia in July 1932 and his sermon "The Church and the Peoples of the World" delivered at Fano, Denmark in August 1934.[14] In the former Bonhoeffer challenged the ecumenical movement to form a more adequate theological basis in order for it to move beyond the shallow passing of resolutions without speaking a concrete Word of God, which in this case he saw as boldly calling the world to embrace peace and

\*\*\*\*\*

[11] DB:130

[12] Bonhoeffer called himself a pacifist on several occasions, but because of his skepticism of 'absolute principles' it remains questionable whether he ever became a 'principled pacifist'. For two differing and thorough treatments of this question see Brown, D. "Bonhoeffer and Pacifism", paper written for the Bonhoeffer Consultation of AAR, 29 Oct. 1976; and Rasmussen, L. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972, especially pages 94-126.

[13] De Gruchy, Seminar on Bonhoeffer on 26 September 1990.

[14] "A Theological Basis for the World Alliance", NRS:157-173; WTJC:98-110; "The Church and the People's of the World", NRS:289-292; WTJC:131-133.

speaking out clearly against re-armament. He proposed a 'theology of forgiveness', which held together justice and truth, as the foundation of international peace. During the latter Bonhoeffer unambiguously called for the church to assert itself in taking responsibility for establishing peace in the world.

Certainly the emphasis on the social gospel in the U.S. and his involvement with people in Harlem had an indelible impact. He struggled to hold together the North American emphasis on social concerns and the German emphasis on systematic theology, but he knew this was a challenge he must address. In terms of reconciling the two, Bethge writes,

The later Bonhoeffer of *The Cost of Discipleship* and the church struggle had not forgotten what he learnt in New York. His stay in America reinforced his basic interests in the concrete reality of the word of God. His problem now was how this concreteness was to be developed, not in opposition to the law which he had made his own, but out of it.[15]

Reinhold Niebuhr saw a transition in Bonhoeffer.

He felt that political questions in which our students were so interested were on the whole irrelevant to the life of a Christian. Shortly after his return to Germany he became very much interested in ethical and political issues and for a time considered going to India to study Gandhi's movement ... Once very unpolitical, he became a very astute political analyst.[16]

While lacking an overt political analysis in *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer is clearly responding to Nazi political and ecclesial policies with a cogent theological critique of the church and a call to single-minded obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord, in direct opposition to Hitler and the claims of his nationalistic programme.[17] Despite the fascist and

\*\*\*\*\*

[15] DB:122; See discussion on page 42 about 'concreteness'.

[16] R. Niebuhr, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol. I, No. 3, 1946, p.3.

[17] Matheson, P. *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, 1981:1; As early as the 1920 Programme of the NSDAP, which Hitler declared unalterable in 1926, Article 24 served as a smokescreen to convince the Catholic and Protestant Churches of the compatibility of the 'positive Christianity' of National Socialism with the Churches. See also Scholder, K *The Churches and the Third Reich*, vol. I, 1987:84-87.

oppressive legislation promulgated by Hitler between February and April 1933 he was able to pacify most Protestant church leaders into thinking that church freedom was safe.[18] The Catholic Church effectively compromised any meaningful resistance to Hitler with the 23 July 1933 Concordat with Rome. Another example of the attitudes Bonhoeffer was attempting to counter were the blatant racism, nationalism and anti-Semitism of the 26 May 1932 'Guiding Principles of the German Christians', a coalition of three right-wing Protestant groupings founded to foster the political aims of the NSDAP.[19]

On a theological level *The Cost of Discipleship* is an unambiguous critique of a one-sided appropriation of the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith which had attempted to equate *belief* in the doctrine (intellectual assent) with justification itself, leaving obedience as an issue of secondary importance.[20] Bonhoeffer's growing concern for the 'concreteness of the word' took expression in several important ways during this period, a few of the major ones being: the positive christology which rejected an abstract idea of God in favor of the *theologia crucis*, the incarnate, crucified and risen Jesus, the humiliated One at the centre of

\*\*\*\*\*

[18] Scholder, 1987:Part Two; DB:197-202; WJJC:125; Within 6 months of taking office Hitler had amassed incredible power. Five of Hitler's initial notorious laws were: 28 February - "Reich President's Edict for the Protection of People and State" (restricting personal freedoms); 21 March - "Treachery Law" (restrictions for people not loyal to Hitler); 24 March - "Enabling Act" or "The Law to Relieve the Need of the People and the State" (gave legislative power to the Nazi government); 7 April - the "Aryan Clause" (anti-Semitic legislation forbidding people of Jewish descent from working in the civil service); and the "Reichstag Fire Edict" (gave police extraordinary powers and made provisions for concentration camps).

[19] Matheson, 1981:4-6

[20] This tendency in Lutheranism continues to the present time. See Berger B. and Berger P.L. "Our Conservatism and Theirs", *Commentary*, Oct. 1986:66. Bonhoeffer is providing a 'modern' corrective for Scholastic and fundamentalist tendencies to absolutise doctrines, in this case the doctrine of justification by faith alone.



existence, history and nature;[21] his pleading with the ecumenical movement to speak a concrete word of peace;[22] the rejection of the Aryan Clause and the challenge to the state in "The Church and the Jewish Question";[23] and the initial work on the Bethel Confession which attempted to 'counter Nazi ideology in the Evangelical Church'.[24] Bonhoeffer had also been searching for a response to the abuse of the 'orders of creation' doctrine. While he had proposed the 'orders of preservation' in *Creation and Fall*, his response in *The Cost of Discipleship* was an exclusive christology and an even stronger eschatology.[25]

And finally, it was not only the power of Nazism that Bonhoeffer was confronting, but as Clifford Green has pointed out, there was also a personal struggle with power; both his own powerful ego as well as a destructive social power like Hitler.[26] Green asserts that during this period (1932-1937) Bonhoeffer vacillated between a power christology and the *theologia crucis* with the former predominant, resulting in an unhealthy ego suppression.[27] In *The Cost of Discipleship* obedience is Bonhoeffer's uncompromising answer to the soteriological and anthropological problem of power. In the final stage of Bonhoeffer's life the theology of the cross becomes dominant and mature ego strength is affirmed, resulting in an affirmation of responsible action and 'existence for others'.

#### Discipleship and Community in *The Cost of Discipleship*

A significant clue to Bonhoeffer's intentions in *Nachfolge* is conveyed

\*\*\*\*\*

[21] *Christology*

[22] See note 14

[23] NRS:221-229

[24] WTJC:21; DB:231-234

[25] DB:375-378; DB:61; See also the eschatology of the 1932 sermon, "Thy Kingdom Come", trans. by Godsey, J. *Preface to Bonhoeffer*, 1965:27-47.

[26] SCH:170-171

[27] SCH:171-200, especially 171 & 194-200

in the English translation of the title; instead of the literal 'Discipleship' we have 'The Cost of Discipleship'. First, Bonhoeffer makes an unequivocal distinction between cheap and costly grace. At its heart this is a reclaiming and reaffirmation of Luther's *sola fide* and *sola gratia*, but in a way that "reassert[s] their validity by restoring to them their concreteness here on earth".[28] Secondly, Bonhoeffer's conception of faith as discipleship, requiring an individual response to the call of Christ, has an unmistakable social character, thus affirming continuity in his theology of sociality. According to Bonhoeffer, "It is impossible to become a new man as a solitary individual. The new man means more than the individual believer after he has been justified and sanctified, it means the Church, the Body of Christ, in fact it means Christ himself".[29]

Thirdly, Bonhoeffer expresses his belief in the power of weakness and sees "discipleship as participation in Christ's sufferings for others, as communion with the Crucified".[30] Green says this theme is subordinated to a power christology, however, the *theologia crucis* does play a central role in *The Cost of Discipleship*. [31] Fourth and finally, Bonhoeffer presents a more eschatological or 'ultimate' view of ethics with his emphasis on the exclusiveness of Christ's lordship and our dependence on God. This was not an escapist eschatology, however, but a concrete theological response to the issues of the day; "when the penultimate, in its lust for glory and its thirst for adulation and sacrifice, thrust itself forward upon the proscenium - and even in the Church those who bowed

\*\*\*\*\*

[28] DB:372

[29] CD:271

[30] DB:374

[31] SCH:194f; DB:374; See discussion on pp. 48-50. Bonhoeffer develops several dimensions of Christ's person and work in CD including divine-human Mediator, human-human Mediator, his suffering love, and his being at the centre of existence, history and nature, to name a few. At the heart of all of these, however, is Christ the Lord, "the dominant figure who challenges people to be truly free". Kelly, *Liberating Faith*, 1984:43.

the knee were legion - Bonhoeffer turned towards the ultimate, doing so, however, for the sake of the penultimate".[32]

### Discipleship as Faith and Obedience

One of the most paradigmatic and memorable statements from *The Cost of Discipleship* is "only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes".[33]. Because of its importance the passage will be cited in its entirety.

The idea of a situation in which faith is possible is only a way of stating the facts of a case in which the following two propositions hold good and are equally true; *only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.*

It is quite unbiblical to hold the first proposition without the second. We think we understand when we hear that obedience is possible only where there is faith. Does not obedience follow faith as good fruit grows on a good tree? First, faith, then obedience. If by that we mean that it is faith which justifies, and not the act of obedience, all well and good, for that is the essential and unexceptionable presupposition of all that follows. If, however, we make a chronological distinction between faith and obedience, and make obedience subsequent to faith, we are divorcing the one from the other - and then we get the practical question, when must obedience begin? Obedience remains separated from faith. From the point of view of justification it is necessary thus to separate them, but we must never lose sight of their essential unity. For faith is only real when there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience.

Since, then, we cannot adequately speak of obedience as the consequence of faith, and since we must never forget the indissoluble unity of the two, we must place the one proposition that only he who believes is obedient alongside the other, that only he who is obedient believes. In the one case faith is the condition of obedience, and in the other obedience the condition of faith. In exactly the same way in which obedience is called the consequence of faith, it must also be called the presupposition of faith.[34]

Bonhoeffer has been criticised at this point for creating a ghetto of activism and obedience over against the gospel of grace and freedom.[35]

To place so much emphasis on obedience or to make a distinction between

\*\*\*\*\*

[32] DB:378

[33] CD:69

[34] CD:69-70; italics in the ET

[35] See discussion in Bethge, E. *Costly Grace*, 1979:153

cheap and costly grace has seemed to some to be a distortion or misunderstanding of the gospel. This critique totally misses the point Bonhoeffer was attempting to make; that is, in Luther's formulations of *sola fide* and *sola gratia* obedience was both a presupposition and consequence of faith - faith and obedience are an indissoluble unity. As a point of clarification, by 'discipleship' Bonhoeffer meant a uniting of the Reformed concepts of justification and sanctification into one new concept.[36] He accused the Lutherans of having "gathered like eagles round the carcass of cheap grace, and there [having] drunk of the poison which has killed the life of following Christ".[37] But grace is costly, not cheap. According to Bonhoeffer,

It was not the justification of sin, but the justification of the sinner that drove Luther from the cloister back into the world. ... It was grace because it cost so much, and it cost so much because it was grace. That was the secret of the gospel of the Reformation - the justification of the sinner.[38]

In the writing of *The Cost of Discipleship* Bonhoeffer explicitly criticized the Lutheran Church in Germany for turning belief in the doctrine of *sola fide* into a new law, and one which was shamefully separated from a life of costly obedience. In the phraseology of modern liberation theologies, orthodoxy was elevated over orthopraxis. Bonhoeffer was fighting to retain the paradox of Christian discipleship - for faith to be truly liberating it must be joined with obedience to Christ. As Kelly puts it, "This call to discipleship is a unique experience of both liberating grace and Christ's command, devoid of legalism, yet binding. ... Discipleship then, is a complete attachment to Christ's person".[39] This 'attachment to Christ' resembles the relational concept in *Ethics* of character formation, of ethics as formation.

\*\*\*\*\*

[36] DB:372

[37] CD:57

[38] CD:52

[39] Kelly, 1984:44

## Discipleship and Sociality

Bonhoeffer's theology of sociality is prevalent throughout the argument of *The Cost of Discipleship*, but is particularly pronounced in the chapters on "The Body of Christ", "The Image of God", and "The Visible Community". Green suggests that the obedience demanded by Christ of the disciples is the added dimension to Bonhoeffer's theology of sociality.[40] The first part of the book, through the exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount and other synoptic stories, establishes the call of the original disciples by the earthly Jesus. Bonhoeffer argues in the second part of the book, via the Pauline corpus, that people today face the same call of the Incarnate One through Christ's presence in and as the Church. While each person must individually face the call of Jesus, becoming a disciple requires being part of the new humanity redeemed in Christ; it means participating in the life of Christ in the Church, and Christ as the Church.[41] Two brief sections from the chapter on "The Body of Christ" bear this out.

It is impossible to become a new man as a solitary individual. The new man means more than the individual believer after he has been justified and sanctified. It means the Church, the Body of Christ, in fact it means Christ himself. ...

*The Church is one man; it is the Body of Christ. But it is also many, a fellowship of members* (Rom. 12.5; I Cor. 12.12 ff). Since the Church is a body made up of many members, no separate member, such as hand or eye or foot, can transcend its own individuality. That is the meaning of St Paul's analogy of the body. The hand can never take the place of the eye, or the eye the place of the ear. Each preserves its separate identity and function. On the other hand, they all preserve that identity and function only as members of the one body, as a fellowship united in service. It is the unity of the whole Church which makes each member what he is and the fellowship what it is, just as it is Christ and his Body which make the Church what it is.[42]

But the theology of sociality is much more pervasive than just a few

\*\*\*\*\*

[40] SCH:182

[41] CD:271-272; CD:278-281

[42] CD:271-272

chapters. We see much of Bonhoeffer's previous 'terminology of sociality' throughout *The Cost of Discipleship*; Adam as representative human attempting to become as God - *sicut deus*; Jesus as the *Kollektivperson* redeeming humanity; the new humanity in Christ; obedience flowing from a *relationship* with the present Christ; Christ existing as the Church; discipleship requiring dying to self and living for others; and encountering the call of Jesus as an ethical demand from an other. Green has provided a useful summary:

... in his earthly life Jesus is the Incarnate one who is present bodily and calls together a community of disciples who follow him obediently; he is the *Kollektivperson* of all mankind who, by his death and resurrection, bears to death the whole of the corporate old humanity and creates the new humanity which is real and "personified" in him; as the Incarnate Christ was present bodily, uniting his disciples to himself, so the community of the church is nothing other than the contemporary, bodily presence of Christ ... ;in the *Word* and *sacraments* of this *community* men are united bodily to the person of Christ, entering individually and collectively into his new humanity, so that "Christ is the new humanity in new men"; thus men today are Christ's disciples. As it was in the earthly life of Jesus, so it is now: God comes to a man not as an idea, a philosophy, a religion, but as a man, a brother in the Christian community of the new humanity.[43]

Becoming a disciple then, is a social reality requiring Christ's indwelling Spirit, obedience to God's call, and a life lived for others in the context of the Body of Christ, the Church. In the final chapter in *The Cost of Discipleship* on "The Image of Christ" Bonhoeffer rooted human existence and human dignity in the Incarnation and thereby used the concept of sociality in a way that gave support for the struggle for justice. In his case the 'least of people' were initially the persecuted Jews, but also later came to include the mentally ill, elderly, physically disabled, and homosexuals.

\*\*\*\*\*

[43] SCH:183

... in the Incarnation the whole human race recovers the dignity of the image of God. Henceforth, any attack even on the least of men is an attack on Christ, who took the form of man, and in his own Person restored the image of God in all that bears a human form. Through fellowship and communion with the incarnate Lord, we recover our true humanity, and at the same time we are delivered from that individualism which is the consequence of sin, and retrieve our solidarity with the whole human race.[44]

#### Discipleship as Participation in Christ's Suffering for Others

"In the interpretation of the weak Word we are close to the profoundest thought ever expressed by Bonhoeffer: discipleship as participation in Christ's sufferings for others, as communion with the Crucified".[45] In the midst of a German society glorying in the strong leadership of Hitler and the 'supremacy' of the Aryan race, supported theologically by a distorted 'orders of creation' doctrine, Bonhoeffer introduced a concept of discipleship, grounded christologically, that made suffering and rejection synonymous with being a Christian.

Suffering and rejection sum up the whole cross of Jesus. ... the very notion of a suffering Messiah was a scandal to the Church, even in its earliest days. That is not the kind of Lord it wants, and as the Church of Christ it does not like to have the law of suffering imposed upon it by its Lord. ...

Jesus must therefore make it clear beyond all doubt that the "must" of suffering applies to his disciples no less than to himself. Just as Christ is Christ only in virtue of his suffering and rejection, so the disciple is a disciple only in so far as he shares his Lord's suffering and rejection and crucifixion. Discipleship means adherence to the person of Jesus, and therefore submission to the law of Christ which is the law of the cross.[46]

And, following Luther, Bonhoeffer saw this suffering as applying not only to individual disciples but to the entire church. Suffering is one of "the marks of the true Church".[47]

\*\*\*\*\*

[44] CD:341

[45] Bethge, E., DB:374; Bonhoeffer's theology of the cross will be examined in much greater detail in the next chapter, but its specific role in *The Cost of Discipleship* will be developed here.

[46] CD:96

[47] CD:100

Bonhoeffer's theology of the cross was not only a reaction to the rise of Hitler; it had origins as far back as *Sanctorum Communio*, in Christ as the *Stellvertreter*, who suffered vicariously for the sins of humanity.[48] It is in the Christology lectures of 1933 that Bonhoeffer develops the as yet most detailed picture of his *theologia crucis*, in the 'humiliation' and hiddenness of Christ in the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. In *The Cost of Discipleship* Bonhoeffer suggested that Jesus still stands in solidarity with others in the midst of their suffering, only now he does it through individuals in the Body of Christ, a development of the idea of *Christus praesens* from *Sanctorum Communio*. [49] "Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ" and answering the call to suffer. And it is only in bearing the cross that a disciple triumphs over suffering, just as this was true for Christ.[50] This is the paradox of strength in weakness.

In terms of autobiographical influences on Bonhoeffer's theology, it has already been mentioned that *The Cost of Discipleship* is a response to his becoming a 'disciple' and submitting his strong ego to the Lordship of Christ. Green suggests that the way Bonhoeffer worked through this personal struggle with his ego left an ambiguous and sometimes confusing anthropology and Christology. Specifically, Green accuses Bonhoeffer of not distinguishing clearly between "dominating power and mature strength", a danger which can lead to resignation, fatalism and affirming weakness indiscriminately.[51] Christologically, he vacillates between a power Christ and a weak Christ with the former being predominant;

\*\*\*\*\*

[48] SC:106-107

[49] CD:272-274; CD:95-104

[50] CD:101

[51] SCH:194-200



... the Christ of *Nachfolge* is an overwhelming power of "absolute authority" who demands total submission to his commands and the complete renunciation of any independent human will. The power of Christ is set over against the power of the self; the self-centered man renounces the ambition of his autonomous ego and is obedient to Christ in the service of the church.[52]

Green's point is valid and caution must be used to clarify the limitations and conflicts in Bonhoeffer's approach. However, having done this, it is also valid to recognise that Bonhoeffer held in tension a power Christ - the Lord of the Church - with the suffering and rejected Christ, presenting an uncompromising challenge for true discipleship to include vicarious suffering with and for others as participation in the sufferings of Christ.

Bethge provides a helpful summary on the place of 'the power of weakness' at this stage of Bonhoeffer's life.

God's freedom confines itself within the limits of a weak human community of individuals. This had already been the view of the Bonhoeffer who wrote *Act and Being*, whereas 'the weak Christ, the weak Word' here presages the Christology of the final year of his life. The belief in the power of weakness was one of Bonhoeffer's most basic insights, and he was to hold to it throughout his theological life.[53]

#### Discipleship and Eschatology

Perhaps the most important question to ask about the eschatology of *The Cost of Discipleship* is what it means in relation to costly discipleship. Are eschatology and discipleship reconcilable and what was Bonhoeffer attempting to accomplish? In his 1933 essay 'The Church and the Jewish Question' Bonhoeffer had presented the possibility of the church's action "not just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but to put a spoke in the wheel itself".[54] While this statement in isolation is not representative of Bonhoeffer's understanding of church-state relations, it does demonstrate his seriousness about the church playing a responsible role in relation to society. Yet in *The Cost of Discipleship* we find hints

\*\*\*\*\*

[52] SCH:194-195

[53] DB:373-374

[54] NRS:225

of quietism emerging, for example, when Bonhoeffer said "... we cannot alter the circumstances of this world. Only God can take care, for it is he who rules the world. Since we cannot take care, since we are so completely powerless, we ought not to do it either".[55] Certainly Bonhoeffer's own involvements - actively organising resistance to the German Christians while in London, speaking out clearly for peace in the international ecumenical movement, preaching prophetically, running the Finkenwalde Seminary for the Confessing Church, - do not imply a withdrawal from working in the world for peace and justice.

Bethge attributes this shift to eschatology to Bonhoeffer's reading of the times. He claims that the events of 1933 helped Bonhoeffer to find focus from amongst his many theological interests, dropping for the moment such themes as the doctrine of Christ's Lordship over the World, reflections on the State, and the 'orders of preservation', to give single-minded intensity to the theme of discipleship. He rejected the calls in theological circles to deal with a 'new' theology of creation, suggesting rather that 'the time for the 'theology of break-through' [eschatology] had come.[56] Since 1933 Bonhoeffer had developed a new understanding of the role of the world - it was "merely a dangerous jungle which ha[d] to be traversed".[57] This eschatology, however, rather than escapism, the "peaceful backwater of the Pietists", or "the otherworldliness of the Enthusiasts", is a "summons to battle, it is concentration and hence also restriction, so that the whole of this earth may be reconquered by the illimitable message" of the exclusive call and Lordship of Jesus Christ.[58] By concentrating specifically on radical discipleship Bonhoeffer was calling the Church to be dependent on God alone, not on the

\*\*\*\*\*

[55] CD:198

[56] DB:377-378

[57] DB:378

[58] DB:378

fervent political ideology of German nationalism. This remains a relevant caution to all nationalistic and revolutionary movements. Perhaps the most helpful way to frame what Bonhoeffer was doing is to borrow terminology from the *Ethics* to say he was emphasising the 'ultimate' without for a moment forgetting the concrete needs of its correlative, the 'penultimate'

Bonhoeffer was afraid that *The Cost of Discipleship* would be misunderstood either as creating a ghetto of activism or promoting an attitude of the church against the world. Both are dangers in the book. The ecclesiology of *The Cost of Discipleship* distinctly separates the church and the world, and the message of costly discipleship is addressed directly to the church as a challenge and critique. As de Gruchy describes this conflict,

The church will always be in conflict with the world, ... It therefore neither conforms to the world nor retreats from it, but in the midst of the world seeks to realize increasingly in its life the form of Christ (*Gestalt Christi*), the suffering Lord. *The Cost of Discipleship* is thus a powerful call to follow Christ in costly obedience".[59]

Although he still held a more traditional view of the Lutheran 'two kingdoms' doctrine at this time, his intentions in the book as well as his active involvement in the church struggle against Nazi policies belie these criticisms.

#### Context from which *Life Together* emerged

If Bonhoeffer's 'personal transformation' had resulted in the emphasis on discipleship, as developed in *The Cost of Discipleship*, it could be said that his desire for a 'community' experience originated in his idea of discipleship, and *Life Together* is a reflection of 'discipleship in

\*\*\*\*\*

[59] WTJC:26

community'. [60] *Life Together* and *The Cost of Discipleship* come from the same period of Bonhoeffer's life, thus the context described earlier applies in this case as well. But there were additional factors which help us to understand Bonhoeffer's unique attempt to develop a monastic-type community in the Protestant church in Germany.

The emergence of the Pastor's Emergency League and the Confessing Church was in direct response to the rise of power of the German Christians in ecclesial affairs and Hitler's influence and interference in the churches, for instance through the Ludwig Müller fiasco. [61] Between mid-1934 and early 1935 the Old Prussian Council of Brethren, using some of the limited ecclesial freedom still available to it, decided to establish five seminaries for its ministers rather than have them participate in existing seminaries. [62] It is from this development that Bonhoeffer was asked to lead the seminary at Zingst, which three months later moved to Finkenwalde.

As already mentioned Bonhoeffer had been thinking about 'community life' for some time. So when the invitation came to direct the preacher's seminary Bonhoeffer had the opportunity he needed to put his fermenting ideas into practice. As Bethge tells us, in a letter to Sutz "he described his first attempts to write on the subject of 'discipleship', not as exegesis but, typically, as 'spiritual exercises'. He wished training to take place in 'conventional ecclesiastical seminaries where the pure doctrine, the Sermon on the Mount and divine worship are taken

\*\*\*\*\*

[60] DB:380 "The idea of a compact, circumscribed community had come to him as soon as he began to think about discipleship. By the time of the informal study sessions at Prebelow and Biesenthal in 1932, he had thought it out to its conclusion, and it was there, for the first time, that Bonhoeffer included periods of 'quiet' and 'meditation' in the daily routine, though no one except himself knew what to make of these".

[61] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to develop the complex roots of the development of the Confessing Church. For a thorough treatment see Scholder, 1987 & 1988, esp. vol. II.

[62] DB:341-343

seriously ..."[63] We find the concept of 'discipleship in community' in a letter to his brother Karl-Friedrich dated 14 January 1935, after he had accepted the post as director of the seminary,

I think I am right in saying that I would only achieve true inward clarity and sincerity by really starting work on the Sermon on the Mount. Here alone lies the force that can blow all this stuff and nonsense sky-high, in a fireworks display that will leave nothing behind but one or two charred remains. The restoration of the Church must surely depend on a new kind of monasticism, having nothing in common with the old but a life of uncompromising adherence to the Sermon on the Mount in imitation of Christ. I believe the time has come to rally men together for this.[64]

Bonhoeffer was anxious to gain an impression of other traditions before he began his experiment in community life.[65] While in London he arranged through Bishop Bell to visit several Anglican seminaries and communities, including both high church and low church. He also visited Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist, Methodist and Quaker seminaries or communities. One of the significant developments Bonhoeffer noticed was "the way in which ... both the church in general and his own parish in particular influenced the personal life of the candidate during his time of study".[66]

After the Finkenwalde Seminary had been established and running Bonhoeffer proposed the establishment of a community of 'brethren' to co-exist with the preacher's seminary. Day provides some insight into Bonhoeffer's intentions when he writes,

For the Word to be heard in Germany there was needed a community in which it would become audible, one whose life together would call other Christians to responsibility in their own local communities, a community who would stand uncompromisingly apart from the national delirium in solidarity with the victims.[67]

The experiment in *vita communis* resulting in the corresponding written reflections on Christian community became the most widely read of

\*\*\*\*\*

[63] DB:380

[64] DB:380

[65] DB:335

[66] DB:335

[67] Day, 1982:99

Bonhoeffer's work during his own lifetime. He had struck a nerve at the centre of one of Protestantism's greatest weaknesses and provided a potential model or resource as a way forward. In the forward to *Life Together* Bonhoeffer opened the door for dialogue and sharing in the task of building new forms of community in the church, although wisely expressing caution and encouraging the "watchful cooperation of all responsible people".[68]

Bethge asserts that this kind of community life was fundamentally important to Bonhoeffer,

'The summer of 1935 ... has been the fullest time of my life, both from the professional and from the human point of view', Bonhoeffer wrote in a letter to the members of his first session at the seminary. At last he had embarked on work about which he had no reservations, whereas previously he was ridden by the thought that he had not yet found his true task in life. Now his new calling afforded him the opportunity of doing what he had always longed to do.

The compact, closed circle of students enabled him to devote all his energies to his new theological theme, discipleship. ... The living community, about which Bonhoeffer had thought so much during the past four years, was now to be realized through a *praxis pietatis*, that provided an ambience favourable to the development of his theological ardour.

A preachers' seminary had once seemed to him a place to be avoided; now it was the place where, for a few years, his doubt and unrest were to make way for the satisfaction of meaningful activity. His search for other and more worthwhile work ceased. It was a delight to him to confirm young theologians in their calling in the hard-pressed Church and to share with them, not only his gifts, but everything he possessed.[69]

#### Discipleship and Community in *Life Together*

One of the clearest ways to understand Bonhoeffer's intentions in working out the relationship between discipleship and community is to review the reasons given to support the proposal for the Evangelical House of Brethren which was to co-exist with the preacher's seminary.

\*\*\*\*\*

[68] Bonhoeffer, translated by Godsey, J. in Vorkink II, P. (Ed.) *Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age*, 1968:121.

[69] DB:341

1. The content and manner of preaching can be sustained with greater objectivity and staunchness by a community than is possible for an individual in isolation. The principal objective, therefore, is not contemplative introversion, but proclamation.
2. The answer to the now general question as to the nature of the Christian life cannot be given in the abstract, but only by the concrete experiment in communal living and communal awareness of Christ's commandments. Thus the second objective is the theological question of discipleship.
3. The renunciation of traditional privileges postulates a group of ministers who are always available and who, in a community, will find that concentration which is necessary for service outside. In other words, the church struggle demands a new form of pastoral office.
4. The community would afford a spiritual refuge to pastors working on their own who, from time to time, would be able to retire there and renew their strength for further service.[70]

Bonhoeffer perceptively saw a need for a community which would both support and influence Confessing Church pastors as well as prepare them to witness and serve the local church. Proclamation, not contemplative introversion, was the express objective of this community. Bethge tells us that some in the church were critical of this "banding together in a monastic form" because it seemed to be a form of escapism.[71] As mentioned in the previous discussion on *The Cost of Discipleship* Bonhoeffer in no way withdrew from his socio-political involvement during this period. Point two in the 'House of Brethren proposal' unambiguously emphasizes the objective of working out the question of discipleship through concrete community life. Far from being escapist, as Hanfried Müller interprets *Life Together*,[72] Kelly calls it preparation "to function in a police state",[73] to engage the world. Point three of the proposal underscores this point of the community as the place of preparation 'for service outside'. And the fourth point of the proposal unashamedly offers the community as a place of 'spiritual refuge' for pastors, a place to be nourished and strengthened, but this, too, is seen as renewal 'for further

\*\*\*\*\*  
[70] DB:385

[71] CG:154

[72] Müller, H. 1966:246

[73] Kelly, 1984:117

service. Bonhoeffer never divorced community life and spiritual disciplines from engagement in the world, but instead integrated them into a wholistic spirituality which remains instructive today.

Jim Wallis, influenced by Bonhoeffer and writing to a North American audience, captures the idea of overcoming idolatrous and oppressive world powers by specifically working out costly discipleship in the midst of a Christian community.

The gospel of salvation in Christ must be addressed to people's need to be freed from the idolatrous power and domination of the most powerful institutions of the world system. The action of God in changing people's lives and enabling them to live in a different way is at the heart of the gospel message. Throughout the Bible, the path of obedience to God is a communal pilgrimage, not merely an individual trek. Corporate strength and power cannot be countered through individual effort alone, but must be resisted with *another form* of corporate power with a different set of values and assumptions. The dominance and control of the large institutions of the present system must and can be resisted with the new corporate strength that comes from a body of believers who share their lives together, support each other, take liability and responsibility for one another, hold each other accountable to a common commitment, reinforce a set of values that is deviant from the larger society, and are empowered by the Holy Spirit.[74]

To be a disciple meant, for Bonhoeffer, to be conformed to the incarnate, crucified and risen Christ. But Bonhoeffer explicitly rejected the emphasis on conversion made by a communally-oriented group like the Oxford Movement, saying they had "replaced the witness of the Gospel with the witness of personal change",[75] rejecting also any emphasis on the self or the group. At the heart of this process of conformation and transformation was encounter with the Word, the Word of God in Jesus Christ. The focus of communal and spiritual disciplines like prayer, meditation, intercession, confession, and silence was discernment of and conformation to the concrete and personal Word of God.

\*\*\*\*\*

[74] Wallis, J. "The Vehicle for the Vision" in a Sojourners magazine supplement, Jan. 1977, vol.6, no.1, p.4.

[75] DB:388



## Conclusion

During this period of his life, influenced by the bible and especially the Sermon on the Mount, Bonhoeffer had become a disciple. Costly discipleship and living 'for others' became his dominant theological themes. *Metanoia* or personal transformation required living a life of obedient discipleship, not separating faith from obedience. Discipleship meant participating in Christ's suffering for others and taking on what others would like to shake off. Although desiring to keep the door open for an academic career, Bonhoeffer made a significant shift by pouring his energies into the Confessing Church and the ecumenical movement. The theoretical role of the church from his early theology found a vitalising expression in the concrete experiment in community, as Green points out;

... at Finkenwalde ... Bonhoeffer actually gave reality to his understanding of the church as it had first been formulated in *Sanctorum Communio* and then made existentially personal in this theology of discipleship, where sociality and discipleship are joined together".[76]

The community, rather than a place of introverted introspection, was a place of preparation for proclamation and service to others. For Bonhoeffer discipleship needed to be worked out in the context of a Christian community, and true community was impossible without being understood in the context of responsible discipleship under the lordship of the incarnate, crucified and risen One.

\*\*\*\*\*

[76] SCH:202

CHAPTER 3: A VISION - THE CHURCH FOR OTHERS:  
SUFFERING, METANOIA AND RESPONSIBILITY IN THE  
Ethics AND Letters and Papers from Prison

Introduction

The relationship between personal transformation and community took on new dimensions in the third phase of Bonhoeffer's life and writings, with the themes of suffering, responsibility and metanoia taking a prominent place. This chapter will explore these three themes and their relationship with personal transformation and community in two of Bonhoeffer's later works - the *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Bonhoeffer wrote the material that exists in the *Ethics* between March 1940 and April 1943, which corresponds with his active involvement in the conspiracy against Hitler. Bethge edited the material for *Ethics* after the war and it was originally published posthumously in 1949.[1] While not completed by Bonhoeffer, his writings compiled as the *Ethics* represent a culmination of longstanding interest in ethics evident from his early student days.[2] As Benjamin Reist reminds us, the promise and contribution of Bonhoeffer to theology is his "ethical intensification of all theological concepts" resulting in "an ethical theology".[3] *Letters and Papers from Prison*, edited by Bethge, was first published in German in 1951 under the title *Widerstand und Ergebung (Resistance and Submission)*, indicative of Bonhoeffer's struggles in prison to "resist succumbing to fate and, instead, to discern God's purpose in history and maintain hope".[4] It was the publication of these writings which caused a stir in

\*\*\*\*\*

[1] WTJC:221; de Gruchy has a helpful but brief summary of the history of problems involved in editing the *Ethics*. For a more thorough treatment see Green, C.J. "The Text of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*" in Peck, W.J. (Ed.) *New Studies in Bonhoeffer's Ethics*, 1987:3-66.

[2] DB:88; Seeberg had encouraged him to pursue ethics

[3] Reist, 1969:118-119

[4] de Gruchy in WTJC:36

the theological world, with Bonhoeffer specifically being accused of being responsible for the 'death of God theology' and the secularization of the gospel. However, Bethge has given perhaps the clearest interpretative guidelines by reminding us of the need to read Bonhoeffer's prison theological reflections in light of the 'Outline for a Book', the proposed title being *The Essence of Christianity*. [5]

#### Context from Which the Ethics Emerged

The *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison* reflect some noticeable changes in Bonhoeffer's thinking, although the changes are developments maintaining continuity with his past. [6] There was a clear shift from positions in *The Cost of Discipleship* - e.g., pacifism, the strong emphasis on obedience to the Sermon on the Mount, and a more traditional Lutheran two kingdoms doctrine - to those of the *Ethics* - e.g., a just war position, a new tension between obedience and freedom in decision-making, and a rejection of two sphere thinking.

The reasons behind Bonhoeffer's changing perspectives are complex, but the following, listed chronologically, are perhaps the most important: the growing persecution of and his alienation from the Confessing Church; the deteriorating conditions in Germany; the existential crises over conscription and his subsequent trip to the United States; his 'redeemed' patriotism; and his ultimate participation in Hitler's war machinery via the *Abwehr*, military intelligence.

The Confessing Church experienced increasing persecution in 1937. Niemoller was arrested on 1 July, the Finkenwalde seminary was closed by

\*\*\*\*\*

[5] DB:765-767

[6] I follow Bethge, de Gruchy, Kelly and others who, although recognising changes in Bonhoeffer's theology, see these as logical developments instead of radical departures.

the Gestapo on 28 September, and by Christmas 27 Finkenwalde seminarians were in prison.[7] Between 1936 and 1940 Bonhoeffer was banned from teaching at a university,[8] giving speeches or public addresses,[9] publishing,[10] and travelling to Berlin except to see his parents.[11] All of this stifled his opportunities for meaningful involvement in opposing Nazism. During this time, however, Bonhoeffer also grew more alienated from the Confessing Church, and eventually accused it of being more concerned about protecting itself than in being a church for others. In the *Ethics* he accused the church, by its silence, of being "guilty of the decline in responsible action, in bravery in the defense of a cause, and in willingness to suffer for what is known to be right".[12]

The human rights violations in the country were increasing and Bonhoeffer remained well informed about such atrocities as the 'elimination' of Jewish people and the treatment of the physically and mentally disabled. He spoke out strongly and consistently against human rights violations and Nazi policies which is why the government was so interested in silencing him. In his 'After Ten Years' reflections given to Hans von Dohnanyi, Hans Oster and Eberhard Bethge at Christmas 1942, Bonhoeffer wrote,

We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled - in short, from the perspective of those who suffer.[13]

Bonhoeffer's ecclesial-eschatological Christianity had shifted to a more "Christo-universal outlook on world reality", [14] affirming Christianity's 'this-worldliness' and the need to work for justice in the world.

\*\*\*\*\*

[7] DB:485-490

[8] DB:426

[9] DB:602

[10] DB:634

[11] DB:502-503

[12] E:115

[13] LPP:17

[14] Kelly:118

The Bonhoeffer of pacifist leanings experienced a serious crisis over his impending conscription in March 1939 which consequently resulted in his 'flight' to the United States in June 1939 to take up a lectureship at Union Theological Seminary, among other work. The trip to the U.S. became a crisis of its own through which Bonhoeffer realised he must return to Germany to "share the trials of this time with my people..." or "I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war...".[15] Bonhoeffer remained patriotic, but his was a 'redeemed' patriotism, one which allowed him to love his country yet will for it to be defeated in order for positive reconstruction to occur.

Upon returning from the U.S. in July 1939 the hypothetical talk of war became a reality as Germany invaded Poland on 1 September and England declared war two days later. Bonhoeffer's options for employment or service in the Confessing Church were limited. The Confessing Church ultimately did provide him the space to do theological writing, but after he began working for the *Abwehr* in October of 1940 Bonhoeffer cut himself off from many of his familiar contacts. All these factors opened the door for his 'community of influence' shifting from the Confessing Church to that of the conspirators, the 'unconscious Christians' involved in responsible action to save Germany.

*Ethics* was written in a boundary situation by a theologian faced with compromises, by one who accepted tyrannicide as an 'exceptional deed', a 'deed of free responsibility' which must be done for the greater good of the country. Rasmussen has rightly pointed out the ambiguous nature of the decision to participate in Hitler's assassination because of the unknown consequences which would result.[16] The *Ethics* we have is of a

\*\*\*\*\*  
[15] LPP:559

[16] Rasmussen, 1972:127-148

fragmentary nature, never completed, representing four different attempts by Bonhoeffer, and thus retaining an experimental nature.[17]

Context from Which Letters and Papers from Prison Emerged

Bonhoeffer was arrested for questioning on 5 April 1943 after being implicated by an *Abwehr* agent who had been accused of financial irregularities surrounding the smuggling of Jews into Switzerland in a secret operation. Only later did his captors discover his involvement in the assassination plot. He remained in prison until his death at Flossenbürg on 9 April 1945.

*Letters and Papers from Prison* was compiled and edited by Bethge, who has divided the prison writings into four periods, " I. The phase of the preliminary investigations; II. The continually vain waiting for a date for the trial; III. The period of hope for the overthrow of Hitler and the 'ditching' of the charge; and IV. The time after the catastrophe".[18] The significant theological reflections come from the first eighteen months while Bonhoeffer was in Tegel prison in north-west Berlin.

Because they are letters containing incomplete and exploratory thoughts, never intended by Bonhoeffer for publication, we have provocative seeds of ideas that were never fleshed out in detail. Unfortunately Bethge had to burn some of Bonhoeffer's letters out of fear for his own safety from *Gestapo* investigations and other important letters have not survived. Many of the letters had to pass through censors, thus requiring limitations and caution, and many other letters were smuggled out of prison by

\*\*\*\*\*

[17] See Green, C. J. "The Text of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*" in Peck, W.J., 1987:12; Green has suggested that the *Ethics* "must be considered a less fragmentary and much more coherent text than previously assumed". ... While "they retain an experimental character ... there is purposeful development, both within the manuscripts themselves and from his writings in the later 1930's to the *Letters and Papers from Prison*".

[18] LPP:ix

Bonhoeffer's guards. We are left with fragments - insightful, challenging, stimulating to where Bonhoeffer was going with his theology.

### Suffering, Metanoia and Responsibility

In the Bonhoeffer of this later period, tempered by the experiences of the Finkenwalde community and the new community of the conspirators, we discover the heart of Bonhoeffer's understanding of personal transformation - vicarious suffering, metanoia, and living responsibly for others.

#### **Suffering and the Theology of the Cross**

Human suffering has been called by Albert Nolan "the new starting point for modern theology and spirituality in most of the Christian world today".[19] This reflects the extraordinary increase and depths of human suffering in the modern world. At the outset three fundamental realities must be acknowledged: 1.) suffering must not be generalized or treated at the same level [20]) - while all people suffer there is a clear distinction of degrees, with many people suffering what Schillebeeckx calls a 'barbarous excess' of suffering;[21] 2.) the reasons for this excessive or oppressive suffering are consistently the sin of others, often taking the form of institutional violence; and 3.) suffering is not an abstract theological concept to be debated, but an ugly and disturbing reality which cannot be minimized or softened by theological discourse. Much Western theological reflection on suffering has been written by theologians who have not personally experienced the dehumanizing effects of oppressive

\*\*\*\*\*

[19] Nolan, A. *God in South Africa*, 1988:49.

[20] Metz, J.B. *Faith in History and Society: Towards a Practical Fundamental Theology*, 1980:114.

[21] Schillebeeckx, E. *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, 1980:725.

suffering. Liberation theologies have responded to oppression and suffering by rightly asserting both the need to take human experience seriously and the need for theology to be committed to the struggle for justice aimed at transforming oppressive structures. Liberation theologians find Jesus' solidarity with the poor and oppressed at the heart of their own liberating praxis.

Returning to Bonhoeffer we see his response to suffering and oppression in Germany as one of solidarity with the victims of Nazism and of struggling for justice. His ethical commitments and praxis were in congruence with his 1932 statement that "the first confession of the Christian community before the world is the deed",[22] in this case the concrete act of obedience meant standing in solidarity with the oppressed people in his society. Human suffering, particularly of Jewish people, was one of the most challenging issues confronting Bonhoeffer. In 'The Church and the Jewish Question,' written on 7 May 1933, he issued the first Protestant attack on Hitler's anti-Semitic Aryan Clause announced a month earlier. Here Bonhoeffer stated that the church may have to "put a spoke in the wheel",[23] meaning the church would take direct political action against a state which abused its moral duty in the area of keeping law and order. By the time of writing the *Ethics* Bonhoeffer was involved in smuggling Jews out of Germany. The nationalism of Nazism had gone to grotesque extremes, eventually resulting in the Holocaust, one of the most tragic experiences ever of human evil.

At the heart of the theodicy issue are two important questions: 'where is God in the midst of suffering?' and 'who is this God who allows suffering to happen?' - questions of God's presence or absence and God's

\*\*\*\*\*

[22] Bonhoeffer, *Das Wesen der Kirche*, 1932:58, quoted from WTJC:14.

[23] NRS:225; in WTJC:127



identity.[24] It is precisely at this point that Bonhoeffer's turn to *theologia crucis* has relevance.

Where is the seemingly absent God in the midst of suffering, according to Bonhoeffer? Before dealing with this question about God's absence Bonhoeffer clearly sees the incarnation as a central statement of God's presence. "Bonhoeffer's is a 'condescension' or 'kenotic' Christology - the whole fullness of God is found precisely in the earthly, human life of Jesus; infinitude is 'emptied' into finitude".[25] The incarnation is the ultimate statement of God's presence with us, but it is the cross which confirms God's presence with us *in the midst of suffering*.

The modern experiences of secularization, alienation and suffering, however, have implications of an 'absent' God. Bonhoeffer made direct connections between a "*theologia crucis* and our contemporary experience of God's absence which has resulted from the process of secularization":[26]

We cannot be honest unless we recognize that we have to live in the world etsi deus non daretur. And this is just what we do recognize - before God! God himself compels us to recognize it. So our coming of age leads us to a true recognition of our situation before God. God would have us know that we must live as men who manage our lives without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34). The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God.[27]

Bonhoeffer's formulation of the dialectical tension of God's presence and absence is a modern reflection of our experience of God, and one which encourages us to take responsibility for our lives and for the world, important dimensions of personal transformation.

Bonhoeffer goes on in the same paragraph to tell about the identity of this God and how God helps us in our suffering:

\*\*\*\*\*

[24] de Gruchy, "Standing by God in His Hour of Grieving: Human Suffering, Theological Reflection and Christian Solidarity", C.B. Powell Lecture at the University of South Africa, October 1985 (published in 1986):12-16.

[25] Rasmussen, 1972:16

[26] de Gruchy, 1986:23

[27] LPP:360

God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matt. 8:17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering. Here is the decisive difference between Christianity and all religions. Man's religiosity makes him look in his distress to the power of God in the world: God is the deus ex machina. The Bible directs man to God's powerlessness and suffering: only a suffering God can help.[28]

In direct contrast to triumphalistic theologies or belief in a 'power God' (which too often leads to an immature dependence) Bonhoeffer portrays 'the Exalted One as the Crucified' [29] as he develops the centrality of the cross, and the way of suffering and weakness as the way of Christ.[30]

De Gruchy provides a summary of what participating in the suffering of Christ implies.

It is on this basis that we can then begin to think of the true witness of the church in the world, not just as the bearer of the Word but as depicted in 1 Peter: "participating in the sufferings of Christ" (4:13 - NIV). God's redemptive suffering in Christ becomes concrete in the world through the life and witness of the suffering community of faith and especially its prophets. Without this embodiment the message of the cross remains theory, an empty word that reinforces the experience of the absence of God amongst those who suffer injustice and oppression. The ultimate failure of the People of God, whether it be Israel in the Old Testament, or the Christian church, is when it becomes the cause of such suffering instead of the suffering servant which mediates the redemptive love of God. The followers of Jesus vicariously endure suffering on behalf of others; they do not inflict it on them. Suffering becomes redemptive when it is vicarious, and in our context that only becomes possible when we accept our guilt in the suffering of others and our responsibility to be in solidarity with them. In this act of solidarity we meet God and discover not only *where* God is but also *who* God is.

Thus the message of the suffering God, the word of the cross, requires a fundamental change, a *metanoia*, in the self-understanding of the church in our time. The church under the cross is the church which suffers vicariously on behalf of those who suffer at the hands of the powerful.[31]

\*\*\*\*\*

[28] LPP:360-361

[29] C:117; E:81; 297-298; LPP:360-361;382-383

[30] Green has noted that Bonhoeffer's 'weak Christ' of this period, instead of just replacing the 'power Christ' of *The Cost of Discipleship*, is held in dialectical tension with the God who is 'there for others', whose "transforming strength... is given in his his weakness".(SCH:320) More will be said about this later.

[31] de Gruchy, 1986:26-27

Another one of the implications of the centrality of the cross for Bonhoeffer is its call to worldliness. In the *Ethics* Bonhoeffer returns to his familiar theme of *theologia crucis*, but he expands the traditional Lutheran understanding to include a "christocratic understanding of all reality".[32] In the reality of living in the world with all of its ambiguities and pain, it is the cross which "sets men free for life in genuine worldliness".[33] All reality is under the cross and it is "unbiblical to think in two spheres and act as though the political and secular realm had nothing to do with Christian ethics and obedience".[34]

While this thesis is concerned predominantly with *personal* transformation, Bonhoeffer's understanding of *theologia crucis* has obvious implications for socio-political transformation. Jürgen Moltmann perceptively discusses the prophetic critique of the theology of the cross needed in the political realm.

In political terms, its limit lay in the fact that while as a reformer Luther formulated the *theologia crucis* in theoretical and practical terms against the medieval institutional church, he did not formulate it as social criticism against feudal society in the Peasant Wars of 1524 and 1525. What he wrote to the peasants did not express the critical and liberating force of the cross, the choosing of the lowly which puts the mighty to shame, nor the polemic of the crucified God against pride and subjection, domination and slavery, but instead a non-Protestant mysticism of suffering and humble submission. The task therefore remained of developing the theology of the cross in the direction of an understanding of the world and of history. The theology of the cross had to be worked out not merely for the reform of the church but as social criticism, in association with practical actions to set free both the wretched and their rulers.[35]

Bonhoeffer's critiques of the German Christians and the Third Reich were

\*\*\*\*\*

[32] Rasmussen, 1972:22; It is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on Bonhoeffer's concept of 'reality' in the *Ethics*, except to say that here he "states vividly that Christ's taking up the world into himself in the Incarnation established an 'ontological coherence' of God's reality with the reality of the world" (Rasmussen, 1972:16).

[33] E:297

[34] de Gruchy, WTJC:33

[35] Moltmann, J. *The Crucified God*, 1974:72-73

attempts to develop the theology of the cross in just such directions.

Weakness and suffering are far from exalted values in modern society, and even in the church these values are shunned to greater or lesser degrees. Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck is specifically critical of the 'rugged individualism' of the West, calling for greater vulnerability and risk-taking, because psychological healing and wholeness cannot occur "without being willing to be hurt".[36] One of the more profound books of our time, which argues that only the wounded can truly be healers, has the title *The Wounded Healer*. [37] Peck has suggested that perhaps the best motto for Christianity is the paradoxical "in weakness, strength". [38] He also goes on to argue that true community and peace between individuals or groups can only occur when there is vulnerability and a sharing in the pain of others, [39] ideas embraced by Bonhoeffer's understanding of sharing in the sufferings of God in the world.

In spite of the rejection of suffering, weakness and vulnerability by many modern Christians, there is a strong biblical tradition of God experiencing grief, suffering and pain, not only in response to disobedience and rebellion, but also in solidarity with the oppressed and outcasts of his time. Bonhoeffer calls Christians to stand in solidarity with this God 'in his hour of grieving', [40] to participate in the sufferings of God, as a sign of a transformed life.

\*\*\*\*\*

[36] Peck, M.S. *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*, 1987:227.

[37] Nouwen, Henri *The Wounded Healer*, 1972.

[38] Peck, 1987:230      [39] Peck, 1987:233

[40] LPP:349

## Metanoia

It is not the religious act that makes the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life. That is *metanoia*: not in the first place thinking about one's own needs, problems, sins, and fears, but allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ, into the messianic event, thus fulfilling Isaiah 53.[41]

This is a radical understanding of *metanoia* when compared to the traditional Protestant one operative in post-World War I Germany. It reflects Bonhoeffer's understanding of the need for Christians to stand in solidarity with the suffering as well as his concept of 'being for others'. The German Christians as well as many members of the Confessing Church were not prepared to admit their guilt, even after the war, let alone repent from and confess it. *Metanoia* involves taking sides with the poor and oppressed and standing in solidarity with them against the powerful forces which exploit and crush them. Albert Nolan, among others, has challenged Christians in South Africa to 'take a preferential option for the poor'.[42] Perhaps the similarities between 'taking a preferential option for the poor' and the Marxist, materialist idea of committing 'class suicide' and taking up the cause of the working class are threatening to Christians in power or those unwittingly supporting the status quo. Whatever the reason for resistance to *metanoia*, to being transformed, Bonhoeffer's understanding of living out the gospel requires taking a 'view from below', "from the perspective of those who suffer".[43]

In looking to ground his ethics Bonhoeffer explored many sources: reason, moral fanaticism, conscience, duty, free responsibility, and silent virtue, all noble humanitarian values.[44] However, he ultimately rejected

\*\*\*\*\*

[41] LPP:362

[42] Nolan, A. "The Option for the Poor in South Africa" in Villa-Vicencio, C. & de Gruchy, J. (Eds.) *Resistance and Hope*, 1985:189-198.

[43] LPP:17

[44] E:67

them all and settled instead for 'ethics as formation', based on a relationship with Jesus Christ in which Jesus takes form in the life of the Christian.[45] The process of *metanoia*, of repenting and turning from sin to God, is grounded for Bonhoeffer in the ethical relationship of a person with God. Bonhoeffer sees *metanoia* as a social concept rooted in the formation of the individual by Christ taking form in us. In his chapter in *Ethics* on 'Ethics as Formation' Bonhoeffer rejects ethics as a set of principles to be applied in favor of a personal-relational model. "It is not written that God became an idea, a principle, a programme, a universally valid proposition or law, but that God became man".[46] In contrast to our ethical explorations and attempts 'to become like Jesus', formation in Christ's likeness only occurs as a result of Christ taking form in us, moulding our form to his own likeness. And this ethical transformation involves our being formed in the likeness of the Incarnate, Crucified and Risen One. Bonhoeffer is in continuity with his lifelong search for the concrete 'form of Christ', here defining ethics as "the bold endeavor to speak about the way in which the form of Jesus Christ takes form in our world".[47]

One of the concrete forms of Christ in the world was not only participating in the 'suffering of God', but actively sharing in the struggle for justice. It is instructive here to recall Bonhoeffer's understanding of reality as developed in the *Ethics*. Jesus Christ is the source, ground, and goal of all reality.

\*\*\*\*\*

[45] E:80-88

[46] E:85

[47] E:88

[48] E:194

[49] Rasmussen, 1972:22

The Christian ethic speaks in a quite different sense of the reality which is the origin of good, for it speaks of the reality of God as the ultimate reality without and within everything that is. It speaks of the reality of the world as it is, which possesses reality solely through the reality of God. ... Henceforward one can speak neither of God nor of the world without speaking of Jesus Christ. All concepts of reality which do not take account of Him are abstractions.[48]

For Bonhoeffer, to stand against the Nazi regime was to side with justice, and this was consistent with his assessment of reality and what it meant to be conformed by Christ.

The ontological coherence of God's reality and the world's in Christ leads Bonhoeffer to discuss moral action in two ways that in the end are the same: 'conformation to Christ' (*Gleichgestaltung*) and action 'in accordance with reality' or 'with due regard for reality' (*Wirklichkeitsgemaessheit*).[49]

This understanding of reality accounts for Bonhoeffer's positive appropriation of his non-Christian co-conspirator's actions based on their humanitarian values. They acted responsibly for others, something Bonhoeffer called 'deputyship'.

Biblically speaking *metanoia* means a fundamental change of mind which implies a turning from sin and a turning to God.[50] This being so, then, integral to transformation is an awareness of what one is turning from. For Bonhoeffer it meant turning from sin on several levels - personally, within the church, and within the nation - then accepting guilt and taking responsibility for changing an unjust and oppressive regime. While 'accepting guilt' meant predominantly 'collective' guilt for Bonhoeffer, he also meant personal guilt. At least four categories of guilt could be referred to in Bonhoeffer's case: the guilt of the nation, the guilt of the church for not speaking out in opposition to the atrocities committed against humanity, the guilt of his bourgeois heritage, and the personal guilt involved in being involved in tyrannicide. Since Bonhoeffer ties

\*\*\*\*\*

[50] Brown, C. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. I, 1975:3357-359.

'accepting guilt' so closely together with his concept of 'deputyship' further discussion of the former will be postponed until the following section on 'Responsibility'. For the sake of the discussion here, implicit in Bonhoeffer's understanding of *metanoia* and 'accepting guilt' is the call to responsible action.

As mentioned earlier, another aspect of *metanoia* for Bonhoeffer was 'being for others'. He clearly saw his resistance activity as 'being for others'. [51] In the 'Outline for a Book' in *Letters and Papers from Prison* Bonhoeffer calls Jesus 'the man for others'. [52] This pregnant term has its origins in Bonhoeffer's Christology lectures of 1933 where the essence of Christ's person *pro nobis* is grounded ontologically.

... Christ is Christ not as Christ in himself, but in his relation to me. His being Christ is his being *pro me*. This being *pro me* is in turn not meant to be understood as an effect which emanates from him, or as an accident; it is meant to be understood as the essence, as the being of the person himself. This personal nucleus itself is the *pro me*. That Christ is *pro me* is not an historical or an ontical statement, but an ontological one. That is, Christ can never be thought of in his being in himself, but only in his relationship to me. That in turn means that Christ can only be conceived of existentially, viz. in the community ... It is not only useless to meditate on a Christ in himself, but even godless. [53]

... He is the center in three ways; in being-there for men, in being-there for history and in being-there for nature. [54]

Roots of 'being for others' emerged in *Sanctorum Communio* where the interconnections of Bonhoeffer's christology and anthropology became evident. Just as the ontological structure of Christ is in Christ's being for humanity, history and nature, the ontological structure of humanity is in the self-other (I-Thou) relationship. Luther had developed the idea of *cor curvum in se* (the heart turned in upon itself) and Bonhoeffer appropriated this concept, citing egocentricity as the impediment to true

\*\*\*\*\*

[51] E:224-227

[52] LPP:381

[53] C:47-48

[54] C:62



selfhood.[55] Only when the self breaks its bondage to its own ego and turns towards the others does it find fulfillment and real transcendence. The essence of 'being', then, is only possible in sociality, in community with others. When Bonhoeffer then says that "the Thou of the other man is the divine Thou" [56] he is declaring "that because Christ is in, with, and under human sociality, a man only finds self-fulfillment, indeed self-formation, in being with and for others; and being with and for others is the way in which a man is formed in Christ".[57]

*Metanoia* and personal transformation are about ethical relationships; they are social concepts. Transformation takes the form of moving away from egocentricity to 'being for others', to taking responsibility by responding to the needs of our 'neighbors'. Relating to God is not an abstract, ethereal concept; it means involvement in relationships and doing very concrete actions for others, ideas expressed very clearly by Bonhoeffer in his 'Outline for a Book'.

...Encounter with Jesus Christ. The experience that a transformation of all human life is given in the fact that "Jesus is there only for others." His "being there for others" is the experience of transcendence. It is only this "being there for others," maintained till death, that is the ground of his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Faith is participation in this being of Jesus (incarnation, cross, and resurrection). Our relation to God is not a "religious" relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being imaginable - that is not authentic transcendence - but our relation to God is a new life in "existence for others," through the participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendental is not infinite and unattainable tasks, but the neighbor who is within reach in any given situation. God in human form ... 'the man for others,' and therefore the Crucified, the man who lives out of the transcendent".[58]

### Responsibility

To 'be for others' requires taking responsibility in the form of

\*\*\*\*\*

[55] C:31

[56] SC:37

[57] Rasmussen, 1972:19-20

[58] LPP:381-382

concrete actions. This section will attempt to develop an understanding personal transformation as 'being responsible', specifically examining freedom, sociality, deputyship, accepting guilt and taking responsibility in and for the world.

Bonhoeffer's consistent socio-ethical approach calls out for obedient discipleship and concrete acts of responsibility, themes developed in *The Cost of Discipleship*. But a definite shift takes place, as Rasmussen points out.

In *The Cost of Discipleship* the key word is singleminded obedience. This is what is commanded. But in *Ethics* it is freedom, permission, liberty that are commanded. Bonhoeffer certainly does not drop obedience as a key term for Christian ethics, but now he always adds 'and freedom' when speaking of obedience; too, he now speaks of a real tension between obedience and freedom. They stand in tension with and complement each other.[59]

Thus Bonhoeffer could find room for the possibility of tyrannicide as an act of obedience and free responsibility. Such an act was a boundary situation, a *Grenzfall*, an exceptional circumstance, allowing the disciple the freedom to act. Bethge says that one of the influences on Bonhoeffer's writing of the *Ethics* was his desire "to free people for action", [60] the people being his friends and acquaintances in the conspiracy. Bonhoeffer was in a boundary situation that required a concrete response; he perceived not responding as being disobedient. It was a compromising situation in which he ultimately hoped for God's grace.

It [the action of a responsible man] has not to decide simply between right and wrong, and between good and evil, but between right and right and between wrong and wrong. ... Obedience knows what is good and does it, and freedom dares to act, and abandons to God the judgment of good and evil".[61]

One section in particular of his poem "Stations on the Road to Freedom",

\*\*\*\*\*

[59] Rasmussen, 1972:40

[60] DB:625

[61] E:249-252

written the day after the failed 20 July 1944 *Putsch* on Hitler and thus sealing Bonhoeffer's fate, captures his commitment to responsible action.

*Action*

Daring to do what is right, not what fancy may tell you,  
valiantly grasping occasions, not cravenly doubting -  
freedom comes only through deeds, not through thoughts taking wing.  
Faint not nor fear, but go out to the storm and the action,  
trusting in God whose commandment you faithfully follow;  
freedom, exultant, will welcome your spirit with joy.[62]

De Gruchy captures the spirit of freedom in Bonhoeffer's ethics when he writes,

The act of free responsibility demonstrates precisely that Bonhoeffer's ethics is not about being and doing good, but about discerning God's will in context and, having done everything possible to avoid being deluded by self-interest or seduced by fanaticism, to act accordingly, trusting in God's grace".[63]

In Bonhoeffer's intensely relational ethics, freedom and responsibility must be understood under the rubric of sociality. Sociality and freedom are inextricably linked. "The structure of responsible life is conditioned by two factors; life is bound to man and to God and a man's own life is free".[64] This is the familiar dialectic of (ethical) responsibility and freedom. But responsibility for Bonhoeffer, as we saw developed in *Sanctorum Communio*, goes back to the ethical demand of the 'other,' it is a profoundly social concept. "... it is not written that God became an idea, a principle, a programme, a universally valid proposition or a law, but that God became man".[65] Ethics are guided by relationships - a faith relationship with this man, Jesus, and our relationships with others through which God presents the challenge to act in free responsibility.

For Bonhoeffer true selfhood and the ground of reality itself are only rightly understood by someone engaged in responsibility, in responding to

\*\*\*\*\*

[62] LPP:371

[63] WTJC:35

[64] E:224

[65] E:85

the claim of the other. "The I arises only with the Thou; responsibility follows on the claim".[66] "... Reality is 'experienced' in the contingent fact of the claim of 'others.' Only what comes from 'outside' can show man the way to his reality, his existence. In 'sustaining' the 'claim of my neighbor' I exist in reality, I act ethically; that is the sense of an ethics not of timeless truths but of the 'present'".[67]

While tracing Bonhoeffer's theoretical roots to *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* we are also brought back to the idea of *Stellvertreter*, of Jesus Christ as 'vicarious representative' which is found there. In his section in the *Ethics* on 'The Structure of the Responsible Life' Bonhoeffer develops this concept in a different direction - that of 'Deputyship' (*Stellvertretung*) in line with his and the co-conspirator's activity in the resistance movement.

The fact that responsibility is fundamentally a matter of deputyship is demonstrated most clearly in those circumstances in which a man is directly obliged to act in the place of other men, for example as a father, as a statesman or as a teacher. ... Deputyship, and therefore also responsibility, lies only in the complete surrender of one's own life to the other man.[68]

Those in Bonhoeffer's circle of the resistance movement saw themselves as acting on behalf of the German people to free them from the tyranny of Nazism. Deputyship has shifted for Bonhoeffer from the church to the world. As has been said in this regard,

In *Sanctorum Communio* it was through the 'vicarious action' of Jesus Christ that the church was established; in the *Ethics* the focus of Christ's 'deputyship' has shifted from the church to the world, because the whole world is now brought under the reign of Christ. But equally deputyship has become central to an ethic which includes both Christians and non-Christians in the life in the world.[69]

One of the central questions with which Bonhoeffer was struggling was 'Who are the real Christians in this situation'? For Bonhoeffer, those who

\*\*\*\*\*

[66] SC:36

[67] AB:86

[68] E:224-225

[69] de Gruchy, WTJC:34

took the responsibility for acting on behalf of others understood what Christianity was about, whether or not they were conscious of Christian motives. Although he did not use these terms, 'orthopraxis' became a more telling criteria of Christian witness than 'orthodoxy'. Transformation involved a new openness to engaging the world, which Bonhoeffer grounded Christologically.

In the Christology of the *Ethics* Bonhoeffer broadened the realm of Christ's lordship from the Church to all of reality. The chapter on "Christ, Reality and Good" (subtitled "Christ, the Church and the World") tackled traditional theological opposites - for example, natural-supernatural, profane-sacred, rational-revelational - and argued for their original unity in Christ. This is an important shift away from the traditional interpretation of the 'two kingdoms' doctrine as developed in *The Cost of Discipleship*. Now, for Bonhoeffer, all of reality had its unity in Christ and thus, as Kelly says, "history, as fulfilled by Christ, action".[70]

The reality of Christ comprises the reality of the world within itself. The world has no reality of its own, independently of the revelation of God in Christ. ... There are, therefore, not two spheres, but only the one sphere of the realization of Christ, in which the reality of God and the reality of the world are united. ... the whole reality of the world is already drawn in into Christ and bound together in Him, and the movement of history consists solely in divergence and convergence in relation to this centre.[71]

We find this pursuit for the Christological concreteness of reality in the basic concern of the theology found in the prison letters: 'who Christ really is, for us today'?[72]

Bonhoeffer's new openness to the world had particular relevance to the conspirator's work in the pursuit of justice. Bonhoeffer interprets the

\*\*\*\*\*

[70] Kelly, 1984:48

[71] E:197-198

[72] LPP:279

seemingly opposite biblical passages "He that is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30), and "He that is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:40), as complementary truths that both become true under the cross of Christ, thus beginning his argument for God's acceptance of those 'good' people who were not professing Christians.

Rasmussen is critical of Bonhoeffer at this point - the Christological basis of all reality versus the 'unconscious' Christianity of the non-Christians in the resistance movement - on epistemological grounds, saying that Bonhoeffer betrays his insistence on knowing reality only from "the necessity of the christological revelation and the locus of its comprehension (the Church)".[73] Rasmussen is perhaps ultimately correct in his assertion that Bonhoeffer entered an epistemological corner from which there was no escape. However, the significant note of importance in Bonhoeffer's high appraisal of the conspirator's actions is that their concern for the oppressed and their praxis of liberation actually served as a witness to a church that was failing to live out the gospel as well as putting the conspirators in a place where they could encounter God,

... so that it happens that in the hour of suffering and of responsibility, perhaps for the first time in his life and in a way which is strange and surprising to him but is nevertheless an inner necessity, such a man appeals to Christ and professes himself a Christian because at this moment, for the first time, he becomes aware that he belongs to Christ.[74]

Bonhoeffer was one of the few in the church to 'engage the world' by entering the shady world of political conspiracy.[75] He strongly believed his conspiratorial activity to be 'responsible action', yet along with this form of deputyship he saw the need to accept the corresponding guilt. Bonhoeffer never tried to avoid taking responsibility for the guilt

\*\*\*\*\*

[73] Rasmussen, 1972:170

[74] E:60

[75] DB:585ff

associated with the conspiracy; but this must be seen in the light of his 'redeemed patriotism' and his understanding of sociality which meant that individuals shared in the guilt of the German nation. As mentioned earlier, there are at least four levels for which Bonhoeffer acknowledged guilt - Germany's actions, the Confessing Church's failure to speak out against injustice, his own bourgeois heritage,[76] and his involvement in the conspiracy.

As Bonhoeffer framed his concept of deputyship, that is responsible action for others, it went hand in hand with accepting guilt.[77] This reflects a profound understanding of the implications of confessing guilt, and that is *metanoia*, a personal transformation resulting in obedient discipleship. Deputyship required responsible action based on selfless love for other human beings, resulting in difficult decisions which did not allow for the appeal to a 'personal innocence' that sought to escape guilt. Bonhoeffer drew heavily on the example of the guilt Jesus bore.

... Jesus is not concerned with the proclamation and realization of new ethical ideals; He is not concerned with Himself being good (Matt. 19:17); He is concerned solely with love for the real man, and for that reason He is able to enter into the fellowship of the guilt of men and take the burden of their guilt upon Himself. Jesus does not desire to be regarded as the only perfect one at the expense of men; He does not desire to look down on mankind as the only guiltless one while mankind goes to its ruin under the weight of its guilt; He does not wish that some idea of a new man should triumph amid the wreckage of a humanity whose guilt has destroyed it. He does not wish to acquit Himself of the guilt under which men die. A love which left man alone in his guilt would not be love for the real man. As one who acts responsibly for the historical existence of men Jesus becomes guilty. It must be emphasized that it is solely His love which makes Him incur guilt.[78]

And the implication of Jesus' guilt in relation to the conspirators was all

\*\*\*\*\*

[76] DB:581

[77] For a discussion on guilt and responsibility see de Gruchy's essays "The Liberation of the Privileged" in *Bonhoeffer and South Africa*, 1984:83-87 and "Confessing Guilt in South Africa Today in Dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer" in the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 67, June 1989:37-45.

[78] E:240-241

too clear,

... Jesus took upon Himself the guilt of all men, and for that reason every man who acts responsibly becomes guilty. If any man tries to escape guilt in responsibility he detaches himself from the ultimate reality of human existence ...[79]

Rasmussen has two particularly relevant critiques of Bonhoeffer's understanding of guilt. First, he finds a methodological problem, saying that a person should not experience guilt if acting in obedience to the concrete command of Christ, even if the act of free responsibility is such an exceptional case as tyrannicide. Secondly, Rasmussen points out a potential Christological confusion when Bonhoeffer fails to distinguish between 'true guilt' (incurred through violation of the divine law) and 'forensic guilt' (deputyship; the act of pure love in selfless being-for-others; type behind Jesus' sinlessness). As Rasmussen puts it,

So Jesus becomes the *exemplum* for those who incur true guilt by acts of resistance that violate divine law, instead of being only the *exemplum* for the forensic taking on of guilt. In terms of the resistance, it appears that Bonhoeffer justifies christologically the guilt incurred in violation of divine law when, in fact, his argument really only supports the acceptance of guilt forensically.[80]

It is the nature of 'boundary situations' to test the limits of human ethical behavior. Bonhoeffer's radically contextual and relational ethic, which sought concrete, obedient response to the call of Jesus Christ in acts of free responsibility, proved to be ultimately dependent on faith - faith that God would scrutinize the integrity of the one struggling for justice, leaving judgment about guilt or innocence in God's hands.

The confession of guilt, understood to include *metanoia* and responsible discipleship, is the starting place for transformation, and it is at the heart of liberating people to take responsible action in the world, thus leading to hope and renewal:

\*\*\*\*\*

[79] E:241

[80] Rasmussen, 1972:172



The church today is that community of men which is gripped by the power of the grace of Christ so that, recognizing as guilt towards Jesus Christ both its own personal sin and the apostasy of the western world from Jesus Christ, it confesses its guilt and accepts the burden of it. It is in her that Jesus realizes his form in the midst of the world. That is why the church alone can be the place of personal and collective rebirth and renewal.[81]

That Bonhoeffer took seriously the collective guilt of the Church is evident from the seriousness with which he struggled to provide a new vision for the Church, that of 'the church for others'. In this process Bonhoeffer saw the iconoclastic critiques of Feuerbach and Nietzsche as being helpful because they exposed weaknesses within Christianity that needed to be addressed, failing which personal transformation within the Church would continue to be hampered. Feuerbach had specifically criticised Christianity for leading to quietism by 'projecting' a perfect God and thereby excusing the moral failures of 'imperfect' persons.[82]

In his 'Outline for a Book', for which the title would probably have been the historically significant *The Essence of Christianity*, Bonhoeffer used the concept of the 'world come of age', describing not the liberal ideal of humanistic, moral improvements, but rather the historical reality of increasing secularisation as one of the consequences of the Enlightenment. Bonhoeffer was rejecting an idea of God, commonly projected by the Church, as the 'god of the gaps' who existed on the fringes of human existence, to be called upon only in times of weakness or trouble. For Bonhoeffer God was at the centre of human existence, not on the margins as an incidental working hypothesis for those problems we are unable to solve. In identifying who this God was at the centre of existence, we find Bonhoeffer's consistent rejection of metaphysical speculation in favor of

\*\*\*\*\*

[81] E:111

[82] Allen, D. *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, 1985:239-240.

an understanding based on ethical transcendence and sociality, but now the fruit of a more mature Christology. Through the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of the historical Jesus, and more specifically our relationship to this Jesus, comes transformation.

Who is God? Not in the first place an abstract belief in God, in his omnipotence, etc. That is not a genuine experience of God, but a partial extension of the world. Encounter with Jesus Christ. The experience that a transformation of all human life is given in the fact that 'Jesus is there only for others'. His 'being there for others' is the experience of transcendence. It is only this 'being there for others', maintained till death, that is the ground of his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Faith is participation in this being of Jesus (incarnation, cross, and resurrection). Our relation to God is not a 'religious' relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being imaginable - that is not authentic transcendence, but our relation to God is a new life in 'existence for others' through participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendental is not infinite and unattainable tasks, but the neighbour who is within reach in any given situation".[83]

The church must also be transformed, according to Bonhoeffer, to 'exist for others' in responsible service, taking seriously the 'secular' problems of society.[84] Bonhoeffer had a vision of a servant-church, a 'church for others', a vision which he hoped would capture not only those traditionally in the church, but also those 'modern' people struggling for justice who had previously rejected the church. Far from turning his back on the church Bonhoeffer was seeking a renewal which would make the church a more responsible and outward-looking community, serving the needy and persecuted people in society. As de Gruchy describes Bonhoeffer's intentions,

Christian faith and practice had to be re-worked, not rejected, ... What was required was a radical change (*metanoia*) which would transform Christian praxis by relating it to the 'sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world'.[85]

In the *Ethics* Bonhoeffer makes it clear that "in responsibility both

\*\*\*\*\*

[83] LPP:381

[84] LPP:382-383

[85] WTJC:39

obedience and freedom are realized",[86] but only in tension with each other. Having tried to define the "structure of responsible life in terms of deputyship, correspondence with reality, acceptance of guilt, and freedom",[87] Bonhoeffer struggles to define more exactly the locus at which responsible life is realized, ending up asking questions which perplex and challenge responsible people to this day.

Does responsibility set me in an unlimited field of activity? Or does it confine me strictly within the limits which are implied in my daily concrete tasks? What must I know myself to be responsible for? And what does not lie within the scope of my responsibility? Is there any purpose in regarding myself as responsible for everything that takes place in the world? Or can I stand by and watch these great events as an unconcerned spectator so long as my own tiny domain is in order? Am I to wear myself out in important zeal against all the wrong and all the misery that is in the world? Or am I entitled, in self-satisfied security, to let the wicked world run its course, so long as I cannot myself do anything to change it and so long as I have done my own work? What is the place and what are the limits of my responsibility?[88]

Bonhoeffer does not provide answers to these questions, but he does not allow people to escape 'taking responsibility', to avoid facing the evil and injustice in the world, to live for self instead of living for others.

One 'answer' Bonhoeffer does give is to make the distinction between the ultimate and the penultimate, with justification by faith being the ultimate word about our relationship with God and the struggle for justice and peace being the integrally related penultimate word.

### Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how Bonhoeffer's vision of the 'church for others' requires a type of *metanoia* which results in standing in solidarity with those who suffer and in taking responsibility for changing the world to be more just. *Metanoia* involves a socio-ethical relationship

\*\*\*\*\*

[86] E:253

[87] E:253

[88] E:253-254

with God through which Christ takes form in us, shaping us to his image. For the church to live out the gospel today it must embrace the message of the 'suffering God,' choosing to suffer vicariously on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised; needing to take sides against those dominant forces of political and economic power which "trample on the heads of the poor ... and deny justice to the oppressed." [89]

For Bonhoeffer the incarnation itself is a profound statement of God's presence with us. But it is through the cross which we learn not only of God's presence, but of God's solidarity with our pain and suffering. Bonhoeffer's theology of the cross helps us to understand God's presence and seeming absence in a way which encourages responsible discipleship, thereby resulting in acts of solidarity with suffering people and working to transform the world to be more just.

Bonhoeffer is undeniably challenging individuals to be 'for others,' but his vision of the 'church for others' has primarily a corporate focus. He understands the relationship between personal transformation and community more broadly. To be a 'church for others' requires embracing all of humanity, not just the members of our particular congregation or denomination, or even the limits of the Christians world. It means thinking of 'community' as 'global community.' It means thinking beyond the narrow constraints of our gender, race, class, nation, political organisation, or ideology. It means taking sides with all those who suffer and are oppressed - refugees, the elderly, women, gay men and lesbians, the poor, the mentally or physically disabled, to name a few. Our world is undeniably an interdependent global village in which the decisions and actions of one group of people directly or indirectly affect the lives of

\*\*\*\*\*

[89] Amos 2:7

other groups. Living a transformed life within the social web of the global community means experiencing the pain of others as 'our' pain and responding by acts of solidarity and responsible action to make the world more just. As Desmond Tutu has written "... we need one another in a pluralistic world for none can ever be self sufficient. We are interdependent or we must perish." [90] Bonhoeffer teaches us that we must not be slaves to the self-interest and limits of our group's agenda, but rather to the lordship of the Suffering Servant who showed us how to live 'for others,' especially those who suffer.

\*\*\*\*\*

[90] Tutu, D., "Black Theology - a book Review" in *Hope and Suffering*, 1983:37

SOLIDARITY AND SALVATION: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION AND COMMUNITY IN DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

CONCLUSION

By looking specifically at the theology and Christian witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer we have attempted to demonstrate how personal transformation is grounded in community existence and experience. The introduction sought to establish common ground in the 'Church Struggle' in Nazi Germany and the church struggle in South Africa, identifying commonalities in struggles over theological truth, over personal and societal liberation, over a more inclusive understanding of who the church is and who it serves, and finally over what it means to be obedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The introduction also pointed out the need for a 'redeemed' understanding of personal transformation which frees it from quietist, overly-pietistic, or individualistic concepts, and which roots it firmly in a social context in which we are required to make ethical decisions and commitments.

The first chapter discussed the theoretical grounding for Bonhoeffer's fundamentally important concept of sociality as developed in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Creation and Fall*. We initially discussed the interdependent nature of the knowledge of God, self and the community of faith, stressing Bonhoeffer's attempt to shift epistemological questions from the post-Kantian emphasis on reason and individualism to more social categories which emphasized relationships and ethical interdependence. Then we clarified Bonhoeffer's social-ethical-historical theological anthropology which again endeavoured to shift theology from an emphasis on reason to a more wholistic and relational understanding. Thirdly, we explored Bonhoeffer's desire to ground revelation concretely in the reality of the redeemed humanity of the church, the *sanctorum communio*. And the last

section of chapter one sought to clarify Bonhoeffer's understanding of transformation via 'fallenness and restoration' as developed in his idea of Jesus' vicarious action to restore the broken community of humanity.

By looking at *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*, the second chapter examined personal transformation in the form of 'discipleship' and in the context of the community experience of the Finkenwalde seminary and community of brethren. During this period of his life Bonhoeffer gave up his academic career to become a 'disciple', emerging himself in the ecumenical movement, the Confessing Church and the struggle for justice in Germany. Far from being a place for escaping the demands of his context, the community life at Finkenwalde provided an environment of challenge and support; the challenge of sharpening socio-political insights and theological acumen, of maintaining spiritual disciplines, of studying and debating together, of hearing the Word; and the nurture and support of fellowship in the face of trials, of mutual confession of sins, of prayer and worship, and of meditating on the Word. Two dominant themes in this chapter were 1.) "only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes";[1] and 2.) the social nature of discipleship. "The Church is one man; it is the Body of Christ. But it is also many, a fellowship of members." [2] Both community life and obedient discipleship to the exclusive lordship of Jesus Christ are integral to living a transformed life.

Chapter three developed a more mature Bonhoeffer's understanding of the relationship between personal transformation and community by looking specifically at the themes of suffering, responsibility and *metanoia* in the *Ethics and Letters and Papers from Prison*. Bonhoeffer's incarnational

\*\*\*\*\*

[1] CD:271

[2] CD:100

Christology and his exposition of a theology of the cross were two of his answers to the problems of human suffering and God's seeming absence. As part of his understanding of *metanoia* Bonhoeffer challenged the church to confess its guilt, to take sides with the oppressed, and to suffer vicariously on behalf of those who suffered at the hands of the powerful. The process of *metanoia* was grounded socially for Bonhoeffer in the ethical relationship of a person with God, resulting in a process of character formation through which Christ takes form in us. Chapter three concluded by discussing transformation as 'being for others' and taking responsibility for changing the world to be more just, acts done within the socio-ethical dialectic of responsibility and freedom.

Perhaps the strongest statement Bonhoeffer ever made, stronger than his written words, was his costly witness, risking his very life, in taking responsible action for others. His active concern for the Jewish people in Nazi Germany and his eventual martyrdom give strong credibility to his theological ideas.

Bonhoeffer's understanding of transformation, while still rooted in the community (*Gemeinde*) of faith, also allowed for a different 'community of influence' outside the church, that of 'secular' people working for peace and justice. The values the conspirators fought for needed to be at the heart of the church's witness and actually served to challenge the church to be transformed into a more responsible and relevant institution.

Bonhoeffer has three particularly relevant messages to give to the contemporary church regarding personal transformation. First, transformation implies taking sides, as Jesus did, with the poor and oppressed. Christians are called to stand in solidarity with those suffering oppression by concrete acts of support. This requires an understanding of the 'church' which is broad enough to break down national,



racial, class and gender boundaries in order to allow the suffering of one part of the 'body of Christ' to impact the rest of the church. Only then will the community affect genuine personal transformation which results in solidarity and vicarious suffering. Second, integral to the Bonhoeffer's concept of *metanoia* is confessing guilt, living for others, and being conformed to Christ. To repent has concrete social consequences, failing which the *metanoia* was not authentic or properly understood. And third, personal transformation implies *taking* responsibility for making the world more just and egalitarian, not *giving up* responsibility by 'putting things in God's hands' or giving in to fatalism. Christians should begin by taking responsibility for changing themselves and the church, but transforming society is definitely within the realm of Christian responsibility, as all of reality is under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

In a section entitled 'Optimism' in his "After Ten Years" reflections, Bonhoeffer wrote,

There are people who regard it as frivolous, and some Christians think it impious for anyone to hope and prepare for a better earthly future. They think that the meaning of present events is chaos, disorder, and catastrophe; and in resignation or pious escapism they surrender all responsibility for reconstruction and for future generations. It may be that the day of judgment will dawn tomorrow; in that case, we shall gladly stop working for a better future. But not before.[3]

\*\*\*\*\*

[3] LPP:15-16

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, D. *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985.

Barth, K. *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. Trans. D. Horton, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Church Dogmatics III/1*. Trans. by J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, & H. Knight, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958.

Berger, B. and Berger, P. L. "Our Conservatism and Theirs", *Commentary*, October 1986.

Berger, P. "The Social Character of the Question Concerning Jesus Christ" in Marty, M. E. (Ed.) *The Place of Bonhoeffer*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1962.

Bethge, E. "The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life and Theology", *The Chicago Theological Seminary Register*, February 1961, vol. LI, no. 2.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Costly Grace. An Illustrated Introduction to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Trans. by Rosaleen Ockenden, New York: Harper and Row, 1979.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*. Trans. under the editorship of Edwin H. Robertson, London: Collins, 1970.

Bonhoeffer, D. *Act and Being*. Trans. by Bernard Noble, Intro. by Ernst Wolf, New York: Harper and Row, 1961.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Cost of Discipleship*. (Revised edition), New York: Macmillan, 1963.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Christology*. (Revised edition), Trans. by Edwin H. Robertson, London: Collins, 1978.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Creation and Fall*. Trans. by John C. Fletcher et. al., Rev. by editors of SCM Press, London: SCM, 1959.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Ethics*. (Rearranged edition following the 6th German edition, 1963), Ed. by Eberhard Bethge, Trans. Meville Norton Smith, New York: Macmillan, 1965.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Thy Kingdom Come" in Godsey, J. *Preface to Bonhoeffer*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. (Revised and enlarged 4th edition) Ed. by Eberhard Bethge, Trans. rev. by Frank Clark, Reginald Fuller et. al., Trans. of additional material by John Bowden, New York: Macmillan, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Life Together*. Trans. by John W. Doberstein, London: SCM, 1954.

\_\_\_\_\_. *No Rusty Swords*. Ed. and intro. by Edwin H. Robertson, Trans. by E. H. Robertson and John Bowden, London: Collins, 1965.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Sanctorum Communio*. Trans. by Ronald Gregor Smith et. al., Published in the U.S. as *The Communion of Saints*. New York: Harper and Row, 1964.

\_\_\_\_\_. *True Patriotism*. Ed. and intro. by Edwin H. Robertson, Trans. by E. H. Robertson and John Bowden, London: Collins, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Way to Freedom*. Ed. and intro. by Edwin H. Robertson, Trans. by E. H. Robertson and John Bowden, London: Collins, 1966.

Brown, C. (Ed.) *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol. I*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975.

Brown, D. "Bonhoeffer and Pacifism", paper written for the Bonhoeffer Consultation of AAR, 29 Oct. 1976.

Day, T. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Christian Community and Common Sense*. Toronto: Edwin Mellon Press, 1982.

de Gruchy, J. W. *Bonhoeffer and South Africa. Theology in Dialogue*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1984.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Standing by God in His Hour of Grieving: Human Suffering, Theological Reflection and Christian Solidarity", C.B. Powell Lecture at the University of South Africa, October 1985 (Published in 1986).

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Church Struggle in South Africa*. (2nd edition), London: Collins, 1986.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Witness to Jesus Christ*. London, Collins, 1988.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Confessing Guilt in South Africa Today in Dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 67, June 1989: 37-45.

Green, C. J. *The Sociality of Christ and Humanity: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Early Theology, 1927-1933*. Missoula, Montana: Scholar's Press, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Text of Bonhoeffer's Ethics", in Peck, W. J. (Ed.) *New Studies in Bonhoeffer's Ethics*. Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1987.

Green, C. J. & Floyd, W. W. *Bonhoeffer Bibliography: Primary and Secondary Sources in English*. International Bonhoeffer Society English Language Section, 1986.

Gifford, P. *The Religious Right in Southern Africa*. Harare: Baobab Books, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1988.

Goba, B. "Corporate Personality: Ancient Israel and Africa" in Moore, B. (Ed.) *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, Atlanta: John Knox, 1973.

Gutierrez, G. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*. Trans. and ed. by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, London, SCM, 1974, 1973.

Harrelson, W. "Bonhoeffer and the Bible" in Marty, M. E. (Ed.) *The Place of Bonhoeffer*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1962.

Hodgson, P. C. & King, R. H. (Eds.) *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

Johnson, A. R. *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1949.

Kant, I. *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Trans. by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960.

Kelly, G. B. *Liberating Faith: Bonhoeffer's Message for Today*. Intro. by Eberhard Bethge, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984.

Kelsey, D. "Human Being" in Hodgson, P. C. and King, R. H. (Eds.) *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

Hopper, D. *A Dissent on Bonhoeffer*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975.

Leatt, J. Kneifel, T. and Nürnberger, K. (Eds.) *Contending Ideologies in South Africa*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1986.

Livingston, J. C. *Modern Christian Thought*. New York: Macmillan, 1971.

Marty, M. E. (Ed.) *The Place of Bonhoeffer: Problems and Possibilities in His Thought*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1962. (1981 reprint of edition published by the Association Press of the National Board of Young Men's Christian Associations).

Matheson, P. (Ed.) *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981.

Metz, J. B. *Faith in History and Society: Towards a Practical Fundamental Theology*. New York: Seabury, 1980.

Moltmann, J. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. Trans. by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden, New York: Harper and Row, 1974.

Müller, H. *Von der Kirche zur Welt (From the Church to the World)*. Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang; Hamburg-Bergstedt: Herbert Reich Evang. Verlag, 1966.

Niebuhr, R. *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, vol. I, no. 3, 1946.

Nolan, A. *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1988.

Nolan, A. "The Option for the Poor in South Africa" in de Gruchy, J. W. and Villa-Vicencio, C. *Resistance and Hope*.

Nolan, A. "The Three Skills", ICT Publication originating from the 1989 Lumka I conference "A Liberating Ministry to the White Community".

Nouwen, H. *The Wounded Healer*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1972.

Nürnberg, K. (Ed.) *Ideologies of Change in South Africa and the Power of the Gospel (Capitalism - Socialism - Marxism)*. Durban: Lutheran Publishing House, 1979.

Pannenburg, W. *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985.

Peck, M. S. *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.

Randall, J. H. *The Career of Philosophy*, vol. II. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965.

Reist, B. *The Promise of Bonhoeffer*. Philadelphia: Lippencott, 1969.

Rasmussen, L. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972.

Schillebeeckx, E. *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*. London: SCM, 1980.

Scholder, K. *The Churches and the Third Reich*. Trans. by John Bowden, vol. I, London: SCM, 1987; vol. II, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.

Theisen, J. P., O.S.B. *Community and Disunity: Symbols of Grace and Sin*, Collegeville, Minnesota: St. John's University Press, 1985.

Tooke, J. V. "Change of Heart and Change of Structures: An Evangelical Point of View" in Nürnberg, K. (Ed.) *Ideologies of Change in South Africa and the Power of the Gospel*. Durban: Lutheran Publishing House, 1979.

Tutu, D. M. *Hope and Suffering*. Compiled by Mthobi Mutlootse, Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers, 1983.

Vorkink II, P. (Ed.) *Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968.

Wallis, J. "The Vehicle for the Vision" in a *Sojourners* magazine supplement, January 1977, vol. 6, no. 1.

Whisson, M. G. and West, M. (Eds.) *Religion and Social Change in Southern Africa*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1975.