Dietrich Bonhoeffer's approach to systematic theology

Fairclough, John. F.

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a witness of Jesus Christ among his Brethren. Born 4th February 1906 in Breslau. Died 9th April 1945 at Flossenburg. (The inscription on a tablet in Flossenburg church, dedicated on Easter Sunday 1952)

Abstract - John F. Fairclough Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Approach to Systematic Theology (M.A. Thesis, 1968)

The study begins by outlining the influence of Liberal Protestantism which Bonhoeffer met as a student at Berlin University. We show that although Bonhoeffer's heritage from the Liberal School was by no means negligible, it was to Karl Barth and his Dialectical Theology that the young Bonhoeffer was more and more attracted. In Act and Being and Sanctorum Communio we see Bonhoeffer's debt to Barthian insights but we also see him moving to a position which emphasizes the given-ness of God's revelation as Christ takes form in the here and now - in the community of the Church. We see that the phenomenon of the Church (as Christ existing as community) holds an undeniable fascination for the young theologian. During the years 1927-33 we claim that his understanding of both Christology and Revelation is dominated by this Ecclesiological interest.

Throughout the study we wish to demonstrate that Bonhoeffer is from start to finish a theologian whose thought is centred in the revelation of Christ. Where we locate development in his theology or when we attempt to understand his thought on such subjects as discipleship or secularization we must observe that all are pursued from a Christocentric position. Indeed Christ gives unity to his thought.

Bonhoeffer's theology arises from personal involvement. Some appreciation of the political and social scene in Germany during the 1930s is essential for a proper understanding of the form and content of Bonhoeffer's theology after 1933. We shall see that during the years 1933 onwards his life and thought merge and we shall be forced to devote more time to biographical details and socio-political questions. Out of this context came such works as The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together.

In the last years of his life (1940-45), Bonhoeffer faced the problem of the meaning of Christ in a technological age. The final section of the study examines Bonhoeffer's understanding of secularization. We note that his thinking springs from a Christocentric position. The material examined is compiled in Ethics and Letters and Papers from Prison.

Contents

Introduction

The Characteristics of Bonhoeffer's Theology

His Theology has its origin in the fact of the existence of the Christian Church in History

In this period of Empirical disciplines, it is inappropriate for the Systematic Theologian to construct a system of Dogmatics by starting with certain texts or credal statements. Rather, he must start with what is clearly existing in the contemporary world - the undeniable fact of the existence of the Church or Christian Community.*

This phenomenon of the Christian Church holds an undeniable fascination for the young theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and becomes the main concern of his early academic writings. Both his understanding of Christology and Revelation are influenced by his Ecclesiological interest. Although Bonhoeffer welcomed the Barthian Dialectical Theology with its undermining of the Liberal Protestantism, he himself felt that the Dialectical School had given too little concern to the reality of the community of revelation which was for him the real presence of Christ among men. This interest in the Church is reflected in the subject of his Licentiate thesis - Sanctorum Communio (23). Here Bonhoeffer explored the sociological phenomenon of the Church and its relation to the presence of Christ.

This quest for historical realism was never abandoned by Bonhoeffer. He was willing to face the fact that the Christian is called to live in the present. He felt justified in seeing secularization as part of the divine purpose. For Bonhoeffer Biblical faith is based on a world view which understands the whole of life as relevant. This is why he was prepared in the

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* Cf. J.A.T. Robinson - In the End God (Collins, Fontana, 1968) p.36-41 where is discussed the true starting point for the Christian Theologian.
Also see A. Richardson - Science, History and Faith (Oxford University Press, 1950) pp.45-50

last five years of his life to offer tentative suggestions on the problem of how one could speak meaningfully about God in a world which had abandoned 'religious' metaphysics and accepted man's autonomy.* He never had the opportunity fully to develop his thoughts about the relation of the world to Christ, but he points the way and challenges the church to finish the task.

His Quest is centred in the Revelation of Christ

All his thinking - whether on the subject of genuine discipleship (which was his main interest during the period of 1933-9) or secularization - stemmed from one centre, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. For Bonhoeffer theology was essentially Christology and where we see Bonhoeffer's thought breaking new ground it must be understood solely as the development of Christology.† This is the unifying element in his theology; indeed it is the deeper understanding of the incarnation that forced along Bonhoeffer's theological development.

Bonhoeffer is only willing to understand the reality of the Church (in Sanctorum Communio) and the worldm(in Ethics and Letters and Papers from Prison) by taking seriously the concrete form of Jesus Christ. In his early thought the concrete form of Christ lives on in the historic community of the church. Here Christ is present with his people, "Christ existing as community" yet Lord over it. In his later writings he stresses that it is only in Jesus Christ that God's relation to the world is able to be defined.

His Theology arises from Personal Involvement

Under normal circumstances a gifted student like young Dietrich Bonhoeffer could have looked forward to a distinguished career as a full-time University teacher. Indeed he had taken up such a post at Berlin University in 1931.

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*A recent article in Theology (Vol 71, No.572 p.71-80) by A.G. Weiler gives a brief outline of the origins of secularization in late Medieval Europe which Bonhoeffer detected in his analysis of history.

†Cf. J.D. Godsey (13) p.264-272 on the significance and importance of Christology in an understanding of Bonhoeffer's theology

However Political developments in Germany and the outbreak of the Second World War were to bring about dramatic changes in the course of his life. These changes were of no little importance in shaping both the form and content of his theological writings.

In the midst of the rise of Hitler's National Socialism and its blatant heresies Bonhoeffer could not rest content with being merely an academic theologian. It will be noted in the body of the thesis that more biographical information about Bonhoeffer (and the contemporary German Political and social scene in which he was intimately involved) is given than would be required in understanding fully the thought of other theologians. This is because Bonhoeffer believed that words were only significant if spoken from within a real situation, and accompanied by concrete action. In the midst of the Confessing Church struggle in 1937 he wrote:

> If we are to believe, we must obey a concrete command. Without this preliminary step of obedience, our faith will only be pious humbug, and lead us to the grace which is not costly. (24, p.55)

For Bonhoeffer action against an evil like National Socialism must be based on a genuine theological position and so his theological energies were directed to this vital task. John Gibbs sees Bonhoeffer in correct perspective when he claims: "It is not just that Bonhoeffer achieved an integration of thought and life to which few of us even approximate, but that his thought can only be understood when seen in the light of the successive situations to which his obedience led him". (28, p.13)

His Christiah witness in the Confessing Church, the Finkelwalde Seminary, the Resistance Movement and the Gestapo prisons, all forced his thought to the question of the relation of the church and Christ to the world. For Bonhoeffer to be committed to Christ is to be involved in the concrete life of the world for which Christ died.

> When all is said and done Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life is the most eloquent commentary upon his message. It was out of his own deep commitment to God and his fellows in, for the most part, frightening situations of concrete evil and suffering that he learned the freedom of Christian service. (28, p.25)

Part 1 The Theological Student and young Lecturer

a. Biographical Introduction - 1906-33

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in Breslau on February 4th, 1906 into an upper middle-class family. He and his twin sister, Sabine, were the sixth and seventh children in a family of eight. The home was cultured and had a strong academic atmosphere; his father taught Psychiatry at Berlin University. In this cultural and academic environment Dietrich came in contact with "everything enlightened, temperate, humanitarian and responsible in nineteenth-century Germany". (27, p.13) His academic potential was soon evident and many remarked on his prodigious energy and concentration and his insatiable curiosity which questioned everything. The nature of his home with its visitors - Ferdinand Tonnies, Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch and Adolf von Harnack - encouraged lively intellectual discussion on all topics from sociology to literature and introduced the young Bonhoeffer to the current trends in contemporary thought. This background no doubt accounts for Bonhoeffer's ruthless honesty in theological reasoning and his great desire to use the insights of other disciplines - sociology and social philosophy - to define his own contribution to Theological thought. This concern with current philosophy, sociology and social philosophy is apparent in two early academic works, Sanctorum Communio and Act and Being (23 and 22). Both these writings reflect the general philosophical and sociological trends of the late 1920s.

From the beginning he was expected to be a scholar and in the Autumn of 1923 at the age of 17 he entolled at Tubingen University as a Theology student. He remained there two months before spending three months in Rome and North Africa. A year before this he had decided to enter the ministry of the church and so in the summer of 1924 he entered Berlin University to begin serious theological studies under such scholars as - Adolf von Harnack, Reinhold Seeberg, Karl Holl, Adolf Deissmann and Ernst Sellin. The outlook of the Theological Faculty at Berlin was Liberal Protestant. Although Bonhoeffer was critical of its method and its speculation and more attracted to the Dialectical Theology of Karl Barth wedmust not underestimate the great influence which the Liberal Protestant school of thought had in shaping and directing Bonhoeffer's own theology. (See Part 1 (d))

In 1927 Bonhoeffer was awarded the Licentiate of the University for his thesis - Sanctorum Communio - A Dogmatic Inquiry into the Sociology of the Church. (23) In this work the influence of Karl Barth's Dialectical Theology is clearly seen. Barth himself recognized his disciple in this thesis and described it as "a theological miracle". (13, p.21)

At 21 years of age Bonhoeffer went to Spain to be assistant minister to the German-speaking congregation in Barcelona. We shall have more to say on the influence of this pastoral ministry later. While at Barcelona he worked on his inaugural dissertation, Act and Being (22), Which was to admit him to the University of Berlin as a lecturer in July 1930 at the age of 24. In September of the same year he went to the Union Theological Seminary in New York as Sloane Fellow. The influence of this visit on his life and thought is noted elsewhere.

Bonhoeffer returned to Germany in the summer of 1931 to take up his duties at Berlin University as a lecturer in Systematic Theology. Before taking up this appointment he spent several seeks at a seminar in Bonn conducted by Karl Barth. This association was to last for the rest of Bonhoeffer's life. Writing to Erwin Sutz about this seminar he remarked, "I don't think that I have ever regretted anything that I have failed to do in my theological past as much as the fact that I did not come here earlier. .... I have been impressed even more by discussions with him than by his writings and his lectures". (9, p.120-1) He found the theological atmosphere at Bonn to his liking and was very sympathetic to Barth's revolt against nineteenth century Liberal Protestantism.

Bonhoeffer took up his work at the Berlin Theological Faculty in August 1931. The subject of his inaugural lecture was 'Man in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology'.(9, p.50-69) In the autumn of the same year he published Act and Being(22).

Under normal circumstances he could now have looked forward to about forty years of lecturing in Systematic Theology and publishing learned theological works which would have gained for him an international reputation in theological circles. However we shall see that social upheaval and political developments in Germany in the 1930s were to force him to assume a new role. He was to become a prophet; to speak the word of God to contemporary man.

b. The Theological scene from Schleiermacher to the second decade of the Twentieth Century

Since Bonhoeffer's student days at Berlin University were spent in an atmosphere of Liberal Protestantism it will now be necessary to briefly outline the origin and development of this particular method in Theology. We shall wish to define the positive influence which Liberal Scholars like Harnack, Holl and Seeberg had on this young and gifted theological student. We use the term 'positive influence' because, as we have already noted in the previous section (section a.), the young Bonhoeffer firmly identified himself with the radical critique which Karl Barth was carrying out on the Liberal school.

The origin of Liberal Protestantism lies in the work of Schleiermacher whose influence on theological thought was greater in 1910 than it was during his own life-time. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) conducted a vigorous campaign against the so-called 'Enlightenment' (Aufklarung) which was characterised by a crude self-satisfied rationalism. The thinkers of the Enlightenment had taken up the challenge which Copernicus and Galileo had laid before them. These two had pointed out that the earth was not the centre of the universe. This should perhaps have led to the humiliation of man but the thinkers of the Enlightenment discovered that it had more optimistic implications. Far from accepting the reality of man's humiliation and insignificance in the universe, they pointed out that man is all the greater for his actually having made this discovery. Man is thus centre of things in quite a different way. The fact that he was able to discover this revolutionary truth by his own resources and to think it abstractly means that the world is even more his world. On this theme Barth has written, "It is paradoxical and yet it is a fact that the answer to his (man's) humiliation was those philosophical systems of rationalism, empiricism and scepticism which made men even more self-confident. The geo-centric picture of the universe was replaced as a matter of course by the anthropocentric". (1, p.16) The development of this movement was assisted and emphasized in the Eighteenth century by the revival of science which opened up even more resources to the evolving autonomous man. Armed with the techniques of logic, observation and mathematics nothing appeared to be beyond the scope of man.

In reacting against this mechanistic and rational approach, Schleiermacher rushed to the other extreme of attempting to locate the basis of theological knowledge in the activity of feeling of experience. This approach, no doubt, owes much to two influences - the warm personal devotion of the Moravians which Schleiermacher experienced during his adolescence and secondly, the Romantic movement of the Eighteenth century. On the Moravian experience Barth locates "the bold idea of a Christianity in which the Saviour and the individual soul as well as the Saviour and the Christian communion were brought ..... into a synoptic, mediated, polar relationship". (1, p.332) Commenting on Schleiermacher's method, Barth writes, "For Schleiermacher being educated and education must definitely mean mediation - uniting vision, synthesis and peace not only between this and that opposite, but ultimately between all, even between the most profound opposites". (1, p.331-2) The key word here and the concept which occurs regularly in the later sermons is 'peace' - the removal of apparent contradictions and opposites. 'Peace' exists for Schleiermacher when truth is known, not in the way the rationalists know a truth, but when a person's experience brings 'peace'.

For Schleiermacher 'peace' is equated with religion which is "the moment of the unity of intuition and feeling which takes place beyond all thought and action". (1, p.334) In this experience man is aware of his own self as utterly dependent on God. Ninian Smart gives a succinct definition of Schleiermacher's understanding of the moment of intuition: "The contemplation of the pious is the immediate consciousness of the universal existence of all finite things in and through the Infinite, and of all temporal things in and through the Eternal". (2, p.307) Here we have a theology of pious self-awareness which claims that by directing man to this attitude of thankful and reverent dependence is the same thing as directing him to God.

It is relevant to reflect that if this argument of the reality of pious self-awareness is taken to its logical conclusion then every man is religious and it is possible for this 'homo religiosus' to become aware of his dependence on God. This enabled Schleiermacher to claim that the highest capacity of human nature is realized in religion where religion completes the experience of unconditional dependence. Here religion is "man's quest for tthe

Infinite" (3, p.83) and since the Infinite possessed the reality and meaning of the cosmos it was too easy of Schleiermacher to see religion as the source of all human scientific, cultural, moral and social endeavour. It was inevitable that the teaching of the Kingdom of God would have to be adjusted so that it was "utterly and unequivocally identical with the advance of civiliation", (1, p.315) since religion in general and the Christian religion in particular is the highest value in life, and civilization without religion is incomplete. We shall observe later that this approach fails to do justice to the Biblical revelation of incarnation. It also forces Theological thought to withdraw from dialogue with the world and it is perhaps Bonhoeffer's distinctive contribution to theology that he wished to see God at the centre of life and involved intimately in His world. Since Schleiermacher's approached relinquished all dialogue with the world there was always the danger that the Christian Gospel would be adapted to the time instead of standing in judgment over the developing culture.

All Bonhoeffer's teachers at Berlin University defined their own positions in relation to Schleiermacher. Indeed all theologians came under the influence of him. However, before we examine the work of Bonhoeffer's teachers and its influence on him, it is necessary to consider briefly the method of Albrecht Ritschl who greatly influenced one of these teachers - Adolf von Harnack.

Ritschl (1822-89) rejected Hegel's speculative rationalism and was critical of Schleiermacher's subjectivism. Barth writes, "Ritschl rejected all the previous attempts to overcome the Enlightenment which were centrally determined by the tendency of Romanticism". (1, p.391) Taking Schleiermacher's concept of religious consciousness as his starting point, he attempted to construct a theological method which pushed this intuitive activity to its extreme limit - viz. into the realm of judgments of value. According to Ritschl, the religious consciousness is not so much active when it is confronted with judgments of existence as when it is rescued by the activity of authentic value judgments. H.R. Mackintosh points to two passages in Ritschl's writings which we can use as a key to his method.

> The distinction of worth or value is of no importance whatever for the metaphysical theory of the universe, whereas the religious view of things rests on the fact that man distinguishes himself in worth from the phenomenon around him.
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> In every religion, what is sought, with the help of the superhuman spiritual power reverenced by man, is a solution of the contradiction in which man finds himself as both a part of nature and a spiritual Personality claiming to dominate nature. (4, p.147-8)

Mackintosh points out that for Ritschl, religion solves a practical tension and must not be considered as a speculative affair. As man observes and experiences the hostile world, both in nature and in human society, he realizes his true worth and is aware that alone he cannot cope with these forces. Faith then comes to his aid and asserts the reality of transcendeht spiritual powers by whose aid man can cope with this ordeal. In this approach, religion is seen as a product of the struggle for existence and God appears to be at man's disposal to free him from the natural conditions of his existence. It is not surprising that the most important work from Ritschl should be titled, Justification and Reconciliation (completed 1874). In this work reconciliation is understood as "the realized ideal of human life". (1, p.393) The writing reveals an over-simplification of the Christian Gospel. For instance, his claim that 'sin is judged by God as ignorance' is fundamentally un-Biblical and his understanding of Christ's work of reconciliation, because it avoids making metaphysical claims about Christ which are necessary in such a situation, avoids thorough intellectual inquiry. In such a situation all Ritschl claimed was that when the Church affirmed that Jesus was divine, what was being said was that Jesus has for the Church the value of God.

Ritschl's most influential contribution to theology was his scientific interest in history. Religion, he claimed, must feed upon concrete facts and events; particularly on the lives of great religious personalities and their experiences. The climax is reached in the personality and experience of Christ. But here Ritschl has taken too much for granted. Mackintosh summarizes:

> Christ, the Revealer of God, is indeed in history ; but Ritschl failed to see, or a least failed to insist, that he is not of history, and that for this very reason His being in history at all is a Divine marvel. The historian's business is to make each event luminous as the

> outcome of its antecedents and its milieu; but if the being of Christ is in fact transcendent, if in a sense upon which everything depends He has come 'from the other side of reality', if, as we contemplate Him in the Gospels, we become aware that God is present in Him incognito, then to approach the interpretation of His Person with the assumptions as to what history is, is inevitably to confuse the issue. ....It is clear, also, that Ritschl ignores that fact that when in faith we take ourselves to Scripture, it is not to employ it as a historical source-book, but rather as authentic witness to Christ, in which the voice of God Himself is heard. The insight of faith is something else than historical perception..... (4, p.152)

At Berlin, both Barth and Bonhoeffer studied under Harnack who "remained fundamentally Ritschlian to the last". (5, p.103) Harnack considered that "theology should be based on history, but adapted for use by human faith". (5, p.103) He was afraid that a religion which could not have its foundation in an historic figure was liable to wander into the realms of subjectivism, while on the other hand an historical study of religion which had no eye for religious values was, according to Harnack, lacking seriousness.

Harnack carried into the twentieth century the theological method and suppositions of the nineteenth century and pursued them with such an enthusiasm that the first decade of the twentieth century was marked by a renaissance of Schleiermacher. In his book The Humanity of God (6) Barth has written, "The year 1900 brought the nineteenth century to its chronological end and marked at the same time a climax in the history of its theology: the publication of Harnack's What is Christianity?* Due to this achievement, nineteenth century theology continued to live for some time with force and dignity almost unbroken, in spite of signs of dissolution". (6, p.14)

Although it is inadequate to summarize Harnack's theology as consisting of two main tenets - the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man - one is aware of the dearth of Christological teaching in the 16 lectures in What is Christianity? For Harnack, Jesus was not the Son of God, but merely the most

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*What is Christianity?(Benn, London - 5th Edit, 1958) is a translation of Harnack's Das Wesen des Christentums, which embodied a series of open lectures given to students in the University of Berlin in the winter of 1899-1900. The lectures were published in German in 1900. The English translation appeared in 1901.

complete and perfect teacher and revealer of God. Harnack claims that Jesus himself did not believe that he was the Son of God and therefore we need not believe it either. With this apparent horror of New Testament Christology, Harnack was forced to see the gospel as centred in the life and teaching of the Jesus of History. He argued that the kernel of this teaching could be presented when the husk of Greek philosophical and dogmatic theories had been removed.* Alec Vidler defines this kernel of truth as consisting of "the kingdom of God as a present possession, the rule of God in the hearts of men; this is identical with eternal life". He continues, "It is life lived in the conviction that God is our Father, that his providence rules over our whole life and over the world, and that we are his children, of infinite value in his sight, with a divine sonship which is at once a gift to be received and a vocation to be fulfilled". (7, p.16)

Because Harnack failed to deal with the doctrine of the person of Christ he was led to consider the essence of the Christian faith as being the Father and not the Son. Ultimately this type of theology could only lead to Christianity being considered as but one religion among many and Jesus Christ as a great but not unique religious personality. If theology is practised in this particular context each religion stands or falls on its own merits and only has authority within a definite geographical, cultural and historical situation. Another member of the Liberal school, Ernst Troeltsch, found himself unable to affirm the universality of the Christian religion or to entertain the belief that it is called to be the religion of mankind. J.M. Creed in The Divinity of Christ quotes a striking passage from one of Troeltsch's later lectures: "The primary claim of Christianity to validity is the fact that only through it have we become what we are, and only in it can we preserve the religious forces that we need". (5, p.111) In the light of this outlook it is likely that Christianity can only claim validity for a Western-European civilization and perhaps this claim of validity is only a temporary one.

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* This is the theme of Harnack's monumental work The History of Dogma (E.T. 1899). He sees the history of dogmatic writings as a process which has obscured the gospel by philosophical speculation. He considered that it was the task of the theologian not to reconstruct dogma but rather to abolish it so that the 'pure' gospel could be exposed.

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century Emil Brunner and Karl Barth were convinced that the approach of the Liberal school was leading theology astray into a cul de sac. In his essay 'Evangelical Theology in the Nineteenth Century' (6, p.11-33) Barth points to the year 1914 as the time when he became convinced that the end of the era of Liberal Theology had arrived. He writes, "The actual end of the nineteenth century as the 'good old days' came for theology as for everything else with the fateful year of 1914. Accidentally or not, a significant event took place during that very year. Ernst Troeltsch, the well-known professor of systematic theology and the leader of the then most modern school, gave up his chair in theology for one in philosophy. One day in early August 1914 stands out in my personal memory as a black day. Ninety-three German intellectuals impressed public opinion by their proclamation in support of the war policy of Wilhelm 11 and his counsellors. Among these intellectuals I discovered to my horror almost all of my theological teachers whom I greatly venerated. In despair over what this indicated about the signs of the time I suddenly realized that I could no longer follow either their ethics and dogmatics or their understanding of the Bible and of history. For me at least, nineteenth century theology no longer held any future". (6, p.14)

During the second and third decades of the twentieth century Barth was to attempt a complete reconstruction of Protestant Theology which repudiated the very foundations on which the Liberal school had built. Bonhoeffer's early theology owes much to Barth's reconstruction but as J.A. Phillips has rightly pointed out "too much emphasis in the study of Bonhoeffer has been placed upon his reaction against his teachers (Harnack, Seeberg, Holl and Troeltsch) and too little on the great influence they exerted upon him". (27, p.34) Thus before we briefly sketch the main characteristics of Barth's theology of the Word of God we must examine the positive influence which the Liberal school exerted on the young Bonhoeffer.

c. Bonhoeffer's heritage from the Liberal Protestant School of Thought

In 1930 Harnack died at the age of 80. He had lived long enough to see the reaction against the Liberal Protestantism of which he had been the most powerful exponent. Although Bonhoeffer had already come under the influence of the architect of this reaction, Karl Barth, he nevertheless pays a moving tribute to Harnack's work in a memorial address of 15th June 1930. He speaks of Harnack's "unswerving quest for truth and clarity" and records that "Empty phrases were foreign to the spirit of his seminar.* Everything had to be clear at any price. ....And if he ever spoke anxiously, or uttered warnings in respect of the most recent developments in our field of scholarship, this was motivated exclusively by his fear that the view of others might perhaps be in danger of confusing something alien with the pure quest for truth". He continues, "We saw in him as it were a bulwark against all shallowness and stagnation .... (a) legacy of true freedom of investigation". (9, p.29-31)

The intellectual integrity and spirit of free inquiry which characterised Liberal Theology at its best and which Bonhoeffer detected in the work of Harnack was a constant goal in his own thought which is throughout open-ended, systematic and rigorously disciplined. Wherever his intellect led him in the pursuit of truth, Bonhoeffer was willing to go even if it meant travelling in uncharted regions. In this free intellectual atmosphere Bonhoeffer was able to make a genuine contribution to the development of Dialectical Theology.

E.H. Robertson claims that Bonhoeffer "remained a Lutheran and a very orthodox Christian". (29, p.9) It is perhaps significant to observe that in the year Bonhoeffer enrolled as a theological student at Tubingen University (1923) Karl Holl published a collection of monographs on Luther† which presented him as a genuinely theocentric theologian. Although Holl's interpretation did not go unchallenged (see 27, p.40-1) there can be little doubt that Bonhoeffer received from Holl a comprehensive introduction to Luther and a

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*See also Bonhoeffer's letters to Harnack (9, p.27-9) where he shows a genuine appreciation of his teacher's seminars. The letters are dated 13th July 1928 and 18th December 1929. (On the latter date it had been announced that Harnack was to retire)

† The first volume of his Gesammelte Aufsatze zur Kirchengeschichte

great respect for basic themes of Reformed theology. Indeed Luther lies as the formative background of much of Bonhoeffer's thought.

It would be appropriate here to make some general observations in connection with Bonhoeffer's debt to Luther. Armed with Barth's rediscovery of the role of revelation in Christian theology, Bonhoeffer was able to give forceful expression of the basic themes of Luther's thought - the reality of sin, the importance of grace, the gift of faith and reconciliation and sanctification in Christ. We shall not be surprised that the outcome of this Barth-Luther dialogue is a theology which is consistently Christocentric.

Luther lies behind Bonhoeffer's picture of the Body of Christ in Sanctorum Communio (23). Like Luther he sees the empirical church as being the Body of Christ and at the same time remaining a collection of sinners. His understanding of the Holy Spirit and its relation to Christ, together with the consideration of its work within the church and among individual christians is Lutheran in most of its aspects. For both Luther and Bonhoeffer the work of Christ is seen as revolving around the preaching of the word within the Christian community and the administration of the sacraments where Christ is indeed truly present.

Even under the stress of imprionment when he was shocked at the things he was saying* in an attempt to interpret Christian experience in non-religious terms, he stood by his Lutheran principles, emphatically claiming that the way to understand our relationship with God was by faith alone and this faith is in Jesus Christ who is the authority of God. In a letter dated as late as August 21st 1944 Bonhoeffer, commenting on 11Cor. 1 v.20 (For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us (A.V.)), writes:

> The key to everything is the 'in him'. All that we may rightly expect from God, and ask for, is to be found in Jesus Christ. The God of Jesus Christ has nothing to do with what God, as we imagine him, could do and ought to do. If we are to learn what God promises, and what he fulfils, we must persevere in quiet meditation on the life, sayings, deeds, sufferings, and death of Jesus. It is certain that we may always live close to God and in the light of his presence, and that such living is an

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* See letter dated 23rd August 1944 (16, p.215)

> entirely new life for us. .... (Jesus Christ) is the firm ground on which we stand. (16, p.213-4)

There are three further points which need to be mentioned here although further discussion of them will come later. Firstly, Bonhoeffer uses Luther's 'pro me' Christology (Christ being there for me) as a starting point for his own Christology but is willing to define it in dynamic sociological terms. This leads him towards his concept of 'Christ existing as community' where he stresses that this term must not be understood as a metaphor or as a mere representation of the body of Christ. From such a position it follows that Bonhoeffer's Christology and Ecclesiology are inseparable; Christ in the church is visible, tangible and concrete. In his thinking about the church he defends sociologically what is essentially a traditional Lutheran position. For him, Christ is 'the man for others' present in the church and the process of salvation is operative within this community.

Secondly, the Lutheran themes of grace, sanctification and the Lordship of Christ over life, are linked with the here and now of discipleship. Bonhoeffer conceives that the grace given through Christ is costly grace and thus demands genuine, costly discipleship. This theme receives a forceful presentation in The Cost of Discipleship (24) and Ethics (17). Bonhoeffer insists that the salvation of mankind had been worked out on the scene of history; Jesus had lived and died in this world and therefore man must accept his role in the world with responsibility and seriousness. We must note that the demand for man's obedience and discipleship in the world is not based on vague humanitarian grounds but on a particular understanding of Christology. Christ died for this world; He is thus concerned for the 'penultimate' (using Bonhoeffer's own terminology) which is the realm of man's efforts at genuine discipleship. Bonhoeffer willingly accepted the reality of God's approval of this world. A few months before his death he wrote in a letter dated 27th June 1944:

> The Christian, unlike the devotees of the redemptive myths, has no last line of escape available from earthly tasks and difficulties into the eternal, but like Christ himself ('My God, why has thou forsaken me?'), he must drink the earthly cup to the lees, and only in doing so is the crucified and risen Lord with him, and he crucified and risen with Christ. This world must not be prematurely written off.... Redemption myths arise from human boundary-experiences, but Christ takes hold of a man at the centre of his life. (16, p.186)

And again in a letter dated 21st July 1944 we find similar sentiments

expressed: "I discovered later, (after the writing of The Cost of Discipleship) 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". (16, p.201)

Thirdly, unlike Barth who is unwilling to discuss the theological meaning of history, Bonhoeffer wished to take up Luther's tenet that 'finitum capax infiniti' and expose his own Christology to some kind of analysis of the historical position which man finds himself in the twentieth century. Bonhoeffer wishes to accept the historical scene as a God-given revelation and so construct a Christology which is meaningful in such a situation.

Besides meeting the independent intellect of Harnack and Holl's enthusiasm for Luther, there were other personalities in the Berlin faculty who were to influence Bonhoeffer in regard to the choice which he made for his early dogmatic writings. Bonhoeffer wrote his Licentiate's thesis, Sanctorum Communio (23) under the supervision of Reinhold Seeberg. Seeberg "concentrated upon the church, developing both the theme of the redemptive community as the basic theme of dogmatics, and a synthesis with the Hegelian metaphysics Ritschl had mistrusted". (27, p.35) In rejecting Ritschl's methodology, Seeberg attempted to "preserve the full unity of the Christian faith in the final revelation of God in Jesus Christ" and "Express this faith not by a reprist-ination of old dogma, but in a form intelligible to modern man and in harmony with the best thought of today". (27, p.41-2)

Seeberg's position which demanded that dogma can and must be rewritten so that it is meaningful in the modern age Bonhoeffer took as his own starting point. He was also sympathetic to Seeberg's doctrine of the church and used much of his teacher's terminology for his own purpose. Following Seeberg's attempt to relate dogma to contemporary philosophy, Bonhoeffer's early writings in Act and Being (22) and Sanctorum Communio (23) show a real effort at open dialogue between theology and any useful insights offered by current sociology and philosophy.. For instance Bonhoeffer's initial thinking about the church which is worked out in dynamic, spatial terms uses many of the insights coined by Martin Buber, Martin Heidegger and E. Grisebach. To what extent we can claim the direct influence of the scholars mentioned is not easy to evaluate, but perhaps it is defensible to say that the resulting dialogue reflects the general philosophical outlook of the late 1920s.

Although Bonhoeffer was to question Seeberg's metaphysics - in particular his use of the concept of man's 'religious a priori' - he learned from his teacher an attitude which called for an open dialogue between philosophy and theology and a serious concern for a sound theology of the church.

Seeberg's thought was founded on the notion that the mind had the capacity for being aware of the reality of God. Here Bonhoeffer was forced to part company with his teacher.

We must emphasize that whatever insights, either philosophical or sociological, Bonhoeffer uses to elucidate his own position, his theology is throughout Christocentric. For Bonhoeffer (but not Seeberg), God's revelation in not through an idea in the mind but flesh and this revelation continues to take a concrete form as Jesus Christ lives and saves mankind in the here and now of the historic community. His anthropology and ecclesiology, if making use of disciplines other than theology, are ultimately approached and tested against his Christology. In this way Bonhoeffer guards against a regression into the Idealist and consciousness theology of the nineteenth century.

We have already made passing reference to Bonhoeffer's use of insights from sociology and social philosophy. This interest springs from his time at Berlin University. Its presence there lies in the work of Ernst Troelsch (1865-1923). After having taught theology in three German universities, Troelsch was Professor of the History of Philosophy and Civilization at Berlin from 1915 until his death in 1923. He was, with his friend Max Weber, amongst the first to attempt the working out of the implications of the (then) new science of sociology for Christian theology. Although Troelsch died before Bonhoeffer studied at Berlin, his bold sociological approach to the doctrine of the church which he presented in The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches (E.T. by Olive Wyon, 1931 - originally published 1912) remained in the air there and determined to some extent the subject and approach of Bonhoeffer's Sanctorum Communio (23). Because of his acceptance of the Barthian position, Bonhoeffer wished to reassert the vertical dimension of the church; to define it as a genuinely theological concept while at the same time using every philosophical and sociological tool at his disposal. Introducing the English translation of Sanctorum Communio, Eberhard Bethge writes: "Its concern was not with the sociological and statistical understanding of the church, but with

its strict and sole source in revelation. .... What he tried to give in Sanctorum Communio was a sociological theology of the church, or a theological sociology". (23, Foreword) Bonhoeffer is willing to use sociology to elucidate the meaning of the church but he is critical of those who attempt to understand the church purely in sociological terms. His target here is Troeltsch himself.

We can now appreciate that Bonhoeffer's heritage from the Berlin faculty was by no means negligible: in Harnack he came into contact with a spirit of independent intellectual integrity which marked Liberalism at its best, from Holl a continuing desire to come to terms with Luther's reformed theology, from Seeberg an urgent desire for a genuine theological-philosophical dialogue and from Troelsch and interest in the empirical church as a sociological phenomenon. Although these influences were to determine the general direction of Bonhoeffer's early systematic writings, it was to Karl Barth's theology that the young theologian felt he must come to terms.

d. Karl Barth and 'The Word of God'

Behind Bonhoeffer the figure of Barth looms large. What Bonhoeffer tried to do in his early systematic writings was to relate Barth's theology of 'The Word of God' to the empirical structure of the church. As we shall see Bonhoeffer was not uncritical of some elements in Barth's bold theological reconstruction but we can confidently claim that Bonhoeffer enthusiastically welcomed Barth's critique of Liberal Protestant thought.

This is now the point at which to outline the nature of the Barthian approach which was making itself felt in the late twenties and early thirties. Following the incident at the Berlin Theology school in 1914 (See Part 1, section b.) Barth was convinced that a new approach in theology would have to found and the Copernican revolution (for it was not less than that) was to centre theology on the concept of the 'Word of God' and the givenness of this Word by God. As Barth read Kierkegaard, the Bible, Luther, Calvin and Dostoyevsky he discovered that the true living God was very different from any God that could be discovered on the human plane through the arguments of philosophers. David Jenkins describes Barth's position:

> It is clean contrary to the existence and being of the living and true God to whom the Bible bears witness to suppose that we can arrive at any conception of his existence, let alone his character, from any concept of our own. We are men and not God and must never forget the infinite qualitative difference between God and man. Anything which fits into human moulds of thought or is derived from human thinking, and therefore moulded by human concepts, cannot possibly be God. God does not fit into anything whatever. He is wholly free of all 'fittingness' and all 'fitting in'. He is God and therefore free, sovereign, transcendent and, in the strictest sense, inconceivable. (11, p.75-6)

This type of thought burst onto the theological scene in 1918 when Barth published his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (E.T. by Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, Oxford 1933). Here a direct blow was aimed at Schleiermacher's attempt to talk about God by starting from a concept of 'absolute dependence', Ritschl's use of 'judgments of value', and Seeberg's tenet that man's encounter with God is through his innate religious consciousness. According to Barth's reading of these theologians , they had pronounced the role of God's revelation as powerless.

Barth, on the other hand, wished to restore God's revelation (the Word of God) to its rightful central place in Christian theology. Barth's mind is dominated by the thought of God which emerges in the Bible - a transcendent God who, though transcendent, becomes ours in the revelation of the Incarnation. The God of the Bible is he who acts in his revelation and in so acting describes himself. The act of revelation is both the proof of God's being and the expression of his nature. Barth emphasizes that God is subject; as such he stands over against man, revealing himself to man, speaking to man his Word of judgment and grace, calling and saving him. God moves towards man (movement in the opposite direction is impossible) supremely in Jesus Christ, God's Word incarnate. For Barth the norm of Christian thought and preaching is simply and solely Jesus Christ. Thus it is correct to speak of Barth's theology as Christocentric (Christ-centred). David Jenkins summarizes:

> .... from first to last we are wholly dependent upon God's giving us recognition of Him as He gives us knowledge of Himself and on His giving us knowledge of Himself He grants us recognition. The knowledge of God is, therefore, sheer miracle from God to man given straight down from above. The centre of this miracle is the God-given recognition that Jesus is the Christ, that is that He is the fulfilment of God's Word witnessed to by the Old Testament because He is Himself personally that Word. The Christian Gospel is preached because Jesus Christ has been recognised to be the Word of God and the content of the Gospel is Jesus Christ as the Word of God. Here men are, by God (the Holy Spirit), brought up against the truth and reality of God in historical and concrete form (Jesus Christ, the Word of God Incarnate) so that they may know the true God and be truly related to that Truth. The witness to the Word of God Incarnate is the Written Word, the Scriptures which exist in their sheer matter-of-fact givenness, just as the historical Jesus Christ did in his. There are no general, theoretical and therefore humanly recognizable reasons why these Scriptures should be the Word of God written, any more than there are why this man Jesus should be the Word of God incarnate. The fact is that they are so and this fact is known as fact because it is in and through the Scriptures and in and through Jesus Christ that men are convinced of the knowledge of God and convicted by the knowledge of God. There is no way into this knowledge of God unless God Himself chooses to give you this knowledge and if He chooses to give you this knowledge you know that you have it. Hence there is the closest possible connection between the knowledge of God and God's election. (11, p.76-7)

Thus Barth repudiates the notion pervading nineteenth century Liberal theology that the starting point of any theology could be found in man and

his religious consciousness. Barth locates the starting point of Biblical theology in God's free act of grace and the consequent 'election' of man. The optimistic anthropocentrism of much rationalism and consciousness-theology had failed to recognize the central doctrines of the Biblical revelation. To Barth the knowledge of God remains unknown to man because he is a finite and sinful being. The reality of sin in man is fundamental to Barth's approach.* He could not understand sin as 'deed and only deed' (Ritschl). Because of man's sinful state, God cannot be found in a man-initiated search; God rather reveals himself to man and this revelation is just the Incarnation. God gives as the subject; He can never be manipulated as an object. H.R. Mackintosh in his discussion of Barth writes, ".... God is not one unit in the world of objects; He is the Infinite and sovereign One who is known only as addressing us. He cannot be explained, as an object can; He can only be addressed, and that because He is first addressing us". (4, p.256)

The view that God's revelation only confirms what the religious consciousness itself knows in any case, has no place in this approach which sees revelation as the only locus for the knowledge of God. Along with religious consciousness and judgments of value, Barth must reject other concepts which in the past have been the tools of the theologian - natural theology, speculative metaphysics and apologetics. All these are suspect when the reality of the fall of man assumes its true and rightful place in Christian thought. Commenting on Schleiermacher's inability to see man as he really is, Barth writes:

> With all due respect to the genius shown in his work I can <u>not</u> consider Schleiermacher a good teacher in the realm of Theology because, so far as I can see, he is disastrously dim-sighted in regard to the fact that man as man is not only in <u>need</u> but beyond all hope of saving himself; that the whole of so-called religion, and not least the Christian religion, <u>shares</u> in this need; and that one can <u>not</u> speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice. (Quoted in 4, p,258)

It is interesting to reflect that the theology of both Barth and Bonhoeffer

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*Barth holds the view that the divine image in man has been <u>totally obliterated</u> by the fall. This position is out of line with the Biblical doctrine of man. For a criticism of Barth's position, see J. Baillie - <u>Our Knowledge of God</u> (O.U.P., London 1939) p.17-34.

evolved from intimate contact with situations in everyday life.* During Barth's years as a pastor he was faced with the problem of how he could effectively do what he was commissioned to do by the Church, viz. preach the genuine word of God. During his ministry in Geneva (1909-11) and then in Safenwil (1911-21) he became aware that the movement of the church's preaching had been in a direction away from the Theocentric and Christocentric Biblical message. "As Ministers we ought to speak of God. We are human, however, and so cannot speak of God .... For to speak of God seriously would mean to speak in the realm of revelation and faith". (Quoted in 8, p.4) It was during this period in the pastoral ministry that Barth came to see that the concept of revelation had been forgotten in eighteenth and nineteenth century Theological thought and in its place had been substituted the word of man.

This led Barth back to a consideration of the central Reformation themes of sin, redemption, election and sanctification. He came to see more and more clearly that if a genuine theology was to be constructed, there would have to be less and less room for religious experience and it associates and more and more for revelation and the God-given Incarnation in Christ.

The year 1914 gave a tremendous boost to Barth's effort at theological reconstruction. Alec Vidler draws attention to the 1914 political situation and its effect on pre-1914 religious anthropology:

> The way of thinking that was fashionable in Germany, and indeed elsewhere too, before 1914, was one of sunny confidence that man, at any rate, western man, was steadily advancing in civilization and culture. Man's limitless capacity for achieving beauty, for attaining to truth, for diffusing goodness, was becoming more and more evident. Religion - Christianity, in particular - endorsed, underpinned, crowned this splendid confidence that what you might call the kingdom of heaven was in process of being guilt upon earth. .... It was on such a world, so confident of its own powers and virtues and prospects, that the catastrophe of war broke in 1914. Karl Barth was at that time pastor of a country parish on the borders of Switzerland within hearing of gunfire in Alsace. The barbarism that had suddenly descended on the civilized world, and by which his own little country was surrounded, gave him furiously to think. Had he no better message for his people, in a world gone mad, than more smooth talk about man's capacities for peace and progress? (7, p.84-5)

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*This particular influence on Bonhoeffer which became very significant from 1933 onwards is discussed in Part 3.

For Barth this smooth talk must end, principally because he had witnessed that the theologians who relied on this type of Weltanschauung were merely becoming the servants of public opinion.* Thus started Barth's reconstruction with Christology as the starting point for all theology. He was of the opinion that Schleiermacher had "avoided the offence of a real Christology". (1, p.313) Through his weekly sermon preparation Barth came to see that the New Testament revelation is indeed centred in Christology. In the flesh of humanity was God active for the salvation of man. This concept had proved and embarrassment for Harnack who had a horror of the being of God in his revelation in the midst of humanity.

This Christocentric approach which is characteristic of Barth is the foundation for Bonhoeffer's own theology. Indeed Bonhoeffer's thought is as Christocentric as that of Barth. However, E.H. Robertson is correct in speaking of Bonhoeffer as 'a post Barthian'. (12, p.50) This points to the fact that Bonhoeffer was no slave to the Barthian position; rather, he made a critical acceptance of the general trends of Barthian theology.

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* See - Part 1 section b. and K. Barth's The Humanity of God (6) p.14

Part 2 Bonhoeffer's Systematic Theology (1927-33)

In this section we shall examine Bonhoeffer's thought before the rise of National Socialism in Germany and his attack on it through his work in the Confessing Church. During the years 1927-33 he was concerned with dogmatic theology from an essentially theoretical and academic point of view. For instance, his understanding of the church, which lies at the focal point of his dogmatics, corresponds more to the church of correct academic theology than observation of the historical church. After 1933 we shall witness Bonhoeffer's personal involvement in church and politics forcing him to expand and develop his early thought. This development represents the experiential nature of Bonhoeffer's theology; he "was stirred and sometimes overwhelmed by events". (29, p.147)*

a. Bonhoeffer's approach to the Doctrine of Man

The type of theology one pursues depends fundamentally on the anthropology which one adopts. In constructing his doctrine of man, Bonhoeffer wished to do justice to the following insights:

1. that one cannot assume a 'religious a priori' in man. This is Bonhoeffer coming to terms with Barth who, as we have seen, had unsettled the assumptions of pre-1914 religious anthropology. The Schleiermacher-Ritschl school had seen religion in terms of man's projection of his inner drives, needs and aspirations and had thus located God's reality and activity within man's inner being. The result had been that God became a deification of nineteenth century man and revelation was considered as being merely continuous with natural man's religiousness. The insights Barth discovered in the work of the sixteenth century reformers - the complete discontinuity between God and man, the reality of sin, 'cor curvum in se' (Luther) and man's passive reception of the grace of God - are basic to Bonhoeffer's approach to man.

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*This particular aspect of Bonhoeffer - the merging of his life and thought - is indeed a very relevant key to the understanding of the development of his thought after 1933. This will be discussed in Parts 3 and 4. It is defensible to claim that the period 1927-33 is one in which Bonhoeffer produced mainly technical, academic theology.

2. that man is essentially much more than mind. Man is person with reason as a limiting factor. Here Bonhoeffer wished to protest against all forms of rationalism which too easily assume that God can be somehow grasped primarily or exclusively by intellectual means. For Bonhoeffer, the whole man, and not just his intellect and reason, is involved and grasped by the truth in a decisively personal way.

3. that man acquires and maintains his 'human-ness' by existing in community. The individual, for Bonhoeffer, exists only through the 'other'. When he poses the question whether God is concerned with community or individual man, he confidently asserts that "man is not conceived of by God .... as an isolated, individual being, but as in natural communication with other men, and in his relation with them not just satisfying one side of his otherwise closed spiritual existence, but rather discovering in this relation his reality, that is, his life as an I". (23, p.52) *

4. That it is in Christ that the reality of man is really concerned. This highlights Bonhoeffer's concern to think outwards from Christology. Christ is concrete revelation; Jesus Christ is not an idea but flesh and historical life. Man understands himself from Christ who assumes concrete form as he lives in the concrete community of the church. Man's understanding of himself is found only in Christology; Christ 'pro me'. However, for Bonhoeffer, Christology cannot be separated from Ecclesiology since this is the place where Christ is present and free for man.

Bonhoeffer's inaugural lecture in the Berlin faculty of theology on 31st July 1930 was devoted to a consideration of 'Man in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology'. (9, p.50-69) This lecture, however, is not our only source for reconstructing his doctrine of man; his two other academic works, Sanctorum Communio (23) and Act and Being (22) discuss the problem at various times.

In approaching the problem, Bonhoeffer lays down two conditions which he considers are essential if the question of man is to be posed and answered with

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* That personal interaction (socialization) is essential for turning human animals into human beings is generally accepted by both psychologists and sociologists. Cf. W.J.H. Sprott - Human Groups (Penguin Books) 1958, p. 50-2.

any intellectual honesty. Firstly, man's existence must be really concerned and secondly, this existence must be able to be shown as a continuity. (9, p.50)

His plan in the lecture is to mount a critique against those thinkers (Liberals and Idealists) who have attempted to understand man from his possibilities. He shows that thinkers like Martin Heidegger and E. Grisebach who have pointed out that a better understanding of man may be located in seriously considering his limitations, have provided a better basis for an understanding of man. From this insight, Bonhoeffer then attempts to construct his own anthropology.

He takes M. Scheler as representative of the Liberal school; those who wish to understand man from his possibilities. Bonhoeffer summarizes this approach: "His (i.e. man's) possibilities are man's nature i.e. man remains with himself, his nature understands itself immanently. He is in a world which rests on itself, he needs nothing but himself to reach at his nature". Using this a priori Scheler (according to Bonhoeffer) builds "up a world of 'value' transcending consciousness. In this world is God. Man is able to perceive God not in the intellectual process, but in the 'sense of value', whose purest form is love. There is a genuine recognition of value only in love. In love man soars to the perception of the eternal and highest value of the holy, God. He embraces the all in himself, he is able to embrace God in himself in passionate gazing. That is the 'totality of life' which the totality of value discloses and comprehends in itself". (9, p.53)

Bonhoeffer questions this approach at several points. We can summarize his criticism as follows:

1. This approach takes a very optimistic view of man. It may be assuming too much to claim that man per se possesses within himself the possibilities of coming to God.

2. Over against the kingdom of 'value' stands the kingdom of evil. We cannot take for granted that the kingdom of 'value' should always be in control and dominate the kingdom of evil.

3. This is essentially a static closed system. The being of God, of world and I is delivered into the hands of the person remaining in itself and understanding itself from itself.*

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* For discussion of Scheler, see also Act and Being (22) p.56-8.

In Act and Being (22) Bonhoeffer considers Idealistic philosophy. He concludes that in its approach to the understanding of man it remained abstract and unhistorical. He sees in Idealism reason reigning supreme; "reason has no bounds, for in principle the very bound can be thought away until it is no more a genuine boundary". (22, p.31) At first sight it would appear that this ought to afford man a satisfactory location for the understanding of his self. Bonhoeffer shows that this is not the case. We can summarize his critique as follows:*

1. In Idealism one finds self-understanding from the self, for the I is the creator of its own world. The objects of my knowledge (the outside world) are 'in relation to me'. This approach avoids reference to the transcendental and is thus a subjective and unacceptable understanding of man

2. Man understands himself from out of himself, one may even say 'out of God' as long as God is in man. In contrast to Liberal theology, Barth's Dialectical theology had demonstrated that there is a qualitative (not just a quantitative) difference between God and man.

3. Idealism has given the reason of man a too exalted position. "Hegel wrote a philosophy of angels, but not of human existence. It is simply not true that concrete man (including even the philosopher) is in full possession of the mind". (22, p.27-8)

4. The ego in Idealism remains imprisoned in itself. Bonhoeffer claims that this is what the Protestant reformers meant by the corruption of reason, the 'cor curvum in se' (Luther).

Bonhoeffer is attracted to Martin Heidegger's existentialistic analysis of man's peculiar mode of being as 'Dasein', because this approach sees man being challenged by something outside himself. 'Dasein' is concrete human existence in time, as man's 'being there', in the world. This guards against thinking producing its own world.

Bonhoeffer is obviously attracted to Heidegger's system because he conceived the human being as much more than a 'res cogniţans', a thinking thing.

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*The following summary is based on Bonhoeffer's critique in Act and Being (22) p.27-32.

Heidegger sees man as an incomplete being who is developing and changing by being 'thrown' into life in time. Heidegger's philosophy rests on the tenet, "All existence is co-existence .... The world is what I share with others".* However, although this approach sees man's understanding of himself in relation to his contact with the world, time and death, in the last resort it is man himself who is answering the question of man.† Bonhoeffer is willing to develop his own thinking about man by using the insight that for man to come to authentic understanding of himself he must be challenged by something outside himself, but his own approach is both existential and Christian.

Bonhoeffer contrasts Heidegger's approach with that of Eberhard Grisebach who wishes to fix the limit of man not by thought but by a concrete 'Thou'. (see 9, p.59) In Bonhoeffer's opinion, this marks a major breakthrough because man is here understood from his limitations rather than from his possibilities. Commenting on Grisebach's system, Bonhoeffer writes, "Here the recognition that man can understand himself only from his limits, i.e. in reference to transcendence, in contrast to any self-understanding of man from his immanent possibilites, seems to be given extremely pointed expression. The really new thing in Grisebach is that he cannot think of man without the concrete other man. In this, the will to overcome any individualism i.e. any imprisonment of the I in itself, is clearly expressed." (9, p.59) Considering the same approach in Act and Being (22), he writes, "Reality is "experienced" in the contingent fact of the claim of "others". Only what comes from "outside" can show man the way to his reality, his existence. In "sustaining" the "claim of my neighbour" I exist in reality, I act ethically...." (22, p.86)

This ethical-dialogical atmosphere which pervades Grisebach's approach was seminal for much that Bonhoeffer wrote on revelation, the church and the demands of discipleship. However, although Bonhoeffer was willing to concede that Grisebach's intentions deserved careful consideration, he was not uncritical of his outlook. He considered that Grisebach succeeded in removing

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* M. Heidegger - Sein und Zeit (1927) p.117.

† Cf. 9, p.57 and 22, p.65-6 where Bonhoeffer notes ".... Heidegger's concept of being, despite its powerful expansion of philosophy through the discovery of the Existential sphere, cannot be adapted for the purpose of theology". (No room has been left for the role of revelation).

the element of individualism, characteristic of previous systems, but at the expense of making the Thou absolute in the place of the I and by giving it a position which can only be God's. According to Bonhoeffer, "godless thought no matter how ethical remains self-enclosed". (22, p.89)

In formulating his own understanding of man, Bonhoeffer's method was essentially eclectic and he was not unwilling to cap a philosophical insight with a theological extension. He uses the discoveries of Heidegger and Grisebach but produces and understanding of man which is definitely Christian. He sees man continually arising and passing away again in time; he is a dymamic being rather than a static character (as in Idealism). He accepts that within this temporal process the person essentially and inevitably requires the existence of others; when man is addressed by others he is then responsible - faced with decision. And so in Sanctorum Communio he writes:

> It is not by my having a reasoning mind that I make universally valid decisions, but I enter into the reality of time by relating my concrete person in time in all its particularities to this obligation, by making myself morally responsible. (23, p.30)

Therefore for Bonhoeffer, personality is always being towards others; confronting others in social situations. Peter Berger summarizes Bonhoeffer's position:

> The person originates in and passes away again in time. Ultimately, the person can be understood only in the relationship to divine transcendence. But even within the temporal process the person essentially and inevitably requires the existence of others. .... Bonhoeffer's person is an "Ethical-social reflexive concept". Therefore, the heart of the concept of the person is responsibility. Man is profoundly social and hence, in his essence, a responsible being. Society cannot be understood except as a web of mutually responsive and responsible beings. (15, p.59-60)

In accepting this position, Bonhoeffer is asserting the claim that man is essentially not mind but person. This person can only perceive his own reality by being outward looking. In Sanctorum Communio (23) He writes:

> It is a Christian recognition that the person, as a conscious person, is created in the moment when a man is moved, when he is faced with responsibility, when he is passionately involved in a moral struggle, and confronted by a claim which overwhelms him. Concrete personal being arises from the concrete situation. (23, p.31)

In Idealism this encounter was located in the mind but Bonhoeffer is quick to point out that the autonomy of the mind is unchristian since it conceives the human mind as being capable of absolute value which can only be the property of the divine mind.* Idealism had identified God and man, whereas the Bible had pointed to the fact of the discontinuity of God and man. Here Bonhoeffer's thought is under the influence of Barth. In his onslaught against Liberal Protestant thought, Barth had emphasized (perhaps over emphasized) the absolute transcendence of God and the complete corruption of humanity. The rediscovery of this particular insight was considered by Bonhoeffer to be one of Barth's greatest contributions to modern theology. In this Barthian atmosphere, Bonhoeffer says in his lecture:

> The I really remains in itself and that is not its credit, but its guilt. The thought of man imprisoned in itself, is the true expression of man questioning himself in statu corruptionis (9, p.60)

Bonhoeffer insists that, although philosophy attempted to understand man from his possibilities, his limitations are equally important and these limitations bear the name of God: God's revelation (in Christ for Bonhoeffer) is the location where the nature of man is posed in any seriousness. In the lecture, Bonhoeffer states his position:

> If the question of man is really to be posed seriously, it can only be posed where man is before God. Whereever else it is posed, it is not posed in full seriousness. In other words, man is completely taken out of himself, he is brought before God in his entirety, and at this point the question of man becomes serious because it no longer itself includes its answer, but instead the answer is given completely freely and completely afresh to man by God, because God has put man before him and bids him ask in this way. That is, man comes to know his foundation not through himself, but through God. (9, p.60-1)

In 1931 during a lecture to American theological students on Barth's theology, Bonhoeffer had highlighted this theme:

> God's coming in Christ is the proof by God himself that man cannot come to God; that is to say, God's coming in Christ must be the judgment upon mankind; in other words, it shows to man his limitations which lie exactly there where God's work begins....

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* Cf. Luther's concept of 'cor curvum in se'. Bonhoeffer accepts Luther's position and thus sees man as only understanding himself in relation to God-given revelation. If man were capable of understanding the meaning of his reality then revelation in Christ would have been superfluous.

> This act of limiting man is God's judgment and grace in one,... (9, p.365)

If man is thus to understand himself from his limitations, these limitations must be the limitations as imposed by God. It must not be the limit of thought because "any limit, so long as man can impose it by thought, is determined by the possibility of going beyond it; i.e. even the man who wishes to understand himself from his limitations in the end understands himself from his possibilities". (9, p.63-4) Bonhoeffer now wishes to go forward by seeing man as a whole personal being, with his reason as part of this being, in a dynamic, continuous relation of obedience and sanctification with God. So he writes in Act and Being (22):

> ..... essentially reason has no bounds, for in principle the very bound can be thought away until it is no more a genuine boundary. Reason can only be taken into obedience, whether the obedience of speculation, the obedience of Christ, or however else. There are bounds to concrete man as a whole, and their name is Christ. (22, p.31,32)

Thus Bonhoeffer's man only understands his being when his limit is one between persons and is defined as one of forgiveness of sins and sanctification by the living presence of Christ. H. Gollwitzer (in The Existence of God (35)) is correct when he writes that, "For Bonhoeffer (contra Bultmann) the unity of the believing and pre-believing existence cannot 'be asserted apart from revelation' i.e. not by describing revelation as the fulfilment of potentialities that are already demonstrable in advance". (35, p.222) Bonhoeffer sees man as either in Adam or in Christ and this cannot be experienced by man reflecting on himself, but in the act of reference to God. However, man has no possibilities "by virtue of which he can stand before God". (9, p.65) Only God can provide this very essential reference by His Word which comes to man. This Word is judgment and grace. Here one is reminded of the great Barthian themes as Bonhoeffer outlined them in his American lecture:

> The limited man is the judged man, and at the same time the limited man who gives all righteousness and glory to God is thus justified by God's work and grace alone. The acknowledg-

> ment of one's limit before God is faith, not as a possible act of man, but only as an act of God, who sets and shows these limits to man. This is the message of justification by grace or faith alone. (9, p.365)

This justification is the work of Christ, just as the revelation of God is in Christ. Theology for Bonhoeffer becomes therefore Christology; the living Christ as a concrete reality is active now within his church.

A high doctrine of the church is characteristic of Bonhoeffer's theology. Since he cannot accept that man is merely a rational being (rather he is a person in dialogical relationship with other persons) he sees man only understanding his nature in the community where Christ is present in personal dialogue with man. It is the living Christ, available for man in the church, who gives man the meaning of his existence and offers him new life. Bonhoeffer's thinking here is reminiscent of the personalist philosophy given forceful expression by Martin Buber*. This thinker directed attention to the fact that it is only as God addresses man in personal terms that man can have any awareness of the transcendent God. For Bonhoeffer, this God-man dialogue is centred in Christ alone and it is to Christ alone (Christ 'pro me') that man is responsible as person to person. In Sanctorum Communio (23) he writes, " .... the Christian person achieves his true nature when God does not confront him as Thou, but 'enters into' him as I". (23, p.37) In his Christology (28) Bonhoeffer shows that God's address to man is in Christ and this address is bound up with his existence in a living community. The Word demands for its expression the reality of a living community; only in such a location has it any meaning at all to man. He writes:

> The word lies wholly at the disposal of the person who speaks,

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*Buber (1878-1965) has been criticised (by Karl Barth) for restricting his thought to anthropology and thus loosing the transcendental sanction for true humanity. Neverthe-less Buber's influence on philosophy, theology and sociology has been profound. He pointed out in I and Thou (T and T Clark, 1937) that the being of man is not analysable as an inert object within man's reach, in a sense of being able to be established as part of a system; but it is to be grasped, in the sense of a mutual encounter in which each self in its wholeness meets another, and in the meeting decides to be for the other in a reciprocal movement which is at the same time of the essence of community. For Buber all life is a dialogue in which the Word which is not of man comes to man. But this Word comes to man in and through the concerns of man, his dicisions, his responsibilities, his responses. See A Reader in Contemporary Theology - Ed. J. Bowden & J. Richmond (S.C.M. Press, 1967) p.53-7.

> so it is always new. The nature of Word as address demands a community. The nature of the truth in this word of address makes it seek a community to bring about an encounter in the truth. Truth is not something which rests in itself and for itself, but something which takes place between two persons. Truth happens only in community. Only here does the concept of the Word acquire its full significance. Christ as Word in the sense of address .... is truth spoken in the concrete moment, the address which puts a man in the truth before God .... Christ as Word in the sense of Address is only then properly the Christ pro me. (28, p.51)

This means that where man learns the nature of his reality he is fully addressed as a person who is existing in real personal dialogue with the source of revelation. If anything less were the case, the revelation of Christ would be relegated to the position of a mere entity.

Bonhoeffer has now located the proper understanding of man in Christology and this has led him quite naturally into ecclesiology (Christ existing as community) where the church is to be defined in theological-sociological terms. And so he concluedes his lecture:

> .... man can no longer understand himself from himself, but only from Christ, who exists as community, i.e. from his Word, which the community bears and without which the community does not exist. (9, p.68)

b. Bonhoeffer's understanding of Revelation

Bonhoeffer's thesis for the Licentiate of Theology, Act and Being (22), was published in 1931 and was concerned with the question of revelation. Present in this work are many insights and influences we have already discovered in our discussion of Bonhoeffer's doctrine of man (See Part 2, section a.) They can be summarized:

1. Revelation must ultimately become an ecclesiological statement (as an extension of Christology; a Christology of Condescension). The church is the community of revelation where man comes into dialogue with the transcendent.

2. His understanding of revelation relies greatly on Barth's rejection of the Idealistic-Liberal appraoch. Both Barth and Bonhoeffer see Liberalism as avoiding the embarrassment of revelation in Christ and so declaring it superfluous.

3. Bonhoeffer accepts that man must be completely transformed if he is to have any knowable contact with God's revelation. He does not accept that God can only enter the consciousness as a reality if there is in man an organ for this purpose.* Bonhoeffer attacks this position with the Reformer's concept of cor curvum in se of natural man (Luther). Revelation puts an end to any notion of man possessing an innate religious a priori, or a conscience where God encounters him.†

Bonhoeffer attempts in Act and Being (22) to elucidate the unique character of the Christian way to knowledge by relating it to the two opposing philosophical solutions that had influenced the understanding of revelation in the 1920s - the transcendental, which emphasized 'act', and the ontological which emphasized 'being'. From the beginning however he assumes that Christian theology, as well as the Christian faith, are dependent on revelation.

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* Cf. R. Seeberg's position (27, p.41-4)
† Cf. Karl Holl's interpretation of Luther's religion as one centred on conscience (27, p.39-41). See Bonhoeffer's criticism in 'Man in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology' (9, p.61)

This was the outlook of Barth's Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (1919). He stated that man's fallen nature must be taken seriously and if this happens it is realized that knowledge of God is not possessed by man as an automomous part of his make-up. Rather, theological truth comes from beyond or 'above' himself, vertically. Truth is found only in God's revelation in Christ and therefore revelation is essentially Christology. For Barth, God's revelation is saving knowledge. Man knows God only because of the miracle of God's redeeming action in Christ. Barth insists that the God of Christianity acts, sends his word, takes the initiative, reveals, creates, gives, calls, elects, judges and discloses. Religious experience and faith are discontinuous and man cannot be led by apologetic arguments from one to the other.

Like Barth, Bonhoeffer wishes to be a Christian theologian. In his lecture on Barth (9, p.361-372) he defines what he means by this term:

> .... the Christian theologian must know the proper and stable premise of his whole thinking which the philosopher does not recognise: the premise of the revelation of God in Christ, or, on the subjective side, faith in this revelation. God entered history in Jesus Christ and made himself known to the world in this revelation .... The fact that God himself comes into the world convinces the world of the impossibility of its coming to God by itself..... (9, p.362)

In his reading of Luther, Bonhoeffer detected that for him revelation is theo-centric (and in the end Christo-centric) and man's role is passive rather than active, receptive rather than productive. Knowledge of God (for Luther) comes from outside man and is founded on a relationship of faith, not on religious experience. Rather, religious experience springs from faith and not vice versa.

Bonhoeffer examines the Kantian philosophy which defined the limits of human reason; for man, reason is merely a limiting capacity. The concept of God for Kant is purely a limiting concept, seving only to indicate the boundary of man's knowing. Real knowledge of God because of his property of transcendence remains unknown to man. However, Bonhoeffer finds in Idealism

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See Bowden J. & J. Richmond - A Reader in Contemporary Theology (S.C.M. Press, 1967) p.22-33. Also Richmond J. - Faith and Philosophy (Hodder and Stoughton, 1966) p.138-141.

Cf. P.S. Watson (37), writing on Luther's theology - "There is no place

the belief that the reason has authority over the transcendent and asserts that there is no being independent of the self. Thus in Idealism the ego and God exchange roles, and God is placed in unity with the ego itself; God "is" only so long as I think.

Considering Transcendentalism, Bonhoeffer sees the ego and God defined as limiting concepts 'in relation to' which thinking (human existence) always 'is'. Thus God can never be objectively knowable. Bonhoeffer wishes to question how the reason can presume to define its limits in relation to an unknown entity. He concludes that the reason does not understand itself 'in relation to' the transcendent, but 'in relation to itself'. Thus Bonhoeffer has shown that in both Transcendentalism and Idealism the ego remains imprisoned in itself. Transcendentalism ends with a non-objective, unknownable God, while Idealism ultimately identifies God and man.

For Bonhoeffer, God is not objectife in the sense that he is graspable by our thoughts but this does not mean that he is unknown. God is rather known when he himself wishes to reveal himself, but in this revelation man is himself involved by becoming completely transformed. Bonhoeffer writes, " .... there is no ability to "hear" before the hearing". (22, p.47)

In chapter 2 of Act and Being, Bonhoeffer examines the Ontological attempt to solve the act-being problem. "Ontology wants to say that there is something real existing outside consciousness, outside of the logical sphere and the limits of reason". (13, p.61) Here the logos (reason) abandons its claim but this can only take place when being is in full freedom from thinking. According to Bonhoeffer, this is the work of reason; the reason loosens its claim but in doing this, it recovers itself all the more powerfully because the limits of reason are established by itself. This means that the being comes into the power of the thinking ego and this is an offence to the Christian idea of revelation. If revelation is to have its central place which is its by right, thinking, even that of the Christian theologian must be suspended within the being of revelation. On this theme Bonhoeffer writes:

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for the slightest degree of human self-assertion or self interest in the presence of God. Here, man must be content to receive undeserved the gifts God wills to bestow on him. In other words, he must let God really be God, the centre around which his whole existence moves". (37, p.37: See also 37, p.34-8)

> What offends Christian thought in any autonomous self-understanding is that it considers man capable of bestowing truth on himself, of transporting himself into the truth by his own resources, since it is reasonable to suppose that the "basis" of existence must somehow be within truth (likeness to God). (22, p.71)

Rather a position which does justice to the act of God's freely coming to man will be one in which God and man are in personal dialogue. In this dialogue, reason as part of man's make-up is illuminated by the encounter. A similar atmosphere is present as Barth writes in Dogmatics in Outline (31):

> He (i.e. God) cannot be known by the powers of human knowledge, but is apprehensible and apprehended solely because of His own freedom, decision and action. .... Man is able to think this being;,but he has not thereby thought God. God is thought and known when in His own freedom God makes himself apprehensible. .... Knowledge of God takes place where divine revelation takes place, illumination of man by God. Christian faith and knowledge of Christian faith take place at the point where the divine reason, the divine Logos, sets up his law in the region of man's understanding, to which law human, creaturely reason must accomodate itself ..... Faith is God's mystery breaking forth; Faith is God's freedom and man's freedom in action. (31, p.23-4, 28)

Bonhoeffer is completely Barthian in his conclusinn to chapter 2 of Act and Being;

> .... truth (here knowledge of God) comprises only that reference to God which Christian theology does not hold possible save in the Word spoken, of man and to man, in the law and the gospel. It is in this sense that formal validity may be conceded to the proposition, common to transcendentalism and idealism, that knowledge about oneself or about God is no "disconnected possession", but places the knower in a direct "possessive" relation to the known, ... this means that knowledge in truth about oneself, or about God, is already "being in...." - whether in "Adam" or in "Christ". (22, p.71)

And again a little later he writes:

> Thought is as little able as good works to deliver the cor curvum in se from itself. .... for the world of the I untouched by grace is confined to the I. ..... Only thought which bound to the obedience of Christ, "is" from the truth - can place into the truth. (22, p.72)

Thus Bonhoeffer wishes to see our knowledge of God located only in His own revelation. However, this location cannot be understood as a last

possible one, but as one that must already have been taken in order that we can take it. A philosophy or a systematic metaphysics because of their very natures leave no room for revelation. The place philosophy occupies must be occupied by Christ alone.

Bonhoeffer wishes to go on from here to show that God's revelation cannot be understood as a series of free acts impinging upon certain individuals from time to time. For Bonhoeffer, revelation demanded some sense of continuity. Ernst Wolf points to this particular concern in his introduction to Act and Being:

> The solution of the problem of "act" versus "being" is reached in terms of revelation and the church, and, in the concept of revelation itself, is understood within the community of persons, over against the one-sided "act" interpretation (whether theocentric, as with Barth, or anthropocentric, as with Bultmann) or the equally one-sided "being" interpretation with its doctrine of the self-binding of the freedom of God. Bonhoeffer attempts to comprehend the continuity of the new being in faith with the human-personal ego as a whole in the reality of the community. (22, p.5-6)

We must now examine how Bonhoeffer arrives at this position. The problem Bonhoeffer poses for himself is this: When revelation is interpreted as act, man's knowledge of God and self is thought to be dependent upon the free revealing act of God himself. However, the contingent character of the act means that this 'knowledge' remains inaccessible to man's reflection, and can only 'happen' from time to time in 'direct consciousness'. To establish his own position, Bonhoeffer now has to consider how best to understand the concept of God's freely given revelation. He takes a critical look at Barth's understanding of God's freedom and discovers there what he terms as a purely formal conception. For Barth, God is free in that he is bound by nothing, "not even by the manipulable "entity" of his "historical" Word .... God can give and withdraw himself absolutely according to his pleasure; in either action he remains free". (22, p.80) He supports his understanding of Barth by citing a passage from his Dogmatik (1927):

> .... the relationship between God and man in which God's revelation may truly be imparted to me, a man, must be a free, not a static relationship, in the sense that its very constancy may never mean anything other than constancy in a

> transaction not only continuous but at every moment beginning in all seriousness, at the beginning. It may never be conceived as already given, already obtaining, nor even as analogous to a natural law or mathematical function; instead, one must always think of it as actwise (aktuell)- i.e. with all the instability of a deed in course of execution. (22, p.81)

Bonhoeffer is critical of this approach at several points. Firstly, there is no sense of continuity here. The act of revelation recurrently begins at the beginning so that there can be no inference from one act to the next. Secondly, he considers that in taking this position of extreme transcendentalism, Barth has made God non-objective and thus non-available. Thirdly, he parts with Barth who insists that no "historical" moment is capax infiniti. Here Bonhoeffer is following Luther who rejected finitum non capax infiniti.* For Bonhoeffer God is involved intimately in the life of finite man. In contrast to Barth's extreme transcendentalism, Bonhoeffer quotes in a footnote a passage from the writings of Luther:

> It is the honour and glory of our God (unseres Gottes Ehre), however, that, giving himself for our sake in deepest condescension , he passes into the flesh, the bread, our hearts, (unehrlich) handled, on the altar as on the Cross. (22, p.81n.)

In place of Barth's 'formal' understanding of God's freedom,† Bonhoeffer wishes to adopt a 'material' understanding. He claims that Barth has been dealing with possibilities - with what God can or cannot do, might or might not do - rather than holding on to the reality in which God has in fact revealed himself. In a very significant passage Bonhoeffer writes:

> The whole situation impels one to ask whether a formalistic understanding of God's freedom in contingent revelation, conceived wholly in terms of the act, is really the proper groundwork for theology. In revelation it is a question less of God's freedom on the far side from us, i.e. his eternal isolation and aseity, than of his forth-proceeding, his given Word, his bond in which he has bound himself, of his freedom as it is mostly strongly attested in his having freely bound himself to historical man, having placed himself

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*Cf. H.H. Kramm (38) who points out that Luther accepted that God uses the spoken words, Bible, water, bread and wine - secular things - to contain and transfer infinite, eternal things. See 38, p.52.

† Cf. however, Barth's later position in his Humanity of God (6), p.42.

at man's disposal. God is not free of man but for man. Christ is the Word of his freedom. (22, p.90-1)

He then looks ahead in his argument as he writes:

God is there, which is to say: not in eternal non-objectivity but "haveable", graspable in his Word within the Church. (22, p.91)

Bonhoeffer is thus propounding a concrete or substantial understanding of God's freedom. In taking up this particular position, Bonhoeffer is now led to develop the role of revelation in the direction of the ontological concept. Also, if revelation is understood according to being, the concern is directed towards and understanding of the continuity of the revelation and of man. In other words, it must be possible to maintain that God "is" in the revelation and it must be equally true that man "is" and acts out of this being. Bonhoeffer wishes to come to a position which safeguards revelation as transcendent (the concern of Barth) and yet because of his particular understanding of God's freedom - there, accessible, extant.

Before he defines his own position, Bonhoeffer discusses three possibilities for interpreting revelation according to being and points out their shortcomings. The three possibilities are a. as doctrine b. as psychic experience and c. as an institution.

Bonhoeffer argues that doctrine is basically continuous and accessible but because of its very nature it leaves the existence of man unaffected, unencountered. The acceptance of doctrine as the source of revelation delivers God into the power of the human ego and thus it does not strike man from outside himself. Bonhoeffer writes, " .... when revelation is understood only as doctrine, the Christian idea of revelation eludes the grasp, because there has been an attempt to seize God with an ontological apparatus which is adequate only to the human". (22, p.109)

Bonhoeffer's Barthian standpoint is evident when he dismisses the attempt to understand revelation as a psychical experience. This approach to God via religious experience had assumed an unbroken continuity from God to man. Again Bonhoeffer finds man's existence unaffected.

The third possibility, argues Bonhoeffer, unlike the other two, establishes a being of revelation trans-subjectively by understanding it as an institution of God. In this sphere lie the Roman Catholic Church and the verbally inspired

Bible of Protestant Orthodoxy. Bonhoeffer observes, "In the institution God "is" as one directly confined and at the disposal of man. Catholicism takes this to mean that whoever is in the institution is in God". (22, p.110) He cannot accept this as a useful insight (as it stands in Roman Catholic thought) since "the being of an institution is incapable of affecting the existence of man qua sin; it cannot stand over against man, be objective (gegen-standlich) in the full sense". (22, p.111)

Underlying the criticism of the above three possibilities lies Bonhoeffer's understanding of the person. (See Part 2 section a. above) He had accepted the fact that a real meeting only takes place in a dialogue with another person. Thus Bonhoeffer's argument is pushed forward, ".... although on the one hand it is correct to make the transition from the ontology of revelation to the concept of the Church, on the other hand the Church should here be conceived not in an institutional sense but in terms of persons". (22, p.111)

Bonhoeffer is now able to place man's encounter with God at its ultimate point of concreteness. The question - how can I encounter God as person in Christ? - is answered by - I meet God in Christ but I meet Christ in the church, for the church is the contemporary Christ - it is "Christ existing as community". However, the church is not a hierarchical institution but Christ in my neighbour and dependent on the preached Word as the limit of his whole life. "Christ is the subject of the proclamation, and he is the subject of the congregation". (15, p.95) Bonhoeffer claims, "The Christian communion is God's final revelation: God as "Christ existing as community", ordained for the rest of time until the end of the world and the return of Christ". He continues,

> It is here that Christ has come very nearest to humanity, here given himself to his new humanity, so that his person enfolds in itself all whom he has won, binding itself in duty to them, and them reciprocally in duty to him .... it (the church) is a communion created by Christ and founded upon him, one in which Christ reveals himself as the ὁ αὐτὸς ἄνθρωπος , the new man - or rather, the new humanity itself. (22, p.121)

Man's mode of being in the church is as a 'person' in fellowship. This being is a real, impinging, continuous relationship; it is more than a mere

activity from time to time. "It is in the personal communion, and only there, that the gospel can truly be declared and believed". (22, p.122)

Bonhoeffer's particular understanding of God's freedom for man is again evident when he writes, "God's freedom has bound itself, woven itself into the personal communion, and it is precisely that which proves it God's freedom - that he should bind himself to men". (22, p.122) Thus revelation for Bonhoeffer takes place in the church - the Christian community - and as such does not lie in a past event or in an entity which is at man's disposal. In a striking passage, Bonhoeffer claims:

> .... the being of revelation "is" the being of the community of persons, constituted and embraced by the person of Christ, wherein the individual finds himself to be already in his new existence.

He continues:

> This ensures three considerations: 1. the being of revelation can be envisaged in continuity; 2. the existence of man is critically involved; 3. it is impossible to regard the being of revelation as entity, as objective, or on the other hand as non-entity, as non-objective. (22, p.123)

By continuity, Bonhoeffer means that the revelation is assured since the church preaches the death and resurrection of Christ. If only the individual heard the preaching, the continuity would be in danger but this danger disappears when the church itself hears the preached word of the church (even if the individual from time to time does not hear it). The continuity of the revelation is not cited in man but is guaranteed suprapersonally by the community of persons. That man's existence is critically affected is assured by his being drawn into the fellowship of the church. This claim is grounded on the fact that the Christian community must be understood as personal in character and its subject is Christ.

> It is only from the person of Christ that other persons acquire for man the character of personhood. In this way they even become Christ for us in what they both demand and promise, in their existential impositions upon us from without. (22, p.124)

Commenting on his third consideration, Bonhoeffer points out that if the revelation was a fixed entity it would remain past and as such existentially powerless. Also if it was volatilized into the non-objective, its continuity would be lost. In Bonhoeffer's approach there is the possibility of a real

existential impact and this impact is connected with something concretely objective, yet something standing-over-against man and never able to be drawn into the control of man. Bonhoeffer's thought has gained much from the existential understanding of the 'person' but his own thought moves into a distinctly Christian sphere. It is only in relation to Christ's revelation that man can understand his being. Man only understands himself and the meaning of God's revelation when he is placed in the truth. So he writes:

> For the man in untruth revelation remains, as "person" remains, an entity or thing which "there is": towards this one's relation and attitude are neutral in the sense that the existence of man is not critically involved. It is only within the communion itself that revelation can be conceived in its real existential being. (22, p.126)

The church then is the personal community where act and being unite. It is act in that it exists only by virtue of the act of faith; this act of faith must be understood as genuine faith in God, and not faith in faith. To demonstrate the difference, Bonhoeffer contrasts two acts of faith - one which looks wholly outside itself and a reflexive act which looks back on itself ('actus directus' and 'actus reflexus' in Bonhoeffer's terminology). Only the former ('actus directus') really grasps revelation since it is not only the personal faith of the believer but the faith of the church, which as the believing community has being and continuity in time and space. However, Bonhoeffer points to a paradox "that the being of revelation, namely, the church, exists only in faith; yet only that faith is genuine which acknowledges that revelation does not depend on faith". (15, p.96) But Bonhoeffer insists that "These two propositions must combine to make a third: only in faith does a man know that the being of revelation, his own being in the church of Christ, is independent of faith". (22, p.128) Thus Bonhoeffer has completed what he set out to do: "to unify the aims of true transcendentalism and true ontology which an "ecclesiastical thought"". (22, p.16)

c. Bonhoeffer's concern for Ecclesiological thought

It can be claimed that the Church (with Christ as its Lord) stands at the focal point of Bonhoeffer's theology during the years 1927-33. However, his basic concern is to understand the church from a particular concept of Christology and revelation. Indeed his ecclesiological thought is a development of his Christology. J.Godsey is correct in his estimate:

> For Bonhoeffer theology was essentially Christology, but because Christ is not without his body, Christology includes ecclesiology within itself. This explains Bonhoeffer's insistence that revelation is always concrete revelation. The word of God, Jesus Christ, became not an idea but flesh. God revealed himself in a concrete, historical life, and Bonhoeffer passionately believed that revelation continues to take place only in a concrete form, namely, as Jesus Christ lives and takes form in a concrete community, in his church. (13, p.264)

We have already seen the validity of Godsey's claim in our discussion of Bonhoeffer's understanding of man and revelation. (See Part 2, sections a. and b. above) There we saw the young theologian locating the meaning of both man and revelation (only possible in Christ) in the personal nature of the Christian community. We can substantiate our claim that the church lies at the centre of Bonhoeffer's thinking by summarizing what we have already discovered in his early writings:

1. Man can only understand himself in relation to God in the Word which comes from God and it is in the church that the preached Word of God comes to man. This is the locus where man is judged and forgiven. In the church alone does man really understand himself.

2. For Bonhoeffer, revelation demanded some sense of continuity and he discovered this in the continuity of the church; Christ preached in the church. "Revelation", writes Bonhoeffer, "should be envisaged only with reference to the church, where the church is regarded as constituted by the present annunciation, within the communion, for the communion, of Christ's death and resurrection". (22, p.119) Thus in the church Bonhoeffer finds the concretion of God's revelation; a revelation which lies outside man. Speaking of this characteristic thread in Bonhoeffer's thought, J. Godsey writes:

> Although Bonhoeffer shared with the dialectical theologians their desire to recapture the Reformation understanding of revelation, he was critical of their method, which he believed was ultimately individualistic and abstract.* ..... In contrast, Bonhoeffer advocated a theology that did justice to the fact that revelation is bound to the church .... and so while the dialectical theologians were concentrating on the problem of faith and history, Bonhoeffer was concerned with the problem of faith and community. (13, p.15)

3. Bonhoeffer has a deep concern for the concreteness of revelation. Martin E. Marty rightly claims that "Bonhoeffer rejected angelism, pure transcendence, revelatory illusion from the first". (15, p.15) Rather he clings to what God gives in the present; God's Word to man is not present as idea but in history as flesh God reveals himself <u>for</u> (pro nobis) man. This revelation continues to take concrete form as Jesus Christ lives on in the historic community of the church. "Christ existing as community" is what Bonhoeffer understands as concretion; Christ is present in the church and Lord over it. On the last side of his inaugural lecture we see this position clearly stated:

> .... mystery of the community that Christ is in her and only through her reaches to men, Christ exists among us as community, as church in the hiddenness of history. The church is the hidden Christ among us. Now therefore man is never alone, but he exists only through the community, which brings him Christ, which incorporates him in itself, takes him into its life; Man in Christ is man in community; where he exists in community. (9, p.68)

We shall now look more closely at Bonhoeffer's understanding of the church and man's mode of being within the community of revelation. For Bonhoeffer, man's life in Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ) is life in the church and this is both act and being. Man is the bearer of the new humanity and yet he is sustained in and by it. Here we observe Bonhoeffer's concern for the dialectic of faith and community (church). In the church man's being is really touched and yet the source of this contingency remains outside of him because it exists in the community of Christ. Bonhoeffer borrows Luther's term 'pati' to demonstrate

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*Cf. Bonhoeffer's inaugural lecture at Berlin (9, p.63) and 15, p.104-5 where F. Sherman points out that Bonhoeffer's critique of Barth was aimed at a moving target. "His 1956 lecture on 'The Humanity of God' provides the most vivid documentation of the "change of direction"...." See Barth's own statement (6, p.37f.)

the nature of this existential dialogue in faith within the community of Christ.* Using this term, Bonhoeffer writes:

> In reality I hear another man declare the gospel to me, see him offer the sacrament: "thou art forgiven", see and hear him and the congregation for me; at the same time I hear the gospel, I join in the prayer and I know myself joined into the Word, sacrament and prayer of the communion of Christ, the new humanity now as then, here as elsewhere; I bear it upon me and am borne of it. Here I, the historically whole man, individual and humanity together, am encountered, affected. I believe; that is, I know myself borne: I am borne (pati), therefore I am (esse), therefore I believe (agere). Here the circle is closed. For even agere is pati here; but the I always remains the historical One - though in faith the New One. (22, p.131)

Here man's being is really touched and placed in a new mode of existence through his being a borne person in the Christian community. But the person only knows by faith that his person has in fact been touched and yet this being, in which the believer in the community shares, is not dependent on the act of faith that is directed towards it. To emphasize this fact Bonhoeffer writes:

> Faith is "with reference to" being - the Christian communion - conversely, it is only in faith that this being reveals itself or "is", yet faith knows it to be independent of itself, and knows itself to be a manner of being of that being. Being transcends entity: it is the basis of the entity and and I alike. Thus act comes from being, as it also goes to being. Being, moreover, has reference to act, yet is free. The being of revelation, as hovering between the objective and the non-objective, is "person" - the revealed person of God and the personal community of which that person is the foundation. (22, p.132-3)

In advocating this position, Bonhoeffer can claim that the concerns of a pure actualism and a pure ontology are satisfied and drawn together. He concludes:

> Here the transcendental thesis of "being only in the act", and the original ontological principle of being independent of the act, unexpectedly coalesce. (22, p.133)

Here Bonhoeffer is giving a forceful expression to his conviction that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is visible, tangible, concrete and apprehensible by all men. This revelation is the 'raison d'être of Christ's

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* See 22, p.127-8; 132-4. 'Pati' is a Latin term meaning 'bearing, suffering or enduring'.

community. Here man comes into contact with the saving work of Christ's death and resurrection.

The fact of the resurrection becomes the basis for what Bonhoeffer has to say about the life of the man ἐν Χριστῷ. The living Word (here understood as the dynamic action of Christ for the salvation of man) of the church has the power of forgiveness. Man knows in faith that his being in the church of Christ is his new being, a way of being which was not possible by means of his own potential. Man sees his being established solely by the word of Christ. Being is being in Christ and here alone is unity and wholeness of life, where Christ is active as reconciler and redeemer. This being in Christ takes place within the church where Christ is at work. Thus for Bonhoeffer, concrete Christology must include within itself ecclesiology. Here we are reminded of a passage in Christology (material which formed the substance of a series of lectures delivered by Bonhoeffer at Berlin from May-July 1933):

> The community is the body of Christ, it does not represent the body of Christ. .... This Christ existing as community is the whole person, as the one who is exalted and humiliated. His being as community, like his being as Word and sacrament, has the form of a stumbling block. .... Christ is not only the head of the community but also the community itself. Christ is the head and every member. .... Everything depends on Christ being present to his church as a person in space and time. If this structure can be demonstrated to be existential, and not a chance accidental one, then we shall have theological proof that the mode of existence of the person of the Risen One is in time and space. (14, p.60-1)

The knowledge which man receives and his mode of being within the church is one of salvation. For both Barth and Bonhoeffer, the knowledge which God discloses to man is saving knowledge. Man's being is sustained in this saving work by his incorporation in Christ's community. The central doctrines of Reformation teaching - knowledge of sin, God's initiative in revelation, reconciliation and sanctification - are in Bonhoeffer worked out against the claim of Christ's present existence in his church. The person only knows himself as 'in Adam' or 'in Christ' by his intimate relation with the living Christ of the church. Bonhoeffer writes:

> The Christ preached in the communion gives himself to the member of the communion. Faith means knowing that one has reference to this. In faith I "have" Christ in his personal

> objectivity, i.e. as my Lord who has power over me, atones for me, redeems me. In faith there is no not-knowing, for there Christ is his own witness and confirmation. In faith Christ is the creator of my personal new being .... (22, p.140-1)

This relationship in the community of the church is from start to finish one of faith. Christ is there both creating the faith and sustaining it.

> In the act of belief, which Christ himself creates within me, inasmuch as he gives me the Holy Spirit who hears and believes within me, he also proves himself the free Lord of my existence. Christ "is" only "in" faith, yet he is master of my faith. .... Where and when I believed is known only to God and is inaccessible to my reflexion. Faith abides in itself as actus directus. Nothing could be more mistaken than to deny, from the fact that everything is accessible to reflexion only in reflexion - therefore faith only as "faith-wish-fulness" (Glaubigkeit), "religiosity" - that there is an actus directus taking place in time. (22, p.141)

In this type of approach, Bonhoeffer wishes to guarantee that authentic being cannot be conceived by reflection; rather the believer must live from moment to moment within the bounds of being justified by faith in Christ. Reflection on faith itself destroys that faith. Faith must not look on itself but on Christ alone. Man knows himself in Adam only because he can speak out of his present being in Christ. Man indeed may understand himself from his experience in faith but immediately he redirects his attention towards God active in Christ. Here thinking (reason) or reflection is submissive to man's God-given knowledge of himself. This particular position ensures that we think of the person not in an atomistic fashion but as a concrete whole - body,mind and soul in a unity. Quoting Bonhoeffer's own words:

> If, through man's self-incapsulation, Dasein in Adam was in subjection to his Wiesein, the sight of Christ brings the loosening of the bonds: Dasein becomes free, not as if it were able to stand over against Wiesein as an independent being, but in the sense of escaping from the I's domination into the lordship of Christ, where for the first time in original freedom it recognizes itself as a creature of God. (22, p.170-1)

Bonhoeffer also draws our attention to the saying of Luther, "Seek thyself only in Christ and not in thyself, then wilt thou find thyself eternally in him". (22, p.170)

This is a suitable point at which to look at some of Bonhoeffer's ideas about the church which he developed in his thesis for the Licentiate of Theology of Berlin University. The thesis, Sanctorum Communio(23), was acclaimed by Barth as "a theological miracle".* Because of the revelatory character of the church (which we have already noted as a real concern in Bonhoeffer's Christology) and the gift of faith which lies at the foundation of this revelation in the church, Bonhoeffer states as a fundamental that the church can only be understood and judged from within. He claims that the premise on which we are to understand the community of the church is not based on it being historically comprehensible but "as having its basis in the reality of God and his revelation".† (23, p.89) He writes, "We do not want to bring standards for judging the church from outside; the church can be fully understood from within itself, from within its own claim ...." (23, p.89)

Although in Sanctorum Communio Bonhoeffer wished to do two things:

- to reject the Liberal individualism and substitute the concept of revelation occurring in a concrete historical form in a social institution, and

- effect a dialogue between social philosophy and dogmatic theology,

He was emphatic that the church cannot be understood in purely sociological terms. Bonhoeffer's starting point is the claim that the community of Christ is the work of God and can only be understood through the revelational reality of Christ active within this community. To attempt to understand the church as a purely sociological entity is doomed to failure from the beginning because of the very nature of the church.

Bonhoeffer accepts the essential social character of man as a responsible and responsive being, but he does not claim that man in the communith of the church can be understood just as a being in the midst of a structure of

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*See J.D. Godsey (13, p.21)

†Cf. J.A. Phillips (27, p.38) "Troeltsch had ruled out any understanding of the church on the basis of revelation, and his Social Teachings concentrated instead on its 'historico-sociological shapes and conditions - the non-theological factors' or, in Troeltsch's own words, 'the intrinsic sociological idea of Christianity, and its structure and organization'. Bonhoeffer now wished to reassert the vertical dimension of the church, to 'liberate a genuinely theological concept of the church ..... with every philosophical and sociological tool at his command".

interacting beings. Rather it is only through God's revelation of himself through the Holy Spirit working in and through man that men really become fully human. It is solely out of this being that mam understands himself and the community from which this new being evolves.

Bonhoeffer sees man in the community of the church as reconciled to both God and man. He uses several insights from social philosophy to elucidate his thinking. He detects in social philosophy a useful insight into man's mode of being in community: viz, within any community man experiences a dynamic tension between himself and the group to which he belongs.* Bonhoeffer wishes to know whether God means by community something that absorbs the individual, or are the community and the individual both willed by God as having their own significance. To clarify his thought Bonhoeffer uses two concepts - the "objective spirit" and the "collective person".

He observes that wherever wills unite there arises a'structure'. This 'structure' is a new element and arises whether the uniting persons want it or not. This 'structure' is the "objective spirit" of the community. It makes available an individual life beyond the members and yet it only exists through them. If the person moves outside the unity that person looses the force of the objective spirit. The objective spirit is involved in reciprocal dynamic action both with each person and with the community as a whole. A personal character can be ascribed to the objective spirit of a community but not to that of a society. In a society the objective spirit is a means to an end, but a person can never be considered as a means to an end.

By the use of the term "collective person", Bonhoeffer wishes to demonstrate

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* Cf. the findings of recent social philosophy based on observation of widely differing societies and tribes etc. See W.J.H. Sprott - Human Groups (Penguin Books 1958) p.23-56 and J.A.C. Brown - The Social Psychology of Industry (Penguin Books, 1954) p.53-96. Brown writes, "No modern sociologist or social psychologist would accept the atomistic view of society .... because it is not nowadays believed that human beings exist in a random state .... They are invariably organized in one form or another, and the individual is always related to the larger national or tribal society through mediation of smaller and more intimate groupings.... Any national or tribal society, therefore, is built up from a network of primary groups, and it follows that the theory, prevalent during the 18th and 19th centuries, that society consists of a horde of basically selfish and unorganized individuals - the so-called 'rabble hypothesis' - is totally untrue". (Op. cit. p.53,54)

that the individual personal spirit only exists by virtue of social interaction. This means that man is an individual being and yet as a member of a community he is also a collective person and as such carries the marks of that community. In the eyes of God, according to Bonhoeffer, the structures of the collective person and the individual person are the same. He writes:

> Man is not conceived of by God, the all-embracing Person, as an isolated, individual being, but as in natural communication with other men. .... In his sight the community and the individual are present at the same moment, and rest in one another. The structures of the individual and the collective unit are the same. Upon these basic relations rest the concept of the religious community and the church. (23, p.52)

Bonhoeffer wishes to link his concepts of "objective spirit" and "collective person" as they exist in the Christian community. He claims that when a community (fellowship) is understood as a "colledtive person", its centre of action is its "objective spirit". This ensures that the "collective person" is seen both as autonomous and dependent on the individual members of the community. This position enables Bonhoeffer to show that sin and the reality of reconciliation in the church can be understood in their true depth. For Bonhoeffer, sin is not only a break in man's relationship with God, it also has inter-human dimensions in being a break in man to man communication. This, he claims, is the doctrine of original sin. "It (the doctrine of original sin) gives an account of the way mankind belongs together, is bound together, in the status corruptionis". (23, p.73) Thus sin must be considered as an individual act, but at the same time, an act of the human race.

> The mankind of sin is one, even though it consists throughout of individuals; it is a collective person and yet subject to endless fragmentation; it is Adam, as every individual is both himself and Adam. (23, p.85)

This alienation of man as he exists as a "collective person" can only be resolved by a "collective person" and this is "Christ existing as the church". This is where the community is recreated.

In a striking passage Bonhoeffer speaks of Christ's reconciling work in the church as both reconciling God and man, and man and man.

> The thread between God and man, which the first Adam severed is joined anew by God, by his revealing his love in Christ. He no longer demands and summons, approaching mankind purely as Thou; but gives himself as an I, opening his heart. The church is grounded in the revelation of the heart of God. But as, when the primal communion with God was rent asunder, human community was rent too, so likewise when God restores the communion of mankind with himself, the community of men with each other is also re-established, in accordance with our proposition about the essential connection between man's communion with God and with his fellow-men. (23, p.106)

What is the nature of this reconciliation? Bonhoeffer asserts that in Christ men are reconciled to each other and to God. The emphasis on in (ἐν Χριστῷ) here is in contrast to by. In the church is the real presence of Christ - "to be in Christ" and "to be in the church" are for Bonhoeffer one and the same thing. However it is the work of the Holy Spirit which effects the reconciliation of the individual within the church.

> The Holy Spirit (is) the will of God which brings individual human beings together in the church, maintains it, and is effectual only within it ..... and only by being personally appropriated by the Holy Spirit, by standing in the actual church, do we experience our election in the Church, which is based on Christ. (23, p.104)

Bonhoeffer uses the word 'stellvertreter'* to describe the work of Christ in the church. 'Stellvertreter' may be translated as 'deputy', 'representative' or 'substitute'. In using this word Bonhoeffer wished to understand the work of Christ as both representation (on our behalf) and substitution (in our place). Christ is a 'representative' in the sense that in Christ mankind is placed in fellowship with God, but this does not include within it, solidarity, which is never possible between Christ and man. 'Representation' is the life-principle of the new humanity but Christ as the bearer of this life-principle remains head of the community. Thus Christ's relation to the church must be understood in terms of 'fellowship' and 'lordship'. Jesus does not declare himself in solidarity with the community but in a vicarious and representative way, he lives in the community as its lord and life-principle. Christ

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* See 13, p.36n

'represents' the community and yet the community possesses him as revelation in the Holy Spirit.

Bonhoeffer sees Christ's relation to the church in a double sense. Firstly, the church is realized and fulfilled only in him and thus time is abolished. Secondly, the church is built up in time on Christ as its foundation through the work of the Holy Spirit. Although Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit is operative in the church in the reconciliation of God and man, two factors oppose this work: time and the evil will. God cannot ignore these factors. "Now man's guilt cannot be regarded by God 'as if' it did not exist; it must truly be made "unhappened", that is, eradicated". (23, p.113) This, according to Bonhoeffer, takes place not through a reversal of time, but through divine punishment and a new creation of the good will. He sees Christ taking on himself the guilt of all humanity and suffering the divine punishment for the sins of all men, once and for all.

The understanding of Christ's passion as being the time when Christ bore the punishment for the sin of all mankind has been hotly debated.* However, Bonhoeffer boldly asserts, "Jesus, being himself innocent, takes the others' guilt and punishment upon himself, and as he dies a criminal, he is accursed, for he bears the sins of the world and is punished for them ...." (23, p.113) Here Bonhoeffer is following Luther but he (Bonhoeffer) claims that he holds this particular view not as a possible ethical concept but as a theological concept which recognizes Christ's offering 'pro nobis' as a gift of God in his love for man. And in this spirit he writes:

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*Cf. O.C. Quick - Doctrines of the Creed (Nisbet, 1938) p.228-231 where the concept of 'penal substitution' is critically assessed. Quick writes, " .... we must not seek to interpret with any logical exactness language which speaks of Christ as having suffered instead of the sinner. Indeed, such a saying as "One died for all, therefore all died", excludes the idea of substitution strictly understood, and signifies rather representation. ..... The language of substitution then is but an imperfect attempt to express the truth that in the crucifixion the divine love showed itself willing to endure to the uttermost for man the terrible consequencies of sin which in justice should have fallen on the sinner. Christ, we may truly say, endured for us and on our behalf, though not strictly instead of us, what we could never have endured for ourselves". (Op. cit. p.229)

> .... the idea of vicarious atonement is possible only so long as it rests upon an offer from God, that is, it is in force only in Christ and his church. It is not a moral possibility or standard, but solely the reality of the divine love for the church; it is not a moral but a theological concept. (23, p.114)

In all Bonhoeffer's thinking about the church there exists a very rich doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit. A Christology of condescension* (or humiliation) makes it possible for God's revelation to be located in concrete, 'haveable' terms in the church, but it is the Holy Spirit working through Christ's word in the church which makes the saving revelation contingent. Bonhoeffer states:

> Christ himself is in the Word; the Christ in whom the church is consummated seeks through his Spirit to win man's heart, in order to fit it into the actualised church of Christ. (23, p.115)

For Bonhoeffer, fellowship with God is possible only through Christ and since Christ is present only in the word in his community, it means that there is fellowship with God only in the church. There the work of the Holy Spirit is intimately bound to Christ as he exists as community. All individualistic notions of the church are quite inadequate to understand its nature.

> The Holy Spirit operates solely in the church as the communion of saints; thus each man who is apprehended by the Spirit must already be a part of the communion. No one, on the other hand, whom the Spirit has not yet apprehended can be in the communion. (23, p.116)

J.A. Phillips rightly observes, "His (Bonhoeffer's) view of revelation as the church leaves open the question of the relationship of Christ and the church to the world outside of the church". (27, p.69)

Bonhoeffer sees the Spirit working on the church in a three-fold way - as multiplicity of Spirit, as community (fellowship) of Spirit and as unity of Spirit. His task here is to relate the social structures that are present in every personal community (objective spirit, collective person - see above) to

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*See Christology (14, p.110f.) ".... the form of humiliation is the form of the Christus pro nobis. In this form Christ means and wills to be free for us. Had Christ proved himself by miracles, we would 'believe' the visible theophany of the Godhead, but is would not be belief in the Christus pro nobis. .... There is only faith where a man so surrenders himself to the humiliated God-man as to stake his life on him... The only assurance that faith tolerates is the Word itself which comes to me through Christ. (Op. cit. p.114-5)

the work of the Holy Spirit. (23, p.116-144)

The expression "multiplicity of Spirit" points to the work of the Holy Spirit in approaching each individual and making him aware of his 'loneliness'. Each person experiences his own justification and sanctification but this is in the church which is the locus of the Spirit's action. "He who alone is the Christ is the one who is present in the community pro me", writes Bonhoeffer in his Christology. (14, p.48) The pro me however must be understood as existing only because of the close relationship between the community of Christ and the individual. God sees the community of Christ and the individuals in one act of election.

The "fellowship of Spirit" points to the fact that the work of the Holy Spirit not only restores fellowship with God but by creating faith and love the man-to-man relationship is also restored. The church is a fellowship of love and this disinterested love can only spring out of faith in Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit. Bonhoeffer writes about this in a very striking passage which is worthy to be quoted in full. It concludes his discussion of the "fellowship of Spirit":

> The basic moral relationships which were disrupted in the corpus peccati are renewed by the Holy Spirit. The community is constituted by the complete self-forgetfulness of love. The relationship between I and Thou is no longer essentially a demanding but a giving one. Each reveals his heart to the other, as a heart subdued by the will of God, even though in actual fact the formal moral and social basic relationships between the I and Thou remain so long as conscience, law and the wrath of God exist, so long, that is, as we walk by faith and not by sight. The Christian comes into being and exists only in Christ's church. He is dependent upon it, that is, upon the other man. Each man sustains the other in active love, intercession and forgiveness of sins through complete vicarious action, which is possible only in the church of Christ resting as it does in its entirety upon the principle of vicarious action, that is, upon the love of God. But all are sustained by the church, which consists in this action for one another of its members. The church and its members are structurally together, and act vicariously for each other, in the strength of the church. This constitutes the specific sociological character of community based on love. In all this the singularity and solitariness of each member are not abolished; he must constantly struggle on his own responsibility to pray and to achieve an attitude wholly determined by obedience. (23, p.136)

The problem which now appears is how are we to understand the "Spirit of unity" in the church where multiplicity and community are held in tension. Bonhoeffer points out that the unity here is not to be understood as agreement or harmony among individuals but rather unity is to be seen under the concept of 'collective person' - "Christ existing as community" where unity is established in Christ. The 'multiplicity of persons' as a 'collective person' in no way abolishes the individuality and the fellowship of persons. The unity of the church comes from above; it does not arise by the intention of the members of the community.

How is the church active in the world as an empirical institution, working for the salvation of man? This leads Bonhoeffer to a discussion of the cultic activities of the Christian community. (See 23, p.144-204)

Like any other community, the church possesses an 'objective spirit'. (See above) Since for Bonhoeffer, the church can only be understood as "Christ existing as community", the 'objective spirit' of the church bears both the historical activity of Christ and the social activity of the Holy Spirit. However there exists within the sanctorum communio the communio peccatorum (in the form of human imperfection and sin) thus making it indefensible to identify the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit with the 'objective spirit'. In order to define the relationship, Bonhoeffer uses the concept of function; Christ and the Holy Spirit use the historically given forms of the objective spiritual life in the guilding up of the empirical church. The Holy Spirit uses the cultic activities of preaching and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper. Bonhoeffer is faithful to his Lutheran background when he writes:

> The Bible is the Word only in the church, that is, in the sanctorum communio. The Word is concretely present in the church as the Word of Scripture and of preaching - essentially as the latter. There is no distinction between these in themselves, since so long as they are not inspired by the Spirit they remain the word of man. The Spirit has not united himself in substance with the word of the Bible. Thus effective preaching is possible only in the sanctorum communio. (23, p.161)

In writing of the sacraments, Bonhoeffer asserts:

> The Protestant idea of the sacraments is necessarily connected with the Word ..... Sacraments are acts of the church, and like preaching they unite within them the "objective spirit" of the church and the Holy Spirit operating through it. (23, p.166)

As we have already observed, the sacraments of the church (for Bonhoeffer) are baptism and the Lord's supper. They bear God's presence in faith to his people in their particular historical situation. The baptism Bonhoeffer speaks of is infant baptism. This is accepted from the premise that the church is a community (fellowship) and not a society,* and as such can carry children within it. This sacrament is also valid because in the place of the necessary faith (which is not possible to the child) the "objective spirit" of the community assumes the role of the subject of the faith and through baptism receives the child into itself. Bonhoeffer stresses that the child should remain within the community life of the church where he can be carried. Bonhoeffer writes of the role of the church in infant baptism. "The church should be open to all, but in being open to all it should be conscious of its responsibility". (23, p.167)

For Bonhoeffer the Lord's supper, unlike infant baptism which embraces all possible members of the church, is for those in the community of the church who "wish to subject their will to God's lordship in the Kingdom of Christ". (23, p.167) At the basis of all Bonhoeffer says about the Lord's supper lies his concept of the Christian community as one of mutual love. Each person surrenders himself to the other person in obedience to God's will through the gift of the Holy Spirit; each man as God's instrument serves his neighbour. Bonhoeffer understands the Lord's supper as being God's gift to the individual but at the same time it is God's gift to the whole church. Also in the sacrament Christ's spiritual presence is not only symbolized but <u>really</u> given to his community. Christ becomes a reality to the <u>individual as</u> the church and this is why the Lord's supper is only valid in the community of

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*Cf. Bonhoeffer's discussion of 'Typology of social communities'. (23, p.55-65) " .... a community, unlike a society, can carry children ... This is not the genetic concept of a community, but the children are in the community as a piece of their parents' will, until they have their own will - an idea which would be meaningless in a society. This is important in the sociological concept of the church. Common feeling, willing and responsibility are the forces of inmost cohesion. The basic attitude is mutual inner interest. (p.57)

the church.

Bonhoeffer sees the Lord's supper as fulfilling a two-fold function. Firstly, it brings about a personal communion between Christ and the individual - "Christ makes a gift of himself, of communion with him, that is, he gives me the benefit of his vicarious Passion .....". (23, p.168) And secondly, in that it is a gift to the church, Christ gives the church to the individuals who make up the body. He writes, "He presents each of us with the rights and duties of priestly action towards our neighbour, and likewise gives each of us our life in the church. It is his gift that enable one man to sustain the other, and be sustained in return. In giving himself he gives us the duty and the strength to act in brotherly love". (23, p.168) *

Bonhoeffer is now able to classify the church as a sociological type. (23, p.175-185) Like a society, the church is a means to and end - the attainment of God's will. Like a community (fellowship), the church is an end in itself. But unlike both, the church is a fellowship of the Spirit. It is the Spirit-founded and Spirit-effected fellowship and community of God, "Christ existing as community", the presence of Christ. The fact of the Spirit introduces a unique aspect into the nature of this fellowship. It expresses the church's transcendent foundation and characterizes it as a community that is ruled rather than coerced. The church, then, is both a means to an end and an end in itself, and its uniqueness exists in the fact that these elements are united by God, in that he gives himself as the means to his purpose and thereby creates a fellowship existing in Spirit-effected love. This means, however, that its uniqueness can only be comprehended <u>theologically</u>, never sociologically. The fellowship of the Spirit, with its life-principle of love, is a form of fellowship sui generis; it exists in faith in the word of God, which means that its structure is grounded in the Christian notion of revelation.

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*This is Bonhoeffer's particular understanding of "the priesthood of all believers". The Holy Spirit uses each individual in the church as he declares the gospel to his neighbour (equality is not assumed here). The office of the individual and the community belong together.
See 23, p.143; 163 & 125.

Part 3 Christology and Discipleship - Bonhoeffer's Theology (1933-9)

a. The general characteristic of the theology of 1933-9

Up to 1933 Bonhoeffer's writings had been by and large technical theological works which had demonstrated his ability as a very able and sophisticated young theologian. Sanctorum Communio, Act and Being, Christology and his inaugural lecture at Berlin University are works of a professional dogmatic theologian. As a result they are highly technical and argumentative works and mainly for the attention of theologians. When one reads works like Creation and Fall, Temptation, Life Together and particularly The Cost of Discipleship one detects throughout a totally different style of writing. The works mentioned are no less deeply theological but there is now present a directness, an intensity and a deep challenge to the readers which is absent in the writings of 1927-33. It is not surprising that Life Together and The Cost of Discipleship came to the immediate attention of Bonhoeffer's contemporaries and made his name known during his own life-time. They attracted wide attention not only because of their apparent simplicity and directness, but also because the person writing is whole-heartedly committed to faith in Christ and is supremely confident in that faith. Men of his time were willing to listen because Bonhoeffer appeared to be speaking the authentic word of God to contemporary man; he was attempting to show how Christ had relevance to everyday life. We have noted the centrality of Christ in the writings of 1927-33 and Christology is again the key to the theology of this later period. Even when we detect a development and widening of Bonhoeffer's thought, we shall be aware that the development springs from an attempt to understand more fully the meaning of Christ (as is true of all Bonhoeffer's theological development).

Before we look at the writings which are characteristic of this period - viz. The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together - we must consider two questions: 1. Why was there a new direction in his thought during these years?
and 2. What was characteristic of the writings during these years?

b. Why this new form of writing - Bonhoeffer the Pastoral Theologian

Bonhoeffer reacted against being merely an academic theologian. From what he wrote and what he did he made it clear that for him a genuine theology cannot isolate itself from intimate involvement in the life of the times. In this respect Bonhoeffer stands in a direct line with the Fathers of the Early Church who besides being the greatest thinkers were also the greatest preachers and pastors. It is well known that Origen preached almost every day in the church at Caesarea; Athanasius and Augustine were noted for their diligent pastoral care within the church. What Maurice Wiles says about the Fathers of the Early could well be applied to Bonhoeffer when transposed into the key of the twentieth century:

> The Fathers were the scholars of the Church and both halves of the definition are important. They were scholars seeking to express the faith in as intelligent and coherent a form as they could devise. But they were not working in a vacuum, nor in the setting of a modern secular institution. They were scholars of the Church, continually in touch with the day-to-day worshipping life of the Church. (18, p.29)

For Bonhoeffer theory must be followed by practice and so, although it involved him in great personal restriction and stress, he threw himself wholeheartedly into pastoral and political involvement, the latter of which ultimately resulted in his martyrdom. It must be pointed out however that for Bonhoeffer any action - either in politics or the Church - had to be accompanied by a sound theological basis.

Bonhoeffer's concern with the question of God's will for life in the here and now had a practical boost early in his career. This was during his visit to the Union Theological Seminary in New York in September 1930. Although not impressed with their theology* which witnessed to a gross neglect of Christology, he was conscious of the way in which the theological students involved them-

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*See 9, p.114-118 where Bonhoeffer surveys the contemporary American theological scene and points to its shortcomings.

selves intimately in the social problems of the day. Their theology which he described as 'Protestantism without Reformation'* had little regard for doctrinal orthodoxy but he sensed here in America an active and vigorous church life, a "will for community"†; a church seeking to express itself amidst the political and social problems of the time.

In America he was also made aware of the practical nature of the training of ministers at the Union Theological Seminary. In a 'Report on a Period of Study at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, 1930-31' (9, p.86-91) we find the following observation:

> The American student of theology has one powerful advantage over his German counterpart: he knows much more of everyday matters. In the vacation he goes to do practical work and gets to know people and conditions. This gives his intellectual activity a certain practical point which is foreign to our seminaries. .... The American student sees the question of truth essentially in the light of practical community..... (9, p.88)

There can be little doubt of the tremendous influence which this American visit had on the life and thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It led to his speaking a very timely word to the withdrawn and pietistic German churches which followed the traditional Lutheran attitude of not interfering in the affairs of the State and public morality. Avoiding the spheres of industrial problems and political questions, the church confined its activity to a small circle of churchy affairs and individualistic piety. Thus is was unable to point out the evils of National Socialism and check its rise.✗

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* See 9, p.92-3

† See 9, p.87

✗ Cf. 9, p.71-6 Where there is an interesting exchange of letters between Helmut Rossler (in Germany) and Bonhoeffer who in a letter dated 11 Dec. 1930 speaks of the inability of the Americans to understand German theology; "they laugh at Luther". Rossler's reply which mentioned the National Socialist Movement may have been a real challenge and stimulus to Bonhoeffer: Contained in Rossler's reply (22 Feb. 1931) "What you write of the theological grotesqueness of the American church .... interested me very much. ....our theology has without doubt become better in the last twenty years. Yet everything depends on its working itself out in preaching, and so far there is little trace of this. .... it is an act of pursuing love to which we are called, to make some contact with the questions and needs of the present generation in our country. (9, p.72)

Bonhoeffer was here to proclaim the necessary involvement of the church in the world; for him there must be a restatement of the social and political responsibility of the church. He recognized that the political authority in Germany had become entirely corrupt and immoral and that a false faith was capable of terrible and monstrous things. G. Leibholz writes:

> Bonhoeffer was firmly and rightly convinced that it is not only a Christian duty towards God to oppose tyranny, that is, a government which is no longer based on natural law and the law of God. For Bonhoeffer this followed from the fact that the church as a living force in this world entirely depends on her this-sidedness. .... Bonhoeffer was firmly convinced that 'this side' must be fully related to, and permeated by, Christian love, and that the Christian must be prepared, if necessary, to offer his life for this. Thus all kinds of secular totalitarianism which force man to cast aside his religious and moral obligations to God and subordinate the laws of justice and morality to the State are incompatible with his conception of life. ....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. (24, p.24)

Bonhoeffer was able, because he held such strong convictions on the responsibility of the church, to enter fully into the struggle against the National Socialist regime. However he entered the struggle from a firm theological position. For Bonhoeffer (and men like Barth, Paul Schneider and Martin Niemoller) all action in these challenging years of the thirties and forties sprang from a theological basis which could justify a specific action.* The Christian faith was in no way adapted to the requirements of a secular world. Rather an attempt was made to interpret the Christian faith as a vital force within the concrete problems of the twentieth century historical situation. Practice must be grounded theologically was an overwhelming factor.

No-one reading a volume like the recently published I knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer can fail to be impressed by the qualities which Bonhoeffer's associates detected in his personality make-up: patriotism, devotion to Christ,

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*E.H. Robertson's Christians against Hitler (S.C.M. Press, London, 1962) gives an invaluable account of the resistance of the German Confessing Church and others against the Nazi regime.

the desire for genuine moral responsibility and a love for God's world. With such a personality, we shall not be surprised to see that political and social developments in his own country and throughout the world played a decisive part in the form and development of Bonhoeffer's theological writings.

In his early dogmatic writings he had located Christ as taking concrete form in the church, among men. Coupled with this was the conviction that Christ had saved the world and Germany, as part of God's world, lay under the will of God. In the collection of reminiscences mentioned, Gerhard Jacobi, from 1933 to '39 President of the Confessing Church in Berlin, has observed:

> .... he (Bonhoeffer) was haunted by the question about the will of God hic et nunc. Here he looked far afield: he was not just concerned with Germany and National Socialism, but with all nations of the world with their needs and bewilderments, but also with the new things that had emerged from them. (29, p.73)

Wilhelm Niesel Speaks of Bonhoeffer being "stirred and sometimes overwhelmed by events". (29, p.147)

All the commentators on Bonhoeffer's thought have pointed to the influence of political, social and ecumenical involvement as being a significant factor (if not the only one) in shaping the development and direction of his theology. J. Macquarrie speaks of Bonhoeffer's theology which, as a result of coming out of the midst of the Church's struggle in Germany is "no abstract speculative affair, but one that impinges on the situations of real life". (39, p.330) In Word and Faith (21) Gerhard Ebeling writes:

> One cannot speak of Bonhoeffer's theology .... without recalling how it merges with his life. He sacrificed his academic career to enter into the church struggle. .... He did not by any means neglect secular things for the Christian faith, the life of this world for the Beyond, the humanities for the things of the soul, the work of critical theological reflexion in favour of practical action. On the contrary, the one thing experience taught him was, 'that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to believe'. He therefore laboured to overcome the fateful habit of thinking in two spheres which separates the world of religion from the rest of reality. (21, p.282, 283)

In a similar vein G. Leibholz states:

> It was his brotherly love of his fellow-men which .... caused Bonhoeffer to believe that it was not enough to follow Christ bey preaching, teaching and writing. No, he was in deadly earnest when he called for Christian action and self-sacrifice. (24, p.24)

Before we become over-enthusiastic about the personal involvement of Bonhoeffer's life as affecting the development of his thought, we must mention that a recent writer* (in a study of Bonhoeffer's Christology), while accepting the above thesis, has pointed to certain Christological developments as a complementary factor in the thought of The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together. These developments are located in Bonhoeffer's lectures on Christolog delivered in 1933. We shall discuss this presently. Now we must outline briefly the political scene in Germany which so profoundly affected Bonhoeffer.

The German Political and Social Scene †

In 1931 the extreme National Socialist party was the largest single party in the German Parliament. This party had developed because it exploited the mood and aspirations of the German people, aspirations which had grown as a result of what was considered to have been a humiliating settlement at the end of the first World War. Many Germans felt that the politicians of Germany had betrayed the nation by surrendering when victory was within their grasp. Moreover, the Politians' acceptance of the loss of German territory to Poland and Czechoslavakia along with the payment of 6,600 million pounds war reparations to the allies was rubbing salt into the wound. The mood of the German people was thus bitter and to add to the discontent came the harsh reality of wide-spread unemployment, rising prices and wages that would buy less and less. The effects of the great depression (1929-33) were particularly serious in Germany - growing unemployment, the collapse of the economy and the subsequent moral decline.

The democratic Weimar government established in 1919 had never been firmly

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*J.A. Phillips - The Form of Christ in the World (Collins, London, 1967)

†Sources used in this section: W.L. Shirer - The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (Pan Books, London, 1964), Elizabeth Wiskemann - Europe of the

established and there developed a growing demand for a strong and ruthless regime which would restore order and stability and undo the hated Treaty of Versailles (1919). There were two ways open to the Germans - either National Socialism or Bolshevism. Bolshevism, however, appeared destructive of all that Western Civilization had stood for, whereas National Socialism seemed strong, vigorous and able to handle the situation, particularly as directed by the person appointed German Chancellor in 1933 - Adolf Hitler. Elizabeth Wiskemann has written:

> In his propaganda Hitler promised everything to everyone. Now that it is easy to see what he intended, the credulity of his audiences seems difficult to explain. Originally it was due to his strange fascination as an orator, his appeal to the most primitive mass emotions in a country where national arrogance had been followed by humiliation and bewilderment in the early 1920s. (Op. cit. p.86)

Germans on the whole regarded Hitler's movement as salvation from decadence by means of discipline, efficiency (a characteristic of the German National personality) and exclusive nationalism. Many German Christians accepted National Socialism since on the surface it appeared to be in favour of the churches. On becoming Chancellor, Hitler "talked of completing the work of Martin Luther ....; he encouraged little 'brownshirts' to go to church; he proposed a national bishop". (12, p.7) E.H. Robertson gives two examples of the extreme support which Hitler received from German Christians. The first is a piece of prose which was to be learnt in school and should probably be dated 1934.

> As Jesus set men free from sin and hell, so Hitler rescued the German people from destruction. Both Jesus and Hitler were persecuted; but, while Jesus was crucified, Hitler was exalted as Chancellor. While the disciples of Jesus betrayed their master and left him in distress, the 16 friends of Hitler stood by him. The Apostles completed the work of their Lord. We hope that Hitler may lead his work to completion. Jesus built for heaven; Hitler, for the German earth. (20, p.18)

Dictators (Collins, London, 1966), M.N. Duffy - The 20th Century (Blackwell, Oxford, 1964), H.L. Peacock - A History of Modern Europe (Heinemann, London, 1958), A. Bullock - Hitler, a study in Tyranny (Penguin Books, 1966)

About the same time or a little earlier, a pamphlet was circulated in Witten/Ruhr. It contained the following:

> Without Hitler, there is no National Socialism; without National Socialism, there is no Third Reich; without the Third Reich, there is not German Christian movement, there is no German Evangelical Church. (20, 18)

The German Christians were seen to be adopting National Socialism as part of their creed because National Socialism was apparently adopting the church. At the end of 1933 there was announced Dr. Krause's four articles of faith for the 'German People's Church': *

1. A truly German Christianity is grounded in one race, one God, one faith.
2. The revelation of God is to a people rooted in blood and soil.
3. Rejecting all that is foreign in our faith, we stand firm on the basis of a hero-Saviour and German righteousness, as it is written in our hearts and declared by the great Leader of our spirit in word and deed.
4. Service to our race is service to our God, and true worship.

(20, p.24)

Here we see National Socialism moulding Christian teaching into heresy. However not all German Christians supported Hitler's moves towards the church. As a result the Protestant Church in Germany became divided into the German Church (supporters of the Nazis) and the Confessing Church which wished the National Socialists not to interfere in Church matters. Bonhoeffer became a leader in the Confessing Church but he directed opposition against the Nazis on a theological, not a political, basis. The 'Barmen Declaration' became the charter under which 2,000 parishes resisted all attempts to allow the essential elements in the Christian faith to be perverted. E.H. Robertson, writing of this resistance, states:

> It was a resistance, directed in the first place, not

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*See 20, p.21-7 - 'The Birth of a Heresy', particularly Rev. Hermann Gruner's six theses (p.25-6), published in March 1934. These show the German Christian movement identifying completely with National Socialism. In the theses we find such statements as: "It is because of Hitler that Christ, God the helper and redeemer, has become effective among us. .... Hitler is the way of the Spirit and the Will of God for the German people to enter the Church of Christ. .... The State is God's agent".

against National Socialism, but against the teaching of the German Christians. The greatest single issue was not the treatment of Jews, but the attempt to exclude those of the Jewish race from membership of the Church. (20, p.12)

The call to resistance was to be the response of the church to obey the Word of God as it was understood in the Bible. Bonhoeffer insisted that the Barmen Declaration based on the teaching of the Bible, along with the Dahlem, should be the guides for the action of the Confessing Church.* It is not surprising that Bonhoeffer's thought during these years was devoted to the theological interpretation of the Bible as the book of the Confessing Church. As far as Bonhoeffer was concerned St. Cyprian's dictum : 'Extra ecclesiam nulla salus' (outside the church there is no salvation) meant that whoever knowingly separates himself from the Confessing Church in Germany separates himself from salvation.

John D. Godsey summarizes Bonhoeffer's attitude during the German Church struggle in 8 statements. These are worthy to be quoted in full:

1. The Kingdom of God on earth assumes form in the church and in the state.

2. Church and state are separate, in that each performs a different function within the divine economy, but are necessarily interrelated, in that one cannot properly exist without the other.

3. The German Church Struggle arose when the Nazi state attempted to "co-ordinate" the Evangelical Church; therefore, it was not essentially directed against the Nazi state as such, but against the state's interference in the life of the church.

4. By interfering with the life and work of the church, the state is denying its own essence as a state, for the state has the God-given task of preserving order, so that the church may proclaim the gospel.

5. The church can have but one Lord; therefore, the German Christians, who have accepted the lordship of the Nazi state, have expelled themselves from the church and have thereby relinquished all fellowship.

6. The attack on the church from outside has led to a state of confession in which church order is no longer adiaphorous, but a matter of

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*For details of the drafting and content of the Barmen Declaration, see 20, p.43-52. W.L. Shirer (Op. cit. p.291-296) 'The Persecution of the Christian Churches'. See also E.H. Robertson's introduction to 26, p.15, 23. Cf. 'The leader and the Individual in the Younger Generation' (9, p.190-204), Bonhoeffer's correspondence with Barth (9, p.204-7) and 'The Church and the Jewish Question' (9, p.221-9) where Bonhoeffer states the thological objections to the Aryan Clauses

confession. Therefore, there can be no obedience to or relationship with any church organs established by the state, but only with the organs established by the church itself.

7. The church must never become so preoccupied with its "strange work" of deciding its limits and fighting about church order that it neglects its "proper work" of proclaiming the gospel and building up the Christian community.

8. The church struggle can end only when the state ceases its interference in the life of the church, i.e., when the state carries out its proper function as state and allows the church to be the church. (13, p.118) *

Although we are perhaps correct to consider Bonhoeffer as first and foremost a dogmatic theologian, we must never forget that he was also a very conscientious Lutheran pastor and cared deeply for any people who came under his pastoral care. In identifying with the cause of the German Confessing Church, he was satisfying a genuine yearning for the pastoral ministry. Also he did not enter the church struggle as an untried pastor. Immediately after completing his theological studies at Tubingen and Berlin, he went to Spain (in 1928) as assistant minister to the German-speaking congregation in Barcelona. There can be little doubt that the young Bonhoeffer gained a great deal of satisfaction and insight from this experience. A letter to Helmut Rossler, dated 7th August reveals this:

> .... it is quite a remarkable experience for one to see work and life really coming together - a synthesis which we all looked for in our student days, but hardly managed to find; really to live one life and not two, or rather half a life. It gives the work value and the worker an objectivity, a recognition of his own limitations, such as can only be gained in real life.
>
> I'm getting to know new people every day; here one meets people as they are, away from the masquerade of the 'Christian world', people with passions, criminal types, little people with little ambitions, little desires and little sins, all in all people who feel homeless in both senses of the word, who loosen up if one talks to them in a friendly way, real people; I can only say that I have gained the impression that it is just these people who are

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*See Bonhoeffer's essay 'What is the Church?' (9, p.153-7) and J. Godsey's account of 'The German Church Struggle' (13, p.107-117) which discusses specifically the essays which reveal Bonhoeffer's appraoch to the church/state problem.

> much more under grace than under wrath, and that it is the Christian world which is more under wrath than under grace. (9, p.37)

In 1931 when Bonhoeffer began lecturing at Berlin University, he continued his pastoral work in a tough suburb of the city. Here he prepared 50 boys for confirmation. He lived in the same neighbourhood as the boys, visited their homes and met their working-class parents. He approached this task as a real challenge. In a letter to Erwin Sutz (dated 25th December, 1931) he wrote:

> It is about the most hectic part of Berlin, with the most difficult social and political conditions. At the beginning the young men behaved like mad things, so that for the first time I had real problems of discipline. But what helped most was telling them quite simple biblical stuff with great emphasis, particularly eschatological passages. Now there is absolute quiet, the young men see to that themselves, so I need no longer fear the fate of my predecessor whom they quite literally worried to death. Recently I was out with some of them for two days; another group is coming tomorrow. We've all enjoyed this being together. (9, p.140)*

Bonhoeffer came to London in the closing months of 1933 to become pastor of two German-speaking congregations. He was based at Sydenham. In this ministry he not only came into contact with ordinary men and women - not necessarily Christian - and experienced their way of life and their way of thought, but he also established important ecumenical contacts for his work in the Confessing Church.†

These pastoral experiences, along with his first-hand knowledge of the American socially minded Christianity (discussed above) profoundly influenced the direction of Bonhoeffer's theological concern and methodology. However, even before Bonhoeffer went to London his theological emphasis was shifting from dogmatics to simple Biblical exegesis, and he was becoming more and more concerned with the ethical demands of the New Testament and what it means to

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*Bonhoeffer was faced with the problem of the relevance of the Christian faith in such a demanding pastoral situation. Consequently he drafted a New Catechism (9, p.141-9). See also Bonhoeffer's further correspondence with Erwin Sutz - a letter dated 26th February, 1932 (9, p.149-152)

† See particularly the extensive exchange of letters with Dr. G.K.A. Bell, bishop of Chichester. (9, p.254-260 and p.265-278)

be a disciple of Christ. We can perhaps speak of Bonhoeffer's concern for 'applied' or 'pastoral' theology.

J.A. Phillip's approach to the question of the Development in Bonhoeffer's Theology

We must now return to consider J.A. Phillip's criticism of what he calls the "Chronological-biographical-bibliographical" organization* (27, p.22) as a solution to the development of Bonhoeffer's thought. He states:

> It is certain .... that although biographical and chronological organization can be a useful tool for organizing and interpreting Bonhoeffer's theology, it cannot relieve us of the task of a more critical investigation to determine the reasons for any shifts or breaks in his thought. (27, p.22)

Phillips argues persuasively that while factors in both church and state may have influenced the direction and form of Bonhoeffer's theology, we must also pay attention to "Bonhoeffer's freedom from time and place and circumstance". (27, p.23) Phillips thus pleads for an interpretation of Bonhoeffer's theology which strives to maintain his freedom from the events of his life and of the time in which he lived. Phillips claims that although Bonhoeffer's theological development coincided with the church struggle in Germany, the ideas expressed during these years should be understood against the background of his developing Christology. The Christology of The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together is one that is moving away from that firmly held in Act and Being and Sanctorum Communio - viz. ecclesiology existing within Christology. Phillips locates the emerging new Christology in the series of lectures devoted to this subject which Bonhoeffer delivered in 1933.

The central Christological theme of Bonhoeffer's earlier writings could perhaps be summed up in the phrase - "Christ existing as community" (in the church). However in the 1933 lectures on Christology (14) this early Christol-

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*J.D. Godsey (13) organizes Bonhoeffer's theological development along these lines. Note his usage of the terms 'Theological Foundation' (1906-'31), 'Theological Application' (1932-'39), and 'Theological Fragmentation' (1940-'45)

ogy is superceded by one which speaks of Christ as the "transcendent person". Because of the Confessing church struggle in the 1930s Bonhoeffer, according to Phillips, could not release his new Christology from a restricting ecclesiastical boundary. Thus the two Christologies are held in tension during this period.*

c We shall now briefly outline several of the themes in the Christology lectures.

1. Bonhoeffer will only ask the question who? of Christ, and not how? He is not prepared to find a category for Christ. He locates Christ in Word, Sacrament and Church. This is consistent with what he had written in Act and Being and Sanctorum Communio; Christ exists as the church and the church is "the community of revelation" where Christ is fully understood.

2. Christ is the "transcendent person" - the mediator at the border of my experience, where he gives meaning to my existence. It was to this notion of the relationship of the mediator and the individual that Bonhoeffer was to attach his plea for genuine discipleship, in the sense of an obedient following of Christ and an exclusive attachment to him

3. A dominant theme is Christ at the centre of history and giving it meaning, purpose and hope. Coupled with this is the picture of Christ at the heart of nature. Bonhoeffer is now moving beyond the concept of "Christ

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*A Similar thesis to that argued by J.A. Phillips is expressed by Eberhard Bethge, a contemporary and close associatedof Bonhoeffer. In his essay in World Come of Age (40, p.22ff.) we find the following statements:
" .... this book (The Cost of Discipleship) and what it stands for is not simply the result of 1933 .... originally and essentially it answered earlier questions". (40, p.49)
" .... the turn of the theme of the second period is not the result of the tremendous concentration caused by the church struggle. Though the book was published only in autumn 1937, its theme emerges fully much earlier and is rooted in Bonhoeffer's own theological foundations. .... The Cost of Discipleship is important because it represents Bonhoeffer's first great authentic unfolding of the christological concept". (40, p.51)
However in his organization and exposition of Bonhoeffer's theology, Bethge does not underestimate the influence of the historical scene and the American visit.

existing as the Church" to Christ as the centre and boundary of my existence, history and nature.

Because of the critical times in Germany during the 1930s, it is interesting to observe Bonhoeffer's remarks about the church-state relationship which are dated as early as 1933. In the section 'Christ as the Centre of History' (14, p.63ff.) Bonhoeffer writes:

> The church proves its central place not by putting itself or allowing itself to be put visibly in the centre of the state, by becoming, say, a state church. It does not prove its relationship to the state by its visible position in the sphere of the state. It is the hidden meaning and promise of the state; it judges and justifies the state in its nature. The nature of the state is to bring a people nearer to its fulfilment by an action which creates law and order. The messianic claim secretly indwells the idea of the state's creating order.
>
> Just as the church is the centre of the state, so too it is its boundary. It is the boundary of the state in that with the cross it proclaims the break-up of all human orders. Just as it knows and believes that the law was fulfilled in the cross, so too it also believes that the order of the state was fulfilled in it too. The church does not institute a new law with this knowledge of the cross and the preaching of it, according to which the state has to act, but it proclaims that by God's intervention in history and his death through history the order of the state has finally been broken up and dissolved, yet at the same time ultimately affirmed and fulfilled. .....
>
> Christ is present to us in a double form, as church and as state. But this is true only for us, who receive him as Word and sacrament and community, for us, who, after the cross, must see the state in the light of Christ. .....
>
> Christ as the centre of history is the mediator between the state and God, in the form of the church. Similarly, as the centre of history he is the mediator between this church and God. For he is also the centre of this church, and only because he is can it be the centre of history.
>
> (14, p.65, 66)*

Here is the theological understanding of the church-state relationship which lay behind Bonhoeffer's own actions against the Nazi regime which he considered diabolical.

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*See also J. Pelikan's essay on Bonhoeffer's Christology (15, p.154-5)

c. The form of the writings produced during 1933 to 1939

We have already observed the contrast in style when we compared the pre- and post-1933 writings. (See Part 3, section a.) Bonhoeffer had begun his academic career as a dogmatic theologian but when he was forced to give up his academic position he turned to the exposition of Holy Scripture. This was following the tradition of the great Protestant Reformers, Luther and Calvin.*

However Bonhoeffer wished to interpret Scripture in a very particular way and with certain definite presuppositions. These must be our concern now.

Martin E. Marty in his introduction to Walter Harrelson's essay on 'Bonhoeffer and the Bible' (15, p.113) claims that "Bonhoeffer should be thought of as a homily maker and not an exegete at all". This is certainly a defensible claim.

Since the dawn of literary and source criticism in Biblical study, any theologian who claims to be an exegete of Scripture is expected to consider in his study such matters as the historical setting of the text, textual corruptions and possible emendations, the comparison with possible parallels and comparison with extant extra-Biblical material where relevant. Bonhoeffer cannot have been unaware of these considerations because of his student days at Berlin University.† However these matters receive no consideration in his own Biblical studies; "he shows no interest in literary and historical questions" (27, p.84). From the test Bonhoeffer produces an effective challenge to Christians to respond to the unconditional demands and absolute

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*Cf. T.H.L. Parker - Portrait of Calvin (S.C.M. Press, London, 1954) "The basis of Calvin's theology is the belief that through the Bible alone can God be known in His wholeness as the Creator, Redeemer and Lord of the world. He is not so discernible in any other place - in the creation, or in man's conscience, or in the course of history and experience". (p.51)
Also H.H. Kramm - The Theology of Martin Luther (Clarke, 1947) where the author states that for Luther all parts of canonical books refer to Christ. (p.113)

† At Berlin his teachers had included Adolf Deissmann, Ernst Sellin and Harnack.

commitment of discipleship. We must beware of criticising Bonhoeffer for failing to be something (a critical Biblical exegete) which he never set out to be.

We shall now summarize the characteristics of Bonhoeffer's Biblical exposition* (we shall no longer use the term 'exegesis'). Throughout the summary we shall be aware that his method is determined by an intention to allow the Biblical word to speak of God, man and the world to the contemporary church and world.

1. Literary, etymological and historical questions are of little importance; Bonhoeffer is more interested in the hearing and in the obeying of the Word of God by contemporary man. Phillips claims that this was Bonhoeffer's attempt to concretize his developing Christology†. The Bible must then bring concrete demands to the church. This is clearly stated by Bonhoeffer in his introduction to Creation and Fall where he writes:

> The Bible is nothing but the book upon which the Church stands. This is its essential nature, or it is nothing. Therefore the Scriptures need to be read and proclaimed wholly from the viewpoint of the end. .....
> Theological interpretation accepts the Bible as the book of the Church and interprets it as such. (41, p.8)

2. The entire Bible is to be interpreted Christologically✗. If the Bible is the book of the Church then it must continually be interpreted through the Lord of the Church - Christ. For Bonhoeffer Christ reveals himself through the whole Bible. The Christian turns to the Bible because Christ addresses him through the very words of the text. He insists that Christ is to be found in the Old Testament as well as the New.

3. This Christological approach forces Bonhoeffer to see the whole of Scripture as a unity. It contained a single message having its beginning and end in Christ. Also for him, God is the one God in the whole of Scripture.

4. Perhaps Bonhoeffer is encouraging criticism of his own method when

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*For a detailed discussion - See 15, p.115-119 and 27, p.94ff. Also the valuable notes in 27, p.274-278.

†Cf. Bonhoeffer's own term - 'concretion of proclamation'. See 27, p.85

✗Cf. Bonhoeffer's theological interpretation in Creation and Fall (41) and J. Godsey's exposition of Bonhoeffer's 'The Prayer Book of the Bible' (13, p.189-194) and 'King David' (13, p.143-150)

he desires that the interpreter of the Bible must bring no a priori set of ideas or conceptions to his aid in understanding the Biblical message*. One rather opens the Bible and receives a simple and direct answer demanding absolute obedience. No doubt Bonhoeffer was here speaking from a constant meditation on the Bible in his own devotional life. It is significant that Bible meditation had a very high position in the activities of Bonhoeffer's Theological Seminary at Finkenwalde.

Writing on Bonhoeffer's approach to the Bible and its most outstanding product, The Cost of Discipleship, J.A. Phillips correctly detects Christology as its foundation.

> This 'concretion of the proclamation' had a Christological centre, and it was the marriage of his Christological thought to his strict doctrine of scripture which gave The Cost of Discipleship its remarkable freedom and excitement, and kept the work from a primitive, fanatic biblicism.
> (27, p.94)

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*The critique of Bonhoeffer's method of 'theological interpretation' can be summarized briefly:

1. The Christological interpretation, particularly of passages of the O.T. seems unnecessary and produces a rather forced, naive and to some extent arbitrary exegesis. Messianic passages in the O.T. can be meaningfully interpreted Christologically but Bonhoeffer was mistaken to attempt to force all O.T. material into this mould.

2. Bonhoeffer is failing to do what he set out to do - viz. to bring no presuppositions to the Biblical text. It could be argued that his Christological emphasis is itself one of these very presuppositions. He himself violates the rules he sets down. Perhaps his understanding of the Sermon on the Mount in The Cost of Discipleship is dominated by his own policy of what should be the policy and action of the Confessing Church during the critical years of the 1930s.

3. W. Harrelson has detected a measure of inconsistency in Bonhoeffer's method (15, p.120). He finds in Creation and Fall (41) a foundation of existential theology.

See particularly 15, p.120-122 and p.125-6

d. The basic Themes of the Writings of 1933-9

This is the point at which to look at the writings of 1933-9 and attempt to expose the basic themes which emerge in Bonhoeffer's particular approach to Scripture. We must bear in mind that the themes emerged against the background of the Confessing Church struggle and the spread of heresy by National Socialism. Bonhoeffer relentlessly spoke to the German nation of his age in a style which was immediately understood. He wished to show the relationship of Christology and Discipleship as they appear in Scripture.

Bethge rightly calls this period of Bonhoeffer's thought as the 'affirmation' or 'assertion' of the costly nature of the Christian message. He writes:

> Bonhoeffer's quests were always vehemently on the way towards positive discoveries which he was quick to formulate in destructive criticism as well as in demanding practical steps. (40, p.44)

J.A. Phillips, commenting on this same period, detects an identical concern:

> Bonhoeffer could never be satisfied for long with thinking in the abstract. (27, p.95)

Bonhoeffer's concern was to show how Christ, who stands at the border of the individual's experience and gives it meaning,* is present concretely in Scripture and is very relevant to the life of the church. What is found in Scripture must for Bonhoeffer be translated into action.

> If we are to believe, we must obey a concrete command. Without this preliminary step of obedience, our faith will only be pious humbug, and lead us to the grace which is not costly. (24, p.55)

This call to discipleship is for Bonhoeffer no escape into pietism or monasticism (as his own life clearly demonstrates), even when the powers of the world appear well nigh overwhelming. It is rather a call to fight; it may cost

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*Cf. Bonhoeffer's Christology (14, p.62-3)

a man his life.*

To assert the intimate contact of Christ to the individual members of the church (here the German Confessing Church), Bonhoeffer followed Luther's Tropological interpretation of Scripture.† This approach "stressed the bearing of scripture upon the individual Christian through the action of Christ". (27, p.97-8) There is thus an intimate contact between Christ and the words of Scripture (this gives them authority) and between Christ and the individual in whom Christ initiates faith. Phillips sums this up well when he writes:

> Through the scriptures, Christ comes to dwell in the individual by faith (in ipsa fide Christus adest), so that the individual shares in the victories× and is united with him 'even more closely than the husband is coupled with his wife'. (27, p.98)

Thus it follows that the Christian, in faith, acknowledges the authority of the scriptures and yields to their demands, knowing that the power to fulfil the demands will be given. The Christian approaches Christ as he exposes his life to the concrete demands of scripture. In The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together the themes of Christ, Discipleship and the interpretation of scripture are very closely woven together. This is Bonhoeffer's quest for a concrete expression of Christology.

The Cost of Discipleship

From what we have already written, it is obvious that it would be indefensible to categorize this work as a piece of Biblical fundamentalism. Rather it comprises a challenge to the Christian Church of Bonhoeffer's day (a church in a critical historical setting) to respond to Christ and his exclusive claim as Lord of the Church. Bonhoeffer attempts to show "what is his (The living Christ's) will for us to-day .... What Jesus Christ himself wants of us". (24, p.29) With such an objective, we shall not be surprised that during this

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*Cf. Bonhoeffer's concept of Christ as the 'humiliated one' (14, p.110ff.)

†See 27, p.97-8

×From a reading of The Cost of Discipleship, we could perhaps add that the individual also shares in the sufferings of Christ. Cf. 24, p.77

period the central themes of the Christian gospel - grace, faith, sanctification and obedience (discipleship) - assume a dominant position. According to Bonhoeffer, these themes have either been lost or misunderstood and thus have become irrelevant to life. The gospel only appeals to the pious.

The work under discussion is divided into two parts:

1. An exposition of the relationship between discipleship and grace (an interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, St. Matthew ch. 5-7), and

2. An attempt to show the connection between discipleship and the life of the contemporary church to which Bonhoeffer himself was whole-heartedly committed. Throughout is a stinging challenge to the readers. Every page contains some striking passage demanding commitment:

> Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ. It remains an abstract idea, a myth which has a place for the Fatherhood of God but omits Christ as the living Son. (24, p.50)

And again when he speaks of the disciple's intimate union with the life of Christ and his death as the mediator:

> The cross means sharing in the sufferings of Christ to the last and to the fullest. Only a man thus totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross. The cross is there, right from the beginning, he has only to pick it up; there is no need for him to go out and look for a cross for himself, no need for him deliberately to run after suffering. .... Each must endure his alloted share of suffering and rejection.... The cross is laid on every Christian.... The wounds and scars he (the Christian) receives in the fray are living tokens of this participation in the cross of his Lord. (24, p.78, 79)

Discipleship, Cheap and Costly Grace

Throughout The Cost of Discipleship Bonhoeffer is reinterpreting the great themes of St. Paul's theology.* The Christian is justified by and in Christ and his sins are forgiven. This is by grace (a free gift) of God which alone

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* See the index of The Cost of Discipleship for such terms as cross, grace, forgiveness, justification, righteousness and sanctification.

can save because man is unable to stand before God, however righteous his works may be. Man is always seeking his own interests.* Luther had persistently taught that central in the Christian gospel was justification "sola fide, sola gratia". Bonhoeffer in no way limits this concept but attempts to give it a concreteness and meaning within the lives of individual Christians and it could be claimed that for Bonhoeffer faith is equivalent to discipleship. The ethical life, for Bonhoeffer, springs from faith in Christ.

Because grace (the undeserved gift of God in Christ, received by faith alone) is the source of the Christian life, Bonhoeffer, early in this work mounts a polemic against what he terms 'cheap grace'†. He claims that the misunderstanding of the meaning of grace is the cause of the collapse of organized religion in Germany. By 'cheap grace' he meant:

> .... grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system.✗ It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian 'conception' of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins. The church which holds the correct doctrine of Grace has, it is supposed, ipso facto a part in that grace. In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God. (24, p.35)

'Cheap grace' is therefore grace without the centrality of Christ and his call to committed discipleship; 'costly grace', on the other hand, challenges the individual to respond to the Word of God in obedience and this is true life. The call of Jesus is grace and commandment in one. The call is adherence to Christ who is the only mediator, not only between God and man, but between man

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*Cf. Bonhoeffer's use of Luther's concept - "cor curvum in se" - in Act and Being (22, pp.32, 47, 89, 156)

† See The Cost of Discipleship §24, p.35-49)

✗ This is reminiscent of S. Kierkegaard who in his day was aware that religious belief had become merely a matter of objective faith - the sum of doctrinal propositions ("a little system, if not quite as good as the Hegelian"). We could perhaps equate Bonhoeffer's 'costly grace' with Kierkegaard's "deep inward movements; truth which edifies". See P.L. Holmer's introduction to Kierkegaard's Edifying Discourses (Harpter Torchbooks, 1958)

and reality.*

In contrast to cheap grace, Bonhoeffer writes:

> Discipleship means adherence to Christ and .... 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. (24, p.50)

And a little later:

> Because the Son of God became Man, because he is the Mediator, for that reason alone the only true relation we can have with him is to follow him. 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. Only the Mediator, the God-Man, can call men to follow him. (24, p.50)

For Bonhoeffer, faith and grace must be interpreted as discipleship and it is only then that grace becomes what it ought to be - 'costly grace'. Here it is costly because the disciple is in intimate contact with the reconciling work of God in Christ which was performed at a great price. Bonhoeffer writes:

> Such grace is <u>costly</u> because it calls us to follow, and it is <u>grace</u> because it calls us to follow <u>Jesus Christ</u>. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.... costly grace is the Incarnation of God. (24, p.37)

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*Cf. Bonhoeffer's basis for this claim in his <u>Christology</u> (14, p.61-66), the section devoted to Christ as the centre of human existence, history and the Mediator between God and nature.

†Cf. Bonhoeffer's claim in <u>Act and Being</u> (22, p.108ff.) that the Christian revelation <u>cannot</u> be understood as the sum of doctrinal propositions, or religious experience or the preserve of an institution, since this allocated Christ a place within a human system and in this process the centrality of revelation in Christ was lost.
We must also bear in mind Bonhoeffer's particular understanding of human person being which he had established in <u>Sanctorum Communio</u>. From this understanding, he realizes that all doctrinal systems (no matter how valid) are rational, abstract, theoretical and impersonal, and as such are unable to assume a contingent relationship with human personality. The personal can only respond to the personal. See also E. Bethge's essay - 40, p.55-6

This call to discipleship is contemporary and personal; it is as immediate as the call to Christ's first disciples. (24, p.201) However, the individual disciple lives as a unit within a social context - the Church.

> No one can become a new man except by entering the Church, and becoming a member of the Body of Christ. It is impossible to become a new man as a solitary individual. The new man means more than the individual believer after he has been justified and sanctified. It means the Church, the Body of Christ, in fact it means Christ himself.
>
> Through the Spirit, the crucified and risen Lord exists as the Church, as the new man. (24, p.218)

Although individual discipleship and individualism exclude each other, the individual is not allowed to hide in the multitude. The living Christ (by his Holy Spirit active in the Church) is equally present to the individual and the whole body of the church through the words of scripture and in the Sacraments.* The disciple must simply approach the scriptures as one approaches Christ himself. This is the evangelical understanding of scripture. So he writes:

> By eliminating simple obedience on principle, we drift into an unevangelical interpretation of the Bible. We take it for granted as we open the Bible that we have a key to its interpretation. But then the key we use would not be the living Christ, who is both Judge and Saviour, and our use of this key no longer depends on the will of the living Holy Spirit alone. The key we use is a general doctrine of grace which we can apply as we will. The problem of discipleship then becomes a problem of exegesis as well. (24, p.73)

Through the living words of scripture, Christ brings men into contact with himself by his call and delivers them from all direct contact with the world. Through the participation of the disciple in Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ) and Christ in him, the words of scripture become the inspiration for the life of discipleship. We could perhaps speak of a complete identification of Christ and the disciple or at least a transformation of human personality in Christ. Bonhoeffer defines the expression "Christ dwelling in our hearts" in a manner which resembles his concept of "Christ existing as community" as established

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*Cf. Luther's "Finitum capax infiniti". See H.H. Kramm (38, p.52) and M.E. Marty (15, p.13) See also above Part 1 section c. and our discussion of Bonhoeffer's understanding of the Sacraments - Part 2 section c.

in Sanctorum Communio.

> His life (Christ's) on earth is not finished yet, for he continues to live in the lives of his followers. Indeed it is wrong to speak of the Christian life: we should speak rather of Christ living in us. Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified and glorified, has entered my life and taken charge. .... The Holy Trinity himself has made his dwelling in the Christian heart, filling his whole being, and transforming him into the divine image. Christ, incarnate, crucified and glorified is formed in every Christian soul, for all are members of his Body, the Church. The Church bears the human form, the form of Christ in his death and resurrection. The Church in the first place is his image, and through the Church all her members have been refashioned in his image too. In the Body of Christ we are become 'like Christ'. (24, p.274)

Discipleship and the Way of the Cross

Because the life of the Christian disciple is 'conformation' to the living presence of Christ, Bonhoeffer speaks of the disciple sharing in the humiliation and suffering of Christ: *

> Jesus must ..... make it clear beyond all doubt that the 'must' of suffering applies to his disciples no less than

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*Cf. In Bonhoeffer's lectures on Christology (14, pp.110-118) the concept of Christ as the Humiliated and the Exalted One.
Also Temptation (42, pp.35-40) where Bonhoeffer writes, " ... the Christian recognizes in his suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ, first, the devil, and his temptation to fall from Christ; second, the joy, to be allowed to suffer for Christ; Third, the judgement of God at the house of God. He knows that he suffers 'according to the will of God' (1 Peter 4 v.19) and, in the fellowship of the cross, he grasps the grace of God. (42, p.40)
See also 'The Ministry of Bearing' in Bonhoeffer's Life Together (25, p.90ff.) "The Christian .... must bear the burden of a brother. He must suffer and endure the brother. It is only when he is a burden that another person is really a brother and not merely an object to be manipulated. ..... God verily bore the burden of men in the body of Jesus Christ. ..... It is the law of Christ that was fulfilled in the Cross. And Christians must share in this law. They must suffer their brethren .... (25, p.90)

> to himself. Just as Christ is Christ only in virtue of his suffering and rejection, so the disciple is a disciple only in so far as he shares his Lord's suffering and rejection and crucifixion. Discipleship means adherence to the person of Jesus, and therefore submission to the law of Christ which is the law of the cross. (24, p.77)

This is a constant theme in The Cost of Discipleship where Bonhoeffer uses such expressions as 'the community of the cross', 'people under the cross', 'the calling of the cross', 'the community of the crucified' and 'the disciple's daily dying in the power of the death which Christ died once and for all'. Discipleship means the cross - it is not an accidental tragedy but a necessary suffering which arises from a genuine allegiance to Christ, the humiliated one. It is suffering and rejection for the sake of Christ alone. In this way the disciples become members of the 'community of the cross', 'the people of the Mediator', 'the people under the cross'.

Just as Christ's suffering and rejection were directed towards the salvation of men in the world, so the life of contemporary Christians is in a way vicarious, when the disciples share in the redemptive work and suffering of Christ. Christ allows his disciples to share the fruits of his passion by their bearing the burdens of others and by participation in the work of forgiving men their sins. Thus he writes:

> Suffering has to be endured in order that it may pass away. Either the world must bear the whole burden and collapse beneath it, or it must fall on Christ to be overcome in him. He therefore suffers vicariously for the world. His is the only suffering which has redemptive efficacy. But the church knows that the world is still seeking for someone to bear its sufferings, and so, as it follows Christ, suffering becomes the church's lot too and bearing it, it is borne up by Christ. As it follows him beneath the cross, the Church stands before God as the representative of the world. For God is a God who bears. (24, p.81-2)

Discipleship and the Church

It is characteristic that Bonhoeffer should attempt to interpret his theme of discipleship within the context of 'churchly thinking'* which streeses the concrete presence of the risen and glorified Christ with his Body, the Church. In this context Christ works among his contemporary disciples. For Bonhoeffer, Christ as the ground of salvation and justification exists within the Church and the disciples participate in this existence supremely in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. As Bonhoeffer works through this theme we are never far from his ideal vision of the church in Sanctorum Communio.

In Baptism an offer is made by Christ to men (similar to the 'follow me' offered to the first disciples) by which they become Christ's own possession. Baptism means the dying of the old man (we are baptized into Jesus Christ) and new life in the fellowship of Christ, the fellowship of the cross. Bonhoeffer reiterates his Christus-praesens-ecclesiology and his vision of the resurrected Lord as Head of his Church when he claims that

> the baptized can still live in his bodily presence and enjoy communion with him. So far from impoverishing them his departure brings a new gift. The disciples enjoyed exactly the same bodily communion as is available for us to-day, nay rather, our communion with him is richer and more assured than it was for them, for the communion and presence which we have is that of the glorified Lord. †
> (24, p.212)

To be baptized into the Church, for Bonhoeffer, is to be in the real presence of Christ since "We should think of the Church not as an institution, but as a person, though of course a person in a unique sense". (24, p.217) The disciples of Christ do not merely participate in his teaching but also in his Body.

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*Cf. The Cost of Discipleship (24, pp.205-275)

†Cf. the rich doctrine of the Holy Spirit in The Cost of Discipleship (24, pp.208ff. p.218, 219). Also Bonhoeffer's understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church in Sanctorum Communio - above Part 2 section c.

The Lord's Supper sustains the fellowship (κοινωνία) in the body of Christ. Bonhoeffer writes that "the Lord's Supper fosters and sustains our fellowship and communion in that Body" and "through it the bodily fellowship with the other members of his Body. Thus through the gift of his Body we become one body with him". (24, p.215, 226)

The disciples who constitute the body of Christ occupy space on earth (although they are not of this world) and are called to serve in brotherly love under worldly authorities. The picture of the suffering Lord appears when Bonhoeffer asserts that the disciples may have to suffer in the world because like Christ they are God's sanctuary in the world.

After visiting the Anglican religious communities at Mirfield and Kelham, Bonhoeffer wrote Life Together*, a book which gives practical guidance to those who wish to take their lives as Christians seriously. The theology and practical guidance are consistent with Bonhoeffer's concept of the church as it appears in Sanctorum Communio and the life of the genuine disciple in The Cost of Discipleship. In conclusion we shall list the dominant themes which emerge:

1. Christian community life is life centred in Christ - "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ".

2. It is life with Christ, present in scripture and sacrament, at its focal point. At the Finkelwalde seminary daily meditation on a passage of scripture was the rule. All the members of the community used "theological exegesis"† which made the scripture concrete and practical and thus relevant to the lives of the community.

3. The life of the community is a brotherhood (not an institution) - the members bear one another through Jesus Christ. This is clearly stated in

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* The type of Christian community life described in Life Together is the kind which was attempted at Bonhoeffer's Seminary at Finkelwalde, Pomerania during the late 1930s. The life at Finkelwalde is well described in I knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer (29) pp.107-111, 115, 132, 134, 152ff.

† See above for discussion of Bonhoeffer's usage of scripture which he termed "theological exegesis" or "theological interpretation" - Part 3 section c.

chapter 4 - 'Ministry'.

There is free oral confession of sins since the church lives by forgiveness and it is in confession that the breakthrough to community takes place. The ministry of the individual is for the whole community. The individual can offer Christ to the others since all live beneath the cross.

Part 4 Christology and Secularization - Bonhoeffer's Theology 1940-5

"The thing that keeps coming back to me is, what is Christianity, and indeed what is Christ, for us to-day?" (D. Bonhoeffer, 1944)

a. Introduction to the Theology of 1940-5

We have already claimed that it is impossible to understand Bonhoeffer's theology unless we see it against the background of German history in the 1930s.* Bonhoeffer possessed a sensitive and perceptive personality and he could not remain unaffected by the challenge of contemporary moral, social and political problems. He knew that he was called to live as a Christian in the twentieth century and he deliberately opened himself and his thought to the challenge of this very complex world. He was ready for a great heart-searching in order that he should know what to say about Christ to the world at this particular point in history.

The result of this heart-searching is Ethics (17) and Letters and Papers from Prison (16). Where we see Bonhoeffer breaking new ground in theological insight it will be insight gained through intimate involvement in the history of Germany during the years 1940 to 1945. He completely identified himself with the movement which demanded the overthrow of Hitler and National Socialism. Consequently the themes of responsibility and commitment to life in the secular are dominant during these years. We must however add that Christology still remains central in Bonhoeffer's theology. His problem throughout the two works is how the worldly life is subject to the rule of Christ. In the atmosphere of rigorous intellectual honesty Bonhoeffer wished to relate the themes of Secularization and Christology. His starting point was the Incarnation, not the world; for Bonhoeffer the relation of Christ to the world only

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*See above Part 3 section b.

existed in the fact of the reality of the Incarnation. In the closing chapters of The Cost of Discipleship the world appears to some extent to be an enemy of Christ and his Church:

> The ecclesia Christi, the disciple community, has been torn from the clutches of the world .... The community of the saints is barred off from the rest of the world by an unbreakable seal, awaiting its ultimate deliverance .... The separation of the church and the world from one another is the crusade which the church fights for the sanctuary of God on earth. (24, p.245, 253)

This was written in 1937 but three or four years later Bonhoeffer is willing to evaluate the world in more positive terms. The church now exists for the sake of the world. The task of the church is not to save her own life, it is to go out into the world, to be concerned about this world. In Ethics Bonhoeffer states his new position:

> No man can look with undivided vision at God and the world of reality so long as God and the world are torn asunder. Try as he may, he can only let his eyes wander distractedly from one to the other. But there is a place at which God and the cosmic reality are reconciled, a place at which God and man have become one. That and that alone is what enables man to set his eyes upon God and upon the world at the same time. This place does not lie somewhere out beyond reality in the realm of ideas. It lies in the midst of history as divine miracle. It lies in Jesus Christ, the Reconciler of the world .... Whoever sees Jesus Christ does indeed see God and the world in one. He can henceforward no longer see God without the world or the world without God. (17, p.8)

If Bonhoeffer was willing to explore unknown theological regions in his attempt to understand the world he was not willing to built on any other foundation than a Christologicaloone. In the same way the Christian cannot cast aside the Bible, strict discipline, prayer and faith in Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer's own spiritual life and pastoral duties in prison is proof of this. In prison Bonhoeffer saw more clearly that the Christian is called to live a life for others and for the world. Like Christ the Christian himself may be called to suffer at the hands of the world. Throughout these years Bonhoeffer remained acutely aware of the danger of false worldliness; andeasy alliance with current attitudes.

b. Biographical Outline - 1939-45

Since we have claimed the following:

1. there is a fusion of Bonhoeffer's thought and life, and

2. for Bonhoeffer faith in Christ must be related to life in the secular world, both in matters of state and public morality, it will be valuable to take a look at Bonhoeffer as he lived through the critical years 1939-45.

His anti-Nazi feelings and his patriotism caused a genuine tension in Bonhoeffer's efforts to act responsibly against a movement which he considered heretical and godless. However throughout these years he remained loyal to the anti-Nazi Barmen Declaration of 1934.*

A real conflict developed for Bonhoeffer in 1939 when his age group was due to be called up. He knew he could not serve in Hitler's armed forces and would be unable to take the oath. However he was concerned - not so much for himself - as for the struggling Confessing Church which might be labelled pacifist if he took a pacifist line. He explains his position in a letter to Bishop Bell of Chichester.

> I am thinking of leaving Germany sometime. The main reason is the compulsory military service.to which men of my age (1906) will be called up this year. It seems to me conscientiously impossible to noin in a war under 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 this point which would be regarded by the regime as typical of the hostility of our church towards the state.
>
> (25th March, 1939; 26, p.205-6)

The outcome was that Bonhoeffer went to America on 2nd June 1939 for an intended period of two or three years at the invitation of Henry Leiper. Bonhoeffer however remained unsure as to whether he had made the right decision in leaving Germany.† In the diary entries towards the end of June the determination to go home is clear, particularly when the newspapers report more

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* See 20, p.48-52 for details of 'The Barmen Declaration'

† See diary entry of 15th June 1939; 26, p.228-9

and more disturbing circumstances both in Germany and the rest of Europe.* It seems that isolated from the critical political movements in Germany, Bonhoeffer was more easily able to define his own role in the opposition to National Socialism. In America he was able to think out the proper relation between church and State. He did not accept that there was a sharp distinction between politics and religion. The direction of Bonhoeffer's thought is reflected in a diary entry of 29th June 1939:

> I feel it more and more difficult to understand how the principle of a separation of church and state fits in with the practice of the social, economic, organisational and political activity of the church. In any case, the separation of church and state does not result in the church continuing to apply itself to its own task; it is no guarantee against secularisation. Nowhere is the church more secularised than where it is separated in principle as it is here. This very separation can create an opposition, so that the church engages much more strongly in political and secular things. That is probably important for our decisions over there. (26, p.239)†

At the beginning of July Bonhoeffer was quite determined to voluntarily encounter the evils of the Nazi regime. He wrote to Reinhold Niebuhr:

> Sitting here in Dr. Coffin's garden I have had the time to think and to pray about my decision and that of my nation and to have God's will for me clarified. I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people. (26, p.246) ✕

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*Cf. Bonhoeffer's 'American Diary' - entries dated 18th June 1939 and 22nd June 1939; 26, p.231,232 & 235.

†Bonhoeffer's correspondence during June 1939 show evidence of Bonhoeffer's growing awareness that he must return to his home-land. See the letters to Dr. Leiper dated 15th & 19th June 1939; 26, p.242-246.

✕See also R. Niebuhr's personal reminiscinces in 29, p.165 and 'An imaginary Conversation' between Niebuhr and Bonhoeffer (26, p.265-280)

In The Devil with James Bond (Collins, Fontana 1967) Ann S. Boyd is impressed with the fact that Bonhoeffer was willing to live a full life in the midst of all the problems associated with the twentieth century. She pictures Bonhoeffer equipped with faith and courage ready to fight the political expediency of his time. (See p.107-119) She considers Bonhoeffer as a modern-day St. George with whom modern man could fruitfully identify.

Bonhoeffer was back in Berlin on 27th July. By this time the resistance movement had gained strength and the possibility of war was great since Britain had declared that she could not entertain any further territorial demands by Hitler. However in a demonstration of defiance Hitler's armies invaded Poland on 1st September 1939 and England and France declared war on September 3rd. The Confessing Church struggle now faded into the background and Bonhoeffer's Seminary was abandoned in March 1940 on the orders of the Gestapo. Restrictions were placed on Bonhoeffer's movements. Even since 1938 he had been forbidden to reside in Berlin but now he was ordered to give up his teaching, speaking in public and publishing. Bonhoeffer however was determined to take an active part in the organized political activity which was working for the complete overthrow of Hitler and Nazism. Apparently working on behalf of the Brethren Council of the Confessing Church, he became an agent in the underground resistance movement.

He obtained permission to travel abroad (to Switzerland in 1941 and to Sweden in 1942) in order to take part in discussions about the Ecumenical Movement but in this capacity he was in fact attempting to obtain foreign contacts who would assist in the overthrow of Hitler.* It was in the contemplation and execution of this task that the Ethics was produced. We shall not be surprised to see such themes as commitment, obedience and responsibility in this world occupy a central position. What he wrote in Ethics became the basis for Bonhoeffer's action since all authentic action for him had to be founded on rigorously tested moral and Christian convictions. He was constantly aware of the great tragedy of the German Church of his time which had accepted the false values of Hitlerism. Willem A. Visser't Hooft sees Bonhoeffer in correct perspective when he writes:

> To reject the political system of that time in theory, to reject it by withdrawing into a spiritual realm, was not enough for him. Such an attitude was schizophrenia, it meant that the challenge was not taken seriously, it meant just talk, not action. That in the first instance the Church fought for its own preservation, filled him with sorrow. In a situation where millions of men were threatened in their very existence, it was not a question of saving the Church. But it was mankind

*Cf. Bishop Bell's essay (29, p196-211)

that had to be saved. (29, p.193-4)

In the resistance movement Bonhoeffer was to come into contact with completely 'secular' men who were willing to suffer and die for their fellow men. The leaders of the resistance were the chief of German Intelligence, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, and his deputy, Major General Hans Oster. Their assistant was Hans von Dohnanyi, Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law. They found a post for Bonhoeffer in Munich and so as a secret official in Hitler's intelligence he received the kind of immunity which allowed him to visit Sweden in the attempt to gain British assistance in a plot on Hitler's life. He defended his participation in this way:

> It is not only my task to look after the victims of madmen who drive a motorcar in a crowded street, but to do all in my power to stop their driving at all. (24, p.22)

The Sweden visit took place in May 1942. On this visit Bonhoeffer contacted Bishop Bell of Chichester. Also present was Dr. Hans Schonfeld, research director of the W.C.C. at Geneva. Schonfeld informed Bell that there was a growing movement in both the Protestant and Catholic Churches for the removal of Hitler in the name of freedom and the right to practice a Christian life. Schonfeld wanted the Bishop to find out if the British would support this movement. This meeting took place in Stockholm on 29th May 1942.*

Bell then left Stockholm and after visiting Uppsala went to Sigtuna on an island lake some 30 miles north of Stockholm. It was here that he met his friend Bonhoeffer.† On Sunday 31st May Bell informed Bonhoeffer of his recent conversation with Schonfeld. Bell later wrote:

> Turning then to my conversation with Schonfeld I emphasized the suspicion with which my report would be met by the British Government when I got home. And I said that, while I understood the immense danger in which he stood, it would undoubtedly be a great help if he were willing to give men any names of leaders in the movement.× He agreed readily - although I could see that there

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*For details of the meeting see R. Manvell & Heinrich Fraenkel - The July Plot (Bodley Head Ltd. 1964, Pan Books 1966) p.24-6 (Pan edition)

†See Manvell & Fraenkel (Op. cit.) p.23-31 and E.H. Robertson 20, p.95-109 and I knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer (29, p.198-206)

×See list of names supplied 29, p.202

was a heavy load on his mind about the whole affair.
(29, p.202)

At the same time Bonhoeffer insisted that the Germans must declare their repentance. Thus we see Bonhoeffer's participation in the resistance in the context of moral and religious inspiration.

On the 18th June Bishop Bell wrote to Mr. Anthony Eden (now Lord Avon). An appointment was made for 30th June when Bell described his Sweden meetings. On July 17th Eden wrote to Bell saying that "without casting any reflection on the bona fides of your informants, I am satisfied it would not be in the national interest for any reply whatever to be sent to them".

The war continued and as a result of the British refusal, the resistance in Germany itself was weakened, because no-one believed that anything could be expected of Britain but total destruction. The attempted assassination of Hitler took the place of careful plans for an alternative government and Bonhoeffer's political influence declined.

However his experience of the resistance movement and war seem to have forced on Bonhoeffer a fresh approach to the world and ordinariness with almost the force of a revelation. He calls Christians to accept the responsibility of 'penultimate things' - things of the here and now - since God is God here and now, controller of events that really happen, as the really happen.

When the plot on Hitler's life took place on July 20th 1944 and failed, Bonhoeffer had already been arrested* (actually on 5th April 1943). His time in prison heightened and developed his theme of the secular. The cell became his study and his fellow-prisoners his flock. The majority of the prisoners were not churchmen but Bonhoeffer took a real pastoral interest in them. With such a flock he became aware that the church was quite inadequate to reach them.† This forced his thoughts towards an analysis of the historical development of western man and the necessity of a theological reconstruction which was both meaningful and relevant after such an analysis. Perhaps it is defensible to speak of his theology in Letter and Papers from Prison as applied and

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*For details of circumstances leading up to his arrest, see Manvell & Fraenkel (Op. cit.) p.65

† Cf. his similar feelings as he prepared a group of boys for confimation in a working class suburb of Berlin in 1931. (Part 3, section b.)

pastoral theology. As a result of his contact with the prisoners he wished to understand the world of the 20th century over which Christ was Lord. This is probably why he became very critical of Barth and Bultmann, both of whom he considered neglected the world. Harold Poelchau, Pastor of Tegel prison, records this about Bonhoeffer:

> His Christian faith, and his gift for meeting every kind of person in the right spirit, distinguished Dietrich Bonhoeffer from the mass of his fellow-prisoners; all the same, he felt one with them. (29, p.224)

Lesser men in a similar position as Bonhoeffer would have been contemplating death and release from this world but what one meets in Bonhoeffer's letters and papers is a confident joy in Christ and an intense love and concern for this world. It was in the sphere of the material - in State, in society, in the life of the people that Christ was to be supreme. Had he not written in Ethics? - "His (the Christian's) reality does not separate him from Christ; and his Christianity does not separate him from the world. Belonging wholly to Christ he stands at the same time wholly in the world". (17, p.67)

The real challenge which the prisoners posed for Bonhoeffer was that it was often the non-religious people - often kind and self-surrendering - who had lived life fully. How was he to understand this fact? Were they perhaps just possibly men being redeemed through the death and resurrection of Christ who is Lord of history? And if God can produce such men as these without religion, what part could he have beside for religion in their lives. Bonhoeffer could not ignore the question which these men in a particular historical context posed.

While Bonhoeffer was in prison he read through the Old Testament two and a half times* and suggested that Christians should take the presence of the Old Testament in their canon seriously. By the interaction of the Old Testament's serious concern about life on this earth with an expanding Christology, Bonhoeffer came to an awareness of the worldly and the purely human as the real location of Christ's reconciling work. It follows for Bonhoeffer that the redeeming work of Christ is not confined to the body of the church. In a letter dated 27th June 1944 Bonhoeffer wrote:

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* See 16, p.155-7

> It is true that Christianity has always been regarded as a religion of redemption. But is this not a cardinal error, which separates Christ from the Old Testament and interprets him on the line of the myths about redemption. .... Israel is delivered out of Egypt so that it may live before God as God's people on earth. .... The difference between the Christian hope of resurrection and the mythological hope is that the former sends a man back to his life on earth in a wholly new way ..... The Christian .... has no last line of escape available from earthly tasks and difficulties into the eternal.... This world must not be prematurely written off .... Christ takes hold of a man at the centre of his life. (16, p.185, 186)

Two or three years earlier found his Christology moving towards the theme of the worldly:

> The reality of God discloses itself only by setting me entirely in the reality of the world and when I encounter the reality of the world it is always already sustained, accepted, and reconciled in the reality of God. This is the inner meaning of the revelation of God in the man Jesus Christ. (17, p.55)

In asserting this position Bonhoeffer was forced to mount a polemic against abstractions, principles and thinking in terms of two static spheres - Christian/worldly; sacred/secular; supernatural/natural. The only reality that Bonhoeffer is willing to consider is the expansiveness of Christ's claim on the world over which he is Lord.

Throughout the years 1940-5 Bonhoeffer was again attempting to make the Christian proclamation concrete. This meant that theological thinking must be tested by intellectual honesty. If the Christian revelation was to be concrete it had, for Bonhoeffer, to be in urgent dialogue with temporality, historicity and involvement in the reality of the day.. The revelation could only be a word of authority - a concrete word - if it was spoken from reality. For Bonhoeffer, this reality was Christ who is Lord over all. During the thirties Bonhoeffer had tended to limit himself to the consideration of Christ as the Lord and reality of his community (the church); now Christ is seen as giving reality to all life.

c. Christ's relation to the world

From 1933-40 Bonhoeffer had attempted to live Christian ethics in a critical period within a very complex world. As a result his writings of 1940-5 concentrated on Christian ethics which for Bonhoeffer was a quest for a proper understanding of man's relation to Christ and the world. He saw his task as being one concerned with the concreteness of revelation in Jesus Christ. Because of the fact of the Incarnation man could not separate himself from the world of things - the sphere of the secular. This concentration on the theme of Christ's relation to the world is a direct development of his earlier thought. Bonhoeffer's former concentration on the exclusive claim of Jesus Christ, which was necessary during the years of the Confessing Church struggle, led quite naturally to the recognition and exposition of Christ's total claim upon all spheres of secular life. The genuine secular life for Bonhoeffer is revealed to man in the life of Christ. He sees Christ, not so much as the Omnipotent one standing outside the world, but as deliberately involving himself in the daily affairs of secular life. Secularization is interpreted as the fruit of the Incarnation.*

It follows that if we are to understand Bonhoeffer's thinking about the secular, it is to the development of his Christology that we must go. Various attempts to release his Christology from the restrictiveness of ecclesiology (characteristic of the period of the Confessing Church struggle and his book, The Cost of Discipleship - published 1937) are seen in Ethics. In this work which was written under extremely difficult conditions Christology is developed to demonstrate the claim of Christ to the whole of life. It must however be emphasized that Bonhoeffer's understanding of the world and man's relation to the world is through and through Christocentric. A passage from Ethics clearly demonstrates this:

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*Cf. Charles Davis - 32, p.11-36 "...When man saw almost everything as sacred, he was confusing the sacred and the secular; or, to put it more fairly and accurately, he still had an undeveloped and undifferentiated consciousness. .... The secular was released, because the Christian faith forbade men to indentify the sacred with nature and man. (p.16, 17)

> In Jesus Christ the reality of God entered into the reality of this world. The place where the answer is given, both to the question concerning the reality of the world, and to the question concerning the reality of God, is designated solely and alone by the name Jesus Christ. In him all things consist (Col 1 v.17). Henceforward one can speak neither of God nor of the world without speaking of Jesus Christ .... This does not mean that 'our world' is something outside the divine and cosmic reality which is in Christ, or that it is not already part of the world which is sustained, accepted and reconciled in Him. (17, p.61, 62)

In a recent symposium, World Come of Age, Eberhard Bethge, by using the essays in Ethics in chronological order, has been able to show how Bonhoeffer's effort to define the 'secular' developed during the years 1940-43 (before his imprisonment).* This chronological organization throws real light on Bonhoeffer's Christological development and we propose to use it in our survey of Bonhoeffer's Christology during this period.

In his initial writing Bonhoeffer finds difficulty in releasing his style of writing from that of The Cost of Discipleship even though he now stresses the oneness of the world and God because of the reality of the Incarnation. The Incarnation is where God reconciled the real world to himself. This appears as chapter 4 and 5 in the 1955 English edition of the Ethics.† Bonhoeffer moves beyond his theme of Christ's lordship over the Church which is the basis for the scriptural exegesis in The Cost of Discipleship to a position which asserts Christ's total lordship over the world:

> The more exclusively we acknowledge and confess Christ as our Lord, the more fully the wide range of His dominion will be disclosed to us. (17, p.180)

However more characteristic of these two essays is the fusion of Christology and the demands of committed discipleship. Bonhoeffer sees Christ entering the space that was previously occupied by man's knowledge of Good and evil. In his section on 'The Church and the World' he reiterates the theme of the Christian's exclusive attachment to Christ. But he speaks too of the church's responsibility to the world. This was written no doubt to rouse the Christian Church to see the real horror of Nazism with its irrationalism and barbarism.

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*See 40, p.70-5. Cf. J.A. Phillips 27, p.133-141

†See 17, p.142-184 - 'The love of God and the decay of the world' (Chap. 4) and 'The church and the World' (Chap. 5)

For Bonhoeffer the Church in such a situation must be defenders of such values as reason, culture, humanity, tolerance and individual freedom. Christ is the centre and strength of those who care for humanity and justice.

> It is not that a 'Christ-ian culture' must make the name of Jesus Christ acceptable to the world; but the crucified Christ has become the refuge and the justification, the protection and the claim for the higher values and their defenders that have fallen victim to suffering. It is with the Christ who is persecuted and who suffers in His Church that justice, truth, humanity and freedom now seek refuge..... (17, p.181)

This is the starting point for Bonhoeffer's thinking about the life of the Christian in the world. It has its foundation in the suffering Christ; the Church shares in the sufferings and struggle of Christ. The church may have to suffer for the sake of the world; it exists for the sake of the world.*

In his second approach Bonhoeffer analyses the historical development of the western world and shows how it has lost the unity it possessed in Jesus Christ.† He sees the incarnation as God's "Yes" to history and claims that, "The unity of the west through the form of Christ is the heritage which we have received from the early periods of our history". (17, p.30) It is Bonhoeffer's conviction that during the Middle Ages the unity of the west through the form of Christ was striven for by pope and emperor alike. However this unity was broken by the Reformation - into the body of Christ and the world - since Luther was compelled by the word of the Bible to conclude that the true unity of the church was not to be found in any political power, but only in Jesus Christ as he lives in his word and sacrament. With Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms - the kingdom of the church ruled by the preached word and the kingdom of the world ruled by the sword - the process of secularization was made possible. This process, says Bonhoeffer, was understood wrongly when it implied "the emancipation of man in his conscience, his

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*Cf. the influence of the anti-Nazi Barmen confession of 1934 on Bonhoeffer. This confession breathes the same atmosphere as the two essays under discussion: "... in him (Christ) we encounter a joyous liberation from the godless claims of this world to free and thankful service to his creatures.

We repudiate the false teaching that there are areas of our life in which we belong not to Jesus Christ but another lord, areas in which we do not need justification and sanctification through him." (20, p.50)

†See 17, p.25-78 - 'Inheritance and Decay' and 'The last Things and the Things before the Last'.

reason and his culture and so the justification of the secular as such." (17, p.33) Looking at the historical scene he interprets the French Revolution as emphasizing this emancipation in a really critical way: "Emancipated man meant here emancipated reason, an emancipated class and an emancipated people." (17, p.33-4) Bonhoeffer sees the technology of the modern world as an outcome of this development.*

Bonhoeffer understands this whole process as constituting a crisis without equal because it has brought onto the scene a movement he calls 'western godlessness". In a striking passage he writes:

> It is not the theoretical denial of the existence of God. It is itself a religion, a religion of hostility to God. .... Its God is the new man, no matter whether he bears the trade-mark of Bolshevism or of Christianity. This differs fundamentally from all paganism, for in paganism gods are adored in the form of men, but it is here man who is adored in the form of God, indeed in the form of Jesus Christ. (17, p.38, 39)

Bonhoeffer's thought here hovers on the threshold of his analysis of the contemporary world scene which was produced in his prison writings. In a seminal passage we find allusion to 'A godlessness which is full of promise'. This lies behind Bonhoeffer's later attack on the concept of relgion. He writes:

> Throughout Europe there is intense and widespread resentment against the Church. Yet the Churches lose remarkably few of their numbers, and this points to an important fact, namely, the ambiguous character of the hostility to the Church. It would be quite wrong simply to identify western godlessness with enmity towards the Church. There is the godlessness in religious and Christian clothing, which we have called a hopeless godlessness, but there is also a godlessness which is full of promise, a godlessness which speaks against relgion and against the Church. It is the protest against pious godlessness in so far as this has corrupted the Churches, and thus in a certain sense, if only negatively, it defends the heritage of a genuine faith, in God and of a genuine Church. There is relevance here in Luther's saying that perhaps God would rather hear the curses of the ungodly than the alleluia of the pious. (17, p.39-40)

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*It is significant that technology has only developed in a culture which has been shaped by Christianity and more particularly by the Reformation. See L. Newbigin - Honest Religion for Secular Man (S.C.M. 1966) p.22 ff.

This outlook is taken up with enthusiasm in the prison writings but here Bonhoeffer tends to be on the defensive and perhaps rather negative to his theme of the secular. Here he sees the loss of unity bringing about a destruction and chaos which will ultimately produce a void which is enemy to both God and man. This apostate, rebellious void threatens every facet of life - history (the loss of past and present and the substitution of an adventurous game of chance), inner self development, the family, nation and confidence in truth.*

How can Bonhoeffer's Christology meet such a historical situation? Is Christ allocated a particular place in the world - the Church - over which he is only lord? Since Bonhoeffer's theology is Christocentric this is obviously untenable. He wishes to avoid the division of the world into two 'spheres' - one, divine, holy, supernatural and Christian - the other, worldly, profane, natural and un-Christian, because the real world has been reconciled to God by Christ.** This Bonhoeffer claims is the correct understanding of Biblical thought and Reformation teaching. They both affirm that there is only one reality, "and that is the reality of God, which has become manifest in Christ in the reality of the world". (17, p.63-4) He continues:

> The world has no reality of its own, indepently of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. One is denying the revelation of God in Jesus Christ if one tries to be 'Christian' without seeing and recognizing the world in Christ. There are, therefore, not two spheres, but only the one sphere of the realization of Christ, in which the reality of God and the reality of the world are united. .... Whoever professes to believe in the reality of Jesus Christ, as the revelation of God, must in the same breath profess his faith in both the reality of God and the reality of the world; for in Christ he finds God and the world reconciled. .... His worldliness does not divide him from Christ, and his Christianity does not divide him from the world. Belonging wholly to Christ, he stands at the same time wholly in the world. (17, p.64, 67)

Because of this emphasis on Christ's concern and intimate involvement in the secular, Bonhoeffer finds his old themes of 'Christ as concrete revelation

*See Ethics (17), p.41-5

**See 'Thinking in Terms of Two Spheres' - 17, p.62-72

in the church' and 'Christ existing as community in the church' unusable. He is still determined however to express Christology in a concrete fashion and to do this he introduces two terms - 'formation' and 'conformation' - 'Christ taking form' in the world and 'man's conformation with the Incarnate'.* A high doctrine of the church remains but the church is seen as no longer fighting for living space in the world; rather it is a part of the world where Christ has really taken form. Bonhoeffer points out that the form which takes form in man is neither the form of God, which would be alien to man, nor merely an imitation or repetition of the form of Christ, but it is Christ's form itself. Christ bore the form of mankind as a whole and longs to take form in all men, but this longing is still unsatisfied except in the small number of men who are his church. The church is the body of Christ, and the body is the form. On this theme Bonhoeffer states:

> .... the Church is not a religious community of worshippers of Christ but is Christ Himself, who has taken form among men. The Church can be called the Body of Christ because in Christ's Body man is really taken up by Him, and so too, therefore, are all mankind. The Church, then, bears the form which is in truth the proper form of all humanity. .... The Church is nothing but a section of humanity in which Christ has really taken form. What we have here is utterly and completely the form of Jesus Christ and not some other form side by side with Him. The Church is the man in Christ, incarnate, sentenced and awakened to new life. (17, p.21)

The Church is a piece of the redeemed world and this is the place where the figure of Christ breaks through into the world. Since Bonhoeffer has found positive value in certain historical movements (like the Reformation of the 16th century and the Enlightenment of the 18th century) he wishes to understand the nature of the space occupied by the Church in a new way. His old ecclesiology and thinking in terms of two spheres are not acceptable. Bonhoeffer is still finding difficulty in separating Christology and ecclesiology but by his use of the two terms - 'formation' and 'conformation' liberation is taking place. This liberation is clearer in his thinking about

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* See 17, p.17-25

'conformation':

> This is not achieved by dint of efforts 'to become like Jesus' which is the way in which we usually interpret it. It is achieved only when the form of Jesus Christ itself works upon us in such a manner that it moulds our form in its own likeness (Gal 4 v.19). Christ remains the only giver of forms. It is not Christian men who shape the world with their ideas, but it is Christ who shapes men in conformity with Himself .... To be conformed with the Incarnate - that is to be a real man .... It is man's right and duty that he should be man .... The real man is at liberty to be his Creator's creature. To be conformed with the Incarnate is to have the right to be the man one really is.... To be conformed with the Risen One - that is to be a new man before God .... The new man lives in the world like any other man. Often there is little to distinguish him from the rest. (17, p.18, 19, 20) *

Thus for Bonhoeffer man's relation to the world must be understood from the fact of the Incarnation. Because Christ is the Incarnate One it is man's right and duty that he should be man. "Bonhoeffer rejected the quest for the superman, the endeavor to outgrow the man within the man, the pursuit of the heroic, the cult of the demigod - because of the Incarnation". (15, p.212) Christ's glory may be hidden from the eyes of the world and even the one who is conformed with the Risen One has only an occasional glimpse of the glory that is to come. In being conformed with the Risen One he bears here the marks of the cross. (17, p.19) The dimension of human existence in the world is the dimension as revealed in Christ. But the living of the life conformed to the Incarnate Christ involves tension with the world and like the Risen One the Christian bears all the suffering imposed upon him. (See 17, p.19)

In chapter 3 of Ethics† entitled 'The Last Things and the Things before the last' Bonhoeffer frees his thinking about the secular from ecclesiology. He claims that the sphere of the secular should have a real place in theology and he attempts to define this place by using the terms 'ultimate', 'penultimate', and 'natural'. This is probably the most fruitful approach to Bonhoeffer's later thought and development.

His basic presupposition is that 'justification' is the 'last word'. This

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*Cf. Bonhoeffer's Christological writings on 'The Incarnate, The Humiliated One and the Exalted One - (14, p.106-118) - there are clear connections here with the Ethics and the 1933 lectures.

†See 17, p.79-141 but unfinished

justification is through faith in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

> To live by the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the justification of a life before God. And faith means casting anchor upon it and being held fast by it. Faith means founding my life upon a foundation which is outside myself, upon an eternal and holy foundation, upon Christ. Faith means being held captive by the sight of Jeus Christ, no longer seeing anything but Him, being wrested from my imprisonment in my own self, being set free by Jesus Christ. .... There is, therefore, no other means of access to the justification of my life than through faith alone. (17, p.80)

God's justifying word is final in two respects: first, qualitatively, because it it completely free and therefore excludes man's efforts of achieving it on his own; second, temporally, because it is always preceded by something penultimate which remains, even though the ultimate entirely annuls and invalidates it. Bonhoeffer sees that a period of time must elapse and therefore, although justification by grace and faith alone remains the final word, for the sake of the ultimate he must now speak about the "things before the last".

Since for Bonhoeffer justification in Christ (the Incarnate One) is final it must also say something final about the secular. Using Bonhoeffer's terminology: "the penultimate" or "the things before the last" are validated Christologically since the incarnation is "the encounter of Christ with the world". This means that the solution to the relationship between the ultimate and the penultimate can be found solely in JesusuChrist, the incarnate, crucified and risen God-Man.

Bonhoeffer takes the three themes - incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection - and demonstrates their relavance to a proper understanding of the penultimate. He claims that the incarnation means that God enters into created reality and thus reveals his love for his creation. Even though the manhood of Jesus implies the absolute condemnation of sin and the relative condemnation of established human orders, it at the same time allows human reality to remain a penultimate and this must be taken seriously. The crucifixion means that God pronounces the final condemnation on the fallen creation and thereby reveals his judgment upon all flesh. Yet even though the cross discloses the judgment of the ultimate upon all that is penultimate, it at the same tima

reveals mercy toward that penultimate which bows Before the judgment of the ultimate. The resurrection means that God sets an end to death and calls a new creation into life, thus demonstrating his will for a new world. Even though man is already risen again with Christ to newness of life, he remains in the world of the penultimate until he passes the boundary of death.* On this basis Bonhoeffer writes:

> .... the Christiah life means neither a destruction nor a sanctioning of the penultimate. In Christ the reality of God meets the reality of the world and allows us to share in this real encounter. .... Christian life is participation in the encounter of Christ with the world. It has now become clear that the ultimate - the last things - leaves open a certain amount of room for the penultimate, the things before the last. (17, p.91)

In the section entitled 'The Preparing of the Way'†, Bonhoeffer claims that the penultimate (which is everything that precedes the justification of the sinner by grace alone) must be taken seriously on account of its relation to the ultimate, and he points to two concrete things that are penultimate in relation to justification - 'being man' and 'being good'. (17, p.92) Christ's grace is the ultimate and is freely given but this does not mean that man can neglect to prepare for the coming of this grace. On the contrary man is called to prepare for the coming of the grace by removing every possible obstacle. So Bonhoeffer states:

> There are conditions of the heart, of life and of the world which impede the reception of grace in a special way, namely, by rendering faith infinitely difficult. (17, p.94)

According to Bonhoeffer the Christian must attempt to remove hunger, injustice, loneliness and disorder from the penultimate scene for the sake of the ultimate. He insists however that preparing the way for Christ must be more than merely the attainment of certain conditions. These actions performed for the sake of the penultimate must possess spiritual reality; they must be acts of humiliation and repentance before the coming of the Lord. Repentance demands action and this action is to be directed towards 'being man' and 'being

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*See 17, p.89-91

†See 17, p.91-100

good'. Bonhoeffer explains that it is the coming Lord himself who has already shed light upon what is meant by 'being man' and 'being good'. This is clearly stated in a passage where Christ is pictured as preserving and claiming the penultimate:

> It is because Christ is coming that we must be men and that we must be good. For Christ is not coming to hell, but to 'His own' (John 1 v.11); He is coming to His creation, which, in spite of its fall, is His creation still. Christ is not coming to devils but to men, certainly to men who are sinful, lost and damned, but still to men. That the fallen creation is still the creation, and that sinful man still remains man, follows from the fact the Christ is coming to them and that Christ redeems them from sin and from the power of the devil. It is in relation to Christ that the fallen world becomes intelligible as the world which is preserved and sustained by God for the coming of Christ, the world in which we can and should live good lives as men in orders which are established. (17, p.97)

If this position is accepted it follows that whatever humanity and goodness is found in the fallen world must be claimed for Christ. From this starting point Bonhoeffer wishes to define his concept of 'The Natural'. *

Bonhoeffer considers that Protestant thought has tended to elevate the concept of grace to such a high position that everything human and natural has been placed in an abyss of sin. The result has been that relative distinctions within the fallen creation have no longer been made; the natural life has suffered complete disruption.

By 'natural' Bonhoeffer means "that which after the Fall, is directed towards the coming of Christ". The 'unnatural' is "that which after the Fall, closes its doors against the coming of Christ." (17, p.102) Through the Fall the creature becomes 'nature', and this means that the direct dependence of the creature on God is replaced by the relative freedom of the natural life.

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*Bonhoeffer discusses his understanding of 'The Natural' - 17, p.101-106. He elaborates his approach in several subsequent sections: 'Natural Life, Suum Cuique, The Right to Bodily Life, Suicide, Reproduction and Naseent Life, The Freedom of Bodily Life, The Natural Rights of the Life of the Mind - 17, p.106-140. The final section is unfinished but the preparatory notes are extant - see 17, p.140-141.

Bonhoeffer points out that this relative freedom, which can be used in either a true (natural) or false (unnatural) way, is not t be confused with the absolute freedom for God and for the neighbour which is imparted by the word of God alone. However Bonhoeffer stresses that the natural life must not be understood simply as a preliminary to life with Christ; rather the natural can be known only in its relation to Jesus Christ. So Bonhoeffer writes:

> Christ Himself entered into the natural life, and it is only through the incarnation of Christ that the natural life becomes the penultimate which is directed towards the ultimate. Only through the incarnation of Christ do we have the right to call others to the natural life and to live the natural life ourselves. (17, p.102-3)

What is the role of reason for the natural free man? Bonhoeffer stresses that reason is not a divine principle of knowledge. Rather, it exists entirely in the natural and is the conscious perception of the natural as it presents itself. "Reason," states Bonhoeffer, "understands the natural as something that is universally established and independent of the possibility of empirical verification." (17, p.104) And so it follows that "the natural can never be something that is determined by any single part or any single authority within the fallen world". (17, p.104) Bonhoeffer claims that no-one can decide what is natural, for the natural is already established and decided.

> .... so long as life continues, the natural will always reassert itself. ..... (This) provides a solid basis for that optimistic view of human history which confines itself within the limits of the fallen world. (17, p.105, 106)

The fourth and final approach to the secular in the Ethics comes very close to the spirit of the prison writings on this subject. Characteristic of this approach is the expression 'Divine Mandates'.* Comparing this approach with the two previous ones, Eberhard Bethge writes, "We had the 'conformation' of Christ with the world and the world with Christ; we had the 'natural'; now we have 'the setting free of life for genuine worldliness'". (40, p.73)

Bonhoeffer uses the term 'Divine Mandate' to demonstrate God speaking directly in command to the world. God does not command in theoretical speculation, private inspiration, historical forces or sublime ideas - he commands

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*See 17, p.73-8 and p.252-7

rather in a concrete manner, according to Bonhoeffer, in four Mandates - Labour, Marriage, Government and Church. This is how Christ assumes concrete form in the world.

Bonhoeffer defines his position regarding the expansiveness of the Divine Mandates thus:

> It is God's will that there shall be labour, marriage, government and church in the world; and it is His will that all these, each in its own way, shall be through Christ, directed towards Christ, and in Christ. God has imposed all these mandates on all men. He has not merely imposed one of these mandates on each individual, But He has imposed all four on all men. This means that there can be no retreating from a 'secular' into a 'spiritual' sphere. There can be only the practice, the learning, of the Christian life under these four mandates of God. (17, p.73)

Bonhoeffer insists that the first three mandates are not 'secular' in contradistinction to the fourth; all are equally divine because of their relation to Christ. The mandates allow man to share in God's creative power for the glory and service of Christ.

On the role of Government Bonhoeffer states:

> By the establishment of law and by the force of the sword the governing authority preserves the world for the reality of Jesus Christ. Everyone owes obedience to this governing body - for Christ's sake. (17, p.76)

The divine mandate of the church differs from the other three in that its task is to enable the reality of Jesus Christ to become real in the preaching and organization of the church and the Christian life. It extends to all mankind by impinging upon all the other mandates, so that the man who is simultaneously a labourer, a partner in marriage, and the subject of a government is now to be a Christian labourer, partner and subject.

> The whole man stands before the whole earthly and eternal reality, the reality which God has prepared for him in Jesus Christ. Man can live up to this reality only if he responds fully to the totality of the offer and the claim. (17, p.76-7)

As we consider Bonhoeffer's concept of 'Mandates' we are reminded of his term 'Deputyship'.* 'Deputyship' is the responsible life which is conditioned by two factors; that man is bound to man and that man is also bound to God

*See Ethics (17) p.194ff.

through reconciliation in Christ.

Bonhoeffer has now rescued his Christology from 'churchly thinking'. Christ is involved very much in the life of the world. Bonhoeffer sees earthly agents (mandates) seizing a definite secular domain by divine command. Thus God is freed from the church and given unrestricted movement in His world. Man also is called to live for the sake of the other man and for the sake of this world (the penultimate).

We are now ready to look at the development of Bonhoeffer's thinking on the 'secular' in the fragmentary writings, Letters and Papers from Prison.

d. Letters and Papers from Prison

Letters and Papers from Prison (16) is a miscellaneous collection of poems, reminiscences, autobiographical fragments and theological writings. In this section, however, we shall only be concerned with the material which is relevant in constructing Bonhoeffer's theological development in regard to secularization and its relation to Christology. In prison he had a great deal of time to think round his basic questions:

> .... what is Christianity, and indeed what is Christ, for us to-day?
>
> and How can Christ become the Lord even of those with no religion? If religion is no more than the garment of Christianity - .... - then what is a religionless Christianity? (16, p.153, 153)

Bonhoeffer claimed that such challenging questions needed to be asked because the traditional answers were no longer meaningful in the western world of the 20th century. For Bonhoeffer any analysis of the historical development of the western world would reveal its secularization. If theology is to be intellectually honest it must take seriously this phenomenon of secularization, the rapidly increasing autonomy of one department of life after another from religious or metaphysical control. Theology must set its thinking at the centre of the world's maturity (its 'coming of age' in Bonhoeffer's terminology) and thus take the question of man in history as its starting point. Bonhoeffer understands secular man as free and the theologian must no longer speak of man as dependent on God. It is futile for the theologian to try to subject mature man to a God whose strength depends on man's weakness and ignorance.

Bonhoeffer's first attempt to understand the significant movements in history appeared in Ethics in the essay entitled 'Inheritance and Decay' (17, p.24-45 - see above Part 4, section c.). Here attention was focused on the theme of 'secularization' but Bonhoeffer at that time was not ready to accept it as a positive challenge to his theology. However, when he makes his second analysis of the historical development, the theme of 'this worldliness' (the 'penultimate' in Ethics) receives special significance. This marks a real turning point in Bonhoeffer's theology.*

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*In connection with Bonhoeffer's concentration on the theme of 'this worldliness' rather than 'other worldliness' in Letters and Papers from Prison are

In a letter dated 8th June Bonhoeffer outlines the process of secularization which began in the 13th century. He writes:

> The movement that began about the thirteenth century .... towards the autonomy of man (in which I should include the discovery of the laws by which the world lives and deals with itself in science, social and political matters, art, ethics and religion) has in our time reached an undoubted completion. Man has learnt to deal with himself in all questions of importance without recourse to the 'working hypothesis' called 'God'. .... it is becoming evident that everything gets along without 'God' - and, in fact, just as well as before. As in the scientific field, so in human affairs generally, 'God' is being pushed more and more out of life, losing more and more ground. (16, p.178)

Bonhoeffer believes that both Roman Catholic and Protestant Theologians have taken a negative view of this process; they have seen it as a defection from God and Christ. Christian apologetic has been set up in opposition to this 'coming of age' of man. For man 'come of age' there is the disappearance of a certain sort of dependence.* For instance man is not dependent upon God to explain the workings of the Universe, he is not dependent upon miraculous and heavenly power to put right the evils of his life, (he sets to work with his sciences and technologies to right them himself) and he is not dependent on the promise of future bliss to make this life worth living.

Instead of accepting the autonomy of man, Christian apologetics (according to Bonhoeffer) has tried as a last resort to claim authority over the 'ultimate questions'.

> Efforts are made to prove to a world thus come of age that it cannot live without the tutelage of 'God'. Even though there has been surrender on all secular problems, there still remain the so-called 'ultimate questions' - death, guilt - to which only 'God' can give an answer, and because of which we need God and the Church and the pastor. .... But what if one day they no longer exist as such, if they too can be answered 'without God'? (16, p.178-9)

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* TWO letters - dated 18th Dec 1943 (16, p.108-111) and 23rd Jan 1944 (16, p.118-122) - where the relationship between the two themes is understood on fairly traditional lines. See R. Gregor Smith (ed) - 40, p.132-4.

Bonhoeffer will not associate himself with any theological appraoch which attacks or underestimates the strenght of man within the 'penultimate'. This was to put forward God as a God of the gaps which are to be found in man's weakness and despair. Bonhoeffer quite clearly states his own position:

> The attack by Christian apologetic on the adulthood of the world I consider to be in the first place pointless, in the second place ignoble, and in the third place unchristian. Pointless, because it seems to me like an attempt to put a grown-up man back into adoliscence, i.e. to make him dependent on things on which he is, in fact, no longer dependent, and thrusting him into problems that are, in fact, no longer problems to him. Ignoble, because it amounts to an attempt to exploit man's weakness for purposes that are alien to him and to which he has not freely assented. Unchristian, because it confuses Christ with one particular stage in man's religiousness, i.e. with a human law. (16, p.179)

For Bonhoeffer the world's 'Coming of Age' is not an occasion for polemics and apologetics. Rather the 20th century historical scene must be understood in the context of a reinterpretation of the gospel and the meaning of Christ.

In a letter of 16th July 1944 Bonhoeffer returns to the theme of the world's autonomy.* He briefly outlines from Lord Herbert of Cherbury to modern physics, the process which has gradually made man and the world autonomous† of God - "etsi deus non daretur". From his survey Bonhoeffer concludes:

> God as a working hypothesis in morals, politics, or science, has been surmounted and abolished; and the same thing has happened in philosophy and religion. For the sake of intellectual honesty, that working hypothesis should be dropped or as far as possible eliminated. ..... And we cannot be honest unless we recognize that we have to live in the world etsi deus non daretur .... God would have us know that we must live as men who manage our lives without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15 v.34). The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before who we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God. God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us.

Although Bonhoeffer is fully open to the challenge of the 20th century historical scene, we must not assume that this open-endedness is based on

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*See 16, p.195-6

†For a panoramic account of the process and characterics of Secularization, see C. Williams - Faith in a Secular Age (Collins, Fontana 1966) p. 19ff.

anything but a particular interpretation of the God as revealed in the Bible. Bonhoeffer compares Christianity with all other religions and concludes that the other religions picture God as coming to the rescue of weak and impotent man; God is the 'deus ex machina'. On the other hand the Bible points to a powerless and suffering God. Perhaps, says Bonhoeffer, the process of secularization opens up the way for seeing the God of the Bible, who wins power and space in the world by his weakness.*

With this particular conception of God, Bonhoeffer found it necessary to pursue a polemic against what in the past had been understood as religion (contact with God at the boundary of existence, and an answer to unsolved problems together with an individualistic concern for the salvation of the soul). Perhaps 'religion' was merely a garment of Christianity and was able to be removed. Bonhoeffer was thus willing to examine the concept of a 'religionless christianity'.

Perhaps this is a suitable point at which to summarize several conclusions which are now apparent in Bonhoeffer's thought:

1. He is now fully willing to accept what God has and is revealing in the intellectual development of western thought - viz. maturation of secularity. He claims that this historical process must become the concern of the Christian theologian if Christianity is to be honest intellectually and true to its message. With such a challenge to face, he wished to be concerned with what Christianity was in reality now. For him the 'religious apriori' was no longer a viable intellectual tool and because of this, Bonhoeffer is willing to ask radical questions concerning God's being and his relation to the world. How can the theologian speak of God as transcendent, in a world which no longer admits the relevance of the old categories and the old sense of the transcendent. Thus for Bonhoeffer movements like the Renaissance, the Reformation and the period of the Enlightenment are to be understood as revelations.

2. He is now willing to explore the possibility of a time of no religion†

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*The letters so far discussed in this section should be read against the background of some preliminary quests in an earlier letter (30th April 1944) - 16, p.151-5 where Bonhoeffer criticized 1900 years of Christian preaching and theology which had assumed a religious apriori.

† See later for Bonhoeffer's understanding of the word 'religion'.

at all. For him, secularization is no longer to be understood as godlessness nor does he make a plea for a better secularism (as in Ethics). With his particular understandigg of the term 'religious' he felt that man was using the concept of God theoretically to complete what appeared as weakness in himself. God and Christ were merely asigned to a role which man wished them to have. Because of this 'religion' had come to mean, not faith in Christ as the living Word of God but inherited metaphysical systems expressed in doctrines and individualistic piety. This often meant that religion bore no relation at all to the life and activity of men in the secular world.

3. Although Bonhoeffer's plea for a 'religionless Christianity' relies to a great extent on a particular reading of the intellectual history of the west since the Middle Ages (that has rarely been characteristic of Christian theologians) he also finds that a certain understanding of Christology supports this particular reading. Here again Bonhoeffer's approach remains Christo-centric. The Lutheran humiliation-Christology - a Christology which sees the exalted Christ as suffering as a 'man for others' - lies as the foundation of Bonhoeffer's concept of 'the world come of age'.

For Bonhoeffer the crucified Lord died for this world, and in so doing confirmed the true worldliness of the world. Because of this understanding of the work of Christ, Bonhoeffer can allow the world to be the world. In Act and Being Bonhoeffer had whole-heartedly accepted Luther's 'finitum capax infiniti' and here again it is in evidence.

W. Hamilton sees this development in Bonhoeffer's approach to the secular in correct perspective when he writes: " .... the new thing in Bonhoeffer's thought is neither the open acknowledgement of the inevitability of secular-ization, nor the particular Christology, but the combination of these two factors." (40, p.152)

Throughout the prison writings Bonhoeffer's theme is Christ and 'the world come of age'. The life of Christ liberates the world and the man of faith is thus able to live in a 'worldly' way. In this way he is freed from religious bonds and inhibitions (the real meaning of 'etsi deus non daretur) and as a Christian allowed to live fully in the world. However since this living in the world is based on Christology it cannot be the world's understanding of worldliness. It is rather a worldliness exposed and deriving from

Christ as Lord of the world. Thus it involves both death and resurrection.

e. Bonhoeffer's understanding of the word 'religion' and his plea for the abolition of religion

Since we have referred to Bonhoeffer's plea for the abolition of 'religion' it will be necessary to examine:

1. Karl Barth's attack on 'religion' of which Bonhoeffer approved, and 2. What Bonhoeffer understood by the term 'religion' (in German 'Religionslos', perhaps better translated 'religiosity')*

3. Bonhoeffer's critique of Barth's position which Bonhoeffer himself labelled 'positivism of revelation' (16, p.181).

In a letter of 5th May 1944, Bonhoeffer wrote, "Barth was the first theologian to begin the criticism of religion, and that remains his really great merit .....". (16, p.156-7) Bonhoeffer bases this claim on an examination of Barth's commentary on The Epistle to the Romans (1919, 1923) and the essay in Church Dogmatics - 'The revelation of God as the abolition of religion'.† In both these works revelation and religion are understood in such a way as to be mutually exclusive. 'Religion' is interpreted by Barth as man's reaching out towards God, whereas faith is the response of man to God's revelation of himself as Lord in Jesus Christ. This revelation rests firmly on God's initiative. Barth claims that if 'religion' were possible then the revelation would have been unnecessary. Barth attacks 'religion' because he sees it as one of man's greatest temptations to 'domesticate' God who is by his very nature transcendent and thus not available to man's attempts to 'domesticate' him. Barth writes:

> Sin is always unbelief. And unbelief is always man's faith in himself. And this faith invariably consists in the fact that man makes the mystery of his responsibility his own mystery, instead of accepting it as the mystery of God. It is this faith which is religion. It is contradicted by the revelation attested in the

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*See A. Richardson - History sacred & Profane (S.C.M. Press 1964) p.81n.

†See K. Barth - Church Dogmatics (T. & T. Clark) Vol 1, 2 p.280-361.

> New Testament, which is identical with Jesus Christ as the one who acts for us and on us. This stamps religion as unbelief.
> (Church Dogmatics Vol 1, 2 - p.314)

For Barth this unbelief springs from man's efforts at justification and sanctification of his own terms. The criteria will differ radically from God's and will be unknown and unknowable to man because of the transcendent nature of God. Barth is careful in his essay to define what he means by God's transcendence. He claims that the transcendence is not that of one who is beyond and needs to be evoked by man, but one in which man is met by Jesus Christ. This is Barth's understanding of divine grace.

For Barth the incarnation is an expression of the 'secularity' of the gospel. This means that man knows God only as the one who makes himself known to man in the everyday events of secular life. Daniel Jenkins in his book, Beyond Religion (43), summarizes Barth's position thus:

> Man's religion provides him with the final and most closely guarded citadel in which he can defend himself against the divine grace. Religion fulfils the positive function of making man aware of the inadequacy of his own resources and ready to lift up his eyes towards God, but of itself it cannot save man. Faith working through love which transcends religion and yet provides more religion and transcends religion once more is alone that which justifies men in God's sight. (43, p.33) †

Bonhoeffer's own polemic against 'religion' and 'religious' interpretations of Christianity is profoundly influenced by this Barthian position.* He too sees the man of faith set free for action in the real world. He is released from self-preoccupation on the religious as on other levels, for identification with his neighbour in the day to day affairs of the world as the place in which he knows God and enjoys life to the full.

Bonhoeffer's attack on 'religion' is also a development of his Christo-centric concern. For instance in his essay 'Thinking in Terms of Two Spheres' (in Ethics (17), p.62-72) he had claimed that the reality of God and the reality of the world could not be separated. If they were separated then their

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* See Daniel Jenkins (43) p.33ff

† For a discussion of Barth's attack on religion, see Daniel Jenkins (43) p.26-33.

unity in Christ was denied. Christ is Lord over the world but 'religious' interpretations - whether metaphysical or individualistic - by their very nature reduce God's concern for the world and Christ is merely an aid to support human failure. In this way Christ is turned into an object of religion.

Eberhard Bethge, to whom many of the letters were written, has attempted a formulation of what Bonhoeffer meant by 'religion'.* We shall use it as an outline in our discussion below.

First, religion is individualism. The religious man is preoccupied with himself and his interior states. He longs to escape from sin and death to a better world beyond the grave.† The emphasis falls on the other side of the boundary drawn by death. In effect God is separated from any concern in the world of everyday life.

Secondly, religion is metaphysics. A religious interpretation of Christianity turns it into a system of abstract truths which are to be communicated to men by words. Religious metaphysics completes what man finds lacking. For example, man feels that the reality of the world must be completed by a sound structure - and so the role of God is located there. This obviously leads to thinking in two spheres.

Thirdly, the religious interest becomes more and more one department of life only. Bonhoeffer sees this department fighting a rear-guard action against secularization. Because of this religion can only live in the dark and remote areas of life where man feels weak and unable to cope with the world. Here God merely exists on the borders of human existence and as time

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*Bethge's formulation appears in 'The Chicago Theological Seminary Register' for February 1961.
For an understanding of Bonhoeffer's term 'religion', the following letters need to be examined: a. 16th July 1944 (p.193) b. 25th May 1944 (p.173)
c. 30th June 1944 (p.186) d. 27th June 1944 (p.185)
e. 8th July 1944 (p.190) f. 30th April 1944 (p.151)
See also Daniel Jenkins (43), p.33-5; Gerhard Ebeling (21), p.133ff. and C. Williams - Faith in a Secular Age (Collins, Fontana 1966) p.54-61.

†Contrast with letter of 27th June 1944 where Bonhoeffer discusses his understanding of the O.T. and the Christian hope of resurrection which "sends a man back to his life on earth in a wholly new way....." (16, p.186)
See also Part 4, section b. above.

passes these borders will become smaller and smaller. In this approach God is assigned his place in the world, in the "boundary situations". (16, p.154-5)

Fourthly, religion is the 'deus ex machina' concept. Here God just comes onto the scene to help his children when they are in trouble, or to answer unsolved problems. It is the concept by which the sermon must first produce feelings of profound need, must hunt for the human weaknesses, and then give out the appropriate remedies in proper doses. Religious people speak of God when human perception is at an end, or human resources fail. It covers up actual godlessness with piety, mysticism, cultic acts and religiosity. When men by their own strength solve more and more of their problems (and we are not to assume that Christianity has all the correct answers) the God as a 'deus ex machina' will become superfluous.

Fifthly, religion has become perverted into privilege. Bonhoeffer points out the Ek-klesia has come to mean not so much 'called out' (for service in the world) as 'the favoured ones'. Christians are not separated from the world. Far from it; they exist for the world. In his 'Outline for a Book' (16, p.208-211) Bonhoeffer writes in his draft for chapter 3:

> The Church is the Church only when it exists for others...THE Church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others. .... It will have to speak of moderation, purity, trust, loyalty, constancy, patience, discipline, humility, contentment, and modesty. It must not underestimate the importance of human example (which has its origin in the humanity of Jesus and is so important in Paul's teaching); it is not abstract argument, but example, that gives its word emphasis and power. (16, p.211) *

Bonhoeffer's position, however, in his critique of 'religion' moves beyond that of Barth. According to Bonhoeffer, Barth had not taken his

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*This emphasis on the responsibility of the church to the world was no doubt influenced by Bonhoeffer's disappointment with the Confessing Church in its attack on the German Christians and Nazism. Bonhoeffer felt that the Confessing Church had made the defense of its own existence its primary concern. It thereby lost its chance to speak a word of reconciliation to mankind and the world at large. See 16, p.172, 181 and 209)

critique of 'religion' to its logical conclusion but had stopped half way. Bonhoeffer labelled this half way position 'positivism of revelation'.* Writing on Barth, he says:

> .... he put in its place (i.e. in place of 'religion') a positivist doctrine of revelation which says, in effect, 'like it or lump it': virgin birth, Trinity, or anything else; each is an equally significant and necessary part of the whole, which must simply be swallowed as a whole or not at all. .... The positivism of revelation makes it too easy for itself, by setting up, as it does in the last analysis, a law of faith, and so mutilates what is - by Christ's incarnation - a gift for us. In the place of religion there now stands the church - that is in itself biblical - but the world is in some degree made to depend on itself and left to its own devices, and that is the mistake.
> (16, p.157)

What are the main points of Bonhoeffer's criticism?† We could summarize them as follows:

1. The revelation means nothing to the mature world. It is meaningless because it is couched in traditional terms (terms which are only contingent in a 'religious' situation) and will as a whole be rejected by the mature world.

2. Barth has failed in his religionless interpretation of the gospel because the position he adopts bears no relation to the world. Barth is therefore unable to speak of God in the present historical context because he has ignored the world of science and technology.

3. He has assumed a 'religious a priori' in man which make it possible for him to accept or reject the revelation.

4. In Barth's system the world stands outside the Lordship of Christ.

5. Barth had remained content in his Church Dogmatics to take the whole of the Christian gospel and systematize it, using the language of the

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* See the letters dated 5th May and 30th April and 8th June, 1944 (16, p.155, 151 and 177)
Cf. Regin Prenter's essay - 'Bonhoeffer and Barth's Positivism of Revelation' in World Come of Age (40), pp.93-130. Here is set down the features of Barth's teaching on revelation which could have justified Bonhoeffer's criticism.

† Cf. 40, p.95-103 and J.A. Phillips (27), p.156ff.

Bible. Bonhoeffer feels that it may be necessary for the church to remain silent about her great themes if she cannot relate them to the secularized world. Bonhoeffer is not so much interested in how the gospel should be presented (question of language) as what the content of this gospel should be. Eberhard Bethge writes on this point: "Non-religious interpretation is not objective translation, and speaking at all costs everywhere and to everybody. It is centrally the involvement in the figure of Christ". (40, p.81) Bethge is here pointing to Bonhoeffer's particular understanding of non-religious interpretation; it lies in his notion of arcane, or secret discipline (Arkandisziplin).* Christians by their secret discipline preserve the mysteries of the Christian faith from profanation. Bonhoeffer,however, connects this notion of a secret discipline with his thoughts about the ultimate and the penultimate (the last things and the things before the last). In contrast to the visible, 'worldly' life of the Christian in the realm of the 'things before the last', there must be a hidden, disciplined life of devotion and prayer that is grounded in belief on the 'last things'. The worldly life always requires the nourishment of the secret discipline and the secret discipline always sends a man back into the world.

It can be seen that Bonhoeffer is willing to pursue a more radical line than that taken up by Barth. He wishes to explore the possibility of finding an intimate connection between God's revelation (in Christ) and the life of man in 'the world come of age'. 'Positivism of revelation' turns the great themes of revelation into 'religious units' and in doing so assigns to them a transcendent sphere in the modern world. In this way it denies the maturity of the world by making the great themes a completion of its own resources. Bonhoeffer wished to take the penultimate seriously for the sake of the ultimate and saw as a consequence the church called to a secret discipline. Regin sums up the position:

Barth's and Bonhoeffer's ways have in fact parted and moved in

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*On theme of 'Secret Discipline' see letter dated 30th April and 5th May 1944 (16, p.151ff & p.155ff) -,Also 'Thoughts on Baptism'(16, p.160ff)

> opposite directions .... We might label it conveniently act (i.e. cognition) versus being (i.e. action).
> With Barth everything points to eternity - undoubtedly in the service of the gospel - in order to anchor man's salvation solidly and unshakeably in God's eternal decree, even in God's eternal being as self-love. Bonhoeffer moved in another direction. He too wants to guard the mystery of God; as one of Barth's school, so to speak, he too wants to free the gospel from the chains of religion. But he sees the mystery of God and his love, not in the eternal Aseity in its inner-trinitarian relations, but as the historic being 'pro mundo', which leads him with all his thinking - whereby thinking follows being (action) - into temporality, away from eternity towards the religionless man, to the godless man for whom the church must be present with God in Christ in order to be truly the church. (40, p.128)

Barth's thought is too much dominated with one narrow strip of past revelational history which means that God's action is only conceived as operative at the extremities of everyday life. Bonhoeffer on the other hand wished to see the church as the servant of Christ in the contemporary secular events. In Ethics this position is clearly stated:

> The Christian congregation stands at the point at which the whole world ought to be standing; to this extent it serves as deputy for the world and exists for the sake of the world. On the other hand, the world achieves its own fulfilment at the point at which the congregation stands. The earth is the 'new creation', the 'new creature', the goal of the ways of God on earth. The congregation stands in this twofold relation of deputyship entirely in the fellowship and discipleship of its Lord, who was Christ precisely in this, that He existed not for His own sake but wholly for the sake of the world. (17, p.266)

For Bonhoeffer, the Christian is not out to make something out of himself (a holy life or a churchman for example) but he is called to be a man; to be open to the full breath of human existence that Christ revealed.* The Christian must take life in his stride with its duties and problems but by means of the arcane (secret) discipline and true worldliness there is produced a life lived completely before God.

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*Cf. letter of 21st July 1944 - "I remember a conversation that I had .... with a young French pastor. We were asking ourselves quite simply what we wanted to do with our lives. He said he would like to become a saint.... At that 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

f. Bonhoeffer's attempt at thinking about the "non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts"

Bonhoeffer was calling Christians to a life of true worldliness and he knew that this demanded real tension with the way of the world; a tension demonstrated clearly in the cross of Christ. Bonhoeffer's task was to express this tension without the believer becoming in some way 'religious'. His attempt never got beyond the initial stage and we are left with only fragmentary utterances.

Basic to his position is the conviction that true worldly Christianity - a secular faith - can only spring from a reliance upon the grace of Christ. Also since Christ's life was one of complete self-giving for others, so the Christian is called to a costly self-giving for the life of the world.

To describe this life Bonhoeffer uses two phrases - 'secret discipline' (Arkandisziplin - mentioned in the previous section e.) and 'sharing in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world!'. These two phrases represent the height of Bonhoeffer's theology. It must be noted that Bonhoeffer's thought here is dominated by the desire to establish an intimate relationship between Christ and the Christian disciple. J.A. Phillips, commenting on Bonhoeffer's thought at this particular period, speaks of "his astonishing and unashamed desire to establish a secular style of life upon a Christological foundation". (27, p.224) The problem of non-religious interpretation arises for Bonhoeffer not from any doubt of Jesus Christ, but precisely from faith in Jesus Christ.

What positive conclusions does Bonhoeffer derive from this Christocentric position concerning the Christian disciple and his relation to the world?

1. The Christian can only be a worldly man because Christ was fully a worldly man. Christ involved himself in and died for this world and this is the world in which Christians are to participate fully and responsibly. In

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depth of the contrast. I thought that 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.

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." (16, p.201)

a letter of 5th May 1944, he wrote:

> It is not with the next world that we are concerned, but with this world as created and preserved and set subject to laws and atoned for and made new. What is above the world is, in the Gospel, intended to exist <u>for</u> this world; I mean that, not in the anthropocentric sense of liberal, mystic pietistic, ethical theology, but in the biblical sense of the creation and of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (16, p.156)

2. To be Christian is not to be 'religious' but to be truly human and this involves the disciple in full personal responsibility. Since the secular world is the scene of Christ's saving work, God must be understood as being operative in the midst of human life. So with the coming of Christ 'religion' is abolished; there is no other God than the one who comes to us in the truly human existence of Christ.*

3. A truly worldly Christianity relies only on the grace of Christ which alone can make man free from self concern (the individualism of 'religion') and free for the true worldly life of concern for others. Jesus existed for 'others' and the 'existence for others' of Jesus is the experience of transcendence. Faith is participation in this existence of Jesus. The disciple's relationship to God is not a 'religious' relationship, but is a new life of 'existing for others'; a participation in the existence of Jesus.†

4. The freedom however is a <u>costly</u> freedom. Underlying Bonhoeffer's understanding of 'non-religious interpretation' is the Lutheran Christology of Humiliation.✕ The Christian here is called to imitate Christ; the Christian shares in the sufferings of God by living a life completely in the world. The costly transcendence of God was expressed in Christ's life of complete self-giving for the sake of the world. Thus the life of the Christian disciple is in a sense redemptive as it exists wholly for 'others'. The identification of

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*See letter dated 18th July 1944 - 16, p.198

†See part of 'Outline for a Book' - 16, p.209-210

✕Cf. the 1933 lectures on <u>Christology</u> (14, p.110ff) and J.A. Phillips 27, p.193-8. See letters dated 27th & 30th June 1944 - 16, p.185ff.

the Christian with Christ who lives at the centre of life in his dealings with men appears clearly in two letters dated 27th and 30th June 1944. In the first letter, suffering and the cross are seen as the guarantee of the acceptance by Jesus of the world. Bonhoeffer then turns to the life of the disciple:

> The Christian, unlike the devotees of the redemption myths, has no last line of escape available from earthly tasks and difficulties into the eternal, but, like Christ himself ('My God, why has thou forsaken me?'), he must drink the earthly cup to the lees, and only in his doing so is the crucified and risen Lord with him, and he crucified and risen with Christ. This world must not be prematurely written off; in this the Old and New Testaments are at one. Redemption myths arise from human-boundary-experiences, but Christ takes hold of a man at the centre of his life. (16, p.186)

On this particular theme it is interesting to refer to Bonhoeffer's 'Outline for a Book'* where the same position is presented for later elaboration. In the notes for the second chapter - 'The Real Meaning of Christian Faith' - he writes:

> Who is God? Not in the first place an abstract belief in God, in his omnipotence etc. That is not a genuine experience of God, but a partial extension of the world. Encounter with Jesus Christ. The experience that a transformation of all human life is given in the fact that 'Jesus is there only for others'. His 'being there for others' is the experience of transcendence. It is only this 'being there for others', maintained till death, that is the ground of his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Faith is participation in this being of Jesus (incarnation, cross, and resurrection). Our relation to God is not a 'religious' relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being imaginable - that is not authentic transcendence - but our relation to God is a new life in 'existence for others', through participation in the being of Jesus. (16, p.209-210)

This is a radical reading of the meaning of the incarnation; a this-worldly transcendence (theologia crucis)†. Here one can speak of God only because the cross remains <u>in</u> the world. This cross shows Christ in his weakness, suffering and powerlessness but this is the only firm ground on which the Christian can stand. This is the theme of a letter dated 21st August 1944 (16, p.213-5).

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*See 16, p.208-211. For the notes on the second chapter see pp.209-210

†The influence of the O.T. is at work here (with its emphasis on the concrete, historical and material as the sphere of God's redemption). See letters 28th Nov 1943 (16, p.100ff.) and 27th June 1944 (16, p.185ff.)

In the second letter referred to (viz. the one dated 30th June 1944 - 16, p.186ff.) we see a new insight appearing; one derived from Bonhoeffer's observation of Christ's dealings with men in the gospels. He sees Christ accepting men as they were - not trying to win them over by subtle subterfuge. to expose their sin. Christ is rather the worldly man who never throws doubt on a man's health, his vigour and his fortune.*

> When Jesus blessed sinners, they were real sinners, but Jesus did not make everyone a sinner first. He called them away from their sin, not into their sin. .... It is true that Jesus cared about people on the fringe of human society, such as harlots and tax-collectors, but never about them alone, for he sought to care about man as such. (16, p.189)

Thus we see that Bonhoeffer bases his plea for this-worldliness or 'non-religious interpretation' on a. the cross and b. the life of Christ. The theme of the cross is taken up in the description of Christian discipleship as a "sharing in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world"; the Christian in faith is involved directly in the being of Jesus in the world.

The theme of the worldly life of Christ, expressed in the formula "Jesus, the man for others" shows Bonhoeffer's claim that the finite world <u>is</u> capable of bearing the infinite. This world bears the other world in Christ's absolute givenness "for others". However he guards against misinterpretation here by his concept of 'secret discipline'. J.A. PHillips summarizes:

> The Christian shares in the sufferings of God by leading a worldly life, and in the secret discipline by refusing the world any ultimate claims upon him. (27, p.225)

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* It is perhaps in this light that we should read Bonhoeffer's criticism of existential philosophy and psychotherapy (16, p.188). Bonhoeffer expresses an extreme reaction which he probably would have modified after more careful consideration. We must not accept the <u>Letters and Papers from Prison</u> as the final position of Bonhoeffer's thought. His death was untimely.

g. The Concepts of "Secret Discipline" and "Sharing in the Sufferings of God at the Hands of a Godless World" as Bonhoeffer's 'non-religious interpretation'

1. Secret Discipline

The concept of 'secret discipline' (Arkandisziplin) is decisive for a proper understanding of Bonhoeffer's 'non-religious interpretation'. It appears twice in the prison letters.* In the letter dated 30th April 1944 Bonhoeffer is considering the position of the church and its cultic activities in a non-religious situation. In the midst of his questions there appears the following;

> What is the place of worship and prayer in a religionless situation? Does the secret discipline, or alternatively the difference .... between penultimate and ultimate take on a new importance here? (16, p.154)

Again in a letter dated 5th May 1944 we find the concept appearing in the midst of Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth.† He writes:

> There are degrees of knowledge and degrees of significance; that means that a secret discipline must be restored whereby the mysteries of the Christian faith are protected against profanation. The positivism of revelation makes it too easy for itself, by setting up, as it does in the last analysis, a law of faith, and so mutilates what is - by Christ's incarnation - a gift for us. In the place of religion there now stands the church - that is in itself biblical - but the world is in some degree made to depend on itself and left to its own devices and that is the mistake. (16, p.157)

We should note particularly the context of the second extract above - the criticism of Barth's understanding of revelation. Barth, according to Bonhoeffer, had merely interpreted the whole of the gospel in traditional-biblical terms and as a result it meant nothing to a 'world come of age'.

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*See letters dated 30th April and 5th May 1944 - 16, p.151ff. & p.155ff.

†For fuller discussion of Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth's 'religion' see Part 4, section e. above.

Barth's 'positivism of revelation' had profaned the content of the faith because it had failed to show clearly how the 'mysteries' of the Christian faith are related to the life of the world. Bonhoeffer's particular understanding of the significance of Christ as he appears in the New Testament, together with the fundamental materialism of the Old Testament, has forced him to take the reality of the world seriously. So, argues Bonhoeffer, the world must not be shown the 'secrets' - church, prayer, preaching, sacraments, the life of Christ - in their uninterpreted forms.

Bonhoeffer insists that the whole gospel must be preserved by the church* but where it cannot be related to the world, silence must be upheld. Where secular interpretation is not possible, the church must not compromise by falling back on a religious apologetic which is quite inappropriate in a 'world come of age' situation.† For Bonhoeffer the form and logic of the Christian revelation was not the form and logic of the world, so the revelation will be 'for the world' in a way that will have to remain secret to the world. J.A. Phillips draws our attention to Regin Prenter's claim that "this secrecy is not the selfish, jealous guarding of the knowledge of the elect but on the contrary, an act of penance on the part of the church for the sake of the world". (27, p.227)

This theme of penitential secrecy is apparent in Bonhoeffer's 'Thoughts on the Baptism of D.W.R.'. (16, p.165-172) He is thinking about the central themes of the Christian faith. He feels that the church in the present situation cannot grasp or express them. He writes:

> We are not yet out of the melting-pot, and any attempt to help the Church prematurely to a new expansion of its organization will merely delay its conversion and purification. It is not for us to prophecy the day (though the day will come) when men will once more be called so to utter the word of God that the world will be changed and renewed by it. It will be a new language, perhaps quite non-religious; it will shock people and yet overcome them by its power; it will be the language of a new righteousness and truth, proclaiming God's peace with men and the

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*This is why he is critical of the reductions and demythologization of Rudolf Bultmann - See 16, p.156, 181

†Bonhoeffer perhaps had in mind here the Existential Philosophy which was the foundation of Bultmann's methodology - exploiting man's weakness.

> coming of his kingdom. .... Till then the Christian cause will be a silent and hidden affair, but there will be those who pray and do right and wait for God's own time. (16, p.172)

Here we see Bonhoeffer reflecting on the church's groping for something which cannot be uttered, its powerlessness and forced silence, its praying and doing right among men - a silent and hidden affair. As an act of penance the Christian must refuse to call attention to the church and its message. However, behind Bonhoeffer's thinking there lies a vision of the renewal of the church but time did not allow him to develop this theme more fully. There are only hints in his 'Outline for a Book': *

> The Church is the Church only when it exists for others. To make a start, it should give away all its property to those in need. The clergy must live solely on the free-will offerings of their congregations, or possibly engage in some secular calling. The Church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving ..... (16, p.211)

This is essentially the 'Servant Church' † witnessing to the truth of Jesus Christ as the Lord of History, at work in every nation of the world in spite of and through the ambiguous political, economic and social structures.

On the positive side there is in the Baptismal Thoughts a plea for the Christian to continue "prayer and right action" in the midst of a this-worldly existence. The fact is that by the 'secret discipline' the Christian enters fully into the secular condition common to all men, but he enters into dialogue - not on its own terms - but only as it is taken up and affirmed in Christ, his Lord. This discipline consists of a determination not to belong to the world even as one lives in and for the world with all one's being (like Christ as pictured in the Gospels). Life in the world is sustained only by Christ. Bonhoeffer fuses discipleship with a Christological foundation of humiliation:

> The centre of the 'arcanum', the real 'secret', cannot be thought of otherwise than as the hiddenness of God in his sufferings ..... What else could the contents of the 'secrets' of Christian faith be, than the suffering of God in the world hidden in the revealed suffering of Jesus

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* See 16, p.208-211

† Bonhoeffer would have approved of A.T. Hanson's - The Church of the Servant (S.C.M. Press 1962), particularly the section with the title 'The Servant Church' p.71ff.

Christ? In other words: the 'arcanum' has to do with the messianic secret of Jesus, that he who suffers in the world is Lord of the world. (H. Muller - Von der Kirche zur Welt (Leipzig 1961), p.395-6 ..... cited by J.A. Phillips (27), p.237)

2. Sharing in the Sufferings of God at the Hands of a Godless World

Two letters dated 18th and 21st Judy 1944 take up the theme of "sharing in the Sufferings of God"(16, p.198ff.). Here Bonhoeffer proposes that the 'non-religious interpretation' must have its starting point in the full acceptance of a godless, religionless world and the suffering of God within such a world. Following from this, the meaning of Christ for to-day will only appear relevant as the Christian in faith shares in the sufferings of God in the life of this godless world.

J.A. Phillips sees this as the consummation of Bonhoeffer's thinking in his prison letters. He claims, "It embraces the this-sided nature of the Christian life of faith as well as the description of the mature world as 'godless'. Once more, a this-worldly life is made possible through adherence to Christ, who is described by means of a Christology in which his life with men and his suffering and death have at last 'merged into a single vision, both acting as signs of God's being for the world'." (27, p.238)

Bonhoeffer points out that the only difference between the Christian and the unbeliever is that the Christian is called to share in God's sufferings. This insight is based on Christ. Since Christ, the worldly man, experienced Gethsemane, so the Christian is not so by virtue of a 'religious' act but only by participation in the sufferings of God in the secular world. In this particular atmosphere Bonhoeffer wishes to give 'metanoia' (repentance) an interpretation which includes the conept of suffering. He does this by relating it to the picture of Isaiah's Servant. So he writes, "'Metanoia' (is) not in the first place thinking about one's own needs, problems, sins, and fears, but allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ, into the messianic event, thus fulfilling Isa. 53. ..... Jesus calls men, not to a new religion, but to life.....a life of participation in the powerlessness of God in the world." (16, p.199-200)

In the second letter (the one of 21st July 1944), after commenting on the dangers of his approach to Christian discipleship in The Cost of Discipleship, he outlines his new position which to some extent equates discipleship with suffering and helplessness. Here he is working out what the characteristics of a this-worldly Christian discipleship should be:

> By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes, and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world - watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith, that is 'metanoia'; and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian (cf. Jer 45!) How can success make us arrogant, or failure lead us astray, when we share in God's sufferings through a life of this kind? (16, p.201)

For Bonhoeffer the world come of age is now the world in which God suffers; God is edged out of the world onto the cross.*

William Hamilton (40, p.154) points to two lines of development in these two letters. Firstly, the distinction between ultimate and penultimate is gone and instead we have "participation in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world". Here cross and discipleship coalesce to become a single vision.

Secondly, the Christian is not asked to live in the world as if God were not given (etsi deus non daretur) but in participation in the sufferings of God, the Christian is closely bound up with the God who is both given and at hand. †

It is interesting to look at Bonhoeffer's approach to discipleship in the earlier works - The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together - where the call of Christ delivers the disciple from all direct contact with the world by incorporating him in Christ existing as the church. During the period of these two works the church was conceived as a 'space' within the world and set against it.

In contrast to this, Bonhoeffer, in his prison writings, sees the Christ-

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*See letter of 16th July 1944 - 16, p.196-7

†Cf. last sentence of extract above.

ian as participating fully in Christ's "being for others" in the setting of secular life. This is for Bonhoeffer how God's transcendence ceases to be a theoretical dogma. The Christian lives out this transcendence amidst his problems which go on or not just as before. (God is not an answer or a way of escape - a deus ex machina) However Christ's mode of "being for others" is for Bonhoeffer that of the suffering Messiah. The Bible he claims points the Christian to the powerless and suffering God who really encountered the world to its full extent and yet remained Lord of it. Thus the Christian encounters Jesus as Lord in the context of frustration and humiliation and this will be the difference between Christians and non-Christians. J.A. Phillips sums up the position thus:

> By participating in Christ's being-for-others in worldly life, by encountering him there in the joys and sorrows, successes and failures of life in the world in which he lived and which he redeems through his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, the Christian 'shares in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world. (27, p.241)

The life of the Christian in the world is a complete identification with and responsibility for it but the redeemed Christian refuses to give the godless world any ultimate claim upon him. This, according to Bonhoeffer, was the firm ground on which the Christian stood. He wrote movingly on this theme on 21st August 1944:

> It is certain that we may always live close to God and in the light of his presence, and that such living is an entirely new life for us; that nothing is then impossible for us, because all things are possible with God; that no earthly power can touch us without his will, and that danger and distress can only drive us closer to him .... But the truth is that if this earth was good enough for the man Jesus Christ, if such a man as Jesus lived, then, and only then, has life a meaning for us.

Thus from a particular Christological emphasis Bonhoeffer has accepted the challenge of secularization, as a revelation, and has attempted to show that the life to which Christ calls his disciple at this point in cultural history is one of participation in God's impotence in the world.

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Note

Sources used for the reconstruction of the socio-political upheavals in Germany in the 1930s and Bonhoeffer's involvement in the underground Resistance Movement are cited at the appropriate place in the text of the thesis.