



1981

Christology as the Unifying Factor in the Life and Work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Michael L. Morison
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Morison, Michael L., "Christology as the Unifying Factor in the Life and Work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer" (1981). *Master's Theses*. 3217.

https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/3217

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).
Copyright © 1981 Michael L. Morison

CHRISTOLOGY AS THE UNIFYING FACTOR IN THE
LIFE AND WORK OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

by

Michael L. Morison

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

August

1981

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the valuable and patient assistance of the thesis committee: Dr. Jon Nilson, Ph.D., director; Dr. Gerald W. McCulloh, Ph.D.; and the Reverend Richard Costigan, S.J.. Without their critical insight this paper would not have been possible. The author is deeply indebted to Dr. F. Burton Nelson, Ph.D., of North Park Theological Seminary of Chicago for his friendship and assistance in the research of this material. The author wishes to thank Professor Pierre Long of Chicago's Kennedy-King College for his help with the final stages. The author wishes to thank the members of the International Bonhoeffer Society for their encouragement and support in this endeavor.

VITA

The author, Michael L. Morison, is the son of Percy L. Morison and Frances (Puchreiter) Morison. He was born August 25, 1952, in Camp Atterbury, Indiana.

His elementary education was obtained at St. Barbara's Grade School in Brookfield, Illinois. He took his secondary education at St. Joseph High School, where he was graduated in 1970.

In September 1970 he entered Loyola University of Chicago, and in June 1974 received the degree of Bachelor of Arts with a double major in Philosophy and Theology. In 1976, he became a member of the International Bonhoeffer Society.

From September 1974 to August 1976, he served as a teacher of Humanities at Holy Cross High School, River Grove, Illinois. In September 1976, he was granted an Assistantship in Theology at Loyola University of Chicago. From September 1977 to September 1980, he served as a religion teacher and Community Service Coordinator at Notre Dame High School, Niles, Illinois.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
VITA	iii
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE FIRST AMERICAN VISIT: LASSERRE'S IMPACT ON BONHOEFFER'S VIEW OF PACIFISM	11
III. CHRIST PROVIDES A NEW IMPETUS FOR THE CHRISTOLOGY OF BONHOEFFER	24
IV. BONHOEFFER WITHDRAWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY TO ENTER INTO THE CHURCH STRUGGLE	59
V. BONHOEFFER'S CHRISTOLOGICAL VIEW OF PACIFISM AT FÄNO	62
VI. BROTHER BONHOEFFER INTRODUCES A NEW STYLE OF SEMINARY TRAINING	73
VII. BONHOEFFER, CHRIST, AND THE JEWS	104
SUMMARY	113
REFERENCES	125

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During a February 1979 guest lecture at Loyola University, Dr. F. Burton Nelson proposed that certain theologians ought not to be studied simply through their writings. He further stated that one must relate the man's life to his theological work. The author agrees that Dietrich Bonhoeffer is such a theologian. In the words of Dr. Nelson, "He is a prime example of theology as biography."¹ An understanding of the personality of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is of the utmost importance for full understanding and comprehension of the depth of Bonhoeffer's theological thought. Eberhard Bethge notes that Bonhoeffer's "nature remains undiscovered unless he is encountered as a person."² Heinrich Ott also reflects upon the uniqueness of Bonhoefferian scholarship when he writes:

Interpretation then must not be purely philological and logical, as though we had before us a completed work full of his last word on everything, although to tell the truth even there a purely philological and logical interpreting would not be enough. But we have set us the difficult task of understanding--a sympathetic understanding of both the man and of the facts, entering on the human side into the personal situation out of which Bonhoeffer's work grew, and on the factual into the facts themselves which pressed in upon him and constitutes that situation at its deepest.³

¹Dr. F. Burton Nelson (Department of Theology, North Park Theological Seminar, Chicago, Chairman of the Oral History Committee of the International Bonhoeffer Society) was guest lecturer on the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer at Loyola University of Chicago on February 26, 1979.

²Eberhard Bethge, Costly Grace (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 9.

³Heinrich Ott, Reality and Faith: The Theological Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 67.

It is a necessary prerequisite for the serious interpreter of Bonhoeffer to begin his studies by acquiring an empathy for the life and times of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Eberhard Bethge has provided the Bonhoeffer scholar with a definitive biography of the man.⁴ Recently he has published a concise version of his biography as an introductory work for the new Bonhoeffer reader. In this latter work he states:

Gustave Flaubert maintained: "L'homme, c'est rien, l'oeuvre c'est tout" ("The man is nothing; the work is all.") We are about to repudiate the comment and, in fact, almost reverse his assertion. The fact that Bonhoeffer's work is incomplete is part of its fascination.⁵

It is obvious that the man and not merely his thought will be exposed for scrutiny and examination in this paper. This work will deal with the life and thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer between 1931 and 1939. This is a crucial period in his life because it is during these years that Bonhoeffer clarified his self-actualization of the Christian theology and published his last major complete works, including his most notable works, The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together. During this formative period in Bonhoeffer's life, he directed an underground seminary for the Confessing Church which provided him with an opportunity for theological and spiritual preparation for the rigorous demands of the resistance movement. The seeds for change from a solely theological

⁴The work, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Man of Vision--Man of Courage (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1970), by Eberhard Bethge, discusses the life and times of this man. In his work Bethge has provided the Bonhoeffer scholar with a definitive biography of the man in minute detail and with commentary. It affords the serious interpreter with many reference points from which he may proceed with confidence into more detailed studies.

⁵Eberhard Bethge, Costly Grace (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 9.

movement to active resistance against Hitler were blossoming during this tumultuous period. His thought will be examined in the light of the available biographical evidence. The focus will be upon the influence of these historical events upon his theological work.

Eberhard Bethge proposes that Bonhoeffer's life may be divided by three major crossroads. The first period, up until 1931, discovers Bonhoeffer the theologian. During the second period, 1931-1932, the theologian becomes a Christian. Since it is then that Bonhoeffer appropriated the body of theological knowledge into his person, this period is crucial for the Bonhoeffer scholar. The third period begins in 1939, when the Christian becomes a contemporary. This schema does provide a continuity of thought and personality development in the final and most hectic period of Bonhoeffer's life.

Dr. F. Burton Nelson suggests that a different division of the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer will capture the flow and development that occurred in his life with greater depth and richness. He provides seven steps in the path of Bonhoeffer. These steps may be characterized by the following headings: family, education, university lecturer, pastor, seminary teacher, resistance conspirator, and prisoner. Dr. Nelson's divisions do provide useful adjectives to describe the ebbs and flows of this man's life.

Bethge's and Nelson's views of Bonhoeffer's growth and development are in no way in opposition. Rather, it can be asserted that Nelson's detail enlivens Bethge's model. Nelson delineates steps in Bonhoeffer's paths--paths taken at Bethge's crossroads: Nelson is concerned with the path, Bethge with the crossroads.

The final path travelled by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, which is identified here, is the path of guilty martyrdom. As a prisoner, he had the opportunity to escape; as a conspirator, he was fully aware of the consequences of his action. In resigning himself to being a prisoner, he personally accepted the responsibility for his actions. This final path was recorded for us by Payne Best, when he told of Bonhoeffer's request to deliver a message to Bishop G. K. Bell of Chichester, "This is the end, for me the beginning of life."

These three positions are synthesized in the following outline of the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Crossroads and Paths of Bonhoeffer's Way

- I. Bonhoeffer the Theologian (up until 1931)
 - A. Family
 - B. Education
- II. Bonhoeffer the Christian (1931-32 through 1939)
 - A. University Lecturer
 - B. Pastor
 - C. Seminary Director
- III. Bonhoeffer the Contemporary (1940 through April of 1945)
 - A. Resistance Conspirator
 - B. Prisoner
 - C. Guilty Martyr

The growth of Bonhoeffer's spiritual and theological life paralleled the rise and fall of Nazi Germany. He stood in radical opposition to Adolph Hitler and to Naziism. For this reason, his life stands out

as the "light on the hill" (Matt 5:14). His spiritual maturity was developed during the second period of his life, in the political climate of the rise of Nazi Germany. This spiritual maturity provided Bonhoeffer with the reason and the strength to resist, even when that resistance had to be seen through to its ultimate conclusion--tyrannicide.

Although every man must walk through the streets of his milieu and is destined, inescapably, to be part of the culture into which he was born, few men have been so much a part of their times as was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. And few--including great statesmen of the past--have contributed so persuasively and penetratingly to the thought patterns and life styles of other persons.

The second assertion follows the first. It is precisely because the German pastor was so much at home in the troubled world of the 1930's and early 1940's that other men, struggling against the undertow of history, have grasped his teachings as though they were the only buoyant force in sight. This is itself ironic, for Bonhoeffer was at home not only in the tempest of life, but in the finality of death, which he anticipated as the "highest of feasts on the way to freedom."⁶

From the beginning as a theologian, Bonhoeffer was interested in ecclesiology, discipleship, and Christ. From his work, the Communion of Saints through his Letters and Papers from Prison, Bonhoeffer was concerned with Christ and His Church. Though growth and change took place after the publication of Communication of Saints, Christ was no longer a principle or tool of academic theology after the 1933 lectures on Christology. Yet, as Bonhoeffer the "theologian" becomes a "Christian," he leaves the Communion of Saints and Act and Being as the foundation for his structure of Christology. This is exemplified in the Communion of Saints by the statement: "The social significance of Christ is decisive. He is only present in the church, that is, where the

⁶J. Martin Bailey and Douglas Gilbert, The Steps of Bonhoeffer (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. xi.

Christian community is united by preaching and the Lord's Supper for brotherly love."⁷ In another example from Act and Being, he states: "God is not free of man but for man. Christ is the word of his freedom."⁸

During his Christological lectures, Bonhoeffer is making a contribution to the development of a theology that is living, vibrant, and personal. The academic discipline and self-criticism characteristic of his earlier theological method still remains and is enhanced by his personal conviction. Christology and personal faith are woven together, providing not a fine thread but a strong chord. This chord would bind his thoughts together during the years between 1931 and 1939. Christ is not only the center of Bonhoeffer's theology and life, rather his theological work is Christology. Faith is faith in Christ, and it is to this that Bonhoeffer addressed himself in the lectures on discipleship at the Preachers Seminary, later published as The Cost of Discipleship. During his last days in prison, Bonhoeffer looked back and reflected upon this period of his life:

I remember a conversation that I had in America thirteen years ago with a young pastor [Jean Lasserre]. We were asking ourselves quite simply what we wanted to do with our lives. He said he would like to become a saint (and I think it is quite likely that he did become one). At the time I was very impressed, but I disagreed with him, and said, in effect, that I should like to learn to have faith. For a long time I did not realize the depth of contrast. I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life, or something like it. I suppose I wrote The Cost of Discipleship

⁷Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Communion of Saints (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 101.

⁸Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Act and Being (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 90.

as the end of that path. Today I can see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by what I wrote.⁹

The Christological lectures dealt with the inadequacies of the historical approach and attempted to go beyond them to bring Christ into the classroom as a living person for today. What is present for us in Christ the Center is a record of the student notes which have been compiled, redacted, and published. This is a record of Bonhoeffer's first attempt to grapple with the significance of the life of faith in a personal attempt to clarify his own understanding of Christology. Throughout the second and third periods of his life, Bonhoeffer attempted to evolve and crystallize these first ideas and concepts in response to the existential situation existing in the German Church and in Nazi Germany, and its impact upon the life of the Christian.

If we can accept, then, that sufficient evidence has been given that it is one and the same motif which appears as dominating in the lectures on Christology and again in the Ethics, and it is of course clear that many of Bonhoeffer's concepts and horizons have changed between the two, we can assume that in the time between, at the time of The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together (1937 and 1939), he still held this thought and was oriented toward it, even if another group of subjects had captured his precise interest.¹⁰

The movement of his whole thought through The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together finds its resolution in the action taken by Bonhoeffer in the third period of his life as a contemporary of his time. The price for his understanding of discipleship has been established, and new territory has been explored with a technical theological

⁹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 193. This letter was written to E. Bethge on July 21, 1944, the day after the unsuccessful attempt at the assassination of Hitler.

¹⁰Ott, op. cit., p. 369.

terminology. The disciple must be in and of the world. Bonhoeffer reflects on the nature of this when he says, "I discovered later, and I am still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith."¹¹ No longer may the disciple seek refuge away from the world because it has been redeemed in the cross of Christ, it has been judged in the cross of Christ, and the world stands in the presence of the "new man"--Jesus Christ.

Theologian, Christian, and Contemporary are the three major crossroads in the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. They found their resolution in the man during his prison confinement. Theology found faith in the thirties, faith found action in the forties, and action found freedom in 1945. Bonhoeffer was a man and believer for his times who suffered through "Stations on the Road to Freedom."¹²

The importance of Bonhoeffer's life and thought is succinctly stated by W. A. Visser T'Hooft in his foreward to The Steps of Bonhoeffer:

We shall never have done with Bonhoeffer. His questions and his insights will go on demanding our attention. All over the world people who are trying to find meaning and joy in life despite the disorder of the world are listening attentively to what he says, because he was granted the opportunity of confirming his message through his life and his death.¹³

¹¹Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 193.

¹²Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Stations on the Road to Freedom," in Prayers from Prison (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 27-8. This is a poem that Bonhoeffer wrote describing his path through life. The four key words are discipline, action, suffering, and freedom. This was the autobiographical progression that Bonhoeffer saw in his life.

¹³Bailey and Gilbert, op. cit., p. x.

The attraction of Bonhoeffer lies in those events which shaped a life lived in response to the events of his time, a man who theologically responded to the needs of his Church at the present moment. He was a man who could, in compassion, by bearing the suffering for others, bring an enlivened faith to stand in witness against the Nazi state. Bethge characterizes the importance of Bonhoeffer's Christian life lived in witness by the following comment:

Bonhoeffer, moreover, became a martyr in a German concentration camp because of a political conspiracy. There are certain contemporary theologians whose work has reached a more perfect systematic completion; but they died a natural death. And there are Christians whose protest against the idolatry of the Hitler era ended in a martyrdom more in line with the church's traditional preconceptions; but they did not leave behind them stimulating[ly] written theology.¹⁴

We are confronted with a compelling man whose life and work challenge us, in its totality, to explore the question of faith--the issue of discipleship. The biographies of Gill, Bailey and Gilbert, and Reist are often edifications of certain aspects of Bonhoeffer's life which open further questions because of their incompleteness. Yet, James Wm. McLendon, Jr., notes that there are ways of doing better theological work, and he states,

That way is through a certain attention to compelling biographies. Now let us consider the suggestion that a key to these biographies is the dominant or controlling images which may be found in the lives of which they speak.¹⁵

In this paper, Christ will be shown as a controlling image in the life and thought of Bonhoeffer between 1931 and 1939. The Cost of Discipleship, Life Together, and Christ the Center will be primary texts.

¹⁴Bethge, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁵James Wm. McLendon, Jr. Biography as Theology (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1974), p. 89.

Biographical material from Eberhard Bethge's Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Man of Vision--Man of Courage and Costly Grace, and recollections from those who knew him during those years will be used to clarify the basic themes of these texts. This will be done in order to provide fuller understanding of Bonhoeffer's Christological theology. Bonhoeffer's thought will be studied as a response to the theological and social needs of his time, and the question of how one can be at home in the world and with his God. Christ always remains the unifying chord in Bonhoeffer's theological response to the needs of the Church and the world. It will be demonstrated that the subjects to which Bonhoeffer addressed himself may have changed with the demands of the moment, but the fundamental motif still remains.

Bonhoeffer's work in its incompleteness, and his life, stand as one of those compelling biographies which require a sympathetic understanding of the life and work which flowed from the man, as it was lived out in fidelity. This is our inheritance, and Heinrich Ott outlines our theological responsibility in Bonhoefferian studies:

We then not only have to guard Bonhoeffer's legacy but to administer it and make it bear interest. We shall have to extend the lines and continue the paths in which he thought.¹⁶

¹⁶Ott, Reality and Faith, p. 67.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST AMERICAN VISIT:

LASSERRE'S IMPACT ON

BONHOEFFER'S VIEW OF PACIFISM

During the second period, Bonhoeffer, the Christian, was influenced by his American stay at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Bonhoeffer arrived in the United States in September of 1930 and did not return home until June of 1931. It is also important to note that this was to be his only lengthy excursion into a completely non-German environment. He left Germany knowing that the Weimar Republic was on the eve of its decline and arrived in the United States just prior to Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Mary Bosanquet captures the spirit of Union Theological Seminary at the time of Bonhoeffer's arrival when she states:

Three days after Bonhoeffer's arrival in New York, a general election in Germany produced a surprising result: the number of National Socialist representatives in the Reichstag leapt from twelve to a hundred and seven. But Bonhoeffer was too involved in his discovery of the New World to perceive the horrifying significance of these unexpected figures. The extreme contrast presented by the Union Theological Seminary to almost every aspect of the University of Berlin engaged his full and fascinated attention. Bonhoeffer was astonished by the American student's ability to live cheerfully in a crowd day and night, by what he called their "social courage," referring in particular to the ease with which any student could approach any professor or lecturer, uttering what the young German observer described as "the thousandfold hello" and treating the august personage as an equal and finally by the way in which individual mental effort could at any moment fall victim to general conversation. This way of living led to a friendly openness which made a strong appeal to him, but he commented solemnly that in his opinion, as a result: "In a conflict between the will to speak the truth with all its consequences, and the community spirit, the latter would win the day." He

himself entered into this wholly novel community spirit with a ready grace. The beautiful formal manners which were current coin at the University of Berlin were temporarily laid aside and Bonhoeffer made himself master of a polite bonhomie which must have been entirely captivating.¹⁷

While Bonhoeffer was enticed by the social dimensions of the student life at Union, he did not fail to notice certain failings from the European perspective. There appeared to be a lack of knowledge in the area of dogmatics, an inability on the part of the students to discuss a topic by first obtaining a factual basis for their opinions. Distressing also was student laughter in a class when Luther was quoted. These things were very troubling for the young European scholar. The redeeming virtue of his experience at Union Theological Seminary was later to become an underlying influence for his life as a seminary director.

But in spite of the absence of theological substance, Union Theological Seminary owned one virtue which was not conspicuous among the learned members of the theological faculty of Berlin--a burning concern to bring what they knew of Christianity into contact with daily life at every point.¹⁸

Upon discovery of the different theological thrust of Union Theological Seminary, it was only natural for Bonhoeffer to turn towards his fellow Europeans who were capable of understanding his discontent. Erwin Sutz was a fellow student from Switzerland, who eventually was credited with bringing about Bonhoeffer's first meeting with Barth. His other European friend was Jean Lasserre, whose impact upon the life and thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer cannot be underestimated, but must be rediscovered in light of the new data now available to the researcher.

¹⁷Mary Bosanquet, The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 82-3.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 83.

While Lasserre himself maintains that his influence upon the thought of Bonhoeffer is overemphasized, Bethge maintains that the significance of Lasserre's influence has been demonstrated both by the subject matter of Bonhoeffer's theological writing and by a statement in a letter addressed to Bethge from Bonhoeffer, in prison. Bethge maintains that it is because "Lasserre combined a respectable European theology with a simple obedience to the peace teaching of the Sermon on the Mount" that Bonhoeffer was challenged to rethink the traditional Lutheran stance of separating faith and politics.¹⁹ Bethge further states that it became a "theological and existential struggle which ended with his participation in the conspiracy against Hitler."²⁰ Lasserre's influence upon Bonhoeffer's thought and action is outlined by Bethge in the following passage:

This was his [Bonhoeffer's] first meeting with a contemporary Christian pacifist; also Lasserre was a Frenchman, and in relations with a Frenchman a German could not so quickly shake off all feelings of resentment. But he was also a European theologian who, unlike his American contemporaries, could not be dismissed as being naively ignorant of the relevant history of dogmatics. In contrast to the undoubted sincerity and earnestness of many young theologians at Union Theological Seminary, Lasserre confronted him with an acceptance of Jesus' peace commandment that he had never met before. Not that Bonhoeffer immediately became a convinced pacifist--in fact he never did so--but, after meeting Lasserre, the question of the concrete steps to be taken against warlike impulses never left him again. Jean Lasserre's impact upon him was deeper than he suspected at the time.²¹

He [Bonhoeffer] was deeply impressed too by the phenomenon of American church pacifism, despised by the average Lutheran at the time.

¹⁹Bethge, Costly Grace, p. 42.

²⁰Ibid., p. 42.

²¹Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 112.

Here his friendship with Jean Lasserre, a fellow scholar from France, encouraged and deepened his interest,²²

Bethge has clearly noted the impact of Lasserre on Bonhoeffer in both his major and minor biographical works. Bethge continues to note the influence of Lasserre upon Bonhoeffer when he states:

It is to him [Jean Lasserre] that he refers in the reference to a "saint" in his letters from Tegel prison written on the day after the failure of the 20th July Putsch: also it was Lasserre who provided the first impulse for his great book The Cost of Discipleship.²³

The Cost of Discipleship is a reflection upon the whole text of the Sermon on the Mount and its relationship to the life of the Christian disciple. The text of this book is a compilation and reworking of his lectures delivered to his seminarians during his directorship of the underground seminar from 1935 through 1938.

That this letter to Bethge, recalling a significant turning point along his way, was composed the day after the unsuccessful attempt to assassinate the Führer is notable. Bonhoeffer is recalling what Lasserre may have believed to be a relatively insignificant conversation, which became one of those precious moments of peak communication. The impact of this conversation may have been fully realized only when Bonhoeffer became aware that all had failed and that the battle was over. It may well be that Lasserre's French background made it difficult to appreciate the significance of his words upon Bonhoeffer. The basis for determining the weight of Lasserre's influence upon Bonhoeffer has been taken from Bonhoeffer's own testimony in a letter from Tegel:

²²Bethge, Costly Grace, p. 42.

²³Bethge, op. cit., p. 117.

I remember a conversation that I had in America thirteen years ago with a young French pastor [Jean Lasserre]: We were asking ourselves quite simply what we wanted to do with our lives. He said that he would like to become a saint (and I think it is quite likely that he did become one). At the time I was very impressed, but I disagreed with him, and said in effect, that I should like to learn to have faith. For a long time I did not realize the depth of contrast. I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life, or something like it. I suppose I wrote The Cost of Discipleship as the end of that path. Today I can see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by what I wrote.²⁴

As Bethge has so amply demonstrated, the impact of Lasserre cannot be underestimated. In the spring of 1980, at the Third International Conference of the International Bonhoeffer Society, Bethge had the opportunity of meeting Jean Lasserre for the first time. The context of their private discussions has not been reported nor has it been recorded. Thus it is necessary to investigate Lasserre's reflections of his friendship with Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his thoughts upon the question of his impact on the life and thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Jean Lasserre, in an unpublished interview with Dr. F. Burton Nelson, the chairman of the Oral History Committee of the Bonhoeffer Society, recalls that: "We were a little bewildered by the very optimistic and practical outlook of the American theology. It was one of the main reasons we became close friends immediately."²⁵ This is set in context in an interview with Dr. Geoffrey B. Kelly, Secretary of the English Language Section of the International Bonhoeffer Society, where Lasserre notes:

²⁴

Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 193.

²⁵Dr. F. Burton Nelson interviewed Jean Lasserre on August 11, 1977. This taped and unpublished interview was transcribed by Michael L. Morison. The tape was lent to him by Dr. F. Burton Nelson, North Park Theological Seminary of Chicago. The interview was conducted in English.

My first impression was paradoxical. He was the first German whom I saw close at hand and I think I was the first Frenchman he saw up close too. Given the past history between France and Germany, we were a bit reserved towards each other in the beginning. But, on the other hand, he seemed right from the outset, very sympathetic and kind, and, as a European, I felt very close to him. It's curious, but once I was in New York, I felt much closer to the two Europeans than the Americans and that for a number of reasons, style of life, language perhaps. Bonhoeffer didn't speak French and I didn't speak German so we always spoke in English, even with Erwin Sutz who was from the German-speaking section of Switzerland. He knew a few words of French, but although it may seem paradoxical, I always spoke and wrote to Bonhoeffer in English. As Europeans, both from the point of view of general culture and especially from the theological viewpoint, we felt much closer to one another than to the Americans. At that time the American students and professors were caught up in the wave of modernism and theological liberalism. Karl Barth hadn't penetrated in the United States. And also there was such a wave of pragmatism that we were a bit struck by it. We were Europeans who liked to reflect before acting, while Americans gave us the impression of wanting to act before having reflected. All this, I think, brought us close together; we were accustomed to see each other rather often and in effect, we did become close friends.²⁶

Lasserre confirms Bethge's and Bosanquet's presentation of life at Union Theological Seminary and the depth of the lifelong friendship shared by Lasserre and Bonhoeffer. It is of interest to note that at this time Lasserre did not consider himself to be the pacifist that Bethge believed him to be. Lasserre has stated that he did not become a convinced pacifist until after the war.

Of great importance in this discussion is the question of how the subject of pacifism and sainthood arose in the course of the Lasserre-

²⁶Geoffrey B. Kelly, "An Interview with Jean Lasserre," Union Seminary Quarterly Review XXVII (1972), 150. This review was conducted in French, Lasserre's native tongue, and is particularly valuable because Lasserre edited and corrected the text before it was translated into English. The important difference between these two interviews is the precision in the Kelly interview as contrasted with the feelings expressed in the Nelson interview, the one in English, the common language between Lasserre and Bonhoeffer.

Bonhoeffer relationship. Lasserre addresses himself to this question in the course of his interview with Dr. Geoffrey Kelly:

It happens that one of my best friends was a conscientious objector. He was also a student and pastor. I studied with him for four years in Paris. Although he had never discussed it with us, he had refused military service and so was put in prison. When I myself was in New York, I learned of his situation. It made a deep impression on me. I was already a bit familiar with this idea so that I was somewhat orientated towards a kind of pacifism. I myself wasn't capable of making such a decision and, besides, I didn't refuse military service. But I was impressed and sympathetic to the idea of pacifism while I have the impression that Dietrich never put the question to himself. It was something completely new to him.²⁷

In his unpublished interview with Jean Lasserre, Dr. F. Burton Nelson reveals that if he spoke of being a saint it was with this friend from the seminary in Paris who was a conscientious objector. The model for this would have been Saint Francis of Assisi, who apparently at this time captivated their attention as a model of the Christian life. The fact that Jean Lasserre shared this information and news with Bonhoeffer opened the door to a new way of perceiving the Christian message. Although Lasserre's resulting impact may now be qualified and set within its proper context, it cannot be underestimated. Lasserre did not teach the meaning of pacifism to Bonhoeffer, rather he exposed Bonhoeffer to the possibility of pacifism. It appears that this is territory that they explored together:

His encounter with Lasserre, this first ecumenical confrontation, transformed his academic knowledge of Lutheran ethics into a committed identification with Christ's peace teachings. He based this on the Biblical-ecumenical belief in the body of Christ, and in succeeding years he added more and more bricks to the structure.²⁸

²⁷Ibid., p. 151.

²⁸Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 112.

This intuitive statement on the part of Bethge in his major biography is also confirmed in Lasserre's own words, when he says:

The fact that I was the first Frenchman he was familiar with must have had a certain influence and the fact that I myself was very interested in the "Social Gospel" and was particularly anti-militarist and greatly sympathetic to the idea of conscientious objection, this must have surprised him. It is possible that I was the first to put the question to him.²⁹

Lasserre was a man who grew very close to Bonhoeffer during his year at Union Theological seminary, sharing with him the famous trip to Mexico in June of 1931. This friendship was to endure through the coming years until, finally, a fear for each other's safety forced them to discontinue their exchange of letters.

Bonhoeffer and Lasserre were to meet two more times after the American visit. They met at Lasserre's parsonage where Lasserre hosted a conference between British and German theologians, and the last time they met was during the conference at Fäno. Though their postal communication was to last well into the war, Lasserre admits that their correspondence was limited to what the other was doing. Basically, these were letters of friendship and they were written in English. Lasserre mentions in the Nelson interview that he remembers a Hitler cancellation stamp on some of the postal communication he received from Bonhoeffer.

The friendship appears to have solidified itself on the occasion of Lasserre's and Bonhoeffer's attendance at the movie All Quiet on the Western Front, an experience which also seems to have turned their attention towards matters of peace and pacifism.

²⁹Kelly, "An Interview," 151.

I remember one incident which I believe had sufficient importance. In the early spring of 1931 both of us went to the movies in New York to see the film, All Quiet on the Western Front.³⁰

It was a real risk because we were one German and one French[man], and we were going to see on the screen German and French soldiers killing each other in battles, in fierce battles, and many atrocities and terrible things. But we had not supposed, we had not thought there would be a much stronger difficulty.³¹

This was an anti-militarist film based on the German novel by Remarque. The theater was full. The audience was American and, since the film had been made from the point of view of the German soldiers, the audience immediately sympathized with the German soldiers. When they killed French soldiers on the screen, the crowd laughed and applauded. On the other hand, when the German soldiers were wounded or killed, there was a great silence and a sense of deep emotion.³²

But the terrible thing was that the public, the audience, Americans, were a bit [like] children³³

This was a rather difficult experience for both of us because we were seated next to each other, he a German and I a Frenchman. It was all the more paradoxical because during the war the Americans had fought on the side of the French against the Germans.³⁴

In that movie the American people were with the Germans against the French. And it has been a terrible experience. I have wept that day. And when we got out of that movie Bonhoeffer understood what [a] drama it had been in my heart. And I remember he could not find enough ways of showing me his friendship, his understanding.³⁵

For us this was a very profound experience. First of all from a fraternal view, it touched me to see how he couldn't do enough to console me, to be kindly to me after that movie when we had gone out.³⁶

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Nelson interview.

³²Kelly, "An Interview," 151.

³³Nelson interview.

³⁴Kelly, "An Interview," 151.

³⁵Nelson interview.

³⁶Kelly, "An Interview," 151.

I think this has been, has had a great influence on his thinking. He has, I think, that day discovered that the Church is more important than the nation.³⁷

I think his reaction was deeper and all the more changed from his preconceived ideas of our previous discussions on these things. We had, in fact, some discussions on the relativity of the national community and on the supremacy of the Church over the nation or on the Universal Church. So I think that made a deep impression on him. That experience in the movie theater was a real experience,³⁸ tragically real, and it must have certainly left its mark on him.

Bonhoeffer was drawn towards this idea of pacifism. During their trip to Mexico, Bonhoeffer and Lasserre gave a conference on the topic of peace at the Normal School for Teachers in Victoria, Mexico. Three to five hundred students attended and were astounded to see a Frenchman and a German standing together and calling for peace. Lasserre was even surprised that Bonhoeffer spoke so powerfully for peace:

I was a little surprised. I didn't think he had understood the pacifist vision of things as well as that.³⁹

And it is true that on that day Dietrich spoke in a very strong way for peace. And his speech was absolutely in agreement with mine. I was not yet a true pacifist but on the way to being it. And . . . he spoke in a very clear and decisive way, very evangelical way about peace and the impossibility for the Christian to kill his brother.⁴⁰

Lasserre assesses the importance of their experience at the movie, All Quiet on the Western Front and the impact of their Mexican tour, including their conference on peace, by stating:

And I think this [the movie] has been, has had a great influence upon his thinking. He has, I think that day discovered that the Church is more important than the nation. Because he was my friend and he took my part against the Americans, he was scandalized by the attitude of the American audience. Not only friendship, but also

³⁷Nelson interview.

³⁸Kelly, "An Interview," 151.

³⁹Ibid., p. 152.

⁴⁰Nelson interview.

faith, common faith. I think this has been very important in his way toward pacifism because he discovered that war is not really an important thing from the point of view of the Church. The only really important thing is that the Church be the Church and would remain the Church, and would keep in fellowship with all the other Christians. And what is absolutely wrongful and unacceptable in war is that Christians are compelled to forget their Christian faith and their Christian belonging to the Church, to the universal, the real Church. That is finally more important to him and faithful to the Church and to the fellowship of the Church, ecumenical and international Church.⁴¹

This is confirmed and accentuated in Bonhoeffer's sermon, written in English, for his fellow students at Union Theological Seminary. He had chosen I John 4:16 to be his scripture text, and spoke on the "Love of God."

As a Christian minister I think that just here is one of the greatest tasks for our church: to strengthen the work of peace in every country and in the whole world. It must never more happen that a Christian people fight against a Christian people, brother against brother, since both have one Father. Our churches have already begun this international work. But more important than that is, it seems to me, that every Christian man and woman, boy and girl, take seriously, above all personal and national desires, of the one Christian people in the whole world, of the brotherhood of mankind

You have brothers and sisters in our people and in every people; do not forget that. Come what may, let us never more forget that one Christian people is the people of God, that if we are in accord, no nationalism, no hate of races or classes can execute its designs, and they the world will have its peace forever and ever.⁴²

Bethge sets the American experience in perspective when he analyzes the effect of this trip in his summary of the Union Theological Seminary experience. He reveals what Bonhoeffer appears to have experienced as based upon his personal writings and also as alluded to by his personal friend of that era, Jean Lasserre.

⁴¹Nelson interview.

⁴²Dietrich Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords (London: Wm. Collins Sons, Ltd., 1977), p. 80.

The fact of the matter was that the America he saw on the eve of Roosevelt's New Deal, the activity of churches and students in the economic crisis, and the enthusiasm of the "social gospel," made an ineradicable impression on him. Firmly though he stood by his fundamental theological principles, he was yet strongly motivated by an "insatiable curiosity for every new reality." Henceforward, a purely desk-bound existence could no longer satisfy him. Previously unquestioned habits of thought and feeling suddenly seemed inadequate; they were in need of reappraisal.

As before, the presence of Christ as seen through the eyes of this American theology seemed to him to be distorted or inadequately represented. But was it not inadequately represented on the other side of the Atlantic too? The later Bonhoeffer of The Cost of Discipleship and the church struggle had not forgotten what he learned in New York. His stay in America reinforced his basic interest in the concrete reality of the world 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.

"My stay in America . . . made one thing plain to me: the absolute necessity of cooperation and at the same time the inexplicable gap that seems to make such cooperation impossible. Looking at it from across the Atlantic, our standpoint and our theology look so local, and it seems inconceivable that in the whole of the world just Germany, and in Germany just a few men, have understood what the Gospel is. And yet I see the message nowhere else."⁴³

Bonhoeffer is obviously in the process of development in terms of his personal thought. Much credit for this must be given to Jean Lasserre who introduced Bonhoeffer--acquainted him--with a new perspective, to pacifism and a concept of Christianity that goes beyond nationalism. More precisely, Jean Lasserre and Bonhoeffer shared a mutual discovery of a Christianity that transcends nationalism. Bethge is correct in crediting Lasserre with a significant impact upon the thinking of Bonhoeffer; yet, attention must be paid to Lasserre's story as well. His contribution was not in the direct teaching of Bonhoeffer about the significance of pacifism, although he indeed provided a seminal thought which germinated

⁴³Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 122.

throughout the rest of Bonhoeffer's life. The impact of giving birth to a thought cannot itself be underestimated, especially where a friendship grew strong and deep through sharing of a common set of experiences and concerns.

CHAPTER III

CHRIST PROVIDES A NEW IMPETUS FOR THE CHRISTOLOGY OF BONHOEFFER

The Bonhoeffer who returned to Germany arrived home with a new perspective and a greater insight into the question of the ecclesiastical nature of the Church in the present-day world. The lessons learned about pacifism, peace, and the universality of the Church, transcending nationalism, would now move Bonhoeffer into the evolution of a Christology that could embrace these thoughts, and to a place where new theological insights could be understood in the light of their practical consequences. This new Christological insight would have its impact upon the rest of his theological, pastoral, and social life. The American experience confronted Bonhoeffer with a Christianity that was applied to the everyday life of the people, a Christianity and Christian theology that could be responsive to the situation of life today, a theology that was alive in the faith-life and everyday life of the people. This was bringing theology home from the academic classroom.

This new viewpoint provided Bonhoeffer with a basis from which he could construct a Christology that provided room for action on the part of the Christian. He began to make decisions without theological advisors. This enabled him to explore various expressions of his theological insight. The aliveness of his theology and its application to the world is outlined by Bethge in his discussion of Bonhoeffer's preparations

for his assignment at the University of Berlin prior to the beginning of the actual instruction:

In the next two years [1931-1932], the work by the now twenty-five year old Bonhoeffer lay in three different fields:

1. In the academic sphere, every term held a number of two hour lectures and seminars in the theological faculty of the University of Berlin.
2. In the Church and pastoral field, he delivered sermons and addresses as a student's chaplain and instructed a confirmation class at Wedding; and he organized a week-end home for students and confirmation candidates at Biesenthal, opened a youth club room for the unemployed in Charlottenburg, and then tried to secure a parish in proletarian east Berlin.
3. In the ecumenical sphere, he became a youth secretary in the World Alliance of Churches and in the ecumenical Council for Practical Christianity ("Life and work"); he travelled, spoke and organized.⁴⁴

Bonhoeffer certainly diversified his interest and balanced an academic approach to theology with personal involvement in the more practical issues of church politics (ecumenism) and pastoral care. Bonhoeffer demonstrated his "burning concern" to bring what he knew of "Christianity into contact with daily life at every point," a lesson from his Union Seminary days. His interest in the confirmation class at Wedding led to his moving into a baker's apartment in the poorer section of the city, so that he could be near his students. His door was always open to the boys and at times he cancelled his classes at the University to meet their needs.⁴⁵ Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann, a student at the University, recalls Bonhoeffer's dedication to these confirmands thusly:

Somehwere in the north of Berlin, in Wedding, he ran a group of difficult boys whom nobody so far, had been able to manage. To

⁴⁴ Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pp. 130-1.

⁴⁵ Bethge, Costly Grace, p. 49.

those boys he gave himself with the utmost devotion. Once he arrived fifteen or twenty minutes late for a seminar. It had never happened before, for he was always very reliable and correct. We looked at him in astonishment, but he only said: "One of my boys is dying, and I wanted to have a last word with him. It had to be."⁴⁶

Bethge captures for us the image of Bonhoeffer, the young university lecturer who had yet to prove himself. Bonhoeffer presented for the student body a style of instruction that was unheard of at this venerable institution.

Bonhoeffer started teaching and lecturing at the university in Berlin in the winter semester of 1931-2. The theological faculty had a record number of over one thousand students. Nevertheless, a non-examining lecturer had to prove himself if he was to keep his audience. Bonhoeffer's lecture rooms and seminars, however, did fill.

In 1931, he began to define his position with a lecture on "The Theology of the 19th and 20th Centuries." This created a stir of interest. During 1932 he dealt with the problem of the Church; twenty-five years after Harnack's famous lecture on "The Essence of Christianity" he advertised polemically in the same place his "Essence of the Church." In 1933 he applied himself to, as he said, the most difficult subject of all: Christology.

Clearly Dietrich Bonhoeffer came across needs which were not really satisfied within the distinguished faculty. He satisfied them with extraordinary personal commitment.

He surprised his audience with prayers in the lecture room. He confronted them with the subject of peace, which had a shocking effect on the mass of theological students, who were already overwhelmingly Nazi sympathizers. At that time it was highly unusual, either in the Church or the faculty, to hear such words as: "We shall not shrink from the word 'pacifism.' The next war must be outlawed not by elevating one commandment (as the fanatics do) above the others--the fifth, for instance--but by our obedience to a commandment of God that is aimed at us today, namely that there shall be no more war because it blinds men to revelation."⁴⁷

⁴⁶Wolf-Dieter Zimmerman, "Years in Berlin," in I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ed. Wolf-Dieter Zimmerman and Ronald G. Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 65-6.

⁴⁷Bethge, Costly Grace, pp. 49-50.

In April of 1944, Dietrich Bonhoeffer alludes to the importance of the American experience in bringing about change in his life when he is writing from Tegel prison. "I don't think I've changed very much, except perhaps at the time of my first impression abroad and under the first conscious influence of father's personality. It was then I turned from phraseology to reality."⁴⁸ Dr. Clifford Green takes up this question of Bonhoeffer's transition from "theologian" to "Christian" in his dissertation.

The problem of the powerful ego highlighted in Bonhoeffer's theology was also the major personal problem for the theologian himself. When he wrote the prison letter of his turning "from the phraseological to the real," he referred to the two passages in I and II Timothy which speak of one who "formerly blasphemed" but later served God "with a clear conscience." Bethge has documented that this is a quite personal allusion on Bonhoeffer's part. The "turning" or "break" occurred in the latter half of 1932. In examining what Bonhoeffer described as "a great liberation," we see that the personal problem is, indeed, the problem of the ego and power. This correspondence allows us to better understand the autobiographical dimension of his theology and is therefore indispensable for interpreting Bonhoeffer's theological development.⁴⁹

Bonhoeffer kept this personal change hidden to all except a few close friends and members of the family. Green reports:

Had Bonhoeffer publicized his own spiritual struggle and the new commitment of faith and obedience which issued from it, he would have invalidated it; self-reflection would have deflected faith, and vanity and self-righteousness would have subverted obedience. For reasons intrinsic to the nature of the case, therefore, he kept it hidden.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 275.

⁴⁹ Clifford J. Green, "Bonhoeffer: The Sociality of Christ and Humanity," Dissertation Series 6, University of Montana (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press for the American Academy of Religion, n.d.), pp. 171-2.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 172.

Bonhoeffer expressed this in a very personal letter written to Erwin Sutz from Finkenwalde in 1936.

I plunged into my work in a very unchristian way. An . . . , ambition that many noticed in me has made my life difficult

Then something happened, something changed and transformed my life to the present day. For the first time I discovered the Bible I had preached often, I had seen a great deal of the Church, and talked and preached about it--but I had not yet become a Christian

I know that at that time I turned the doctrine of Jesus Christ into something of personal advantage for myself . . . I pray to God that that will never happen again. Also I had never prayed, or prayed only very little. For all my loneliness, I was quite pleased with myself. Then the Bible, and in particular the Sermon on the Mount, freed me from that. Since then everything has changed. I have felt this plainly, and so have other people about me. It was a great liberation.

Then came the crisis of 1933. This strengthened me in it. Also, I now found others who shared that aim with me. The revival of the Church and of the ministry became my supreme concern.⁵¹

This led not only to the aforementioned difference in his teaching style from that of the rest of the theological faculty, but this also led to a change in his own personal life style.

Now for the first time in his life, he went regularly to the Sunday morning service, and he began to take Holy Communion as often as he could.⁵²

. . . a momentous inner revolution all date from a time when the battle for the new insight, that the theologian must also be a Christian, had been fought and its fruits were ripening. But Bonhoeffer's certainty and joy in his commitment were the fruit of a longer struggle.⁵³

Something of the real person of Dietrich Bonhoeffer was maturing and growing. As the theologian became a man of Christian faith, there arose within him the desire to reflect and explicate this experience

⁵¹Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pp. 154-5.

⁵²Bosanquet, The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 109.

⁵³Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 154.

theologically. This found its first expression in the Christological lectures. As Bethge notes:

This he felt to be the hardest task he had yet undertaken; not because interruptions became more frequent, but because he was faced with the task of bringing together, preserving and testing out all he had previously thought, said and attempted.⁵⁴

In the introduction to the Christological lectures, Bonhoeffer the man of faith is speaking for the first time. The believing "theologian" is at work as a Christian and a theologian. Bonhoeffer, the Christian, had to liberate the living Christ from the chains of philosophical and sociological language.

Bonhoeffer moves from a theological style which is deeply rooted in philosophical and sociological language to a tropological style with its foundations in the Bible. W. B. Gould describes this approach in his paper "After Thirty Years: Bonhoeffer's Discipleship Revisited.":

The tropological approach--employed consistently by Bonhoeffer--is "an exegetical-devotional process whereby the subject and the object are overcome through the action of Christ in confrontation with the Scriptural Word."⁵⁵

This is significant because the change in style represents and reflects the man, and not merely a change in terminology.

While Bonhoeffer was gaining new perspectiveness and insights in his own theological and faith life, the continued growth of the Nazi movement remained. Within a week of the signing of the Concordat, a referendum was held among members of all the Protestant churches in Germany showing an overwhelming majority in favor of the German Christians (National Socialists in the Church).

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 153.

⁵⁵William B. Gould, "After Thirty Years: Bonhoeffer's Discipleship Revisited," University of Dubuque, 1978, p. 2. A paper prepared for and presented to the International Bonhoeffer Society.

The Concordat was concluded on the 20th of July, 1933; then on the 26th of July, 1933, Bonhoeffer uses a curious phrase that elucidates his position to Karow, the general superintendent of Berlin, in a personal letter. "The present weighs heavily on us. God alone knows where the way is that will bring us out into the light."⁵⁶ Bethge also notes in his biography:

. . . for he was alarmed at the sluggish reactions of the church assemblies. He felt that the clergy should have displayed greater vigour and efficacy in countering state intervention, and in such a way as to make everyone realize unmistakably that the whole Church as such was involved, and not merely her leading figures.⁵⁷

Mary Bosanquet recognizes that the pressure of these events, disturbing though they were, only served to intensify Bonhoeffer's creative concentration upon the subject matter at hand.

While these disturbing developments within the Church went forward, Bonhoeffer for the time being continued his work at the university, and it was in the summer of 1933 that his last and most outstanding series of lectures was delivered.

Once more the creative power of the work rests in Bonhoeffer's intense concern for his subject. The young man stood up at the desk not to deliver a series of impersonal academic lectures, but to speak to his students about Jesus Christ.⁵⁸

Abstraction for the sake of scholarly study is now superceded by personal theological reflection, within an appropriately academic and systematic pattern, of the man of faith. It is evident that Bonhoeffer also realizes the full importance of these lectures for himself as a believer. This is the high point of his academic career and his life of faith because these two had reached a synthesis in Jesus Christ.

⁵⁶ Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, p. 248.

⁵⁷ Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 223.

⁵⁸ Bosanquet, The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 123.

Christology has now become the unifying chord for Bonhoeffer's faith and theological work.

The scholar must approach Bonhoeffer's Christological lectures with an openness and sensitivity to the spiritual growth that has occurred. The impact of this spiritual growth upon Bonhoeffer's thought is significant. We are confronted here by a Christian who speaks as a theologian and from the heart, a man of his time speaking of Christ's timelessness as the God-man "for us," the spiritual reality as it was experienced by this Christian-Theologian.

Bonhoeffer the theologian had become a Christian-Theologian. This is the central point in the shift of emphasis in his new tropological approach to the theological task and its verbal expression. Bethge notes in the biography that, during the lectures, Bonhoeffer was characterized by:

a personal commitment that engaged the whole of his personality and showed itself in innumerable ways of practical behavior.⁵⁹

We must study Christology in the humble silence of the worshipping community. Prayer is to be silent and to cry out at the same time, before God in the presence of His Word. We have come together as a community to study Christ, God's word. We have not men in church, but in the lecture room. We have academic work to do.⁶⁰

While Bonhoeffer maintains a claim to the academic work to be done, this work from this time forward will be the work of his faith "seeking understanding." For Bonhoeffer, "'faith' is something whole, involving the whole of one's life."⁶¹ His life, pastoral and ecumenical work,

⁵⁹Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 153.

⁶⁰Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 27.

⁶¹Green, "Bonhoeffer," pp. 249-250.

and his theological endeavors will find their unity and wholeness in faith--in Jesus Christ.

Clifford Green provides us with the most concise outline of the lectures on Christology when he writes:

The lectures were designed to have an introduction and three main parts. The introduction deals with methodological prolegomena, first considering the relation of Christology to the other intellectual disciplines, and then discussing the connection between the doctrine of the person of Christ and soteriology. The three main parts were to treat the present Christ, the historical Christ, and the eternal Christ. Part three was not reached before the semester was concluded. Part two, although placed second in order, in fact discloses the historical and systematic presuppositions of Bonhoeffer's own Christology. It examines the classical Christological formulations and heresies, and their modern counterparts, under the rubric of "critical Christology." It thus prepares the way for Bonhoeffer's own position.⁶²

Bonhoeffer's Christology is the core of this essay. Thus a careful examination of his Christology and its uniqueness from its beginnings in these lectures is necessary. Since this particular time in his life was highly peculiar, it is not surprising that his approach towards this subject would carry with it its own brand of peculiarity.

Christology is a peculiar discipline, because its subject is Christ himself, the Word, the Logos. Christology is Logology. Christology is the science, because it is concerned with the Logos. Were this Logos our own Logos, then Christology would be a matter of the Logos, reflecting upon itself. But this Logos is the Logos of God, whose transcendence makes Christology the crown of learning and whose coming from the outside makes it the centre of scholarship.⁶³

Bonhoeffer is clearly establishing the prima facia place and role of Christology in his life and work. From this point forward for Bonhoeffer

⁶²Green, "Bonhoeffer," pp. 249-250.

⁶³Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, pp. 27-8.

all theology will be the practical application of Christology to the living of the Christian life. The basis for this can be seen in the text of the statement made in August of 1932 on the topic of "The Church is Dead.":

In all that we say and do we are concerned with nothing but Christ and his honour among men. Let no one think that we are concerned with our own cause, with a particular view of the world, a definite theology or even with the honour of the church. We are concerned with Christ and nothing else. Let Christ be Christ.⁶⁴

All valid theology is Christology either implicitly or explicitly. We find the application of this in his sermon preached on the 23rd of July, 1933, on the Church Election Day. During the sermon Bonhoeffer found it necessary to address himself to the problem of justifying one's involvement (particularly his involvement) in the Church struggle, and raising it above the issue of personal egoism in the quest for power.

If it were left to us, we would rather avoid the decisions which are now forced upon us; if it were left to us, we would rather not allow ourselves to be caught up in this Church struggle; if it were left to us, we would rather not have to insist upon the righteousness of our cause and we would so willingly avoid the terrible danger of exalting ourselves over others; if it were left to us, we would retire today rather than tomorrow into private life and leave all the struggle and pride to others. And yet--thank God--it has not been left to us.

Jesus went out into a deserted place with his disciples, close to the edge of the pagan lands, and there he was alone with them. This is the place where for the first time he promises the legacy of his church. Not among the people, not at the visible climax of his mission; but outside, in a distant spot, far from the orthodox scribes and pharisees.⁶⁵

Bonhoeffer roots his Christology in the Chalcedonian doctrine on the nature of Christ. This is the point of departure and the norm against

⁶⁴Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, p. 180.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 208-9.



which Bonhoeffer engages in a "critical Christological" quest for the Christ "present" today.

The Chalcedonian Definition of 451, which produced the classic formulation of the doctrine of the God-manhood of Jesus Christ . . . was concerned with the complete divine and complete human nature of Christ, with the one Jesus Christ with two natures.

What did the formula of Chalcedon say? It states the a priori impossibility and impermissibility of taking the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ side by side or together or as a relationship of objectifiable entities. Simple negations remain. No positive pattern of thought is left to explain what happens in the God-man Jesus Christ. Thus the mystery is left as a mystery and must be understood as such. All thought forms are cut short. After the decision of Chalcedon it is no longer permissible to objectify the divinity and the manhood in Christ and to distinguish them from each other as entities. We cannot form a concept of God and then draw boundaries within it.⁶⁶

John A. Phillips notes that Bonhoeffer remains traditionally Lutheran and orthodox in his approach to Christology, especially by his use of the Chalcedonian definition of Christ. Yet, Phillips identifies the point of emphasis that Bonhoeffer accentuates in his orthodoxy.

Luther used the traditional (medieval) four-fold method of scripture interpretation: historical, allegorical, tropological and analogical. But he tended in time to concentrate upon the third part of this schema which stressed the bearing of scripture upon the individual Christian through the action of Christ (de quolibet spirituali et interiori homine).⁶⁷

As Phillips adds, "Luther made extensive use of this method, especially in his writings on the Psalms, and it is more than a coincidence that Bonhoeffer, who turned so often to Luther . . ."⁶⁸ would follow the model of Luther in his Christological lectures, since he also

⁶⁶Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 91.

⁶⁷John A. Phillips, Christ for Us in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 97-8.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 98.

used the same process in his work, Psalms: The Prayerbook of the Bible. Bonhoeffer is not betraying Lutheran thought; he actually is attempting to get back to where Luther was moving in his thought and work. The uniqueness of Bonhoeffer's approach lies in its faithfulness to Luther's own methodology.

Clifford Green notes that, for Bonhoeffer, "No abstract notion of God apart from his revelation in the man Jesus is permitted; no abstract idea of the humanity of Jesus apart from his unity with God is acceptable."⁶⁹ In short:

For his own positive Christology, Bonhoeffer proposes a way forward in his conceptuality of sociology. "The relationship of God and man cannot [be] conceived as a relationship of things (Dinglichkeiten) but only in the relationship of persons." It is persons who ask of other persons the question: "Who?"⁷⁰

Bonhoeffer begins his "critical Christology" by crystallizing the concept of Jesus Christ from which he will proceed. This is an attempt to liberate Jesus Christ from the limiting world of theoretical theology in all its abstractness. What bothered Bonhoeffer most was the compartmentalizing of Christ into understandable categories so that the theologian could comprehend the mystery of the Incarnation. Yet, the mystery of the Incarnation does not allow for the divorcing of the divine and human nature, even for the sake of scholarly study, as it exists in the person of Jesus Christ. To speak of Jesus Christ, Bonhoeffer felt compelled to speak in terms of the creative power of the mystery of the Incarnation in binding the divine and human nature together in the

⁶⁹Green, "Bonhoeffer," p. 250.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 251.

person of Jesus Christ. "This one God-man is the starting point of Christology."⁷¹ "God in timeless eternity is not God. Jesus limited by time is not Jesus."⁷² Bonhoeffer, therefore, sets forth the framework for his Christological thought in the following passage:

For the Christological question, of its nature, must be addressed to the whole Christ, the one Christ. This whole Christ is the historical (geschichtliche) Jesus who can never in any way be divorced from his work. But Christology primarily seeks his being and not his action. To put it in more abstract terms: the subject of Christology is the personal structure of the whole, historical Jesus Christ.⁷³

For Bonhoeffer, to speak of Christology is to speak of the "whole" and "unified" Jesus Christ. The subject of study, Jesus Christ the God-man, is a unity that must be accepted, studied, and understood as such. In Bonhoeffer's own words, "The theologian must be able to speak of Jesus Christ as one in whom 'Act' and 'Being' are one."⁷⁴

The critical scholar should take careful note of the cautiousness with which Bonhoeffer approaches the subject of Christology. There exists a healthy awe and fear of God; one that fruitfully produces a great respect for the subject of study--Jesus Christ. The fear of destroying the unity, the wholeness of Jesus Christ constantly manifests itself throughout the lectures. This leads Bonhoeffer to speak dialectically in terms of Jesus Christ and the mystery of the Incarnation.

⁷¹Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 46.

⁷²Ibid., p. 46.

⁷³Ibid., p. 40.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 21.

The presence of Christ necessitates the statement "Jesus is fully man"--and it necessitates the statement, "Jesus is fully God."⁷⁵

Here we are confronted with the first problem of Christology: if Christ is presented now only as power, but in his person, how are we to conceive of this presence so that it does not violate the wholeness of his person.⁷⁶

Bonhoeffer is creating a novel approach for his students and himself by maintaining the unity of the two natures. He will now engage in a critical analysis of how one may properly ask the Christological question. He believes that the question must be stated clearly, properly, and succinctly if it is to be understood and answered correctly. But it is an answer that transcends the classroom and theological jargon; the student finds himself confronted ontologically by the person of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer was well aware of the implications of where the improperly asked Christological question could lead the theologian. He explicates this in the section of the lectures dedicated to the historical Christ. The consequences of this improper approach may lead the theologian to heresy, or, worse still, to the loss of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer sums this up when he states: "Who are you really? . . . Christ goes through the ages, questioned anew, missed anew, and killed anew."⁷⁷ The improperly asked question is tantamount to killing Christ.

The question, "Who are you?" remains ambiguous . . . But it can also be the question of the person who, when he asks, means "How can I deal with you?" In that case, the question is simply a disguised form of the question "How?" The question "Who?" can be put to Jesus only when the counter-question has been heard. In that case it is not man who has dealt with Jesus, but Jesus who has dealt with man. So the question "Who?" is to be spoken only in faith.⁷⁸

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 45.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 36.

⁷⁸Ibid.

Clifford Green captures the significance of this understanding for Bonhoeffer in the following passage where he attempts to clarify the Christological question in these lectures.

Two categories are used to develop Christology under the rubric of person: Personstruktur and Existenzweise. If the proper question of Christology is "Who is Jesus Christ?" this is a question that can only be asked of the Christ who is present. Christology is not concerned with an ideal of Christ nor with the historical influence of Christ, but with the resurrected Christ, the living God, who is really present as a person not in isolation but only in relation to men.⁷⁹

As a result, that one question always remains: "who are you?" The answers for Dietrich Bonhoeffer were not systematically developed in a logical progression. Rather, as is continually discovered in this paper, the answers arose as a response to the situation of life at this moment. Bonhoeffer addressed himself to the concrete situations of this historical moment. He responded to Christ in this moment of time and as a faithful Christian-Theologian:

. . . there is a consensus developing among scholars concerning the decisive question about which his life and work centered, viz., the concrete presence of Christ; all else is subsumed under this. Whether the question is "Who is Christ?" (which is the governing idea up until the church struggle) or whether it is the same phrase with "today" introduced into it (which denotes what is really "new" in the letters from prison) it remains the same issue. While the question was forever in his thought, Bonhoeffer found he had several answers to the one question.⁸⁰

Bonhoeffer would spend the rest of his life attempting to live out the answers in very practical ways. I would like to cite one example of this here where Dietrich confronts the question of military conscription

⁷⁹Green, "Bonhoeffer," p. 251.

⁸⁰Peter Vorkink II, Bonhoeffer in a World come of Age (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), p. x.

and its demand that he leave Germany. Since this is an extended quote it shall serve as the only example to demonstrate the way in which Bonhoeffer typically responded to the situation of life as a Christian-Theologian. Many other examples may be drawn from the biography as well: such as his statements regarding the "Crystal Night," his decision to return to Germany in 1939, his decision to become involved in the conspiracy, his participation in "Operation 7", and many other examples.

I am thinking of leaving Germany sometime. The main reason is the compulsory military service to which the men of my age (1906) will be called up this year. It seems to me conscientiously impossible to join in a war under the present circumstances. On the other hand, the Confessing Church as such has not taken any definite attitude in this respect and probably cannot take it as things are. So I should cause a tremendous damage to my brethren if I would make a stand on a point which would be regarded by the regime as typical of the hostility of our church towards the state. Perhaps the worst thing of all is the military oath which I should have to swear. So I am rather puzzled in this situation, and perhaps even more because, I feel, it is really only on Christian grounds that I find it difficult to do military service under the present conditions, and yet there are only very few friends who would approve of my attitude. In spite of much reading and thinking concerning this matter I have not yet made up my mind what I would do under these circumstances. But actually as things are I should have to do violence to my Christian conviction, if I would take up arms "here and now."⁸¹

Bonhoeffer would leave Germany for the United States only to discover that he had made a mistake. Thereupon, he would return to Germany where he would decide that he belonged.

Christology was the practical confrontation of the call of Christ, who is living and present in the world today as the God-man, to live out practically the demands of the Gospel. After the theologian has addressed the question of "Who?" in the proper form of address, he must then permit

⁸¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Way to Freedom (London: Wm. Collins & Sons Ltd., 1977), pp. 205-6.

Christ to be Christ by allowing Him to ask of us, "Who do you say that I am?" Our response to this counter-question is one of faith and action.

This is highlighted once again in the opening paragraph of his sermon on the Church Election Day in July of 1933. During the same month that Bonhoeffer delivered the Christological lectures, he also addressed these words to his congregation:

Matthew 16, 13-18: "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do men say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'but who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.'"⁸²

Later in the sermon he will come back to this simple biblical opening of the sermon to once again expound its Christocentric significance for the believer.

And so he addresses himself directly to his disciples: "But who do you say that I am?" In this immediate confrontation with Christ there can be no "perhaps" or "some say," no opinions but only silence or the answer which Peter now gives: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Here in the midst of human opinions and views, something quite new suddenly becomes visible. Here God's name is recognized. Here is no longer human opinion, but precisely the opposite, here is divine revelation and confession of faith. "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church."

What is the difference between Peter and the others? Is he of such a heroic nature that he towers over the others? He is not. Is he endowed with such unheard of strength of character? He is not. Is

⁸²Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, p. 208.

he gifted with unshakable loyalty? He is not. Peter is nothing, nothing but a man confessing his faith, a man who has been confronted by Christ and who has recognized Christ, and who now confesses his faith in him, and this confessing Peter is called the rock on which Christ will build his Church.⁸³

In the Incarnation, Bonhoeffer believes, the Logos no longer remains a mysteriously incomprehensible reality, but has become man. The person encountered by the believer is the transcendent person of Jesus Christ. Man now encounters a being alien to his own being, a being which in its transcendence encounters man at the borders of his existence. "So the question of transcendence is the question of existence and the question of existence is the question of transcendence. . . . In theological terms: man only knows who he is in the light of God."⁸⁴

Bonhoeffer's lectures explode to life because he is free to speak of "The present Christ--the Pro me." He makes this assertion in the light of the oldest Christological statement: "Jesus is the Christ present as the Crucified and Risen One."⁸⁵ The presence of Christ is to be understood as the presence in the "here and now." This presence is Bonhoeffer's underlying presupposition in the development of his Christ "for me." William Gould summarizes this discussion of Bonhoeffer thus far when he states:

Bonhoeffer never attempts to prove the presence of Christ. Instead, he proclaims him as the God-man who exists for mankind. Bonhoeffer points out that the starting point for theology is the statement that "God is God in the man Jesus. In this Jesus Christ, God is present. This one God-man must be thought of in his relation to mankind,

⁸³Ibid., pp. 208-10.

⁸⁴Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 31.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 43.

rather than in relation to being itself. A theology is only complete when it proclaims that "God is only God pro me (for me), Christ is only Christ pro me."⁸⁶

For Bonhoeffer, Christ's presence and encounter with and "for me" can only occur because of His transcendence and immanence. Yet, it is Christ's transcendence, the mystery of the Incarnation, that permits His immanence as well. It is within the transcendence and immanence of Jesus Christ that He can be present "for me."

Bonhoeffer develops the "for me" structure of Jesus Christ within the context of these lectures. The logic, unity, and uniqueness of his approach truly exposes the Christian-Theologian as he thinks Christocentrally about the "for me" structure of Christ's presence. He suggests that Christ stands in relationship to the new humanity in three ways:

1. Being pro me--Christ is the pioneer of those who follow him (historical relation of Jesus).
2. Christ is for his brethren by standing in their place (place of the new humanity before God). He stands where mankind should, but does not. He is the community (redemption).
3. Since He acts as the new humanity, it is in Him and He is in it. The one, whole unified person of the God-man Jesus Christ is present in the Church which is that small group which has chosen to follow. Present in the church via the pro me structure of His being is Jesus Christ. He is present in the Word, the Sacrament, and the community.⁸⁷

For Bonhoeffer, Christ can only be Christ present bodily in time and space when He is "for me." We must permit Christ to be himself for

⁸⁶William B. Gould, The Worldly Christian (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 5.

⁸⁷Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, pp. 48 ff.

us--to be the God-man "for me." John A. Phillips provides a great deal of insight on this point:

The heart of Bonhoeffer's lectures is his argument that the total orientation of the personal structure of Christ is pro me: Christ's being-for-me is not some "power" which he possesses but rather the definition of his being. His determination pro me is the center of his personal structure.⁸⁸

This person, Jesus Christ, the God-man has chosen to stand "for me."

"This is not an ontic nor historical power which he possesses; his person is this power."⁸⁹ By speaking this way, Bonhoeffer is attempting to reaffirm the mystery of the Incarnation, open the mind of the believer, and prepare the Christian for an encounter with the living Jesus Christ. What man encounters is the living Christ and not an idea or a doctrine.

That is, Christ can never be thought of in his being in himself, but only in his relation to me. That in turn means that Christ can only be conceived of as existentially, viz., in the community.⁹⁰

The "for me" structure of Christ, in the thought of Bonhoeffer, now permits us to accept Christ as the One who has freely bound himself to each man.

But the decisive element in the pro me structure is that the being and action of Christ are maintained within it. Actio Dei and prae-sentia Dei, the being for you and the being for you, are combined. When the unity of act and being in Jesus is understood in this way, the question of his person, i.e., the question "Who?" can rightly be put.⁹¹

⁸⁸John A. Phillips, Christ for Us in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (New York: Harper & Row), p. 80.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 80.

⁹⁰Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 47.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 48.

By being "for me," Christ encounters me as God's Word: "Christ, the Word, is the Truth. Truth is only in the Word and through the Word."⁹²

God has revealed himself in the Word. He has bound himself to the Word so as to speak it to men. He does not alter this Word.⁹³

Though this Word is unalterable, it also remains the Word of address. It is the Word which carries within it "meaning" and "truth" for man. As such: "Christ as idea is timeless truth; the idea of God embodied in Jesus is accessible to any one at any time."⁹⁴ The Word seeks to express itself in the form of address to man. "Whereas the Word as idea can remain; as address, it can only be between two persons. Address leads to answer and it is answerable."⁹⁵

"The nature of the Word as address demands a community."⁹⁶ The Word as address seeks a community which will provide the encounter between the present Christ "for me" and man. The Word of address is the call of God to men, isolating them in the presence of the community, in the "here and now" of their lives, and demanding each man to answer for himself. For Bonhoeffer, the Word of address finds man in the Church:

In the Church, moreover, Christ exists as a "living address" to all men, summoning them to response. As idea, or purely in itself, the Word can, Bonhoeffer says, "remain in itself." But the incarnate in Jesus, the Word becomes "an address," and an address can only be between persons, leading to an answer.⁹⁷

⁹²Ibid., p. 49.

⁹³Ibid., p. 50.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 51.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷William E. May, Christ in Contemporary Thought (Dayton: Pflaum, 1970), p. 77.

The Word seeks a proper disposition for its address. For Bonhoeffer, the community essentially is the Church and Christ takes form as the word of the Church, "Christ is not only present in the word of the Church but also as the word of the Church, i.e., as the spoken word of preaching."⁹⁸ Christ is really present as the Word which encounters and challenges man within the preaching of the Church. Bonhoeffer reaffirms the temporally and spatially "present" Christ in the Church as the Word which encounters and challenges man within the preaching of the Church. Bonhoeffer reaffirms the temporally and spatially "present" Christ in the Church as the Word as it is present in the spoken word of its teaching.

The relationship between God's Word and man's Word in preaching is not that of exclusiveness. The human word of preaching is not a phantom body for the Word of God. But the Word of God has really entered into the humiliation of the Word of man.

Two things must be said here with equal emphasis: "I could not preach if I did now know that I were speaking the Word of God"; and "I could not preach if I did not know that I were not speaking the Word of God." Human impossibility and God's promise are one and the same.⁹⁹

Clifford Green clarifies this when he notes, ". . . even though this humiliation is a veiling of the Word, the human word of the sermon is the Word of God since God freely binds himself to the word of man."¹⁰⁰

This is born out in Bonhoeffer's sermon on the day of the church elections, which also happened to be the day his confirmands were being confirmed. The summary of what he had stated in the classroom thus far

⁹⁸Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 52.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁰⁰Green, "Bonhoeffer," p. 257.

is confirmed in the word of his own preaching:

But it is not we who build. He wills to build the church. No man builds the church but Christ alone. Whoever is minded to build the church is surely well on the way to destroying it; for he will build a temple to idols without wishing or knowing it. We must confess--he builds. We must proclaim--he builds. We must pray to him--he builds. We do not know his plan. We cannot see whether he is building or pulling down. It may be that the times of collapse are for him the greatest times of building. . . . It is a great comfort which Christ gives to his church: you confess, preach, bear witness to me, and I alone will build where it pleases me. Do not meddle in what is my province. Church, do what is given to you to do well and you have done enough. But do it well. Pay no heed to views and opinions, don't always be calculating what will happen, don't always be on the lookout for another refuge! Church, stay a church! But church confess, confess, confess! Christ alone is your Lord, from his grace alone can you live as you are. Christ builds.¹⁰¹

This again may be demonstrated by a talk of Bonhoeffer, in August of 1932, on the "Church is Dead." While the speech predates the Christological lectures, it provides us with a confirmation that Bonhoeffer was already dealing with these thoughts during this time, and that they find a synthesis in the Christological lectures.

Christ must become present to us in preaching. . . .¹⁰²

We must come together to hear Christ. Have we heard him? I can only put the question; each man must answer for himself. But I will say at least this: It is not precisely the significance of these conferences that, where someone approaches us appearing utterly strange and incomprehensible in his concerns and yet demands a hearing of us, we perceive in the voice of our brother the voice of Christ himself, and do not evade this voice, but take it quite seriously and listen and love the other precisely in his strangeness. That brother encounters brother in all openness and truthfulness and need, and claims the attention of others is the sole way in which Christ encounters us at such a conference. We are here and we are joined together not as the community of those who know, but of those who all look for the word of their Lord and seek everywhere if they cannot hear it, not as those who know, but as those who seek, those

¹⁰¹Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, p. 212.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 183.

who are hungry, those who wait, those who are in need, those who hope. Christ encounters us in our brother, the German in the Englishman, the Frenchman in the German.¹⁰³

Just as Christ is fully present in the "for me" structure of the Word, so too is he present fully in the "for me" structure of the sacrament. "Two things are to be said here: Christ is wholly Word and yet the sacrament, too, fully mediates the presence of the Word."¹⁰⁴ It is within the mystery of the sacrament that the Word takes the form of address. The sacramental action is the Word addressed to man. The Word, Jesus Christ, takes unto himself an "embodiment" which causes the Word to be existentially present. Simply, the sacrament is the corporeal form of the Word of God as it is intimately addressed to man. "The elements of water, bread and wine, named by God by name, become sacraments."¹⁰⁵ Dr. Clifford Green draws the correlation between Christ present as the Word and as Sacrament in the thought of Bonhoeffer.

As previously, the category of the Word is the prior one. Like the sermon, "the sacrament is the Word of God for it is the proclamation of the gospel"; it is present both in the sermon and sacraments--eucharist and baptism. While the one, whole Christ is present in the sermon as in the sacrament, yet the sacrament is a specific form of Christ, for here the Word is enacted in corporeal form. Like the sermon, the sacrament is both judgment and "the promise of the forgiveness of sins," "clear revelation"; but it is so in the form of natural elements--water, bread, and wine--which God names and sanctifies in the creaturely world.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 181.

¹⁰⁴Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 53.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁰⁶Green, "Bonhoeffer," p. 258.

Jaroslav Pelikan adds:

And Jesus Christ is not the absent one. His real presence in the sacrament cannot be dissociated from the real presence in the Church, "the presence in Word and Sacrament is related to the presence in the Church as reality is related to form. . . . The Church between ascension and second coming is his form, and the only one at that." Christ is present both as Word and as Sacrament. As Word, he speaks in such a way as to create the form of the Church, which thus becomes not only the recipient of the Word of revelation but herself is a revelation and a Word of God. As Sacrament, Christ assumes bodily form to be present, and the Church is his body.¹⁰⁷

In short, Bonhoeffer states, "The word of preaching is the form in which the Logos reaches the human Logos. The sacrament is the form in which the Logos reaches man in his nature,"¹⁰⁸

"Thus the eucharist is what it is by God addressing and hallowing the elements of bread and wine with his Word."¹⁰⁹ For Bonhoeffer, the Word is Jesus Christ (the God-man), the incarnation of God. It is Jesus Christ in the wholeness of his divinity and humanity who is present "for me" in the incognito of the incarnation.

For Bonhoeffer, the historical man Jesus and the Christ of faith are unified in the incarnation of the God-man. He is present and contemporaneous with us by encountering man at the border of his existence as Word and Sacrament. Christ stands in relation to us as the "new man," the "new creation." Christ stands before God where we should but can not. The humiliation of Christ is the incarnation and His subsequent rejection by the world. This is forever repeated anew in the Sacrament.

¹⁰⁷Jaroslav Pelikan, "Bonhoeffer's Christology of 1933," in The Place of Bonhoeffer, ed. Martin E. Marty (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 151.

¹⁰⁸Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 54.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., pp. 56-7.

To speak of man and history, Bonhoeffer felt that one must also speak of nature. For nature participates in the life of this fallen world, but in a significantly different sense than man. "But nature is a creature under the curse, not under guilt, for it has not freedom."¹¹⁰ Christ has become the new creature and stands "for me" here and now. Nature lives under a curse, the guilt of fallen man, and it longs for its original state--"the created Word of God, proclaiming the Word freely."¹¹¹ And it finds its redemption in Jesus Christ. This remains something that must be proclaimed and believed; but it is something which cannot be demonstrated. It is in the sacraments that the enslaved old creation is made free for the service of the new creation.

For Bonhoeffer--and here he is taking a position quite at odds with the tradition of Protestant thought--the entire natural world becomes of importance in the light of the humiliated one whom we in faith recognize as the Exalted One. "The concept of the natural," he writes, "must be recovered on the basis of the gospel." All of nature, and not only men, is redeemed in Christ, because Christ is Lord not only of the Church but of the world.¹¹²

In his lecture, "The Theological Basis for the World Alliance," Bonhoeffer applies his concept of sacrament when he remarks:

The preaching of the forgiveness of sins is the guarantee of the validity of the preaching of the commandment. Now does this preaching of the forgiveness of sins itself in its turn need a guarantee of its validity? The guarantee of the validity of the preaching of the forgiveness of sins is the sacrament. Here the general saying, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," is bound up with water, wine and bread, here it comes to be out in all its own distinctness, which is understood by those who hear it in faith. What the Sacrament is for the preaching of the gospel, the knowledge of firm reality is for the preaching of the sacrament. Reality is the sacrament of command. Just as the sacraments of Baptism and Communion are the sole forms of the first reality of creation in this

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 67.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Zimmermann, "Years in Berlin," p. 62.

age, and just as they are sacraments because of their relation to the original creation, so the "ethical sacrament" of reality is to be described as a sacrament only insofar as this reality is itself wholly grounded in its relation to the reality of creation.¹¹³

This thought would later reappear in Bonhoeffer's course on homiletics, given during his tenure at Finkenwalde. Here he would once again restate the question of the relationship of nature and sacrament to preaching.

The Word of preaching that enslaved nature is redeemed in hope. A sign of this is given where, in the sacraments, elements of the old creation have become elements of the new creation.¹¹⁴

The bread, the wine, and the water became Christ "present" for "me" in the historical moment of the "here and now" of creation. For Bonhoeffer's Christology everything depends upon his presence both in Word and in the Sacrament. "His determination pro me is the centre of his personal structure."¹¹⁵ "The transfigured body is present everywhere; so too is Christ's humanity in the eucharist."¹¹⁶ Christ is present by virtue of his being there and being there for you.

In the Word he makes use of our human logos; in the sacrament he makes use of our body and is present in the sphere of tangible nature. In the sacrament Christ is beside us as creature, in our midst, brother with brother. But in being a creature he is also the new creature.¹¹⁷

¹¹³Bonhoeffer, p. 160.

¹¹⁴C. E. Fant, Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching (New York: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1975), p. 76

¹¹⁵Phillips, Christ for Us, p. 80.

¹¹⁶Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, pp. 56-7.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 57.

Ergo. Christ's presence in the Church must be seen as a simultaneous presence in both Word and Sacrament. It is within the Word and Sacrament that Jesus can stand as our brother who is there "for me." Bread and wine are nothing in themselves, but "they are real nourishment for the new being."¹¹⁸ "This being-for-men is what makes them a new creation."¹¹⁹ "Christ must be present to us in preaching and in the sacrament. . . ,"¹²⁰ implores Bonhoeffer in his speech to the World Alliance of Churches. For the Church is the embodiment of Christ present "here and now" and standing "for me."

If Christ stands "for me," then it follows He must stand for others in the same manner. The question of Christology also deals with the question of ecclesiology as well. "In other words Christology involves ecclesiology; Christ and church are inseparable."¹²¹ John A. Phillips provides us with a brief synopsis of the interrelationship between Christ, man, and community:

Bonhoeffer argues in his earliest dissertation that, as opposed to the Idealist picture of a personal Mind in which every man participates and to which he must surrender his individuality, the Christian concept of a person posits the individual as an ultimate willed by God. The multiplicity of persons and the integrity of the individual remain irreducible--even within the community of revelation. Community is thus an area of encounter between individuals in which, in the moment of decision, "the individual again and again becomes a person through the other." In community, I encounter and am encountered by, created and am created by, unique, ultimate, inviolable persons who directly affect me at the same time that they remain free from my control.¹²²

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 59.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, p. 183.

¹²¹William E. May, Christ in Contemporary Thought (New York: Pflaum, 1970), p. 76.

¹²²Phillips, Christ for Us, pp. 76-7.

This is foreshadowed in his draft of a text on "What is the Church?", written in 1932, in which he states:

. . . the church is "community," the communion of saints, those freed by God from loneliness, one hearing the other, giving himself, knowing himself responsible because he is bound by God to him. Community through sacrifice, prayer and forgiveness. The breaking of the chains of solitude, the reality of being one with one another and for one another, in love, and brotherhood. And all this from God. God, the present Christ, lays the basis of the community; it is His people called from the world by His word, bound to Him their sole Lord in faith, bound to their brothers in love.¹²³

Where does this Christ stand for Dietrich Bonhoeffer? The God-man who stands "for me" in Word and Sacrament, in and as community, also stands in the same way for you. It is imperative that the believer understand this. Man is brought together with his brother through Jesus Christ. This is reduced to a very simple proposition that will have far-ranging ramifications in the life and thought of Bonhoeffer--Christ is the Center! Christ is the center of all reality; as such, he stands as the mediator of all reality. Christ is the mediator between God and myself, between me and my neighbor, between me and my true self, between nature and man. "He stands on the boundary of my existence, beyond my existence, but still for me."¹²⁴ As William Gould so aptly puts it:

In Bonhoeffer's thought, then, Christ is always the man for others. He is both at the boundary and at the center of man's existence. This does not mean that he relates to man's feelings about his own self (as Schliermacher taught) but that he relates to man as he is a person before God. He not only points out man's failure to fulfill the law by himself, but gives him the grace whereby he may succeed.¹²⁵

As Clifford Green adds, "The fact that these lectures begin with the presence of Christ in the Church should not obscure the fact that the

¹²³Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, pp. 150-1.

¹²⁴Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 61.

¹²⁵Gould, The Worldly Christian, p. 5.

One who is present is not confined to the Church but is Lord and Mediator of all reality."¹²⁶ Green further carries out this thought and briefly sums up what has occurred in Bonhoeffer's thought, and its impact upon him. Bonhoeffer has now been freed of the problems of personal power in egocentricity. Green also demonstrates how these lectures will become a basis from which legitimate action can be taken in obedience to God in the "here and now" of history.

The soteriological meaning is clear. Christ is the Mediator of human existence in that he negates the unlimited, self-established, isolated power of the dominating ego and justifies man for a life of love for others. The gospel, in other words, frees man from egocentricity to Christocentricity: but since Christ is present for man in the fellow man, a pro me-being, man's true being is being-for-others. Admittedly, we do not yet find in these lectures the Christological formula of the Letter, Christ "the man for others" or explicit description of Christian existence as "being there for others." But the whole direction of the Christology lectures, building on the previous theology, points towards these formulations. They are present in intention, if not in actual words.¹²⁷

The background statements leading one to support Green's thesis can be found throughout Bonhoeffer's writings; but the writings of this particular period reflect a thought pattern that encompasses much more than the classroom. An early quotation is drawn from a catechetical guide written for pastors, co-authored by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Franz Hildebrandt in the summer of 1931. It should be noted that this was written as a teachers' guide for pastors and was not intended for use as a textbook.

¹²⁶Green, "Bonhoeffer," pp. 261-2,

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 267.

Where is the true church? Where preaching stands and falls by the pure Gospel of the gracious God against all human self-righteousness. Where the sacraments depend on the word of Christ without any magic. Where the community of the spirit stands in service and not in domination.

Do I need a church? If you knew what the church is and for what it needs, you would not ask, but rejoice. The glad things would leave you no rest as long as you could have them. You would look for the community where one stands in prayer for the other, says all to him and forgives all, and for the promise that "here one shall be Christ to the other." [Luther]¹²⁸

It is significant that Luther is quoted within this context. This concept of "Christ as the man for others" appears to have had its first germination here. Luther and his writings were very special to Bonhoeffer and his work. It is significant, then, that the Christian needs to stand in Christ's place for the other. Supporting Green's statement, we find that the thought is present but that it has not fully matured in the consciousness of Bonhoeffer nor found expression in his theological terminology. Yet it can be said that Christ as the "man for others" is certainly present in his thought.

These Christological themes again find their rudimentary expression in a draft of a July 1932 talk, where Bonhoeffer is discussing the need for a theological foundation upon which to build the World Alliance of Churches.

Because of the Christus praesens, the word of the church here and now must be a valid, binding word. Someone can only speak to me with authority if a word from the deepest knowledge of my humanity encounters me here and now in all my reality. Any other word is impotent. The word of the church to the world must therefore encounter the world in all its present reality from the deepest knowledge of the world, if it is to be authoritative . . . God is "always" God to us "today."¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, p. 144.

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 157-8.

The terminology that Bonhoeffer used to express his thought is interesting, especially when we note the key: "one stands in prayer for the other," "here one shall be Christ to the other" (Luther), "Christus praesens," and "here and now." This terminology will take on its own unique expression as he fully appropriates its meaning and significance to himself in the later period of his life. For now these serve as germinating ideas which yet need to find their full personal appropriation in terms of Bonhoeffer's own theological language. These are concepts which still need to be realized within the context of his life. Already, though, we see the foundations for concrete action being laid in the Christological lectures. All this is alluded to in the summer of 1932, the year before the Christological lectures are delivered, where Bonhoeffer picks up these themes and phrases. In his lecture on the "Church is Dead" we find such as: "Let Christ be Christ," "Christ encounters us in our brother," and "Christ must become present to us."

This will ultimately find its fullest expression in the Letters and Papers from Prison, where Bonhoeffer will state in summary what it has all meant to him. Let us survey a few of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's remarks from the letters between May 1944 and the end of his written communication:

The ground for this lies in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He is the centre of life, and he certainly did not "come" to answer our unsolved problems.¹³⁰

While you are in Italy I shall write to you about the Song of Songs. I must say I should prefer to read it as an ordinary love song, and that is probably the best "Christological" exposition.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 164.

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 165-6.

Redemption myths arise from human boundary experiences, but Christ takes hold of a man at the centre of his life.¹³²

To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, or to make something of oneself (a sinner, a penitent, or a saint) on the basis of some method or other, but the man Christ creates in us.¹³³

Finally, in his outline for a book, Bonhoeffer once again takes up the theme of Christ and Church formally for the last time.

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.¹³⁴

The Church is Church only when it exists for others.¹³⁵

It [the Church] must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others.¹³⁶

Unfortunately, the thoughts of Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Christ and His relationship to man and the world are only fragmentary probes, due to his tragic death. They, however, do give us a clear picture that a synthesis in Bonhoeffer's Christological thought was beginning to occur. This synthesis was one that brought God into the most intimate concerns of man and his world. What we have seen here are the background statements, set within their proper context, and how those statements gave birth to a unique and personal statement on the Christocentric nature of

¹³²Ibid., p. 176.

¹³³Ibid., p. 190.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 202.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 203.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 204.

Bonhoeffer's life and work. We have briefly seen how this was brought into a structural synthesis during his prison confinement. Those events which link the development and continuity of Bonhoeffer's thought between these two periods will now be looked at. The focus will be on those events which link the life of the Christian-Theologian with his thought as a university lecturer, conspirator, and prisoner. The decisions and partings this demanded of the man will be examined.

In closing, this Christian-Theologian provides a refreshing view of the Christological question in a style that is evangelistic along with an approach that is rigidly theological. By maintaining a dialectical balance, Bonhoeffer was able to save evangelism from pietism and theology from absurdity. "Bonhoeffer became 'evangelistic' only by asking this one central question, 'Who are You for us today' and by pointing to an answer with fragmentary probes, and with his life."¹³⁷

Bonhoeffer's ability to venture into these unknown areas of theological questioning have become the hallmark of this twentieth century theologian. Bonhoeffer remains a Christian-Theologian who was driven by his quest for the "present Christ" standing "for me," not bound by the orthodoxy of denominational traditionalism and who had bequeathed to us the possibility of a new generation of theologians who think theologically. As Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann, a former student of Bonhoeffer, recalls, "He was a theologian of the new generation, and just starting."¹³⁸

¹³⁷Vorkink, Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age, p. 50.

¹³⁸Zimmermann, "Years in Berlin," p. 62.

What fascinated me in this man from the beginning was the way he saw things; "he turned them around," to the place where God had ordained for them. And in the process the values which had been so familiar and natural to us were transformed as if by themselves. To tell the genuine from the unreal was of the greatest importance in theology. I should have liked to write the whole lecture down, word for word. Every sentence went home; here was a concern for what troubled me, and indeed all of us young people, what we asked and wanted to know. There was lots of systematic theology in this lecture, as well as dogmatics and symbolics; but they serve as occasions for dealing with the main question.¹³⁹

During this time of mounting evils, it is interesting to note the increased role that Christ takes in Bonhoeffer's life. Bethge is very blunt in his assessment of this when he writes:

In the coming years, when Christians and ministers alike were faced with an unprecedented challenge, this total concentration on Christ in no way represented a barrier to or diminution of the reality of contemporary life. On the contrary, it created an immunization against the deceptions of National Socialism and its servants within the contemporary Church.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁴⁰Bethge, Costly Grace, p. 63.

CHAPTER IV

BONHOEFFER WITHDRAWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY

TO ENTER INTO THE CHURCH STRUGGLE

From the beginning of 1933, the Bonhoeffer family knew that war was inevitable. They were also unanimous in their rejection of Adolf Hitler as a legitimate leader of Germany. Dietrich even denounced Hitler on the wireless as he spoke on the changing concept of leader. He spoke clearly and directly on this topic. "Leaders," Bonhoeffer stated, "or offices which set themselves up as gods, mock God and the individual who stands alone before him, and must perish."¹⁴¹ The struggle in which Bonhoeffer was engaged during this second period of his life was a theological one, but one which remained very real. For the battle was for the "soul" of Germany. It was a struggle that would lead him out of the classroom and into the Church. Zimmermann provides us with his assessment of the situation at that time.

When the Church struggle grew more intense and his life as a university lecturer became more precarious, Bonhoeffer thought that now was the time to work in the congregation. There, he said, the great decisions will be taken, there is the Church now, the Confessing Church.¹⁴²

Bonhoeffer's decision to withdraw from the academic scene was influenced by the intrusion of the state into the affairs of the Church.

¹⁴¹Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, p. 200.

¹⁴²Zimmermann, "Years in Berlin," p. 66.

Changing the attitude of the reactionaries into positive action was Bonhoeffer's constant concern. Bethge summarizes Bonhoeffer's actions on behalf of the Church during the period prior to his assuming a pastorate in London:

The National Socialists in the Church, the "German Christians" as they call themselves, had been trying to gain power since April. In June the General Superintendents in Prussia were removed and a State Commissioner (August Jager) was appointed, Hitler made Ludwig Müller a chaplain to the forces, his confidential advisor on church matters, and the German Christians nominated him as their candidate for Reich Bishop. Bonhoeffer and his students duplicated resolutions, he spoke against Müller at protest meetings and conferred with Gerhard Jacobi, minister at Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, and Niemoller, who now moved into the centre of the opposition in Berlin. Bonhoeffer suggested that the ministers should embark upon a strike of funeral services, that is, revive the ancient measure of an interdict, for as long as the State Commissar was in control On 23rd July 1933 the German Christians won the recently instituted church elections by a large majority. Because of disagreements about the conduct of the election, Bonhoeffer went, with Jacobi, to Gestapo Headquarters for the first time. He suggested to his fellow ministers, again without awakening any response, that they should leave a church which was becoming heretical.¹⁴³

Due to his lack of success in this particular church struggle, "where the great decisions are to be made," Bonhoeffer took up his ministry in London. In a letter to Karl Barth, he betrays his personal reasons why this move had to be made.

I have always wanted very much to become a pastor; I've already told you that a couple of times before.

I was afraid I would go wrong out of obstinancy--and I saw no reason why I should see these things more correctly, better than so many able and good pastors, to whom I looked up--and so I thought that it was probably time to go into the wilderness for a while and simply do pastoral work, with as little demands as possible. The danger of making a gesture at the present moment seemed to me greater than that of going off for some quietness. So I went off.

¹⁴³Bethge, Costly Grace, p. 63.

Now I've been here a week, have to preach every Sunday, and receive news almost daily from Berlin about the state of affairs. That almost tears one apart inside.

I still don't know how long I shall be kept here, If I knew that I was really needed over there--it is so infinitely difficult to know what we should do, ("We know not what we should do, but"144

One other matter that Bonhoeffer took up in this letter was the question of his involvement in the ecumenical movement. He reassured Barth that he would continue his involvement even while on the English side of the Channel. But he was very explicit that he could not represent the views of the German Christians; and this would lead him to strongly oppose the German Christians at Fäno.

¹⁴⁴Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, pp. 230-2.

CHAPTER V

BONHOEFFER'S CHRISTOLOGICAL VIEW OF PACIFISM AT FÄNO

Fäno was to be one last attempt on the part of Bonhoeffer to call the ecumenical movement into action. Bonhoeffer attempted to persuade the delegates to adopt a theological stance of Christian pacifism. He challenged the Conference to develop a theology which could effectively teach Christian pacifism. In essence, it was the last attempt to use the power of the universal church and the peace commandment in an effort to prevent a war that appeared inevitable.

In his interview with Dr. F. Burton Nelson, Lasserre discusses his view of what Bonhoeffer was about during the Fäno Conference. His evaluation of Bonhoeffer's pacifistic stance is based upon the time they were together at Union Theological Seminary and extends through the Fäno Conference itself. He presents a very broad view of Bonhoeffer's progressive development in pacifism during these very short years:

I think it has been the moment, the time, he was strongest in his pacifism. But as I told you, this is my opinion. He has taken a strong pacifist position at Fäno, in the outlook of the situationist ethic. He had understood that Hitler would make war against Europe. His main objective was to prevent that war. And it is my opinion, he hoped at that time that if he could convert to pacifism enough theologians, priests, and pastors; and if the German churches would take a pacifist position asking for conscientious objection against not every war, but the next war. Against this concrete situation it could have been possible, he thought, to avoid catastrophe. That is why, I understand, how he has been so clear, so strong, as a pacifist in Fäno; and why later on he came back to a less pacifist position because it was too late, it was lost. His plan, his dream,

had been destroyed and there was no new situation, situational ethic claim, to ask for a pacifist position.¹⁴⁵

Bethge notes that Bonhoeffer,

As a German Lutheran Theologian . . . was, perhaps, rather too Christological for his western liberal audience, yet what he said approximated sufficiently to their own western views to recognize its essentially pacifist premises.¹⁴⁶

For the English reader the text of Bonhoeffer's sermon, composed in English, is included in No Rusty Swords. The Christological basis for this sermon is easily seen. Even for the Christian of today, the sermon remains a provocative statement for peace. For his text, Bonhoeffer had chosen Psalm 85:9. As Bethge notes: "It expresses in highly concentrated form the most unequivocal and empathetic of his statements on peace that we possess."¹⁴⁷ For Bonhoeffer, peace is rooted in Christ and his commandment, and not upon the world's understanding of peace.

The text of the sermon illustrates how Bonhoeffer confronted the members of the Conference with the Word of God. It was an attempt to make the participants think in terms of what they were to be really about at this conference. This sermon directly confronted the situation of life at that moment in history. Dr. Nelson's paper on Bonhoeffer's participation at the Fano Conference provides one with an important insight into the importance of this event. He reports:

¹⁴⁵Nelson interview.

¹⁴⁶Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 311.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 313.

Bonhoeffer also wrote to Bishop Amundsen just two weeks before the conference in order to underscore the darkness of the hour in Germany. "We must make it clear--fearful as it is--that the time is very near when we shall have to decide between National Socialism and Christianity."¹⁴⁸

With his usual brilliance, Bonhoeffer delivered his sermon making the choice frightfully clear to his audience. He also made the demands of the Gospel of Jesus Christ fearfully clear:

Our task as theologians, accordingly, consists only in accepting this commandment as a binding one, not a question open to discussion. Peace on Earth is not a problem, but a commandment given at Christ's coming. There are two ways of reacting to this commandment from God: the unconditional blind obedience of action, or the hypocritical question of the Serpent: "Yea, hath God said . . . ?" This question is the mortal enemy of all real peace. "Hath God not said? Has God not understood human nature well enough to know that wars must occur in the world, like laws of nature? Must God not have said that we should work for peace, of course, but also make ready tanks and poison gas for security?" And then perhaps the most serious question: "Did God say you should not protect your own people? Did God say you should leave your own a prey to the enemy?"

No, God did not say all that. What he has said is that there shall be peace among men--that we shall obey him without further question, that is what he means. He who questions the commandment of God before obeying has already denied him.

There shall be peace because of the church of Christ, for the sake of which the world exists. And this church of Christ lives at one and the same time in all peoples, yet beyond all boundaries, whether national, political, social, or racial. And the brothers who make up this church are bound together, through the commandment of the one Lord Christ, whose word they hear, more inseparably than men are bound by all the ties of common history, of blood, of class, and of language. All these ties, which are part of our world, are valid ties, not indifferent; but in the presence of Christ they are not ultimate bonds. For the members of the ecumenical church, in so far as they hold Christ, his word, his commandment of peace is more holy, more inviolable than the most revered words and works of the natural world. For they know that who so is not able to hate father and mother for his sake is not worthy of him, and lies if he calls himself after Christ's name. These brothers in Christ obey his word; they do not doubt nor question, but keep his commandment of peace.

¹⁴⁸Nelson interview.

They are not ashamed, in defiance of the world, even to speak of eternal peace. They cannot take up arms against Christ himself-- yet this is what they do if they take arms against one another! Even in anguish and distress of conscience there is for them no escape from the commandment of Christ that there shall be peace.¹⁴⁹

Near the end of his sermon Bonhoeffer challenges the Conference to action. He dares them to speak and act as they have never done before-- in the name of Jesus Christ; to speak now or the chance to do so will have been lost.

Why do we fear the fury of the world powers? Why don't we take power from them and give it back to Christ? We can still do it today. The Ecumenical Council is in session; it can send out to all believers this radical call in the West. Must we be put to shame by non-Christian people in the East? Shall we desert the individuals who are risking their lives for this message? The hour is late. The world is choked with weapons, and dreadful is the distrust which looks out of all men's eyes. The trumpets of war may blow tomorrow. For what are we waiting? Do we want to become involved in this guilt as never before?

What use to me are crown, land, folk and fame?
They cannot cheer my breast,
War's in the land, alas, and on my name
I pray no guilt may rest (M. Claudius).

We want to give the world a whole word, not a half word--a courageous word, a Christian word. We want to pray that this word may be given us today. Who knows if we shall see each other again another year?¹⁵⁰

Bonhoeffer has never been so clear in his renunciation of all violence as he was in this sermon. Yet, Bethge contends that this sermon does not totally align Bonhoeffer with those who were supporters of a "fundamental and general pacifism." Even Lasserre notes that Bonhoeffer appeared to be using a situational ethic in his pacifism. It is clear, though, that Bonhoeffer maintains a Christocentric approach, a Christ who is present in Word and in Sacrament, and a concept of church that clearly

¹⁴⁹Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, pp. 284-5.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 286-7.

raises the Christian above any limits that would compromise the Christ command of peace. The language is clearly Christocentric and the reader can easily see that Bonhoeffer has, as Lasserre has suggested, progressed "the most" in his pacifism. Bethge also comments upon this in the larger biography:

Yet Bonhoeffer's peace sermon does not place him unequivocally among the supporters of the fundamental and general pacifism. Never before, however, had he stated so distinctly that, for the disciple, the renunciation of force meant the renunciation of defense. Christians "may not use weapons for they know that in doing so they are aiming those weapons at Christ himself." This was the strongest argument upon which his "Christian pacifism" was based.¹⁵¹

Bonhoeffer's "Christian pacifism" is grounded in the Christological structure of the Christ who is present in the Church as Word and Sacrament. How can a brother in the church be a person against whom I will take up arms for the purpose of killing? This is a question which plagues Bonhoeffer and has its origins from those days at Union Theological Seminary with Jean Lasserre. The whole question of Lasserre's friend being incarcerated for refusing military service was fundamental to the issue of Christ and pacifism for Bonhoeffer. As we have noted throughout this paper in numerous quotes, Bonhoeffer found it hard to reconcile the fact that a Christian could bear arms against his fellow Christians. For Christians, the Church must transcend all nationalism. It is on this ground, and rooted within his Christocentric framework, that Bonhoeffer proposes this uncompromising appeal to the participants of the Fano Conference.

¹⁵¹Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 313.

Dr. Geoffrey Kelly, in his interview with Jean Lasserre, also asked him to reflect for a moment on Bonhoeffer's role at Fäno. What are the memories? Kelly was interested in the impact of Bonhoeffer upon the participants. On this point, Jean Lasserre was very clear:

Dietrich spoke with great authority and I remember that his intervention caused a shock and had impressed many, especially the young people present. I agreed with him, but at that time he was already engaged in the struggle of resistance against Hitler while I hadn't reached that stage as yet. I still wasn't aware of the danger of Hitlerism. And then he saw much better than I what was demonical in Hitlerism. As for myself, I had at that time a reaction more of a French nationalist who was a bit frightened to see militarism awakened with such national pride among the Germans. I hadn't mastered the problem theologically as he had at that moment. He completely surpassed me in this matter.¹⁵²

Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law, G. Leibholz, wrote a memoir for the beginning of The Cost of Discipleship which gives particular notice to the role of Christ and pacifism in Bonhoeffer's life. This is a perception of one who was a member of the family in which a family member, in whom Dietrich had confided much, had had to emigrate because of his Jewish ancestry. Leibholz recalls a story of the Fäno Conference for us, one which confirms what Bethge has also said in the biography about this meeting:

When war seemed inevitable, Bonhoeffer's friends abroad wanted him to leave Germany to save his life, for he was unalterably opposed to serving in the Army in an aggressive war. When asked by a Swede at the Ecumenical Conference at Fäno, Denmark, in 1934, "What will you do when war comes?" He answered: "I shall pray to Christ to give me the power not to take up arms."¹⁵³

¹⁵²Kelly, "Interview," p. 155.

¹⁵³Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 16.

Yet, as Lasserre recalls, the moment had passed. The use of "Christian pacifism" as a deterrent to war had passed.

Once the moment had passed at Fäno, Bonhoeffer would begin making probes into a new Christological understanding of how the disciple could be a man of action in the contemporary world. Pacifism, and its Christological basis, then must evolve into a new understanding, a new awareness--one that remained authentically Christian and Christocentric. This understanding must also be one that would allow the disciple to act in the world and not to retreat from it, Bonhoeffer's failure at Fäno caused him to make a new theological probe into his Christological understanding of peace and action.

The words of a sermon delivered in 1932 would come back to haunt him after Fäno. An innovative thought from the past would now begin to take form.

Hitler came to power on 30 January 1933. What this event would demand of Bonhoeffer was clear to him by 1934 at the latest. In a sermon in 1932 he seemed to have a premonition: "We should not be surprised if the time comes for our church too, when the blood of martyrs will be called for. But this blood, if we really have the courage and the faithfulness to shed it, will not be so innocent and shining as that of the first witnesses. On our blood would lie our guilt: the guilt of the useless servant."¹⁵⁴

At this point it is very profitable to bring Bethge and Lasserre into a dialogue with Leibholz. While Bonhoeffer had made great strides in his pacifism, he never really became a convinced pacifist. Could it have been that the failure at Fäno required the development of a new understanding of what was demanded of the disciple by Christ? Could it have been that the man, who was a pacifist at heart, was torn by the

¹⁵⁴Bethge, Costly Grace, p. 56.

anguish of the moment--his understanding of fidelity to Christ--into taking action? Would this action really be an affirmation of life?

Leibholz provides a very important insight on this point:

This explains why Bonhoeffer did not take the pacifist line, although his aristocratic noblemindedness and charming gentleness made him, at the bottom of his heart, a pacifist. But to refrain from taking part in the attempt to overcome the National Socialist regime conflicted too deeply with his view that Christian principles must in some way be translated into human life and that it is in the sphere of the material, in state and society, that responsible love has to be manifested.¹⁵⁵

Bonhoeffer has the seed of a new and important thought here, one that will find its harvest during the last period of his life, the concept of "guilty martyrdom." The Fäno Conference became the turning point along Bonhoeffer's way. The realization that a person who wishes to stand in Christ's place for others, as the incarnation of Christ "for others," present in the "here and now" of history, is evident. In the name of Christ, he would focus the bearing of arms against the incarnation of evil and eventually join the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler. Bonhoeffer stands as a martyr for those people with whom he identifies. He recognizes Christ's presence in them; but as a Christian disciple he stands guilty before God and man. The same movement meant by him to affirm life for his Christian brothers and sisters as the people of God is also, a movement that brings with it his condemnation, except for the mercy of God. Bonhoeffer chose the path of "guilty martyrdom."

This is demonstrated by Lasserre's view of Bonhoeffer's movement from pacifism to active resistance. From a traditional understanding of

¹⁵⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship (New York: Macmillan, 1977), p. 31.

martyrdom, testified to by Lasserre, one must dialectically balance the radical demands of Christ in the present age.

. . . if I had learned that Hitler had been assassinated, frankly I would have rejoiced--but apart from historical and ethical considerations. Personally I tend to believe that the end does not justify the means, that an assassination is always a crime and I tend to believe that the good cannot result from evil. This seems to be the fundamental truth of the Gospel. "You don't gather grapes from thorns," the Gospel says. If I had been asked to join that plot, that assassination, I think I would have refused. But to go on from there to blame those who participated in the plot including my friend Dietrich insofar as he participated--besides, I think he participated only distantly--well, I don't think I have the right to reprove them. But I don't think one can say it was an act of obedience to the Gospel. I think there were certainly other means to solve the problem other than assassination and, besides, the heart-breaking result of the assassination which failed was, if I've understood the situation correctly, that six thousand German prisoners were hanged or killed in reprisals. It's a result which the organizers of the plot couldn't have been proud of. It could be said that those who tried to assassinate Hitler were even a bit irresponsible. In any case, I would say that it came too late.¹⁵⁶

Lasserre responds definitively and strongly when Dr. Kelly counters with a question regarding the Christic basis for this act of resistance on the part of Bonhoeffer. In terms of pacifism there is no compromising of the Gospel commandment for Lasserre. The way of action in these terms is clearly radical non-violence. Bonhoeffer and Lasserre are operating from two different Christological points of view. Where Christ is standing "for me" and for you, where Christ is seen as being "present" in the brother, where His presence is seen in the Church both in Word and Sacrament--there can be no question then that I must act on behalf of the brother. This step forward, the step of action on behalf of my brother, is the step taken by Bonhoeffer after Fäno. It is Christologically based! Lasserre has a different Christological view and his words are sharp:

¹⁵⁶Kelly, "An Interview," p. 154.

If I find in the gesture of a Christian a reflection, an echo, a consequence of the cross and resurrection, I say that this is an act of obedience; it's what I call the good. But, if on the other hand, this action contradicts the cross and resurrection, I would tend to say rather that it's not an act of obedience. Now for me assassination simply can't flow from the cross and resurrection, Jesus Christ has taught us an entirely different way of solving the problem. Where I disagree with Bonhoeffer is when he says that it was a Christian gesture. This wish to put a Christian tag on it disturbs me a bit. It's something like self-justification; like a desire to justify what can't be justified.¹⁵⁷

The argument must distinguish between the traditional understanding of martyrdom and an understanding of the new concept of "guilty martyrdom" into which Bonhoeffer moves. In the latter, Bonhoeffer is freed for action. Also, he is willing to accept the guilt of his actions before God and to hope in His mercy, always praying for the forgiveness of "costly grace." Larry Rasmussen provides a very interesting insight into this movement from pacifism to action:

What has happened here? Bonhoeffer, the pacifist, after severe disappointments with the Confessing Church's abbreviated efforts toward international peace, began, in the new setting, to perceive that a continued adherence to a thoroughgoing pacifism was a version of the ethics of private virtuousness, i.e., "setting his own personal innocence above his responsibility for men." He began to regard his pacifism as an illegitimate escape, however legitimately it may have expressed conformation to Christ before this. A thoroughgoing pacifism would invariably have led to fewer contacts with, and less active support for, the very man who embodied the responsibility and acceptance of guilt which the form of Christ in the present extraordinary circumstances demanded. And because conscientious objection was virtually synonymous with subversion and even punishable by death during the Third Reich, the consistent maintenance of his own pacifist stand would not only have endangered his own tasks but would also have brought state suspicion and Gestapo investigation upon his own family and his friends in the conspiracy. It would have been highly irresponsible at a time when they were working hard to stop Hitler's crimes. Pacifism, in this setting, would have been courageous witness, to be sure; but it would have been a private act of pietism. In Bonhoeffer's own understanding it would even

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 154.

have been selfish, however understandable, because it would not have been above all for others.

Bonhoeffer has again viewed the change christologically. If Jesus did not seek first of all to be good or to preserve his innocence, if he instead refused to shun the fellowship of guilt and took upon himself the guilt of others, if he stood in solidarity with those enmeshed in escapable responsibilities that could not but incur guilt in an evil order--if he, true man, did this, then responsible men should do the same,¹⁵⁸

It is important to reiterate that Fäno was the high point of Bonhoeffer's pacifistic thinking, but that Fäno also caused a change to occur in his thinking. The moment where pacifism could have prevented the coming disaster had passed. A great area of thought would arise and Bonhoeffer would not have to discern the Christocentric implications of involvement in a conspiracy that freely and willingly accepted guilt--both politically and spiritually. It was a guilt accepted on behalf of men. Bonhoeffer's movement toward active involvement still required time for both intellectual and spiritual maturation. Even though the seminal thought of guilty martyrdom is present, Bonhoeffer has not yet aligned himself with this thought; it has not had the opportunity to mature in the light of the historical situation of the "here and now."

Present here are the complexity of the time and the plurality of thought and diversity of feeling running its course in Bonhoeffer's consciousness. There is no question that Bonhoeffer was one who saw a multitude of possibilities: he had chosen the most Christian and the most realistic one for the moment.

¹⁵⁸Larry L. Rasmussen, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance (New York: Abingdon Press, 1972), pp. 62-3.

CHAPTER VI

BROTHER BONHOEFFER INTRODUCES A NEW STYLE OF SEMINARY TRAINING

After Fano, Bonhoeffer returned to London. Things were now beginning to happen quickly, and London became that quiet place to gain a perspective on what he was going to do. The sureness that he was right would take root.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's actions these months were without doubt centered on the Church and the ecumenical movement. Nonetheless the dividing wall between this and the political dimension of the time had become very thin. There was no censorship on the letters that Bonhoeffer, while in London, sent to Erwin Sutz in Switzerland. He wrote to him in 1934: ". . . although I work in the Church opposition with all my energies, it is quite clear to me that such opposition is only an interim transitional stage to a quite different opposition, and that the men of this first preliminary skirmish are in a small way the men of that second struggle. And I believe that all Christendom must pray with us that 'resistance unto death' will come and that men will be found who will suffer it" (date: 28 April, 1934).¹⁵⁹

His pastorate, the church struggle, the ecumenical movement and his Indian scheme accounted for all of Bonhoeffer's time and energy. Yet he remained constantly aware that since his university days, he had felt to be, not only his greatest pleasure, but also his vocation--the teaching of theology.¹⁶⁰

This was to become a reality when the Confessing Church opened its underground seminaries, despite opposition to the Aryan Clause, which did not permit non-Aryans to enter the ministry. This was to become "another way" for Bonhoeffer to fulfill his vocation. As well as

¹⁵⁹ Bethge, Costly Grace, pp. 74-5.

¹⁶⁰ Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 332.

another way for non-Aryans to become ministers.

Those "other ways" were to lead to an independent theological chair in the Confessing Church. This was due initially to the shutting down of the Old Prussian preachers' seminaries in March of 1934, by order of the National Bishop.

Bonhoeffer was first approached on 4th June to possible participation in this new type of work, but as yet nothing definite was settled. A fortnight later while he was in Berlin to discuss the Fäno invitation with Koch and Niemöller, he raised the project in talks with friends, asking them to let it be known at the next meeting of the Council of Brethren that he would willingly accept the post.¹⁶¹

The approaching task acted as a catalyst for everything that had been preoccupying Bonhoeffer during the past few years: a theology of the Sermon on the Mount, a community in service and spiritual exercise, a witness to passive resistance and ecumenical openness.¹⁶²

The preacher's seminary was to be Bonhoeffer's last path during this second part of his life. It was to become a time of thoughtful and spiritual preparation. In the seminary, Bonhoeffer treats the Sermon on the Mount with unparalleled topological precision in his lectures on discipleship. For it was here that pastors were to be trained to stand in witness against the guilt of the Third Reich.

The compact, closed circle of students enabled him to devote all his energies to his new theological theme, discipleship. And the work could be carried out under the auspices of the Church. The living community, about which Bonhoeffer had thought so much during the past four years, was now to be realized through praxis pietatis, that provided an ambience favourable to the development of his theological ardour.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹Ibid., pp. 333-4.

¹⁶²Ibid., p. 336.

¹⁶³Ibid., p. 341.

Bethge notes that the seminary provided Bonhoeffer with the opportunity of realizing his Christology within the community life. "Here we may see, by interpreting belief in Christ as discipleship, he succeeds in putting new life into the sawdust puppet of academic Christology."¹⁶⁴ For Bonhoeffer recognized that it was only in the living community that these pastors could be effectively prepared.

This is substantiated by the written proposal submitted by Bonhoeffer, about "The Establishment of a Community of Brethren at the Finkenwalde Seminary," to the Council of Brethren. This proposal would take the seminary beyond the traditional Lutheran approach towards the seminary curriculum. It calls for the establishment of a living community being of service to the Church. As Bonhoeffer notes, ". . . I have formed the plan, of setting up a Protestant community in which we shall attempt to lead a common Christian life as pastors, for the space of a few years."¹⁶⁵ He clarifies his reason for such a community when he states, "That the aim is not the seclusion of a monastery, but a place of the deepest inward concentration for service outside,"¹⁶⁶ The community, in Christ was to become the basis of and a support group for the pastor in service.

As a result of what has been said, the following plan and pattern has suggested itself to us:

The brethren of the community live together with a strict liturgical ordering of their day. They are guided through the day not by

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 378.

¹⁶⁵Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Way to Freedom (London: Wm. Collins & Cons, 1977), p. 29.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., p. 31.

cultic forms, but by the word of the Bible and by prayer. They are bound together by brotherly admonition and discipline and by open confession. A common theological and ecclesiastical consideration of preaching and the word of God in the Bible will keep them down-to-earth and practical. Renouncing everything except the simple necessities, they take upon themselves to lead a common life. The director of the community will assign to each brother his particular work. Here the position is envisioned as being like the house of deaconess. The brethren, living in this ordered community and being supported by it, put themselves at the service of the church, to follow any call that may come to them. The brethren agree to work for a lengthy period of time in the community, but are free to depart at any time. The community decides itself upon admission. Its size is not to be too large,¹⁶⁷

The "House of Brethren" and the Finkenwalde Seminary further removed Bonhoeffer from the disintegrating opposition of the Church. The "House of Brethren" was to provide a support community with its foundations firmly rooted in the practice of the "arcane discipline." Pastor Otto Dudzus', one of Bonhoeffer's seminarians, explains the meaning of "arcane discipline" as it was lived at Finkenwalde.

In this context Bonhoeffer often uses the early church term "Arcane-discipline" (arcanum, hidden, secret), which he had always loved. It refers to that innermost private sphere of life which is lived in the presence of the Lord and his Word, in confession and adoration. It is probably this uninterrupted secret relatedness to his Lord on which his readiness for others, his brotherly sharing in the guilt and fate of the world, is ultimately based. Perhaps it is this very life in the arcanum which is the secret of his long-lasting influence.¹⁶⁸

As one shall see, the importance of this "arcane discipline" cannot be understated.

It is the thesis of this paper, as well as that of Dr. R. Lovin, that Finkenwalde and the "House of Brethren" was a necessary step in the

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 31-2.

¹⁶⁸ Otto Dudzus, "Discipleship and Worldliness in the Thinking of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," trans. K. Gobel, Religion in Life, XXXV (2) (Spring 1966): 239.

development of Bonhoeffer's life and thought, Bonhoeffer the "Contemporary," the conspirator, is possible only because of the "arcane discipline" developed within the piety of the Finkenwalde community. As Dr. Robin Lovin stated in his paper delivered to the Third International Conference of the International Bonhoeffer Society:

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that both Bonhoeffer's associates at that time and his later interpreters treat these years from the consolidation of Hitler's power to the outbreak of the War as an interlude of pietism. The tone of Bonhoeffer's writings and his preoccupation with the details of community life belong to a tradition of inwardness quite at odds with the engagement with the world suggested in his earlier life.

However, close examination of the work suggests a different interpretation. The form of pietism is there--the discipline of meditation, prayer and confession, and the demanding of the Sermon on the Mount--but this tradition has been put in the service of the political theology formulated in response to the rise of Hitler's power. In Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer sought the concrete form of a church that could live out the separation of the orders, without falling into confusion or retreating in the face of opposition. Such a church would require internal resources that only the pietist tradition was likely to provide, but its mission would be to live in the world as a witness of the boundaries and limits in human life, not to create a haven for the faithful apart from the world.¹⁶⁹

Bethge notes that Dietrich knew quite a bit about Rome in terms of historical knowledge. Bethge records Bonhoeffer's reflections of the Roman Catholic practice of confession.

. . . all of the confessionals occupied with the worshippers crowding round them (he noted in his diary). It is gratifying here to see so many serious faces, to which all the things that are said against Catholicism do not apply. Children as well as adults confess with a real ardour that it is very moving to see. To many of these people real confession is not an externally imposed "must," but has become an inner need. Confession does not necessarily lead

¹⁶⁹Robin W. Lovin, "The Christian and the Authority of the State: Bonhoeffer's Reluctant Revisions." A paper presented to the Third International Bonhoeffer Conference, Oxford, 1980; Chicago: University of Chicago.

to scrupulous living: often, however, that may occur and always will with the most serious people. Also it is not merely a pedagogy, but to primitive people it is the only way of talking to God, while to the religiously more far-seeing it is the realization of the idea of the Church fulfilling itself in confession and absolution.¹⁷⁰

Once again, before the opening of the preachers' seminary and prior to returning home from England, Bonhoeffer would research the training of candidates for ministry in other denominations. Bonhoeffer would bring the richness of his personal experience to bear on the pedagogical formation of the seminary and community life at Finkenwalde. Again in his biography, Bethge provides us with the most complete and concise summary of Bonhoeffer's work at this time:

When he asked Bell for an introduction to Gandhi, he had also requested recommendations to Anglican seminaries and communities. He desired to gain an impression of other traditions before he himself attempted a vita communis. Hence, in October, the bishop wrote on his behalf to Father Talbot of the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield, to Father Tribe of the Society of the sacred mission at Kelham, to Father O'Brien of the Society of St. John the Evangelist at Cowley, to Canon Tomlin of St. Augustine's College, Canterbury, and to the Reverend J.R.S. Taylor of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, the latter being a low church center, while the others were high church establishments.

The "end of December" was in fact the time he hoped to leave for India. Bonhoeffer was eventually to visit nearly all of the places named above, though not until March 1935, and then more cursorily than he would have wished. For this, church politics were to blame. He went to Mirfield, where he joined in the horary prayers during which Psalm 119 was recited on every day of the week; this was subsequently to be the Bible passage most frequently quoted by Bonhoeffer. Together with Reiger he went to Kelham, but he also visited seminaries belonging to other denominations. He took note of the way in which, for example, among Presbyterians, Congregationalists or Baptists, both the church in general and his own parish in particular influenced the personal life of the candidate during his time of study. He often spoke of the impression left on him by a visit to the Methodist college in Richmond where he had been introduced by

¹⁷⁰ Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 39.

a German exchange student, Rudolf Weckerling. In the entrance hall there were boards with long lists of names, each followed by the date of ordination and the date of death, often both in the same year, indicating that for many decades men from the college had been rapidly sacrificed one after the other in the fatal climate of the mission stations. Bonhoeffer also visited the Quakers at their center in Selly Oak near Birmingham. "I liked it very much there."¹⁷¹

Bonhoeffer had attempted to expose himself to a variety of traditions, their seminary formation programs, and their piety as it was developed within their formation. It was to be an enriching experience that provided Dietrich Bonhoeffer with a structure of liturgy that permitted the individual the opportunity of assimilating the "arcane discipline." He did not copy any one particular pietistic approach. That would not be like Bonhoeffer. Rather he looked back upon his past experiences and supplemented those with a wealth of different other traditions.

It was to be the lectures on "discipleship" that were destined to become Finkenwalde's own unique "badge of distinction." The life style, the "arcane discipline," practiced by Bonhoeffer and his students was to be something which brought Christ and "costly grace" into the community life.

The years at Finkenwalde were to become a time for clarifying the role of Christ in the life of the disciple--the disciple who has properly understood how to ask the question of "who are you?". The student, has also comprehended what it means to be challenged by Christ, asking the counter-question, "who do you say that I am?" Bonhoeffer's Christocentric approach is taking concrete form in the application of the

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 335.

"arcane discipline." The Christological lectures were vital for Bonhoeffer's self-clarification of "who" Christ was in his life. The careful practice of the "arcane discipline" in the community life of discipleship would serve as a unifying link in his movement from a Christian-Theologian to being a contemporary of his time.

Bethge has reflected upon this in an interview with Mel White. Mel White was attempting to gain an insight into the life at Finkenwalde for an upcoming movie about the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The question of the "arcane discipline" was raised during the course of the interview:

But I think I could show first of all the strength of that inner discipline and that kind of relatedness to the figure of Christ, and that was not just an individualistic game or secluded training, but that was really the counterpart out of which one could meet the dehumanization of Nazism. By that discipline of meditation practice, you became now in a good sense yourself, and had the capability to counter and contradict, and not to give in to that kind of dehumanization which came from Nazism, even in the church.

I would say there is a need for that (today), very much so. When you understand the whole thing as making you dependent, you have not understood the real thing. If you think it is something which is closing you away from the world, then you have not understood what it is. In . . . that discipline, the presence of Christ makes you more open to the world and its affairs.¹⁷²

Albrecht Schonherr, another Finkenwalde seminarian, recalls the training of those days in words very similar to Bethge's:

From all this we learned that the asceticism of the daily morning and evening devotions (each lasting about forty-five minutes and consisting, apart from one free prayer, of readings of texts and singing of hymns), the half-hour of meditation, the time of silence after getting up and going to bed--that all this was not due to a

¹⁷²Mel White and Eberhard Bethge taped interview, 1980. Trans. unknown. Transcript lent to Michael Morison for reasearch purposes through the courtesy of Dr. F. Burton Nelson, North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, chairman of the Oral History Committee of the International Bonhoeffer Society.

toying with monkish habits, or to an aestheticizing liturgism, or the desire to apply psychological leading strings; but to the innermost concentration on the service for which he prepared us, and for which he lived. A unifying arch swung from music and play to quietude and prayer, from the exciting sobriety of his lecture on "Discipleship" to the Finkenwalde rule: Never speak about a brother who is absent.¹⁷³

The application of the "arcane discipline" into the life of discipleship gives form to the Christ present "here and now," Its impact cannot be underestimated in the common life of the Finkenwalde brethren. Yet another dimension of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is presented by another former seminarian, Wilhelm Rott. He recalls for us a Bonhoeffer who is present to the community both as pastor and as brother, a man who was very much in touch with the events occurring in the Church and within the State. He presents a portrait of a Bonhoeffer who is a brother in Christ and in community.

Bonhoeffer by nature was reserved. I was astounded when he told me that beside his relatives he only called one person "du." In the seminary he was addressed as "Herr Pastor," and soon as "Brother Bonhoeffer"; indeed, the number of people he called "du" soon increased there.

Thus for two years, mostly after lunch and before making the rounds through the "halls" of the seminary, "Brother Dietrich," who always had time for his brethren, sat on the steps on the small stairway which led to the inspector's room. The picture is unforgettable: the small wooden staircase, the man sitting on it with crossed legs, reaching now and then for a cigarette, or accepting a cup of coffee out of the only coffee machine of the house. He had been in Berlin yesterday: he told us of it.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³Albrecht Schonherr, "The Single-heartedness of the Provoked," in I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ed. Zimmermann and Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 127.

¹⁷⁴Wilhelm Rott, "Something Always Occurred to Him," in I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ed. Zimmermann and Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 132-3.

From the "staircase talks" I want to quote two points. We were speaking about the uproar caused by his bold assertion; "He who deliberately separates himself from the Confessing Church, separates himself from salvation." It did not seem to affect him. He remarked: "Once the gunpowder smoke has dissolved, everybody who thinks objectively and dispassionately must agree with me." But he was glad when he heard that Peter Brunner, after a protest from the Reformed Rhenish general-superintendent, had on the basis of the Lutheran Confession defended and affirmed his provocative thesis in a declaration for the Council of the Rhineland. Another lasting impression made upon me was Bonhoeffer's complaint how much we lacked the "love of Jesus." He sought the figure of the humiliated one, of the earthly Jesus, in the Christ of faith, "with all his heart." Real faith and love were identical for him. Here was the very heart and core of the existence of this highly intellectual Christian; we felt it in the improvised prayers of the morning and evening devotions; they sprang from the love of the Lord and of his brethren,¹⁷⁵

The remarks of these former students have demonstrated the concrete form that his discipleship took based upon his Christological understanding of reality. All this was the result of the "arcane discipline" which gave an existential form to a previously adhered-to idea. Their testimony is a witness to the radical difference of their training from that of any other seminary in the Confessing Church. Bonhoeffer's piety, as they have noted, is based upon his Christocentric notion of life--that Christ is the Center. A life, even as it was lived in the seminary, that dared to remain in touch with the world through the use of the "arcane discipline," that was Christocentric. It proved to be the place where Bonhoeffer, even though he was the director of the seminary, also prepared himself for a greater service to the Church and to the world. What was done here was done in the name of the Christ who stands "for me." These ordinands would stand in Christ's place "as the man for others." The nature and the intensity of this experience is captured by the motto of the seminary itself--

¹⁷⁵Ibid., p. 134.

HAPAX--"once and for all." This is clearly stated in the opening paragraph of The Cost of Discipleship where Bonhoeffer immediately reveals the need for one to discover Christ:

Revival of church life always bring in its train a richer understanding of Scriptures. Behind all the slogans and catchwords of ecclesiastical controversy, necessary though they are, there arises a more determined quest for Him who is the whole object of it all, for Jesus Christ himself. What did Jesus mean to say to us? What is his will for us today? How can he help us to be good Christians in the modern world? In the last resort, what we want to know is not, what this or that man, or this or that Church, would have of us, but what Jesus Christ himself wants of us.¹⁷⁶

Bonhoeffer is clearly establishing a Christocentric basis for his approach to the life of discipleship lived within the community life of the seminary. The Christocentricity will apply as much to the life of ministry lived in service to the community of this world. He removes the call of Christ from allegiance to a particular church or state. This is a statement coming from a time when the Church was no longer resisting Hitler with the vigor she once did. The Church was succumbing to a Nazi effort to end the church struggle existing between the German Christians and the Confessing Church. It is difficult to say whether this statement comes out of the first course at Finkenwalde or later during the manuscript's preparation for publication. One thing remains clear, Bonhoeffer is establishing a concept of discipleship that is Christocentric. It means adherence to the person of Jesus Christ. This is itself a carry-over from the Christological lectures. Lovin provides a crucial insight into the thought of Bonhoeffer, linking 1932 with Finkenwalde, when he states:

¹⁷⁶ Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 37.

The spiritually and the practices of The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together may be pietistic, but the theology which undergirds them is decisively that of orders of preservation. The visible church "takes up space" in the world and refuses to be forced out of it. In doing so, the church reveals the true structure of the human world and contradicts any center of value and power that would try to claim the whole world for itself. The church of the Cost of Discipleship is political, precisely as was the church of "What is the Church?" in 1932. It witnesses by drawing boundaries in a world where loyalties increasingly demand allegiance without limit.¹⁷⁷

Bonhoeffer sought to make this unutterably clear for his students by providing an opportunity, a situation, where an encounter with Christ was possible. He attempted to remove faith from the restricting boundaries of pietism and academic nomenclature to a place where the seminarian could encounter the loving Christ, standing for him, in the "here and now" of his life. From his own personal experience, Bonhoeffer realized that the strong personal spiritual life was the only way that one could withstand the subversive and dehumanizing effect of Nazism. As Kelly notes, "It would have been expected, therefore, that in Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer introduced his seminarians to the structured life of prayer together which was to become the heart of the Christian community."¹⁷⁸ Bethge further unravels this train of thought when he discusses Christ, prayer, and the community at Finkenwalde:

After two or three weeks we had started with it [meditation], he was called away because he was an ecumenical figure for the church government and was sent to England for a week to deal with the Episcopal churches, or something like that. So only his assistant was with us. And the whole system of meditation for a half-hour broke down. He came back, and he was sorry about it. He was so

¹⁷⁷ Lovin, "The Christian and the Authority of the State," p. 5.

¹⁷⁸ Kelly, "Freedom and Discipline," p. 20.

sorry that we had so soon destroyed the whole practice already, that we felt a bit ashamed, I mean he didn't . . . but he felt how this experiment had broken down. Now we tried again. And after a while then we said, we must come together and talk about it because he had given us in the beginning not much introduction, what to do, how to do this half-hour. And so we thought we must talk about this. And then it came out, the one confessed. Yes, this happened, I took the Greek dictionary and looked all the words up, then I took up the commentary from Bultmann or from Karl Barth or whom else, and found out what the writer of the letter to the Romans had meant to say. And that of course was all wrong. That was not the purpose of that half-hour. Then it came out. You are asking the people in the congregation to listen to your sermon, to listen to what the Scriptures say through that sermon, but when do you listen to yourself, that it is saying something to you? This half-hour is not just for preparing the sermon. It is to discover what the words of God through scripture say to you in your situation now. This is necessary for silence to listen to what this word may say to you personally.¹⁷⁹

The remnants of Bonhoeffer's Christological lectures are readily seen. The proposition from the lectures that one may only speak of Christ from a "proper silence," is discovered through its practical application. In the practice of meditation, Bonhoeffer returns to an ancient spiritual discipline of the Church. It is Bonhoeffer's attempt to apply one of his Christological insights to the situation of life at the seminary. "To speak of Christ means to keep silent; to be silent about Christ means to speak. The proclamation of Christ is the Church speaking from a proper silence."¹⁸⁰ They discovered that the Word of Scripture was also addressed to them. To hear the Word they had to learn to listen.

Meditation was an attempt to actualize this concept in their life of discipleship. These men prepared for a ministry which would confront

¹⁷⁹Mel White interview with Eberhard Bethge, 1980, unpublished.

¹⁸⁰Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 27.

the evil existing in the Church, as well as in the state. Christ, the Center, is ever present for the ordinands in the academic, ecclesiastical, political, and spiritual life of Finkenwalde. This lesson was too important and vital to allow it to pass by. The strength of their individual and community pietism was based upon their oneness with Christ. Bonhoeffer brought about the realization that they must stand in Christ's place as the "man for others." Their strength was grounded in their personal and communal prayer life.

The importance of the meditation as a part of the "arcane discipline" has been established, and Bonhoeffer guides Bethge in the writing of an introduction for meditation. This particular work was to be an introduction and rationale for the discipline of meditation. The underlying reason for this work is the recognition of the minister's important role in the Church struggle. Bonhoeffer recognizes where the minister must place his trust, find his strength and gain his courage. "The church struggle has been carried on by pastors and parishes, not the faculties, who have realized the question of the place of the church."¹⁸¹ Therefore, it is imperative for the pastor to be properly prepared with a spirituality that can meet the demands of these trying times. Such spirituality had to be Christ-centered:

What do I expect from meditation?

In any case, we want to rise from meditation different from what we were when we sat down to it. We want to meet Christ in his Word. We go to the text curious to hear what he wants to let us know and to give us through his Word. Meet him first thing in the day, before you meet other people. Every morning lay upon him everything that occupies you, what concerns you and troubles you, before fresh burdens

¹⁸¹Bonhoeffer, The Way to Freedom, p. 43.

are laid on you. Ask yourself what is still preventing you from following him completely, and let him be Lord over it before new hinderances come your way.

His fellowship, His help and His direction for the day through His Word, that is the aim. In this way you will begin the day strengthened in faith.¹⁸²

It is the person of the God-man, Jesus Christ, present in the Word who is encountered in meditation. In meditation, we allow that Word to address us as individuals. It is a Word that enquires of me, one that seeks to form me. It is a word which frees me for selfless service to the brethren. For the demand of Jesus in Bonhoeffer's discipleship is clear, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."¹⁸³ It is only the man who has died, in his own will, who can overcome the egocentricity in his life. The path of discipleship is different for each individual. There exists no programs or patterns that one can choose. Bonhoeffer recognized this. Piety, understood as a personal discipline, is the key. Discipline must be practiced each day in order to withstand temptations and complacency. For Dietrich, "Here is the sum of the commandments--to live in fellowship with Christ."¹⁸⁴ This places many rigorous demands upon a person's discipleship because of the unknown path that must be walked. Yet, there is a reassurance that comes with it all:

And if we answer the call to discipleship, where will it lead us? What decisions and partings will it demand? To answer this question we shall have to go to Him, for only He knows the answer. Only Jesus Christ, who bids us follow him, knows the journey's end. But we do know that it will be a road of boundless mercy. Discipleship means joy.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸²Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁸³Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship (New York: Macmillan, 1977), p. 99.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., p. 41.

Bonhoeffer realizes that each man must find the place where Christ can encounter him, a place where faith is possible. Bonhoeffer's demand for piety and the insistence upon the "arcane discipline" is an attempt to provide the conditions whereby Christ could encounter the whole person, a place where Faith was possible because there was no retreat. He recognized that:

It would be just as wrong if the young man were to regard discipleship as the logical conclusion of his search for truth in which he had hitherto been engaged, as an addition, a clarification or a completion of his old life. And so to avoid all misunderstandings, Jesus has to create a situation in which there can be no retreat, an irrevocable situation.¹⁸⁶

Finkenwalde was a place where this was to become possible. Bonhoeffer recognized that "Seminarists before their ordination receive the gift of common life with their brethren for a definite period."¹⁸⁷ It was his intention to make the best use of this "gift" for their personal development within the context of the community life.

The spirit which the moment created must have been an exceptionally fertile one. These young men all knew what it was to suffer--frustration, repression, enmity, even personal danger. Four had been turned out of a theological college in Wittenberg because of their refusal to compromise with an official line. All were ready to sacrifice themselves in order to guard the purity of their faith; at the same time they were young, healthy and boisterous. So that these first weeks at Finkenwalde must have uniquely combined the atmosphere of a deeply serious enterprise with that of a glorious lark.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 82-3.

¹⁸⁷ Bonhoeffer, Life Together (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 21.

¹⁸⁸ Bosanquet, The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 151.

This balance could not calm the seriousness of the times and the basic issues confronting these young men during their preparation for the ministry. Bethge characterizes the situation in the following manner:

Of course in those days there was a certain preparedness with students of the Confessing Church to acknowledge the Scripture as the authority for their decisions in church and in their meetings, but of course it had always been an object of study during their university time. And now meeting Bonhoeffer and how he presented Scripture to the candidates, some of them for the first time really encountered an attitude to the Scriptures that it was a word not to be preached, not to be studied, but a word for yourself.

But the decision to make the Scripture the one authority for your life was of course a dangerous thing--it was not just a hobby. I read Dickens or I read Goethe, and you read the Bible. No, in those days it was a decision of life and a dangerous thing, because there was the authority of Mein Kampf from Adolf Hitler and there was the Scriptures with a quite different God, the God of the Jews and that was a decision of life. So to decide to live with one authority, Scripture, the Bible, was a dangerous thing, not like today.¹⁸⁹

From this statement an interesting parallel can be drawn from a statement in the Christological lectures where Bonhoeffer will make the following comment:

The cause of the encounter with Jesus is not the same as the encounter with Socrates and Goethe. It is impossible to avoid the person of Jesus because he is alive. If need be, Goethe can be avoided because he is dead.¹⁹⁰

Yet, the call to follow Jesus is the gentle bidding of Christ asking a man to "come and die." In these days, to accept the call to discipleship was not simply a call to die and rise in Baptism with Christ. Rather, it was the call to accept the encounter with the living Christ, a call that could literally cost a man his life, during the days of the Third Reich.

¹⁸⁹White, 1980 interview.

¹⁹⁰Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 35.

Suffering was to become something very familiar for these students during the next few years of their lives. As Bonhoeffer noted in his lectures on discipleship, suffering was something that would pass only by the drinking of the cup. For "It was not suffering per se but suffering-and-rejection, and not rejection for any cause or conviction of our own, but rejection for the sake of Christ."¹⁹¹ Lovin clarifies the paradox of suffering and the anguish of leaving all for the sake of Christ.

Bonhoeffer, his colleagues, and his students were learning almost daily what suffering this call imposes. The world, particularly the world of the totalitarian state, does not take lightly this alienation of allegiance, and yet the church of Luther could not offer itself as a monastic refuge. The believer remains suspended between two centers of authority: the world which will not have him except on its own terms, and the church which has no use for him if he flees the world. This paradox of discipleship is understandable, however, only if the authorities that order fallen human life are indeed multiple, only if we can give ourselves completely neither to the state, nor to the church--nor for that matter to marriage, to the family, or to work.¹⁹²

Since the Christological lectures, Bonhoeffer has attempted to establish a Christocentrically based life of discipleship; allegiance to Christ alone who is the mediator of all reality. Christ the center is the one to whom I must give myself, my life. ". . . Christ is the mediator as the one who is there pro me."¹⁹³ Bonhoeffer spins this thought out in more detail in The Cost of Discipleship where he will make a more comprehensive statement on the role of Christ as mediator.

¹⁹¹Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 98.

¹⁹²Lovin, "The Christian and the Authority of the State," p. 6.

¹⁹³Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 62.

We must face up to the truth that the call of Christ does set up a barrier between man and his natural life. But this barrier is no surly contempt for life, legalistic piety, it is the life which is life indeed, the gospel, the person of Jesus Christ. By virtue of his incarnation he has come between man and his natural life. There can be no turning back, for Christ bars the way. By calling us he has cut us off from all immediacy with the things of this world. He wants to be the center, through him alone all things shall come to pass. He stands between us and God, and for that very reason he stands between us and all other men and things. He is the mediator, not only between God and man, but between man and man, between man and reality. Since the whole world was created through him and unto him (John 1.3; I Cor 8.8; Heb 1.2), he is the sole Mediator in the world. Since his coming man has no immediate relationship of his own any more to anything, neither to God nor to the world; Christ wants to be the Mediator.¹⁹⁴

Between father and son, husband and wife, the individual and the nation, stands Christ the Mediator, whether they are able to recognize him or not. We cannot establish direct contact outside ourselves except through him, through his word, and through our following of him. To think otherwise is to deceive ourselves.

Wherever a group, be it large or small, prevents us from standing alone before Christ, wherever such a group raises a claim of immediacy it must be hated for the sake of Christ. For every immediacy, whether we realize it or not, means hatred of Christ, and this is especially true where such relationships claim the sanction of Christian principles.¹⁹⁵

Even though Christ calls a man alone and isolates him in a place where faith is possible, Bonhoeffer also recognizes that the disciple is given something that is a pure gift in return. "But since he is the Christ, he must make it clear from the start that his word is not an abstract doctrine, but the re-creation of the whole life of man."¹⁹⁶

"Though we all have to enter upon discipleship alone, we do not remain alone."¹⁹⁷ "But the Mediator who makes us individuals is also the founder

¹⁹⁴ Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, pp. 106-7.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 113.

of a new Fellowship."¹⁹⁸

When he joins the Church the Christian steps out of the world; his work and family, taking his stand visibly in the fellowship of Jesus Christ. He takes this step alone. But he recovers what he has surrendered--brothers, sisters, houses, and fields. Those who have been baptized live in the visible community of Christ.¹⁹⁹

For those who had matriculated from the Seminary, it meant having a place to keep fellowship with--to maintain contact through letters and reunions. The life of Christian community, while given for a "brief" period of time, was a genuine preparation for these ordinands to perfect their discipleship for a ministry of service. It was a period of preparation for the day when the disciple-minister would have to confront the perversion of the Gospel in the world of Nazi Germany. Bonhoeffer appreciated the subtle form of love that the monastery has for the world. But he would not permit his students to escape into the seclusion of the monastery. The disciple was to be in the world, and the Seminary was to be a source of strength. The Seminary was not to be an escape from the world and its problems. Bonhoeffer himself left the Seminary to go to Berlin and to attend conferences outside of Germany. Upon his return, he would share the news with his students in the famous "stairway talks." Here at Finkenwalde were students who knew what was happening in the Church and in the world. As a result, this time in the Seminary was not one of protection of the seminarian from the world; rather, it was to be a time of quiet preparation, both within and outside of the Seminary walls, for their inevitable confrontation with National Socialism.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., p. 260.

Bonhoeffer clearly states that the Seminary was not a time of hiding from the world. In his report, Bonhoeffer demonstrates that the seminary expanded the students' knowledge and view of the world:

Although the quietness of domestic life and work must be the real purpose of the short time at the Seminary, each course has also had a glimpse of life beyond our walls. In the spring, we accepted an invitation to Sweden. For most people this trip was the first encounter with the Church of Christ beyond the borders of Germany, with the ecumenical world. We were given a most hearty welcome. In ten days we were almost overfilled with seeing, hearing, and meetings. The friendship and love we found there enriched us on our return.

Thanks for this time will be equally alive in all of us. For another purpose this summer course went from the house for almost the same time to a popular mission together in the Belgard district. Four brethren each were housed in six villages; they preached on four evenings of the week and on Sunday. In the evenings these four each expounded a text for ten minutes. This combined proclamation, which derives from shared daily work in the parish and shared prayer, commended itself to all the brethren therein involved and, we hope, to the parish. After long weeks of silence it is a special delight to be able to preach the Gospel again. So this popular mission week has strongly influenced the whole semester. Our special benefit from this week has been that since then we have kept close contact with several parishes and a number of the people, and that we are continuously given indications of Christian love and readiness to help. We have much reason for gratitude.²⁰⁰

Bonhoeffer found this experience profitable for the seminarians, but he also found that a reunion for those who had matriculated together with the new arrivals was mutually beneficial. This practice linked one with the other, providing a support group for those who were not engaged directly in the worldly concerns of the Church.

Time at the Seminary is so short, and the gap between life in the Seminary and the solitariness of work in the village is so great and brings with it such important questions, that this yearly meeting is an urgent necessity and a real help. Of course there are individual letters and visits between. The reports of brethren on their work have already grown quite large in volume, and are studied thoroughly by brethren in parishes by circular letters which go out from the

²⁰⁰ Bonhoeffer, The Way to Freedom, p. 126.

house each month, by the short report on the house, the goings-on of the older brothers, the notification of texts for meditation and preaching aids. But all this only gains its full value through the annual reunions. Let us keep to them.²⁰¹

This Christocentric approach to discipleship provided the ordinand with the opportunity to act in freedom against the National Socialists. Lutheranism is steeped in a tradition of authority in the Church, but something had to be done when the Church was not faithful to her call. The only possible liberation from this dilemma was the possibility of recognizing where faith really lies--in Jesus Christ. Yet, Bonhoeffer knew that the Christian was not called to be alone, Christ has given His followers the gift of fellowship. Therefore, the disciple needs and is given a supportive community for times of crucial decisions. This was especially true when Adolf Hitler articulated what it meant to decide for or against Christ, as well as the decisions and partings such a consideration would demand.

For this reason, Bonhoeffer constantly urged his fellow churchmen to rediscover for themselves the freedom of Christ even as they were being constricted by the crushing vice of Nazism, and to reaffirm their Christic vocation to solidarity with the suffering and oppressed of the world.²⁰²

It was for this reason that Bonhoeffer could say to these men during the lectures on discipleship: "The life of discipleship can only be maintained so long as nothing is allowed to come between Christ and ourselves--neither the law, nor personal piety, nor even the world."²⁰³

²⁰¹Ibid., p. 127.

²⁰²Kelly, "Freedom and Discipline," p. 2.

²⁰³Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 192.

"But discipleship never consists in this or that specific action: it is always a decision, either for or against Jesus Christ,"²⁰⁴ Jesus, as mediator, always becomes the norm of Christian action and conduct. As a result, the Christian is free to act in the name of Christ and to bear witness to him, even when the world or the Church turns away from the Gospel.

Early in his lectures on discipleship, Bonhoeffer makes it clear that the disciple is one who lives under "costly grace." "Cheap grace" has been the downfall of the Church and discipleship. Never again can the Christian permit the ugliness of "cheap grace" to rear its head. The precision and clarity of Bonhoeffer's language is unmatched.

Instead of following Christ, let the Christians enjoy the consolations of his grace! That is what we mean by cheap grace, the grace which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs. Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness of sin which frees us from the toils of sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession.

Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy for which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his net and follows him,

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.

²⁰⁴Ibid., p. 250.

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his very life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.²⁰⁵

The life of discipleship lived under "costly grace," a discipleship lived with Christ as its center, is living witness of Christ himself in the "here and now" of the world. This was the realization that Bonhoeffer prayed his students would acquire. It was Bonhoeffer's hope that these students would also participate in this life of "costly grace." One's own discipleship and ministry were dependent upon Christ himself.

The disciple exists in community because of Christ and serves the community in the name of Christ. His is a witness bearing testimony that the world can make no claim of exclusive allegiance upon the Christian. Bonhoeffer's stance is clear. From 1931 through the Fåno Conference, he has spoken on the universality of the Church over nationalism. He explains this theme in his lecture on discipleship when he states: "We shall know when the limit is reached, for every member of the Church will then be obliged to make a public confession of Christ, and the world will be forced to react either by calculated restraint or open violence."²⁰⁶ The Church, which is the body of Christ, has a special calling and a special distinction, when Bonhoeffer states in The Cost of Discipleship:

The Church is not a national community like the old Israel, but a community of believers without political or national ties . . . it has abandoned political and national status, and therefore it must patiently endure aggression."²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 289.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 157.

Yet it remains a community that identifies and supports the oppressed. This is demonstrated in a letter to Mrs. Niemoller, written by Bonhoeffer after her husband's arrest:

God has so directed it that a special blessing goes out from your house to the parish and to the whole church. It is surely to the glory of God that those of us who are still free can look to you and see how you stand firm in trouble and remain patient in affliction. That is the grace of God for which we are grateful. It is a great joy to see how men keep asking for your husband wherever one goes and quiet simple churchgoers are able to be true and bear witness to the same faith for which he suffers and when they are summoned before the authorities.

With deep respect and thankfulness, in the unity of our common intercessions, I greet you²⁰⁸

With each passing day, Bonhoeffer grew more concerned as more and more of the Confessing Church members were being incarcerated. The intercessory prayer list was growing. The members of the Confessing Church had chosen the Scriptures, the Word of God incarnated in Jesus Christ, as their authority. Day by day they were learning about the price of discipleship. As Bethge suggested earlier, this decision was not without danger. This was demonstrated daily. In one of his letters to the brethren, Bonhoeffer comments:

In these days when the homes of our Confessing Church are being searched, we think often and with stronger prayer of you all, especially those of you who are alone and perhaps deeply troubled by all the things that are happening. Especially now, we must rejoice in our fellowship and be true in our intercessions for each other. Make sure that you have the names of all the brethren who were with you here, and bring them out in your meditation, lest any of the brethren should be cut off from this common prayer together.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸Bonhoeffer, The Way to Freedom, pp. 163-4.

²⁰⁹Ibid., p. 161.

Again, in another circular letter, Bonhoeffer writes:

We very much want to let you know that we have thought of you all day in our prayers, and particularly of the two brethren, Lochmann and Wichmann, who are sick. Also about Brother Koch and all those in prison.²¹⁰

During those years Bonhoeffer still attempted to defend the Confessing Church against the attacks of the state authorities and their claims of total allegiance. His work included the preparation of texts in the following areas: "War and Peace," "The Power of the Keys and Church Discipline in the New Testament," and a report on the Confessing Church in Pomerania at the beginning of 1938. Besides the preparation of his seminarians, Bonhoeffer was still engaged on many fronts in the Church struggle.

The discipline learned at Finkenwalde became the source of strength for their opposition to Nazism. The danger of one's own egocentricity and self-righteousness needed to be confronted and overcome. The nature of one's own radical stand and the issue of "costly grace" still required a further resolution. It was imperative that each approach his task from a purely Christian perspective, from a sense of true discipleship, believing it was really the "Christ-work," "Costly grace" could only be possible with a "personal confession" of sin and the real "repentance" of the sinner. This was the norm of discipleship, and it would insure the authenticity of their "Christ-work," This was an unique and personally fortifying experience for the seminarians of Finkenwalde. Confession was introduced to them as an authentically

²¹⁰Ibid., pp. 197-8.

Lutheran practice. Bethge recalls the importance of the resurgence of this particular form of piety on the part of Bonhoeffer:

He [Bonhoeffer] would have asked the person to come because he wanted to do the confession, and we would sit together, and I would say a prayer first as the confessor . . . and ask for the presence of the Confessor Christ as he is listening, that he might grant us grace to come free on the things we wanted to say. And then just wait. And the confessee begins to say what troubles him. Not . . . that's difficult; that's not confession of sin, but where he thinks he has hurt God's will, God's presence, in his life, in his heart, in his thinking. And then it is up to the confessor whether the real thing has come out already or not . . . And when the other one really has confessed that was the real thing and that was all he had to confess in the face of Christ. Then the confessor would say, I ask you to believe that I am here in the name of Christ and I have a mandate, that I'm commissioned to say you're forgiven. Then say a prayer again, and that would be it.

Of course it was a kind of forced experience, because you do not know the liberation that you are getting out of it, the breakthrough that really happens after you have overcome the barriers of blocking yourself, and have experienced then that joy of new communion--as long as you have not experienced, it seems to be totally forced, of course.²¹¹

As Bonhoeffer notes in The Cost of Discipleship: "Confession is the God-given remedy for self-deception and self-indulgence,"²¹² Confession appears to be an integral part of Bonhoeffer's theology of discipleship. It is a vital part of the discipline of the brethren. As brother confessed to brother there was a personal experience of Christ. There was the feeling that through the brother, Christ has acted to liberate them from sin. They had received the gift of "costly grace." Christ stands present "for me" in the brother. Bethge's experience of liberation is confirmed. Bonhoeffer reflects on the role of confession in the community when he states:

²¹¹White, 1980 interview.

²¹²Ibid., p. 325.

He can confess his sins and in this very act find fellowship for the first time.²¹³

Since the confession of sin is made in the presence of a Christian brother, the last stronghold for self-justification is abandoned. The sinner surrenders; he gives up his evil. He gives up his heart to God, and he finds the forgiveness of all his sin in the fellowship of Jesus Christ and his brother.²¹⁴

For Bonhoeffer, the root of all sin is pride, Pride separates man from the community and isolates him in his aloneness, Under the influence of pride, man in sin is man living in hypocrisy. The threat of "cheap grace" is its ability to forgive the sin and not to require the repentance of the sinner.

In the deep mental and physical pain of humiliation before a brother--which means, before God--we experience the Cross of Jesus as our rescue and salvation.²¹⁵

Confession in the presence of a brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation. It hurts, it cuts a man down, it is a dreadful blow to pride. To stand there before a brother as a sinner is an ignominy that is almost unbearable. Because this humiliation is so hard we continually scheme to evade confessing to a brother. Our eyes are so blinded that they no longer see the promise and the glory in such abasement.²¹⁶

The master was not better than the pupils; so Bonhoeffer also practiced personal confession as part of the "arcane discipline." He sought out the brethren of the house to confess as needed. As Bethge notes, it was a forced discipline but a liberating experience that was well worth the pain and anguish of humbling oneself before one's brother. The end result was more than worth the cost for the individual and the

²¹³Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 113.

²¹⁴Ibid., p. 112.

²¹⁵Ibid., p. 114.

²¹⁶Ibid.

community. In the confession of our sin to a brother, the disciple must surrender the cloak of hypocrisy and self-righteousness behind which he lives. Instead of living a lie, the penitent now begins to live in truth. One is no longer alone when one's sins are forgiven in the name of Jesus Christ--one is restored to fellowship with Him. The problem with confession is that "Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous."²¹⁷ Yet, each of us stands as a sinner before God and living in the darkness of one's own secret sin. One living in sin cannot share in the life or discipleship and "costly grace." For:

In confession the Christian gives up all and follows. Confession is Discipleship. Life with Jesus Christ and his community has begun.²¹⁸

Our brother breaks the whole circle of self-deception. A man who confesses his sins is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person.²¹⁹

It is interesting to note that The Cost of Discipleship was written during the Finkenwalde Seminary experience and Life Together was written afterward. The latter was a reflection on the experience of the common life together and was written after the Gestapo had closed the Seminary. While confession is mentioned in the lectures on discipleship, it takes up a large section of Life Together. It gives one an indication of its practical importance for community life. The role of confession within this community cannot be underestimated. It is very important to note:

²¹⁷Ibid., p. 110.

²¹⁸Ibid., p. 115.

²¹⁹Ibid., p. 116.

Confession becomes an opportunity for the disciple to be sure that he is conforming to Christ's will and not pursuing his own egocentric interests. The real role of personal confession is to provide the disciple with the opportunity of maintaining his Christocentric focus as it is lived daily in the life of discipleship.

Life Together was written in September of 1938. This was not a nostalgic reflection of a pietistic and monastic period of escape in Bonhoeffer's life. It was written to capture the reality of the spirit of the period. Bonhoeffer recognized that the situation of life provided a developmental ambience that would never again be duplicated. A record had to be made. As one has seen, Bonhoeffer was very involved with the Church struggle and the events happening in Germany. Bethge provides an interesting background of where and how Life Together was written. It is a chronicle that demonstrates action and reflection in Bonhoeffer's life:

Dietrich wrote in September and October of 1938, and I remember exactly how it was because we both lived together in Göttingen in the house of his twin sister Sabina. I think it is good to remember that Dietrich was not at all in a secluded little pious corner writing a piece for Christian living in peace there. We had just brought Sabina, his twin sister with her family, to the Swiss border in order to emigrate, and that meant for Dietrich and his family a lot, because that great family was so one in thinking, in feeling, in experience. Now to separate and to break up with one member like this, emigrate, because the husband was of Jewish origin and the legislation was just going to be enforced against the Jews, because war was threatening. So the breaking up of the family, the war which we expected every day in the Czech crisis in September of 1938, and the closing down of Dietrich's seminary in the end of 1937, and the attempt to continue a new kind of education with the candidates--that all was behind us, so Dietrich wrote it in this very difficult situation. In spite of that, we played tennis every morning in Göttingen, and I was reading Karl Barth maybe in the corner of the same room. It was in a way a feeling that a period had come to an end, and that it was not any more possible to keep up the Brethren

House. That, with the coming war, and the emigration of his sister, a new kind of responsibility might come upon us. We wanted to keep what we had experienced,²²⁰

²²⁰White 1980 interview.

CHAPTER VII

BONHOEFFER, CHRIST, AND THE JEWS

During November of 1938, the "Crystal Night" of Germany occurred. The Synagogues were burned by the German S.A. men. The Bonhoeffer family had just managed to help Sabina and her family to escape. The Bonhoeffer family, affiliated with the University, had many Jewish friends. As a result, Dietrich's perspective of the Jewish people was different, both socially and theologically, from that of most people. Bonhoeffer's traditional Lutheranism would hinder his theological development because of the concept of the guilt that the Jews must bear for the crucifixion of Christ. Bethge notes Bonhoeffer's response to the Aryan Clause:

Now the measures of the state towards Judaism in addition stand in a quite special context for the church. The church of Christ has never lost sight of the thought that the "chosen people," who nailed the redeemer of the world to the cross, must bear the curse for its action through a long period of suffering.²²¹

Bonhoeffer believed that the final homecoming for the Jews would occur when they returned to God through Christ. He believed that the conversion of Israel "is to be the end of the people's period of suffering,"²²²

Yet Bonhoeffer proclaims that the Church cannot allow the State to prescribe the actions to be taken towards its members. The Jewish question for the State is essentially different for the Church, Dietrich

²²¹Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, p. 222.

²²²Ibid.

Bonhoeffer's main concern here is for the Jewish-Christians:

From the point of view of Christ, Judaism is never a racial concept but a religious one. What is meant is not the biological questionable entity of the Jewish race, but the "people Israel." Now the "people" of Israel is constituted by the law of God; a man thus becomes a Jew by taking the law upon himself. But no one can become a Jew by race In the same way, the concept of Jewish-Christianity has religious, not biological content. The Jewish-Christian mission also stretched to Gentile territory. . . . There were Gentile-Jewish Christians and Jewish-Gentile Christians.²²³

Bonhoeffer has opened the door to a different understanding by distinguishing the difference between the Jewish-Christian and the Jew. This relieves one of the tension to justify the stand that Bonhoeffer has taken a completely orthodox position regarding the "curse" of the Jews. In his paper, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews," Bethge notes that Pinchas Lapide has discovered in certain texts of Bonhoeffer the basis for a different kind of approach to the Jewish question. Quoting Bethge's paper:

He [Lapide] discovers even in theologically rather ambivalent texts, like in the Bible-study of 1936 about King David (the Christ who was in David), positive elements and therefore sentences which in those days were absolutely unpopular like, f.i. [sic, for instance]: "The people of Israel will remain the people of God in eternity" (GS IV, 30). Thus Lapide searches in Bonhoeffer's work for finding elements which unite him with Jewry instead of looking around for ones which separate them. He concluded--and this is a statement of a Jew-- "From the Jewish perspective, Bonhoeffer is a pioneer and forerunner of a slow step by step--reHebraisation of the Churches in our days."²²⁴

Within this context, the scholar can better appreciate the recollection of Hans-Werner Jensen and Gottfried Maltusch of the evening of the "Crystal Night," especially of Bonhoeffer's reaction to this event. First, Maltusch provides the setting:

²²³Ibid., p. 223.

²²⁴Eberhard Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews," A Plenary Address presented to the Third International Conference of the Bonhoeffer Society, Oxford, p. 24.

During the tense days of the year 1938 the seminary of the Confessing Church had already been transferred from Finkenwalde to Koslin in Pomerania. We ordinands lived in a large apartment in the superintendent's house. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was the head of the seminary. . . . In the late evening of the notorious "Crystal Night" two members of our seminary suddenly appeared and told us that the synagogue of Koslin was burning. S. A. men in uniform had prevented the fire-brigade from extinguishing the fire. We were extremely disturbed. Some of us were in favor of our setting off at once to try and perhaps save something. But then we decided not to go as the fire had advanced too far, and for us to hang around as passive onlookers might have given the impression that we approved.

A great discussion now arose among us about this deed, and how to assess it.²²⁵

Hans-Werner Jenson adds:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was at that time driven by a great inner restlessness, a holy anger. With his Mercedes he raced to Berlin to be with brethren and friends in trouble, and driving back through the night he only arrived in the early hours of the morning in our district, which was still comparatively safe from the Gestapo. During those ugly days we learned to understand--not just human revenge, but the power of the so-called psalms of vengeance which give over to God alone the case of the innocent, "for his name's sake." It was not apathy and passiveness which Dietrich Bonhoeffer derived from them, but for him prayer was the display of the strongest possible activity.²²⁶

Maltusch once again picks up the narration:

Meanwhile Dietrich Bonhoeffer had returned. Some of us spoke of the curse which had haunted the Jews since Jesus' death on a cross. Bonhoeffer rejected this with extreme sharpness. We had a very full discussion of Matthew xxvii, 25 and Luke xxiii, 28, as well as Romans ix-xi. He utterly refused to see in the destruction of the synagogues by the Nazis a fulfillment of the curse of the Jews. This, he said, was a curse of sheer violence. "If the synagogues burn today, the churches will burn tomorrow." In this action the godless face of National Socialism had shown itself once again.²²⁷

²²⁵ Gottfried Maltusch, "When the Synagogues Burnt," in I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer, eds. Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald S. Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 150.

²²⁶ Hans-Werner Jensen, "Life Together," in I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer, eds. Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald S. Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 153-4.

²²⁷ Jensen, "Life Together," p. 153.

From this period of time, Hans-Werner Jensen recalls a small but significant point:

There are still marginal comments to the psalms in my Bible which date from the Gross-Schönwitz time, for instance the date, 10th November 1938, the "Crystal Night," besides Psalm lxxiv, 8: "They burned all the meeting places of God in the land,"²²⁸

In his paper, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews," Bethge mentioned a little known fact about Bonhoeffer's Bible:

In my own possession there is one more sign for this new kind of solidarity with the victims of the event. This is just a pencil-stroke and remark in Bonhoeffer's Bible for prayer and meditation--and this at that very psalm 74. In verse 8 there is a pencil-line: "They say to themselves: Let us plunder them! They burn all the houses of God in the land." Underlined that second half. And on the edge of the page put in small writing "9.11.38!", 9th of November 1938, with an exclamation mark: they read like that: Our signs we do not see; there is no longer a prophet to preach; there is nobody among us who knows how long. How long, O God, shall the foe blaspheme? Shall the enemy revile thy name forever?

On the 20th of November Bonhoeffer wrote his usual circular letter to the former Finkenwaldians, now isolated in their small parishes: there it reads: "During the past few days I have been thinking a great deal about psalm 74, Zech. 2, 12 (he who touches you touches the apple of his eye!), Rom. 9, 3f (Israel to whom belongs the sonship, the glory, the covenant, the law, the service, the promises), Rom. 11, 11-15. That takes us right into the prayer,"²²⁹

This period of time is significant because it represents a shift in Bonhoeffer's thinking about the relationship between the Christian Church and the Jewish religion. His comments come at a time when the erosion of the Confessing Church is evident. The True Church of Christ must be defended. He felt compelled to speak on its behalf. The true Church exists where the disciple has focused his life on the master.

²²⁸Jensen, "Life Together," p. 153.

²²⁹Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews," p. 21.

Jesus Christ is the master who mediates all of reality for the disciple. This new truth was a radical shift going beyond his statements to resolve the differences between Jewish-Christians and their relationship to the Church, in terms of the Aryan Clause. Bethge characterizes this shift when he remarks:

The true Church of the Messiah of Israel can only survive together with the persecuted Jews; and she cannot want to have a Christ without the inseparable solidarity [unkunbare Solidaritat, S. Eicholz] with Israel, which seems to be bound together through its suffering with the suffering of Christ.²³⁰

Bonhoeffer has begun to identify Christ with the Jews. This would lead to his participation in "Operation 7," an attempt by the Abwehr to smuggle Jews outside of Germany.²³¹ Bonhoeffer freely identified himself with the Jews in Germany. This was something which transcended the realm of a nation bearing guilt. The result was a development on the part of Bonhoeffer's thought which would include the Jews as members of the weak brothers of Christ. Bonhoeffer demonstrates the responsibility of the Christian as early as the lectures on discipleship:

If the world refuses justice, the Christian will pursue mercy, and if the world takes refuge in lies, he will open his mouth for the dumb and bear testimony to the truth. For the sake of the brother, be he Jew or Greek, bond or free, strong or weak, noble or base, he will renounce all fellowship with the world. For the Christian serves the fellowship [of Christ] . . . ,²³²

Bethge's paper is a foundation for the beginning of a new area in Bonhoeffer's scholarship. The question of Bonhoeffer's subtle feelings

²³⁰Ibid., p. 22.

²³¹Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pp. 651-2.

²³²Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 289.

and theological embracement of Jews is just beginning. Bethge's paper provides a challenge for more thought and research on the part of Bonhoefferian scholars. During the course of the paper, he notes the growth which took place in Bonhoeffer's thinking during the early forties. Bonhoeffer's theological maturity embraces the Jews in a pro-Jewish stance in the Ethics. This is linked to the proposed confession of guilt which the Church should have made:

This confession speaks out what the Christian individual, like Bonhoeffer himself, and what his Church has wrongly done or not done in the situation of Nazi Germany and this at the moment when this Germany is approaching its unbelievable peak of guilt.²³³

From the Ethics, Bethge notes that Bonhoeffer had to be very careful about his references to the Jews. Often he did not use the word Jew for fear of its implications, due to his personal involvement with members of the conspiracy:

The Church confesses that she has witnessed the lawless application of brute force, the physical and spiritual suffering of countless innocent people, oppression, hatred, and murder, and that she has not raised her voice on behalf of the victims and has not found ways to hasten to their aid. She is guilty of the deaths of the weakest and most defenseless brothers of Christ.²³⁴

Bethge adds, ". . . this was before the Gas Chambers were built."²³⁵

Bonhoeffer is consolidating his solidarity with the Jews. They are our

²³³Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews," p. 24.

²³⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics (New York: Macmillan, 1978), p. 114.

²³⁵Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews," p. 24.

brothers in Christ and God's chosen people. "An expulsion of the Jews from the west must necessarily bring with it the expulsion of Christ. For Christ was a Jew."²³⁶ It is readily apparent that Bonhoeffer did not veil his language during this era. Bethge adds that:

With this terminology, "the brothers of Christ," Bonhoeffer enters into the very act of confessing his guilt and his Church's guilt into an act of deep solidarity with the victims of the holocaust-- and he observes at the same time the respect, or better the due distance, self-inflicted distance to the victims, the Jews.²³⁷

In his Christocentric approach, the Jew will play a very significant role in the life of Christianity. Bonhoeffer proposes that "The Jew keeps open the question of Christ."²³⁸

It was this reality that aroused Bonhoeffer the man, the Christian, and the theologian on the evening of the "Crystal Night":

It is of far more importance, that the hermeneutics of the last act of the holocaust are piercing through even into the christology. "The Christ was a Jew. . . . The Jew keeps the Christ question open." That means: The Christ-question will decay without the Jews; without them the Messiah of Israel, the Christ will pervert into a Greek god and finally into a teutonic police-god for watching over racial purity. Indeed, the Jew keeps open the Christ question.

. . . we read here still that Christ "was the messiah of the Israel-Jewish people," and that he "was a Jew". . . . But we do not read any more that Christ is separating the Church from the Jews, instead we read, that this Christ is binding the Church with the Jews together as a matter of life and death.²³⁹

²³⁶ Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p. 90.

²³⁷ Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews," p. 25.

²³⁸ Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p. 89.

²³⁹ Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews," p. 24.

Bonhoeffer has matured in his understanding of the Jews since the enactment of the Aryan Clause, the "Crystal Night" and his ethical writings. The growth of his thought is the movement of his Christocentricity to embrace all that belongs to God, especially His chosen people!

In any case here not only the active man, the human being Bonhoeffer, but also the theologian Bonhoeffer is set in motion, breaking new ground; and this indeed is at a point where we today just begin to articulate these problems now.²⁴⁰

His adherence to Christ which never fainted away up to the end became a binding and connecting element between them [Bonhoeffer and the Jews]--unfolding the inclusive christology.²⁴¹

During the final period of his life, Bonhoeffer made his second trip to America for the purpose of emigrating. At this time, Bonhoeffer was attempting to avoid the upcoming fatal events because of his pacifistic nature. His personal identification with the German people would cause him to return home as a disciple-in-action. He had become a disciple who could not act because his Christianity had transcended national boundaries for both the Church and the state. Bonhoeffer could not leave, for the call to discipleship is a call to deny oneself, to pick up one's cross, and to follow Him, Jesus Christ.

I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people.²⁴²

²⁴⁰Ibid., p. 22.

²⁴¹Ibid., p. 31.

²⁴²Bonhoeffer, The Way to Freedom, p. 246.

The premonition about "guilty martyrdom" once again appears in the last part of this Bonhoeffer letter:

Such a decision each man must make for himself. Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose; but I cannot make that choice in security.²⁴³

The Christian-Theologian, Christocentrically-based in a strong spiritual life of the "arcane discipline," would now become a contemporary-- a man of action. Yet some conclusions now are essential.

²⁴³Ibid., p. 246.

SUMMARY:

BONHOEFFER'S COMPELLING BIOGRAPHY
BECOMES A CHRISTOCENTRIC SPIRITUALITY

This paper has demonstrated the relationship existing between the life and theological thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The Christocentric nature of his work has been demonstrated as it was actualized in his life during this period. Beginning with Bonhoeffer's trip to Union Theological Seminary and culminating with his response to the "Crystal Night," one readily observes the role of Christ both in his theological work and in his life lived in service. For Bonhoeffer, Christology was not a mere abstraction of the Christian teaching on discipleship. Bonhoeffer proves his point in The Cost of Discipleship:

Discipleship means the adherence to Christ, and because Christ is the object of that adherence, it must take the form of discipleship. An abstract Christology, a doctrinal system, a general religious knowledge on the subject of grace or on the forgiveness of sins, render discipleship superfluous, and in fact they positively exclude any idea of discipleship whatever, and are essentially inimical to the whole conception of following Christ. With an abstract idea it is possible to enter into a relation of formal knowledge, to become enthusiastic about it, and perhaps even to put it into practice; but it can never be followed in personal obedience. Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.

Discipleship is bound to Christ as the Mediator, and where it is properly understood, it necessarily implies faith in the Son of God as the Mediator.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, pp. 63-4.

His life during these years was spent in the concrete self-actualization of what it meant to be a disciple of Christ in the contemporary world. His growth in the Christocentric understanding of reality was the result of his struggle as a Christian-Theologian to live the life of discipleship in response to the mounting evils present in National Socialism. His discipleship led him to seek a conformation of himself with Jesus Christ.

Christ was the mediator who called a man to follow him. The path of discipleship was strict and demanded immediate adherence to Christ alone. Even authority itself was called into question. Both political and ecclesiastical authority could be called into question if it was suspected that it did not reflect the form of Christ. The model for such action is the form of Christ "present" in the Scriptures. On the day of the Church Elections, Bonhoeffer appealed to his congregation for a Church that is true to its Lord and His Word:

Where is the church? Where do we find it? Where do we hear its voice? Come all you who ask in seriousness, all you who are abandoned and left alone, we will go back to the Holy Scriptures, we will go and look for the Church together.²⁴⁵

On September 9, 1933, Bonhoeffer wrote to his friend and confidant, Karl Barth:

In your booklet you said that where a church adopted the Aryan Clause it would cease to be a Christian Church, A considerable number of pastors here would agree with you in this view, Now the expected has happened, and I am asking you on behalf of many friends, pastors and students, to let us know whether you feel that it is possible either to remain in a church which has ceased to be a Christian Church or to continue to exercise a ministry which has become a privilege for Aryans.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, p. 209.

²⁴⁶Ibid., p. 226.

In this same letter to Barth, Bonhoeffer comments that "several of us are now very drawn to the idea of the free church,"²⁴⁷ This breaking of the chains of ecclesiastical authority comes in an address delivered in 1936. Bonhoeffer's Christocentric approach to reality has loosened the grip of that one institution that would have a claim to the ultimate authority of its own--the Church.

The Confessing Synod of Barmen has repudiated the teaching of the German Christians in its decisive points as a false teaching. This repudiation means that this false teaching has no place in the Church of Jesus Christ. . . . Since then, the Confessing Church has recognized that it has the responsibility of being and the commission to be the one true Church of Jesus Christ in Germany. That is a fact of church history.²⁴⁸

Bonhoeffer recognized that Christ was present in the Church both in Word and Sacrament, bodily present in the community "here and now" both "for me" and "for the other." This Christocenteredness required a personal adherence to Christ himself--an adherence so intense that it transcended the State and the Church if need be. As Bonhoeffer reminded us earlier in this paper, it is not "what this or that man, or this or that Church" would have of us, but "what Jesus Christ himself wants of us."

Due to the complexities of those days, Bonhoeffer's time was spent appropriating and discerning the Word of scripture. His purpose was to respond to Christ--in order to embrace a free and responsible action that would stand in opposition to Nazism. Christ was the center and mediator! Free and responsible action could only be grounded in a strong spiritual life--a life where egocentricity was supplanted by the "costly grace" of

²⁴⁷Ibid.

²⁴⁸Bonhoeffer, The Way to Freedom, p. 86.

discipleship. Finkenwalde provided Bonhoeffer with the opportunity of synthesizing and appropriating these things. In spiritual terms, it became a time for Bonhoeffer to "center himself" and conform himself to Christ. The answers at any point are tentative. They are a part of his compelling biography, a living theology, which was not permitted the gift of time to objectively look back from an historical perspective. Each moment saw a new challenge to the Gospel and required a new re-thinking of traditional values and theological modes of thought,

An unique development in Bonhoeffer's thought during this period was the concept of the blood of today's martyrs not being so innocent. The willingness of a Christian to freely accept "guilt" and to act while depending on the mercy of God is new. This is nothing less than a probe into a new Christological understanding of the Christocentric nature of the "faith."

At Finkenwalde, the pietatis praxis applied to Bonhoeffer as much as it applied to the students themselves. For he realized that Nazism could only be fought from within the Church by free, responsible, and "guilty" action on the part of the disciple. The years spent as a seminary director are not simply a pietistic interlude in the life of this man of action, rather, these years are a time to perfect the "arcane discipline" to be as sure as possible that one was really conforming himself to the will of Christ.

The imagery used by Bonhoeffer to describe Christ stands as a dramatic testimony of his desire to link the Christ of faith with the life of discipleship: "Christ the Mediator," Christ "for me," Christ "present"

in "Word and Sacrament," Christ as "the man for others" develops an understanding of a living Christ who is present in the "here and now" of history. Bonhoeffer's Christology is really a Christocentric Spirituality. As Dr. Geoffrey Kelly suggests:

If we contend, that religion can and does fulfill a basic human need to exteriorize and communicate our faith, we must also keep in mind that, with Bonhoeffer, it is Christ's presence per se, which enables a Christian community to function in prayer, worship and Christ-centered action on behalf of others."²⁴⁹

Bonhoeffer's sense of piety involved the discernment of the Christ-work in which one is called to participate. The life of discipleship to which one is called is a life lived in service. Bonhoeffer even recognized that martyrdom is not required of every Christian. Even fewer are called to "guilty martyrdom." In a paradoxical sense, Christianity was not something for the spiritual elite. For each had his own cross and sufferings which was portioned to him by Christ. What is more important for the disciple was that one's ego should not lead him astray from the path of discipleship.

The path of discipleship is narrow, and it is fatally easy to miss one's way and stray from the path, even after years of discipleship. And it is hard to find.²⁵⁰

Bonhoeffer felt that it was only within the community of disciples, which is Christ-centered, that one could remain faithful to Jesus Christ. In the community one encounters the Word, the Sacrament, confession, and the brother. The often overlooked guide for the disciple is not the Church,

²⁴⁹Kelly, "Freedom and Discipline," p. 13.

²⁵⁰Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 211.

rather it is Jesus Christ himself. The Jesus who is present "for me" in Word, Sacrament, and community.

For He is himself the way, the narrow way, and the straight gate. He, and he alone, is our journey's end.²⁵¹

Not what a man is in himself as a Christian, his spirituality and piety, constitutes the basis of our community. What determines our brotherhood is what that man is by reason of Christ. Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us.²⁵²

Confession serves the community by calling each to humble himself in his sin before the brother, his brother, to be able to see that it is Christ and not I who is the center of reality. His will be done! This was a constant thrust of Bonhoeffer's thought throughout these turbulent years. For in confession it is:

Our brother [who] breaks the circle of self-deception. A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person.²⁵³

No, confession is not a law, it is an offer of divine help for the sinner.²⁵⁴

This offer of help protects man from self-righteousness and self-deception. It protects man from those things which lead him astray.

In sum and synthesis: it is clear from the beginning that the disciple has no special privilege or power of his own in all his intercourse with others. The mainspring of his life and work is the strength which comes from fellowship with Jesus Christ.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹Ibid., p. 212.

²⁵²Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 25.

²⁵³Ibid., p. 116.

²⁵⁴Ibid., p. 117.

²⁵⁵Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 209.

During the years at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer discovered a basic truth. Finkenwalde enlivened the hearts of its students because of this truth. This truth, which influenced men like Winfried Maechler, Werner Koch, and Eberhard Bethge, is this:

In Christian brotherhood everything depends upon it being clear right from the beginning, first, that Christian brotherhood is not an ideal, but a divine reality. Second, that Christian brotherhood is a spiritual and not a psychic reality.²⁵⁶

We are bound together by faith, not experience.²⁵⁷

This path of thought freed Bonhoeffer for action within the Church and the conspiracy. Bonhoeffer, the man, had become a Christian through baptism. This was to come clearly into focus when the theologian became a Christian through his personal assimilation of this in the early thirties, and was to become fully realized in the forties. Bonhoeffer had nothing to fear! This is demonstrated by his attitude of calm acceptance in prison when he knew that the end was coming. He asked others not to worry, for he was at peace. The reason for this attitude may be traced to his lectures on discipleship:

They must not fear man. Men can do them no harm, for the power of men ceases with the death of the body. But they must overcome the fear of death with the fear of God. The danger lies not in the judgement of man, but in the judgement of God, not in the death of the body, but in the destruction of body and soul. Those who are still afraid of men have no fear of God, and those who have fear of God have ceased to be afraid of men. All preachers of the gospel will do well to recollect this saying daily.²⁵⁸

As Dr. Geoffrey Kelly states:

²⁵⁶ Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 26.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

²⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 242.

The only faith which could liberate the Christian was that lived in the courage of Christ's sacrifice. The freedom for which he longed is granted only in the seeming loss of all freedom at death. But that last step is only what appears from this side of life's end. For the person of faith, dying for the sake of the gospel is resurrection, the beginning of life and the perfection of freedom, And so Bonhoeffer could accept his sentence with courage because of the faith which had liberated him from the fear of that final step. His death for others in quiet trust in the God who suffers was, for him, the liberation of faith.²⁵⁹

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life and work are centered on a Christocentric understanding of the Christ-work. Christ is Christ for us today-- "here and now." Christ stands "for me" and for "the other." The question of Christology must be asked "properly" anew each day, by each generation, "Who are you, Lord?" From the theologian to the simplest believer the question must be asked and the counter-question heard: "Who do you say that I am?" This was the awful truth which tears away the cloak of hypocrisy and self-deception. Its simpleness and clarity is deceiving. This Christocentrism is something which is eternally present in each moment and for each person.

It was this understanding of the role of Christ in the life of the disciple that enabled Dietrich Bonhoeffer to rise above the letter of the law in the Sermon on the Mount, liberating him for the service of Christ in a radically new and different way in his realization of the life of discipleship in the world of the 1930's and 1940's. This paper has established the biographical relationship between the presence of Christ in the life and thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his development of that understanding during the years from 1931 to 1939.

²⁵⁹Kelly, "Freedom and Discipline," p. 25.

His last trip to America epitomizes the depth of the man. He leaves for the United States because he cannot bear arms during an aggressive war. After his arrival, Bonhoeffer discovers that there is something more at stake than a pioneer's stance on "selective conscientious objection." Adolf Hitler and National Socialism represent the real presence of "evil" in the world. The Church has been seduced because of its concern for its own safety. The Christians who stood as faithful witnesses are suffering with the "weak brothers" of Christ. Political asylum is metaphorically the same as the seclusion of the monastery. The Seminary director could have failed to learn his own lesson. It is the author's contention that no one could have blamed him for this. One would now be dealing with a fully developed systematic theology, and not with a compelling biography. Bonhoeffer recognized that the real question was of Christ and Christianity's existence in the world, and not a question of pacifism.

When Bonhoeffer wrote to Niebuhr, he had identified the real issue of the war. He states emphatically that:

Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization.²⁶⁰

National Socialism was an ideology--the choice was clear--Christ or Adolf Hitler. "I know which of these alternatives I must choose"²⁶¹ The cost of discipleship and the price of "costly grace" were unutterably clear. He must return.

²⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer, The Way to Freedom, p. 246.

²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 246.

The result of his decision to return is very intriguing to anyone engaged in Bonhoefferian studies. One is confronting a compelling biography, a theology which is a living biography in the fullest sense of the word, and a life of discipleship lived as a theological response to the deeds of Nazi Socialism. Bonhoeffer's life stands as a witness to the demands of true discipleship. He had no clear vision of his role in resisting Nazism before his return to Germany in 1939. Bonhoeffer wrote about this to Bishop Bell: "What sort of personal decisions will be asked from me I do not know. But nobody knows that now."²⁶² Christ was the journey's end. For the answer Bonhoeffer would go to Him, and that eventually would lead him down the path of "guilty martyrdom."

This paper has captured a few significant highlights of the Christocentric development of Bonhoeffer's life and thought. Bonhoeffer's Christological understanding of Christ evolved from a Christ who stood "for me" into a Christ who was present in me as "the man for others." There was also a movement in his understanding that "Christ was a Jew" and that the Jews were the chosen people of God. The Jew would keep the Christ question open throughout time. Therefore, the Jew's fate was also intertwined with the fate of the Christian Church. There was a subtle shift from an understanding that Christ is to be found in the structure of the Church to where Christ is in the community of true disciples. This may even be an ecumenical community that rises above denominational exclusiveness.

²⁶²Ibid., pp. 248-9.

The discovery of the centrality of Christ in the "arcane discipline," in confession, and in the community liturgical life of Finkenwalde, provided the spiritual basis for the future. Decisions were seen in the light of their consequences, whether it was a decision for or against Christ. The spirituality of the "arcane discipline" freed the disciple from the chains of egoism. The disciple was freed from his own egocentrism for a life of Christocentrism. This new life was to be lived not for myself; rather, it was to be lived in service to others for Christ.

Pacifism became an illegitimate escape for Bonhoeffer. It was a movement toward personal pietism that closed one's eyes to the evils that were so rapidly multiplying in the world. The opportunity to participate in the conspiracy arose because of his family, and his opposition now had to transcend the letter of the law in the Sermon on the Mount. How was the term "peacemaker" to be understood in Nazi Germany?

The significant feature of Bonhoeffer's Christology is its evolution into a Christocentricity in the person of Jesus Christ. It is a movement in Bonhoeffer's life that seeks to secularize the Sacred and Sacralize the Secular, because of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. By maintaining the delicate balance of the mystery of the Incarnation, Bonhoeffer has freed himself from being categorized as either an incarnational or a transcendental theologian in Christology. Bonhoeffer's Christology becomes a Christocentricity which, in the God-man, Jesus Christ, embraces both the secular and the sacred. This Christocenteredness paradoxically allows for the coexistence of the "arcane discipline" and "freedom for action," personal piety and community responsibility, in the life of

discipleship. Bonhoeffer's life and thought during these years (1931 to 1939) is the foundational grounding, though not yet the full expression, of a Christocentric-mysticism--a Christocentric-mysticism that would soon become existentially actualized in the "here and now" of this world. Because of Christ, theology is not simply biography; but the biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is the incarnation of his Christology.

REFERENCES

- Bailey, J. Martin, and Douglas Gilbert. The Steps of Bonhoeffer. New York: Macmillan, 1969.
- Bethge, Eberhard. Costly Grace. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979.
- _____. "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews." A Plenary Address presented to the Third International Conference of the Bonhoeffer Society. Oxford, 1980.
- _____. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Man of Vision--Man of Courage. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1970.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, Act and Being. New York: Harper & Row, 1961.
- _____. Christ the Center. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- _____. The Communion of Saints. New York: Harper & Row, 1960.
- _____. The Cost of Discipleship. New York: Macmillan, 1977.
- _____. Ethics. New York: Macmillan, 1978.
- _____. Letters and Papers from Prison. New York: Macmillan, 1970.
- _____. Life Together. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.
- _____. No Rusty Swords. London: Wm. Collins Sons Ltd., 1977.
- _____. "Stations on the Road to Freedom." Prayers from Prison. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977.
- _____. The Way to Freedom. London: Wm. Collins Sons Ltd., 1977.
- Bosanquet, Mary. The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
- Dudzus, Otto. "Discipleship and Worldliness in the Thinking of Dietrich Bonhoeffer." Translated by Mrs. Kenrick Gobel. Religion in Life XXXV (2) (Spring 1966).
- Fant, C. E. Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching. New York: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1975.
- Gould, William B. "After Thirty Years: Bonhoeffer's Discipleship Revisited." University of Dubuque, 1978.

- _____. The Worldly Christian. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967.
- Green, Clifford J. "Bonhoeffer: The Sociality of Christ and Humanity." Dissertation Series 6, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press for the American Academy of Religion, n.d.
- Jensen, Hans-Werner. "Life Together." I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Edited by Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald G. Smith. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- Kelly, Geoffrey B. "An Interview with Jean Lasserre." Union Seminary Quarterly Review, XXVII (Spring 1972).
- _____. "Freedom and Discipline: The Rhythms of Bonhoeffer's Christocentric Spirituality," Lasalle College, 1980.
- Lovin, Robin W. "The Christian and the Authority of the State: Bonhoeffer's Reluctant Revisions." A paper presented at the Third International Conference of the Bonhoeffer Society. Oxford, 1980. University of Chicago, 1980.
- McLendon, James Wm. Jr. Biography as Theology. Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1974.
- Maltusch, Gottfried. "When the Synagogues Burnt." I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Edited by Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald S. Smith. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- Marty, Martin E. The Place of Bonhoeffer. New York: Association Press, 1962.
- May, William E. Christ in Contemporary Thought. New York: Pflaum, 1970.
- Nelson, F. Burton. "An Interview with Jean Lasserre." August 11, 1977. Tape interview in English. Transcribed by Michael L. Morison, 1981.
- Ott, Heinrich. Reality and Faith: The Theological Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. "Bonhoeffer's Christology of 1933." The Place of Bonhoeffer. Edited by Martin E. Marty, New York: Association Press, 1962.
- Phillips, John A. Christ for Us in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.
- Rasmussen, Larry L. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance. New York: Abingdon Press, 1972.

- Schonherr, Albrecht. "The Single-heartedness of the Provoked." I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- Vorkink, Peter II. Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968.
- White, Mel. Unpublished interview with Eberhard Bethge, 1980. Tape courtesy of Dr. F. Burton Nelson.
- Zimmermann, Wolf-Dieter. "Years in Berlin." I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Edited by Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald G. Smith. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Michael L. Morison
has been read and approved by the following committee:

Dr. Jon Nilson, Ph.D., Director
Assistant Professor

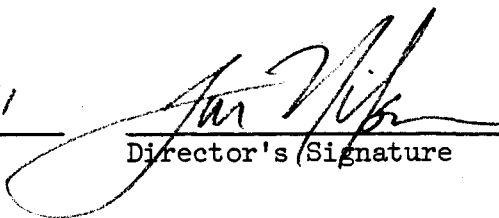
Dr. Gerald McCulloh, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor

Rev. Richard Costigan, S.J.
Assistant Professor

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

December 3, 1981
Date


Director's Signature