

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

The Development, Fruition, Place
and Legacy of his Thought as Seen
from a Christological Perspective

by

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Preface

Two concerns guide this study of the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

(1) It is necessary before Bonhoeffer's thought is made use of that the problem of the relationship between writings so different that they might have been the product of several hands rather than one be confronted and discussed thoroughly. Approximately one half of the present study is dedicated to this task. We have located the impetus for the whole of Bonhoeffer's production in certain characteristic Christological considerations. Here, it becomes clear that the driving force behind Bonhoeffer's theology in its entirety is his certainty that the revelation of God in Christ can and must be expressed as a concrete, contemporaneous, apprehensible and experienced reality in this world.

Bonhoeffer first expressed this conviction in the Christo-ecclesiology of his dissertation and his Habilitation: Christ exists as the church, i.e. he is real and present, apprehensible and concrete spatially in his community. Following three introductory chapters, Part I of this study unfolds and investigates this initial statement of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiological solution to the problem of the "concretion of the revelation" (Eberhard Bethge's phrase).

The second form of Bonhoeffer's concern for Christological "concreteness" was a development of an original and highly existential doctrine of the Person of Christ. Christ, the believer, and the scriptures were enfolded within a dynamic revelational circle. Bonhoeffer had barely introduced this Christology-discipleship when the Kirchenkampf began, with its demand, as he saw it,

that all theology be placed at the service of the embattled Confessing Church. He therefore forced his new thinking into the framework of his original Christoecclesiology. This action infused the latter with a prophetic intensity and power; at the same time it seriously restricted the freedom which his new Christology-discipleship demanded and made available, as it insisted that the definite limits and boundaries of the Confessing Church were also the limits and boundaries of revelation. The Confessing Church was the sole space of Christ, the one true church.

Part II(A) (chapters 6-8) describes the construction of the new Christology-discipleship formula. Part II(B) (chapters 9-10) investigates the effects upon this new Christology of the marriage of this formula to a highly restrictive Christoecclesiology. Part II concludes with the dissolution of this partnership and the reassembly of the constituent fragments in a variety of ways experimentally in the Ethics.

(2) It is at this point in our study that one interest begins to give way to another. For in the Ethics a powerful motif — barely suggested in earlier writings — now becomes a dominant theme: a concern for the relationship of the revelation in Christ to the historical development and secular condition of the western world. This interest is formulated and elaborated in such a way that new possibilities are opened up for the future course of Christian theology. Having developed this concern as the outcome of Bonhoeffer's development, we are now free to concentrate upon it as a contribution to contemporary theology.

Part III(A) (chapters 11-13) examines the developing historical and worldly interest of the Ethics and prison letters, confronting Bonhoeffer's ideas with those of

Troeltsch, Gogarten, and Barth. The ramifications of this interest and, in particular, the way in which Bonhoeffer has taken it up are discussed in three concluding chapters (Part III(B)). We shall see that Bonhoeffer's thoughts on Christ and revelation have indeed moved, as Müller suggests, "from the church to the world." Clarifying and contrasting his notions on "religionless Christianity", "the secret discipline" and "sharing in the sufferings of God" by examining relationships between Bonhoeffer and Tillich, Eulmann, and Barth, we watch Bonhoeffer's Christology-discipleship which first made its appearance in 1933 unfold in its proper setting: the world come of age.

An introduction to the 1923 Barth-Marnack letters and translations of four letters thought useful in understanding Bonhoeffer's development and evaluating his legacy have been appended to this study.

ABBREVIATIONS

1. Bonhoeffer's Works:

- AB Act and Being, London, 1962 and New York, 1961, tr. of Akt und Sein, Munich, 1956.
- CD The Cost of Discipleship, 2nd. ed., New York and London, 1959, tr. of Nachfolge, Munich, 1937.
- CF Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3, London and New York, 1959, tr. of Schöpfung und Fall, Munich, 1937.
- E Ethics, London and New York, 1955, tr. of Ethik, Munich, 1949.
- GS Gesammelte Schriften, vols. I-IV, Munich, 1958-1961.
- Letters Letters and Papers from Prison, Fontana ed., London, 1959, tr. of Widerstand und Ergebung, Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus der Haft, Munich, 1951. As there are several editions in english (including the American title Prisoner for God), each letter is referred to by its date.
- LT Life Together, New York, 1954 and London, 1955, tr. of Gemeinsames Leben, Munich, 1939.
- SC Sanctorum Communio: Eine dogmatische Untersuchung zur Soziologie der Kirche, 3. Aufl., Munich, 1960. The english translation (Sanctorum Communio, London, 1963 and The Community of Saints, New York, 1963) were published too late for use as references.

2. Secondary Sources:

- "Challenge" Eberhard Bethge, "The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life and Theology," in The Chicago Theological Seminary Register, February, 1961.
- Godsey John Godsey, The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, New York and London, 1960.

- Hamilton William Hamilton, "A Secular Theology for a World Come of Age," in Theology Today, January, 1962, pp. 435-459.
- Marty Martin Marty, ed., The Place of Bonhoeffer, Problems and Possibilities in his Thought, New York, 1962
- Müller Hanfried Müller, Von der Kirche zur Welt, Leipzig, 1961.
- MW (I, II, III, IV) Die mündige Welt, vols. I-IV, Munich, 1959-1963.

CONTENTS

<u>Introduction</u>	1
1. Biography.....	2
2. Bonhoeffer as a Theologian.....	10
Notes for <u>Introduction</u>	25
<u>Part I</u> <u>Revelation and the Church</u>	30
3. A Crisis of Vocabulary.....	31
4. Christ Existing as the Church.....	49
5. Ecclesiology as the Ground of Revelation.....	60
Notes for <u>Part I</u>	76
<u>Part II (A)</u> <u>The Concretion of a New Christology</u>	88
6. The New Christology.....	89
7. Concrete Exegesis.....	102
8. Christology and Discipleship.....	115
Notes for <u>Part II(A)</u>	125
<u>Part II(B)</u> <u>The Space and Form of Christ</u>	139
9. Revelation and the Confessing Church.....	140
10. "Conformation" and "The Archimedian Point".....	163
Notes for <u>Part II(B)</u>	181
<u>Part III(A)</u> <u>Christ and the World Come of Age</u>	187
11. History and the Secular.....	188
12. "Positivism of Revelation".....	200
13. History and Revelation.....	219
Notes for <u>Part III(A)</u>	229
<u>Part III(B)</u> <u>This-Worldly Transcendence</u>	238
14. Christ, the Worldly Man.....	239
15. Religionless Christianity.....	254
16. Sharing in the Sufferings of God.....	283
Notes for <u>Part III(B)</u>	313
<u>Appendix I: "Scientific" Theology: Bonhoeffer and the</u> <u>Barth-Harnack Letters</u>	324
<u>Appendix II: Translated Material</u>	337

I n t r o d u c t i o n

Chapter 1

Biography

We have grown up in a society which believed that every man had the right to plan his own life. There was, we were taught, a purpose in life, and it was every man's duty to accept that purpose resolutely, and pursue it to the best of his powers. Since then however we have learnt that it is impossible to plan even for one day ahead, that all our work may be destroyed overnight, and that our life, compared with our parents', has become formless and fragmentary. Despite everything, however, I can only say I should not have chosen to live in any other age than our own...

"Thoughts on the Baptism of D.W.R.", 1944

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's heritage embodied everything enlightened, temperate, humanitarian and responsible in nineteenth century Germany.¹ On his mother's side he counted a grandfather who had served as chaplain to the emperor; his great-grandfather was the eminent church historian, Karl von Hase. Both men had known imperial disfavor and imprisonment for their liberal views.

Dietrich was born with a twin sister in Breslau, on February 4, 1906. The two were the sixth and seventh of a family of eight. Berlin tradition holds that the native Berliner must be born in Breslau, and in 1912 the Bonhoeffer family moved to Berlin, where Dietrich's father occupied the first chair of psychiatry at the university. We know from Dietrich himself that he was greatly influenced by his father. In one of his letters in 1944, he acknowledged:

I don't believe I have ever changed very much, except at two periods in my life, the first under the first conscious impact of ²Papa's personality, and the second when I was abroad.

There is evidence that the uncompromising *mien* Dietrich was later to express was in keeping with his paternal heritage as well as the tradition of the aristocratic von Hases. One significant incident concerning Professor Bonhoeffer is recorded in Ernest Jones' life of Sigmund Freud. Professors Kraus and Brugsch of the University of Berlin invited Freud to contribute two articles to an encyclopedia of medicine the two planned to compile. Freud was delighted, for it would have meant support for his psychoanalytical theories and official recognition of psychoanalysis as a part of medicine. On discovering after some months that Professor Bonhoeffer's assistant, Kutzinski, had been assigned to the same subject, Freud wrote to the editors for an explanation, suspecting (correctly as events proved) that after their initial invitation the editors had been "influenced by Professor Bonhoeffer, who was antagonistic to psychoanalysis."³ Years later, the elder Bonhoeffer was to serve as the ex-officio psychiatric advisor to the trial of Van der Lubbe, the Dutchman executed for complicity in the burning of the Reichstag in 1933.⁴

Dietrich's own mistrust of psychoanalysis may have had its roots in Professor Bonhoeffer's rejection of Freud and his followers, and may be part of the reason why he was so unreceptive to theologies which made wide use of existentialist philosophy. We shall later see just how violent and narrow his view became, especially during the church struggle and when his experience in prison impressed him first-hand with the morbid character of introspection and concern for self.

The wooded Berlin suburb of Grunewald offered a cultural and intellectual environment for Bonhoeffer's upbringing. Hans Delbrück and Adolf von Harnack were neighbors, and Ernst Troeltsch was a frequent visitor to the Bonhoeffer household. There were many memorable evening discussions between Ferdinand Tönnies, Max and Alfred Weber, and Dietrich's elder brothers⁵, ranging from contemporary sociology and Dilthey, Simmel, Dostoevsky, Soloviev, and Berdyaev, the avant garde heroes of philosophy and literature, to the Jugendbewegung with its anti-rationalistic "philosophy of life." Eberhard Bethge, later Bonhoeffer's close friend and the editor of his posthumous works, reports that Dietrich "read very carefully all of Nietzsche" and was profoundly influenced by his Lebensphilosophie with its love for the earth and its creatures.⁶

In spite of what Bethge calls "the careful agnosticism of his father and his brothers,"⁷ Dietrich decided at the age of sixteen that he would enter into theological study. Following a year at Tübingen he matriculated at the University of Berlin with its breathtaking roll call of Liberal scholars: von Harnack and Karl Holl, Hans Lietzmann, the church historian, Ernst Sellin in Old Testament studies, Adolf Deissmann, and Reinhold Seeberg, with whom Bonhoeffer completed his dissertation at the age of twenty-one.⁸

After two years as an assistant with the German-speaking congregation in Barcelona and work on his inaugural dissertation⁹, Bonhoeffer spent a one-year leave of absence at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Professors Scott, Ward, Brewster, and Moffatt were lecturing, John Baillie was visiting professor, Paul Lehmann was attending seminars, and Reinhold Niebuhr had just begun to establish himself as a teacher. Judging from letters and the report which he delivered to his church upon his return, Bonhoeffer was

horrified by the sociable, non-academic atmosphere which prevailed at Union.¹⁰ From a second visit in 1939, however, Bonhoeffer revised his judgement of theological and church life in America with the understanding that much of it was simply inaccessible to a European with his theological and cultural background.¹¹ He later counted his travel abroad as one of the two really formative influences upon his life and work, turning him "away from the phraseological to the real."¹²

Bonhoeffer returned in the summer of 1931 to take up his duties in Berlin as a lecturer in systematic theology. During the weeks before he began his work, however, two memorable events occurred. In June, he delivered an address on behalf of "the youngest generation of theologians" at a memorial service for his beloved Adolf von Harnack, who had died filled with years and honors shortly following his retirement from his teaching post at Berlin.¹³ Bonhoeffer had always been very close to his teacher and his world, so much so that years later, deeply committed to the "theology of revelation" against which Harnack had battled with all the strength of his last years, Bonhoeffer thought of himself as "still a student of Harnack's".¹⁴

In July Bonhoeffer spent two weeks at a seminar in Bonn, conducted by Karl Barth. The association was to last for the rest of his life. He wrote in letters to his Swiss friend Erwin Sutz of his fascination with Barth, confessing that he "scarcely regretted an omission in his theological past more than not having come earlier."¹⁵ The theological movement which centered in Barth deeply affected Bonhoeffer's theology for the remainder of his life, and he became very personally dependent upon the older man.¹⁶

The great years of academic brilliance at the University of Berlin were behind when Bonhoeffer delivered his

introductory lecture. He taught a variety of theological subjects and struggled with his additional duties as chaplain to the technische Hochschule, ecumenical youth secretary, and leader of a notoriously difficult confirmation class of young workers.¹⁷ Of Bonhoeffer's pre-1933 work several sermons, articles, reviews, reports, and lectures remain, including the study of Genesis 1-3 published as Creation and Fall and a reconstruction of his lectures of Christology.¹⁸

With the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the ascendancy of Adolf Hitler in 1933, there began the bitter struggle of the German Evangelical Church to preserve her identity. From the outset of the Kirchenkampf no one doubted on which side Bonhoeffer stood. Two days after Hitler had been installed as chancellor, Bonhoeffer's radio address attacking the Nazi Führerprinzip was interrupted by the authorities. He expanded it and delivered it one month later before a young audience at the deutsche Hochschule für Politik.¹⁹ In April of the same year the "law for the restitution of the civil service", which dismissed Jews, including university professors, from government positions came into force.²⁰ Events moved swiftly in the church. In July, rigged elections returned an overwhelming percentage of "German Christian" supporters of the regime into the governing bodies of the church, and the "Brown Synod" in September prohibited anyone of Jewish blood or marriage from church office, including the pastorate.²¹

By November the Bethel Confession which Bonhoeffer had helped to draft had been published under the editorship of Martin Niemöller, expressing the belated but unequivocal opposition of the "Pastors' Emergency League."²²

But Bonhoeffer was no longer in Berlin. Sick at heart with the dismissal and persecution of Jewish-Christian pastors he had numbered among his friends and disgusted with the vacillation of his university colleagues, he had accepted the leadership of two German congregations in London.²³ Here he renewed his interest in the ecumenical movement, now so important to the opposition in Germany, and attempted to interpret the true nature of the struggle within the German church to its leaders.²⁴ In 1934 the synods of Barmen and Dahlem, under the aegis of Barth, declared the church government heretical²⁵ and created the Confessing Church Brethren Councils which Bonhoeffer represented at numerous ecumenical functions. During the following year he was recalled to Germany.

At twenty-nine years of age Bonhoeffer directed an "illegal" Confessing Church vicars' seminary at Zingst and later at Finkenwalde, in Pomerania;²⁶ and, in connection with it, founded an experimental community known as the Brüderhaus. Some of Bonhoeffer's finest writings were produced during this period of communal life and work, notably The Cost of Discipleship in 1937 and Life Together in 1938. Both the Finkenwalde seminary and the Brüderhaus were dissolved by force in 1937 but the former maintained a clandestine, peripatetic existence until 1940. By this time, Bonhoeffer's own activities had been greatly restricted by the Gestapo.

An attempt to get Bonhoeffer to safety in America undertaken by Reinhold Niebuhr's "committee of two", the other member of which was Paul Lehmann, succeeded for a few months.²⁷ But when war became inevitable Bonhoeffer felt that he had to share in whatever the fate of his country might be, and he returned to Germany in the

summer of 1939. John Baillie invited him to Edinburgh to deliver the Croall lectures for 1940 but travel soon became impossible.²⁸ Bonhoeffer continued work on the talks he was unable to deliver (even after he was forbidden to preach, write, or remain in Berlin and his later books were banned), and the fragments of his work which were not destroyed and had been kept out of the hands of the authorities were published posthumously in 1949 as the Ethik.²⁹

Before the war, Bonhoeffer had been strongly influenced by pacifism. During his time in London in 1934 and 1935, he had even made the preliminary arrangements for a discussion with Gandhi about the most effective methods of passive resistance. But when war began, his brother-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi was committed to the resistance group which eventually sought Hitler's death, as an assistant to General Oster of the Intelligence Service. He urged Bonhoeffer to serve as a V-Mann (Verwendungsmann) or civilian agent with the Abwehr, "partly in order to save him from conscription, partly in order to use his knowledge for the resistance."³⁰ This service (which, as is now well known, was deeply involved in underground activities) enjoyed unusual freedom from Gestapo interference and Bonhoeffer was assigned to the Munich office as a courier.³¹ The extent of his involvement in resistance affairs is not entirely clear, but it is known that he made two journeys on behalf of the resistance and planned others. He lived for a time at the Benedictine monastery of Ettal in southern Germany and travelled in 1941 to Switzerland to deliver certain documents to W.A. Visser't Hooft.³² With remarkable good fortune he was able to disclose the plans for the overthrow of the Nazi government at a meeting in neutral Stockholm in 1942

with George K.A. Bell, late Anglican Bishop of Chichester.³³ But in April of 1943 Bonhoeffer's activities were suspected and he was arrested and imprisoned at Tegel, near Berlin. Most of the letters and papers which have since been published in Germany as Widerstand und Ergebung, in England as Letters and Papers from Prison, and in America as Prisoner for God were sent to his parents and his friend Eberhard Bethge during the days at Tegel.³⁴ But after the failure of the spectacular bombing of Hitler's headquarters on the 20th of July, 1944, more stringent measures were enforced and he was placed in close confinement in the prison on Prinz Albrecht Strasse. The drama of his last days began the following February and he was removed to Buchenwald, Schönberg, and finally to the gallows at Flossenbürg, where he was hanged.³⁵ On Easter morning of 1952, the pastors of Bavaria dedicated a tablet in the village church at Flossenbürg, with a simple inscription which reads:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Witness of Jesus Christ
among his Brethren. Born February 4, 1906 in
Breslau. Died April 9, 1945 at Flossenbürg.

Chapter 2

Bonhoeffer as a Theologian

1. Biographical and Bibliographical Organization of Bonhoeffer's Theology.

The publication of the fragmentary Ethik in 1949 and the appearance in 1951 of a collection of letters and papers from his wartime imprisonment opened post-war biographical and theological interest in Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Since that time, and due largely to the dedication of Eberhard Bethge, the whole of Bonhoeffer's pre-war theological work and the letters, essays, documents, lectures, and sermons of the four volume Gesammelte Schriften have been made available. Two lengthy studies of Bonhoeffer have appeared: John Godsey's The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in 1960, and Manfred Müller's Von Der Kirche zur Welt in 1961. Bonhoeffer has been the subject of innumerable articles scattered throughout various theological journals, and the best of these, together with the proceedings of a circle of theologians influenced by him who have met four times during the years to discuss problems raised by his thought, have been preserved in four issues of a journal entitled die mündige Welt. An American symposium of critical essays appeared in 1962 which bears the title The Place of Bonhoeffer.

Bonhoeffer research is still handicapped by the lack of a detailed biography, although the collection and presentation of the source material is complete. The biographical aspects of Bonhoeffer's career often touched upon his theological work, and it is a basic assumption on the parts of many of his interpreters that the history of the time through which and in which Bonhoeffer lived

bears considerable weight in any assessment of his thought. Bonhoeffer's work is far from systematic. Especially during the Kirchenkampf he wrote largely as occasion demanded, as professor, preacher, pastor, and protagonist of the Confessing Church. At first sight his thoughts seem as unsystematic as his writings, and the productions of the end of his life, the Ethics and the prison letters, appear on the surface to be retractions of much that he had written before. The first task of our present study is to discover the essential homogeneity of his outlook and to try to see the reasons for the diversity, at time, conflict, of his statements.

To do this, we must first examine the methods which have been used by other interpreters. Most characteristic has been a chronological organization which seeks to bring together Bonhoeffer's life and theological production with the history of the times in which he lived. Godsey and Müller have sought to overcome the problem of consistency by drawing a very close connection between the events of Bonhoeffer's life, the historical events in Germany between 1918 and 1945, and the theology Bonhoeffer taught while he lived and foresaw just before his death.

Both John Godsey and Hanfried Müller recognize the difficulty of presenting a "theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer" which attempts to relate one of the later, fragmentary works to any of those written within the preceding ten years. The famous essay on "cheap grace",³⁶ written in 1937, protested against grace without discipleship and faith without obedience in uncompromisingly biblical terms, drawing a visible boundary line between the world and the community of saints. Only seven years later, Bonhoeffer was meditating in his prison cell upon the theme of "religionless Christianity", the dangers of "positivism of revelation", and worldliness as the necessary and proper concern of the Christian. The

abrupt shift of focus from Bonhoeffer's interest in the elaboration of the basis, structure, and life of the church to a concern for the problem of the revelation of God in Christ and the life of the Christian in a mature, "godless" world must be explained.

Godsey attempts to structure Bonhoeffer's thought into a coherent pattern by setting his life and work together in chronological sequence. His study divides Bonhoeffer's life and work into three periods, corresponding historically to pre-Hitler Germany, the 1933-1940 Kirchenkampf, and the wartime catastrophe ("theological foundation," "theological application," and "theological fragmentation"). He links these periods theologically by seeing the whole of Bonhoeffer's concern as Christological and ecclesiological, a concern for what Bethge has called "the concretion of the revelation", a phrase which we will define shortly. Godsey's scheme, thus far, is typical of Bonhoeffer's interpreters. He sees his task as essentially recapitulation and organization, letting Bonhoeffer speak for himself with a minimum of interpretation.

But in Bonhoeffer study, organization cannot escape being interpretation. Presentations of Bonhoeffer's theology differ (whether the difference is acknowledged or not) by the choice of period through which the whole of Bonhoeffer's development is to be seen. Godsey seems to have chosen the second, the period of the Kirchenkampf and The Cost of Discipleship. If this is true, then we can better understand the unsupported conclusions which he reaches at the close of his book and discusses without additional evidence or analysis. The most important of these is that "the last development of Bonhoeffer's theology, while indeed unexpected, does in no sense represent a break with the theology of the former periods, but

rather a bold consummation of the same!"³⁷ Godsey proceeds to question the value of certain important clues to the prison letters (among them, the attack on Barth's theology and the characterization of Bultmann) in an attempt (one imagines) to bring them and the Ethics into agreement with the biblically and theologically orthodox works which preceded. On what grounds? But a careful analytical study of this shift between the second and third periods is outside the modest limits of his study.

Thus Godsey seems to be pointing to his organization, especially the biographical material, as the basis for his judgement of the prison letters. He imagines, no doubt, that this will provide an objective view of Bonhoeffer's development and demonstrate in a self-evident manner that it is continuous and coherent. But we need to know more; the problems are much deeper and must be squarely faced and discussed. Godsey leans too heavily upon his chronological-biographical-bibliographical organization as the solution to these problems. It would thus seem that although biographical and chronological organization can be a useful tool for organizing and interpreting Bonhoeffer's theology, we are not by taking it up relieved of the task of critical investigation to determine the reasons for the diversity of his statements.

Hanfried Müller makes it clear in his study that he has weighted very heavily the fact that the periods of Bonhoeffer's theological development begin and end on dates highly significant for German political and social history. In 1933 Hitler assumed power, in 1939 the war began, in 1944 the end of Nazism was certain.³⁸ A convinced Marxist and an East German, Müller sees Bonhoeffer's

theological production almost as a function of German history: the breakup of the Weimar Republic (Bonhoeffer's search for community), the Nazi takeover (counter-offensive), and the breakup of fascism (questioning of his bourgeois past and vision of a new world order). Müller is not primarily interested in an objective presentation of Bonhoeffer's theology, but rather in the development of his own position, for which he makes use of Bonhoeffer. He fully recognizes this. The difficulty in his interpretation is that he has staked too much on dates which are, at best, approximate. The foundation for The Cost of Discipleship, for instance, was laid in 1932; Müller sees the work as "the theoretical outcome of the practical experiences of the church struggle" which began, in fact, the following year.³⁹ Life Together describes the Brüderhaus experiment which goes hand in hand with the thought of The Cost of Discipleship and has some of its roots in Bonhoeffer's 1927 dissertation; Müller finds it embarrassing to his thesis and characterizes it as a "detour".⁴⁰

There is undoubtedly some truth in Müller's thesis. Bonhoeffer was deeply involved in the life and affairs and spirit of his country, and his thought could not have been unaffected. But surely one should leave room for the "aristocratic" Bonhoeffer who, in Karl Barth's words, "seemed to move on ahead in another dimension."⁴¹ Bonhoeffer's freedom from time and place and circumstance characterized him beyond all else, and impresses anyone who reads the prison letters.⁴² His theology cannot be summed up as a theology of reaction. It was much more a theology of the unexpected, as his friends continually recognized. Involvement does not preclude detachment, hilaritas, as Bonhoeffer was to call it.⁴³

An interpretation of Bonhoeffer must therefore strive

to maintain Bonhoeffer's freedom from the events of his life and of the time in which he lived, if we are to understand him and make use of his contribution.

2. Ecclesiology and Christology as Clues to Bonhoeffer's Theology

If any interpretation of Bonhoeffer's thought is to be theological and sufficiently organized that it will be coherent, we must decide upon a particular vantage point from which to view the whole. Godsey and Müller agree that Christology and ecclesiology, taken together as a single theme, are the clues whereby the unity of Bonhoeffer's far-reaching thoughts may be discerned.⁴⁴

Although the approaches of the two men are different in manner and style — the importance of Bonhoeffer rests for Godsey in his message to the church to "be what it is in Christ" ; while for Müller (who places a greater valuation upon the Ethics and the prison letters), Bonhoeffer shatters the boundaries of a church whose structure has been determined by western ideology, in order to understand the whole of society as redeemed and taken up in Christ — both locate the key to Bonhoeffer's development in his concentration upon the problem of how Christology takes concrete form as ecclesiology.

Godsey is convinced that Bonhoeffer remains in the realm of Christology and ecclesiology throughout the various turnings of his argument. The basic concern remains Christology, "but because Christ is not without his body, Christology includes ecclesiology within itself... 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."⁴⁵

The question is whether this holds good for the last period of Bonhoeffer's thought. Godsey has little difficulty demonstrating Bonhoeffer's virtual identification of Christology with ecclesiology during the first periods of his work, drawing upon the riches of Sanctorum Communio, Act and Being, The Cost of Discipleship, and Life Together. In the Ethics he directs us to Bonhoeffer's stress on the church as "Christ taking form in the world" and (though less certainly, for this is in fact only a small part of the Ethics) his thesis can still be defended. It is with the prison letters that Godsey has the greatest difficulty. Eager to see that Bonhoeffer's sudden interest in "worldliness" not be misunderstood as a devaluation of the church, he writes:

...he does not mean that in becoming worldly, the church would cease to be the church, but that it can only be the church in the true sense when its own attitude toward the world parallels God's attitude, when its life in the world is patterned according to Christ's life, when it takes with utmost seriousness its role as vicarious representative and deputy for the world. That the notion of Christian worldliness does not dissolve the identity of the church nor exclude its essential functions is easily proved, because Bonhoeffer speaks of its ongoing task of proclaiming the word of God, its secret discipline, its cultus,⁴⁶ and its task of intellectual discussion with the world.

Godsey is probably right that Bonhoeffer did not envision a total disappearance of the church in favor of "worldliness". But he misses the significance of the fact that the letters discuss the implications of Bonhoeffer's discoveries for the church only as a side issue and in a very sketchy fashion — the church, as in much of the Ethics, is set off to one side. The discoveries them-

selves are not ecclesiological. No reader of the prison letters can fail to miss the polemical nature of the thoughts on "religionless Christianity" and the fact that the polemic is directed toward the church and her traditional apologetic. It is difficult to determine the place of the church in the prison letters because Bonhoeffer treated it in such an off-hand way, and it is of crucial importance to notice that up to the beginning of the Ethics in 1940 the church was the central theme in his thinking. Bonhoeffer's correspondent, surprised at the direction of the former's thoughts in prison, wrote expressing his concern and received the answer: "You ask whether this leaves any room for the church, or has it gone for good? ...I'm breaking off here, and will write more tomorrow."⁴⁷ Tomorrow did not come. Does this permit Godsey to complete the picture by directing us toward Bonhoeffer's previous interest in the church?

It is at least certain that Bonhoeffer has not swept the church aside with a stroke, but has set ecclesiology aside to clear his mind of pressing preliminary questions. The dangerous conclusion of Müller's study is that Bonhoeffer's ^{thinking} moved steadily from his dissertation in 1927, under the pressure of history, to its consummation in 1945. Gemeinschaft is replaced by Gesellschaft, the community of saints by the godless, secular society. Müller sees in the "religionless Christianity" of the Letters and Papers from Prison the final vindication of man's freedom from the religious world view of the Christian west, such that the Christian may take up a secular Weltanschauung which requires neither a formal concept of God nor the institutional church for its completion. The "world come of age" (the phrase which occurs in Bonhoeffer's letters) and the historical movement of the world toward ultimate seculariza-

tion demand a theology based not upon Christ's redemption of a community, the church, but upon his suffering Lordship over the whole of society. One is thereby enabled to live a life of faith within a world which declares itself to be what it has in fact become: a "godless" world in which God is revealed through the brother and community is manifested in the communist society.

Müller's argument should be studied carefully by theologians in the west for its own sake; it is something vitally new in Christian thought and we cannot afford to dismiss it out of hand. He does not claim to be drawing the conclusions from Bonhoeffer's thought that Bonhoeffer himself would have drawn. The question, as he puts it, is not "where would Bonhoeffer stand today" -- this is pointless -- but rather, "who may rightly receive Bonhoeffer today?"⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer was of course thoroughly dedicated to his bourgeois life and culture, and it seems that he was never really conversant with Marxist sociological analysis or political theory, despite his keen interest in sociology. Still, one feels willing to allow Müller to make use of Bonhoeffer in order to understand the difficult position of the Christian in a Marxist land -- as long as he is not doing violence to the latter's theology.

What Müller does not seem to notice is that his argument has taken Bonhoeffer's "religionless Christianity" as a last word. Because there is no ecclesiology in the letters does not mean that Bonhoeffer has done away with it, nor justify the thesis that society assumes the place of the church. We have enough clues (though they are no more than clues) in the prison letters to know that Bonhoeffer wanted to discuss the role of the church in the area of the "secret discipline"⁴⁹, and that he regarded this as the dialectical partner and corrective of "religion-

lessness". Müller's theology of the cross, which he finds in Bonhoeffer, turns (in Bethge's words) "essentially into a negation of any ecclesiology."⁵⁰ Where he begins with a genuine dialectic between the secret discipline and the liberated life of the world come of age, this dialectic soon resolves itself in favor of the utter invisibility of faith and the disappearance from the scene of the body of Christian doctrine and the peculiar response of the believer to revelation.⁵¹

The central difficulty in Müller's and Godsey's interpretations seems to be their choice of ecclesiology as a vantage point. Godsey can hold Bonhoeffer's position together as a thoroughgoing ecclesiology only by dismissing the very important and significant criticism of the church and of Barth, whom Bonhoeffer identified with its mistakes; directing us toward the latter's earlier and undoubtedly passionate interest in ecclesiology. Müller, on the other hand, points to the virtual identification of Christology with ecclesiology in Sanctorum Communio and then to the meditation on "religionless Christianity" in the letters (with their final, but surely temporary, silence on ecclesiology) in order to argue that Bonhoeffer was seeking a way to replace the church (Gemeinschaft) with the society (Gesellschaft). The socialist society becomes the Body of Christ.

Whatever Bonhoeffer was concerned with in the Ethics and the prison letters, it was not primarily ecclesiology. To base an interpretation of his thought in its entirety on the ecclesiological concern of his earlier thought or to argue from the silence of the letters on the subject that he has thrown it over will make it almost certain that he will be misunderstood. There are so many problems

bound up with any attempt to see Bonhoeffer's theological progression as a logical and inexorable movement from ecclesiological beginnings to mature ecclesiological (or anti-ecclesiological) conclusions that ecclesiology simply has no usefulness as a basic interpretative principle for understanding the whole of the theology of Bonhoeffer.

What seems more fruitful as a guide through Bonhoeffer's thought is an element which undoubtedly did carry through the whole of his thought, and which has been recognized by practically all of his interpreters (including Godsey and Müller).⁵² Bonhoeffer's emphasis on Christology, particularly on a Christology which exhibited certain definite and constant tendencies, is a basic clue to his thinking. One cannot escape it in any assessment of Bonhoeffer, and it has been adopted in this study as the light which can illuminate the dark places, narrow passes, and turnings of Bonhoeffer's path. The danger of turning to Christology, as Ebeling notes, is that of retreating into a kind of Christomonism, reducing all problems to the dogmatic, Christological sphere. We have no wish to do this. The implications must constantly be explored, without obscuring central issues by resorting to a traditional terminology in which we may feel more at home.

Bonhoeffer's Christology developed; if we say that it was a constant motif of his thought, we do not mean that it remained an idée fixe by which he measured the utterances of fifteen years. His theology issued from the tension, we shall argue, between various unreconciled elements in its Christological center. In 1940, he found that his ecclesiology could no longer serve as the conceptual partner of his Christology and he set aside the former to concentrate on the development of the latter.

It will be our task to set forth in detail the Christological motivation for the various shifts in Bonhoeffer's concern. Bethge has described this motivation as "the quest for the concretion of the revelation,"⁵³ by which he means that Bonhoeffer struggled, throughout his lifetime, to give adequate expression to his conviction that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ was visible, tangible, concrete, apprehensible by all men. Almost to the end of his life, he demonstrated this concretion by pointing to the church as the Body of Christ, where Christ was present. In his last years, he explored the possibility of pointing to this reality and "participating" in it within secular, worldly life, without undue concern for the ecclesiological implications of his discoveries. Christology and the concretion of the revelation were constant motifs in his theology, the place of the church and the life of the believer in the world were its variables.

3. The Usefulness of a Study of Bonhoeffer's Theology

A study of the development of Bonhoeffer's theology is of undoubted interest for its own sake. The man seemed to embody in what he called his "bastardized theological heritage" many of the struggles of Protestant theology which since have decided its present day shape. His involvement in the battle of the church against Nazism opens out the whole history of the Kirchenkampf, from which the church of today and theology still has so much to learn. As a human story, one can hardly equal the dedication of a man to his church and country, the conspiracy to eliminate its false leader; Bonhoeffer's courage in the face of betrayal, the disappointment of all his hopes, and death at the hands of the hangman.

Surely, a presentation of Bonhoeffer's theology is

justified if it does nothing more than confront us with this "open and rich and at the same time deep and unnerving man," who somehow "shames us and comforts us at the same time," as Karl Barth was to describe him.⁵⁴ Bonhoeffer's theology, as well as the man himself, has a disturbing quality about it, and it is good for us to be disturbed in this way as theologians.

To confront Bonhoeffer's theology itself as nearly as possible has been the primary concern of this study. We have used Christology as our guide, and we will pause from time to time to get our bearings from the two men to whom Bonhoeffer owed so much and who can be of great service in helping us to understand him: Karl Barth and Martin Luther. Our argument is as follows:

Bonhoeffer began his career with a strong ecclesiological interest, and expressed it in his thesis of 1927 and his dissertation in 1931 as a "visible" Christology: "Christ exists as the church." His first attempt to move out of this restrictive interest occurred in 1932 and 1933 and, characteristically, his shift of emphasis revealed itself Christologically. But in 1934, the Kirchenkampf forced him back upon his ecclesiological theme and introduced, as ecclesiological concerns, certain notions of discipleship and scripture which he had developed independent of his doctrine of the church. With the additional burden of the practical questions of the Confessing Church, Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology was strained to the breaking point. His distance from these practical questions, beginning in 1939, meant that he was free to experiment with a less restricted theme: how Christ "takes form" in the world. The results of this experiment and his involvement with the secular interests of the resistance movement led him, in

his prison cell, to set traditional problems to one side altogether in order to make a fresh start, from a firm Christological basis, on the problem of the revelation of Christ in and for the world.

But a confrontation with Bonhoeffer is not the only task of a study of his theology. Perhaps it was Müller's interpretation which first suggested that one cannot rest content with an objective exposition of Bonhoeffer's thought. It would be easy to dismiss Müller's subjection of Bonhoeffer to his Marxist view of history as a piece of opportunism, but something approaching Müller's audacity is the only possible justification for a continued interest in Bonhoeffer's thought. As Bethge remarks concerning Von der Kirche zur Welt, "this book is not dull." This is not generally true of Bonhoeffer studies. The difference lies in Müller's conscious attempt to "make use" of Bonhoeffer.

We must not only find a way in to Bonhoeffer's theology, but also a way out. If it is true that many of his battles are the battles that Protestant theology fought and continues to fight, may it not be that Bonhoeffer can suggest ways out of the stagnation of the present-day church and the deadlock to which our theological history has led us? This study answers this question in the affirmative, and attempts to direct the reader outward with three issues developed in Part 3. Each involves Bonhoeffer in conversation with other theologians.

(a) Bonhoeffer wrote shortly before he died of the need for a vigorous and open reappraisal of Liberal theology, "taking up and answering" its questions and, in this way, "overcoming" it.⁵⁶ The theology of revelation with which Bonhoeffer identified himself broke off all connection with the nineteenth century. But Bonhoeffer found the

historical question which Liberal theology had raised no longer avoidable -- once it had been raised in the proper way -- if the theology of revelation were to be "intellectually honest." We shall investigate the nature of Bonhoeffer's protest against Liberal theology and explore some of the lines of communication with the previous century which reopened in his prison cell. This will lead us to a discussion with Troeltsch, Gogarten, and Barth.

(b) In the light of his discoveries, Bonhoeffer felt called upon to criticize Karl Barth, with whom he had been identified for many years, and Rudolf Bultmann, whose demythologizing essay in 1942 opened up long closed-off areas of discussion for Bonhoeffer, for not having gone "far enough". Explicitly and implicitly, he attacked the theological presuppositions of a man whose concerns he might otherwise be thought to share: Paul Tillich. We shall have to investigate, correct, and develop all of these criticisms and comparisons for clues which they may provide for an understanding of our present situation.

(c) Bonhoeffer's final remarks from prison suggested, as we shall see, a new understanding of theology and the way in which it approaches its subject matter. Theology speaks of the revelation of God. But in speaking of God in Jesus Christ it speaks of worldly life: how Christ, and in him, the Christian, enter into the life of a world come of age. We shall elaborate Bonhoeffer's fragmentary thinking on this last theme by turning to the concern of Jacques Ellul for a Christian "style" of life as the chief concern of theology in the present day.

Notes for Introduction

1. Readers acquainted with Bonhoeffer's life will find little that is new in this brief sketch, and are referred to Bethge, "Challenge," passim; Godsey, passim; G. Liebholz, "Memoir," in CD. The primary source material is available in the four volumes of GS. Cf. also below, notes 30 and 35.
2. April 22, 1944. Letters, p. 88.
3. Sigmund Freud, Life and Work. Vol. II, London, 1955. p. 279
4. Zeittafel, GS II. Bonhoeffer could and did refer to his family connections in order to commend his own patriotism, especially when his movements were restricted in 1940 and again in 1943. Cf. GS II, pp. 363-6 and "Report on Prison Life," Letters, p. 184.
5. Bonhoeffer's eldest brother, Karl Friedrich, was a professor of chemistry who died in 1957. Klaus, a jurist working with Lufthansa, was executed for his part in the resistance against Hitler as were his brothers-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi (former supreme court justice) and Rüdiger Schleicher (professor of jurisprudence). A third brother-in-law, Gerhard Liebholz, escaped to England before the war.
6. "Challenge," p. 4. As Bethge remarks in his preface to GS III, Bonhoeffer never forgot his debt to Nietzsche and seemed particularly moved by the latter's use of the story of the giant Antaios, who was invincible as long as his feet remained on the ground, drawing strength from the earth. In an early essay on Christian ethics, Bonhoeffer refers to the story, and he returned to it in one of his last writings, an uncompleted drama which he sketched in Tegel in 1943. Bonhoeffer's partners in conversation may also have stimulated his interest in sociology which concerned him so much in his dissertation a few years later.
7. "Challenge," pp. 4, 7. Cf. also Bethge's interesting comparison of the backgrounds of Bonhoeffer and Paul Tillich as it reflected in their later work in Ibid., pp. 35-6; and H.C. von Hase, Begriff und Wirklichkeit der Kirche in der Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers, NW I, p. 27.
8. Sanctorum Communio: eine dogmatische Untersuchung zur Soziologie der Kirche. Berlin, 1930. (= SC).

9. Akt und Sein: Transzendentalphilosophie und Ontologie in der systematischen Theologie. Gutersloh, 1931.
2d. ed., Munich, 1955. (ET=AB)
10. GS I, pp. 51-111.
11. GS III, pp. 85-126.
12. April 22, 1944. Letters, p. 88.
13. Rede zum Gedächtnis Adolf von Harnacks, GS III, pp. 59-61.
14. Cf. "Letter to Winfred" in the appendix to this study.
15. GS I, pp. 17-22.
16. Bethge, "Challenge," p. 7: "But there is no doubt that as far as this independent and creative mind opened itself to contemporary influence Bonhoeffer sided with none more readily than with Karl Barth." Cf. Bonhoeffer's article explaining Barth's theology to americans in 1930 ("The Theology of Crisis", GS III, pp. 110-126). The powerful effect of Barth's personality upon the younger man may be seen in his letter exchanges with Bonhoeffer in GS II, especially the first exchange, December 1932-February 1933 (pp. 39-41). The correspondence in its entirety provides a lively history of the important events in Bonhoeffer's life prior to the war. Barth's violent letter of November 20, 1933 (pp. 134-7) demanding Bonhoeffer's immediate return to Berlin from London was almost certainly in Bonhoeffer's mind when he debated a return to Germany from safety in America in 1939. For Barth's final assessment of Bonhoeffer, cf. "Letter from Karl Barth to Landessuperintendent P. Herrenbrueck," in the appendix to this study.
17. "Challenge," pp. 5-6.
18. Schöpfung und Fall, Munich, 1937 (ET = CF). The early theological work, including the reconstructed Christology lectures, is in GS III.
19. GS II, pp. 19-21, 22-38.
20. "...this law applied to two married relatives of Bonhoeffer." "Challenge," p. 14.
21. Ibid. Cf. GS II, pp. 44-53, 62-9.
22. Ibid., pp. 77-119.
23. Ibid., pp. 120-204.
24. GS I, pp. 224-276; GS III, pp. 248-292.
25. "Challenge," p. 14

26. GS II, pp. 447-514; GS III, pp. 294-369.
27. GS I, pp. 279-354; GS II, pp. 347-362.
28. GS II, p. 362
29. Ethik, Munich, 1949; ET Ethics.
30. Bethge, "Challenge," p. 27. The resistance movement in Germany was very poorly co-ordinated. Bonhoeffer was in contact with the most active group, the complex "Kreisau circle", which was in existence before the war and which sought at various times to take Hitler's life. After the failure of the last attempt, the explosion of a bomb in Hitler's headquarters on July 20, 1944, the group was hounded out and, to use Hitler's phrase, "exterminated mercilessly." A large part of aristocratic and humanitarian Germany was thereby destroyed. The acknowledged leaders of the active resistance were Generals Beck, Oster, von Fritsch, and von Hammerstein; Carl Goerdeler, former Lord Mayor of Leipzig; Wilhelm Leuschner, former president of the United Trade Unions and Jacob Kaiser of the Catholic Trade Unions. Much of the activity was carried out under the cloak of the Military Intelligence Service, headed by Admiral Canaris. Cf. G.V.S. Gaevernitz, ed., in F. von Schlabrendorff, Revolt against Hitler, London, 1948, p. xiii; Gerhard Ritter, The German Resistance, New York, 1953; H. Gollwitzer et. al., eds. Dying we Live, London, 1956.
 Bonhoeffer's exact part in the activities of the Kreisau Circle is still unclear. He made at least two trips on behalf of the resistance. Cf. Revolt Against Hitler, pp. 162-3; Eberhard Bethge, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in German Life and Letters, Oxford, 1957, p. 123; "Challenge," pp. 27-8; Aus Bonhoeffers Konspirativen Reisen. Zwei Abschnitte aus einer Bonhoeffer-Bibliographie als Vorabdruck, MW IV, pp. 109-139; below, notes 32 and 33.
31. "Challenge," p. 27.
32. Cf. W.A. Visser't Hooft, 'Begegnung mit Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in Das Zeugnis eines Boten, Geneva, 1945.
33. Cf. G.K.A. Bell, "The Background of the Hitler Plot" and "The Church and the Resistance Movement," GS I, pp. 390-8, 399-413, and the various letter exchanges in GS I, pp. 355-389.
34. Munich 1951, 6th enlarged ed., 1955. ET London, 1953, Fontana ed., 1959 (= Letters). New York, 1954.
35. Cf. "The Last Days," Letters, pp. 176-182. Within one month Klaus Bonhoeffer, Hans von Dohnanyi, and Rüdiger Schleicher had been executed.

36. CD, pp. 35-47. Insofar as Bonhoeffer's name was widely known in Germany before the war, it was in connection with this phrase and this book.
37. Godsey, p. 267.
38. Müller, pp. 30-52. Müller sharpened this argument and repeated it at the fourth meeting of the Bonhoeffer "circle" in East Berlin in 1961, arousing a great amount of controversy. Cf. Zur Problematik der Rezeption und Interpretation Dietrich Bonhoeffers, MW IV, pp. 52-78 and Bethge's review of his study, Besprechung: Manfred Müller, Von der Kirche zur Welt, MW IV, pp. 169-174.
39. Bethge, MW IV, p. 171.
40. Müller, pp. 244ff. "...this way was really a detour; historically false -- the right way was the later way with the Gospel and the world." (pp. 252-3) "Life Together is related to the later works of Bonhoeffer...as life under the Law to life under the Gospel." (p. 253)
41. Cf. Appendix, "Letter from Karl Barth to Landessuperintendent P. Herrenbrueck".
42. "His passion for human freedom sprang out of the whole of his life and it had a sense of joy about it. It sprang from a quite different dimension, and this he communicated to us in an irresistible way... Anyone who enters into Bonhoeffer's ideas and thinks out his thoughts experiences an inner liberation." Bethge, German Life and Letters, pp. 126, 130.
43. March 9, 1944. Letters, p. 77. Cf. also the comments on "detachment" in the letter of May 25, 1944 (Ibid., pp. 102ff.)
44. Godsey, p. 264. Cf. H.C. von Hase, Begriff und Wirklichkeit der Kirche in der Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers, MW I, pp. 26-46. Müller, pp. 9-14.
45. Godsey, pp. 264, cp. 17.
46. Godsey, p. 271.
47. Letters, p. 110. June 8, 1944
48. Müller, MW IV, p. 53.
49. Letters, p. 92, April 30, 1944
50. Bethge, MW IV, p. 172.
51. Müller, pp. 391f.
52. Godsey, p. 264: "The cohesive and elucidative element in the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is his steadfast

concentration upon the revelation of God in Jesus Christ;" Bethge, German Life and Letters, p. 129: "Bonhoeffer cannot quite see what will happen to the traditional forms of the church, but he can fix the starting point for us. It has the figure of Christ as the center..." Gerhard Ebeling, Die 'nicht-religiöse Interpretation biblischer Begriffe', ML II, p. 19: "...there can be no doubt of the intensity with which Bonhoeffer's thought is oriented on Jesus Christ." Each of Bonhoeffer's major writings plunged fearlessly into a Christological theme. SC, p. 139: "Christ exists as the church;" CF, p. 8: "The Creation story should be read in church in the first place only from Christ... Christ is the beginning, the new, and the end of our world;" LT, p. 21: "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ;" Ethics, pp. 20, 166: "the form of Jesus Christ takes form in man," "Christ is the Mediator and sustainer of the Bible, the church, theology; humanity, reason, law, formation. To Him must everything return, only in Him can there be life;" Letters, p. 90: "The thing that keeps coming back to me is what is Christianity, and indeed, what is Christ for us today?"

53. "Challenge," p. 7.
54. "Letter from Karl Barth to Landessuperintendent P. Herrenbrueck," Appendix.
55. Bethge, ML IV, p. 169.
56. June 8, 1944. Letters, p. 110

Part I

Revelation and the Church

Chapter 3

A Crisis of Vocabulary

Before the war we lived too far from God; we believed too much in our own power, in our almightiness and righteousness. We attempted to be a strong and good people, but we were too proud of our endeavors, we felt too much satisfaction with our scientific, economic, and social progress, and we identified this progress with the coming of the Kingdom of God. We felt too happy and complacent in this world; our souls were too much at home in this world. Then the great disillusionment came. We saw the impotence and the weakness of humanity, we were suddenly awakened from our dream, we recognized our guiltiness before God and we humbled ourselves under the mighty hand of God. ...We had to recognize the limits of man and that means we discovered God anew in his glory and almightiness, in his wrath and his grace.

Ansprache . Herbst, 1930 . GS I, pp. 69-70

Protestant theology was in a state of upheaval when Bonhoeffer began his theological training at Tübingen. In that year, 1923, a prophetic exchange of letters took place between the two men who were to have the most profound influence upon his life: Adolf von Harnack, the great figure of the last years of nineteenth century evangelical theology, engaged Karl Barth and his "theology of crisis" in the pages of the Liberal journal, die christliche Welt.¹ If one were to judge by the strange new phrases which were suddenly appearing in this and similar debates -- the "Wholly Other" who breaks in "perpendicularly from above," revelation "thrown like a stone," the "infinite qualitative distinction" between God and man -- one might call the critical situation a "crisis of vocabulary,"² perhaps the first such great turning point since the time of Schleiermacher. Barth and congenial thinkers called for nothing less than a precipitous break with the theological

development which had been successfully asserting itself for two or three centuries.

At the turn of the century Adolf von Harnack had said in his famous lectures on "The Essence of Christianity" that "those of us who possess more delicate and therefore more prophetic perception no longer regard the Kingdom of love and peace as a mere Utopia."³ But confronting a world whose foundations had been shaken by the world war and the chaotic situation in Germany, young theological students began to look elsewhere for guidance. Bonhoeffer spoke of the recognition of the impotence and weakness of humanity, and the glory and almightiness, wrath and grace of God. God was real, perhaps more real than he had ever been -- but his reality was his distance from man in his majesty. The revolution was given its classic text in Karl Barth's Römerbrief:

The more profoundly we become aware of the limited character of the possibilities which are open to us here and now, the more clear it is that we are farther from God, that our desertion of him is complete...and the consequences of that desertion more vast...than we had ever dreamed. Men are their own masters. Their union with God is shattered so completely that they cannot even conceive of its restoration. Their sin is their guilt, their death is their destiny, their world is formless and tumultuous chaos, a chaos of the forces of nature and the human soul, their life is illusion. This is the situation in which we find ourselves.

Barth was later to compare the beginning of his theological revolution to someone ascending a dark church tower who clutches, instead of the stair rail, the bell rope, accidentally striking the great bell.⁵ But if this bell roused students at Berlin to shocked awareness of the theological situation, their teachers were at first startled, then puzzled, and finally angered. Influential schools of Liberal theology looked to Berlin for guidance and

found little. Ernst Troeltsch died before Bonhoeffer arrived at the university; Karl Holl while he was still in attendance. In 1931 Harnack himself passed at the age of eighty, leaving of the four only Seeberg, the "learned but colorless"⁶ historian of dogma and perhaps the most vulnerable to the criticisms of dialectical theology. But if the University of Berlin was in a state of decline when Bonhoeffer matriculated, it is also true that too much emphasis in Bonhoeffer study has been placed upon his reaction against his teachers and too little upon the great influence they exerted upon him. It is well, therefore, that we begin our study by examining the central motifs in the theologies of his four teachers.

Harnack, Seeberg, Troeltsch and Holl had trained in the theology of Ritschl and Herrmann and represented various modifications of the thought their teachers had expressed.⁷ The first three shared a movement away from Ritschl's disinterest in culture and philosophy of religion and his isolation of theology from other intellectual disciplines.⁸ From this point the three separated further. 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. He was thus enabled to place a conservative view of church history at the service of the Liberal spirit.⁹ Harnack remained loyal to the wider interests of Herrmann, substituting for the centrality of ecclesiology in Ritschl's thought a broad sweep of cultural interests and an individual spirit which drew its strength from the heroic transcendence of history and nature.¹⁰ But the most radical reaction against Ritschl, and against Herrmann and Harnack as well, came from the History of Religions school and the systematic theologian of that movement, Ernst Troeltsch.

"Perhaps the greatest and most modern of the modernists,"¹¹ Troeltsch rejected the kernel-and-husk methodology by which Harnack, Holl and Seeberg sought an irreducible "essence" or minimal "absolute principles" of Christianity, and set out with tremendous self-confidence, a profound understanding of the secular world, and an instinctive mistrust of half-measures to "build" a modern Christianity.¹² He thought of himself as one whose task it was to complete Schleiermacher's revolution. Like Schleiermacher, he saw Christianity as a matter to be dealt with in the area of philosophy of religions, the psychological analysis of religious consciousness and the religious idea as it manifested itself in history.¹³ History and religiousness were self-evident facts; the problem was how to relate them.

Troeltsch had been deeply affected by Hegel and Lessing. For the former, "religious faith grows out of history" but "in its inner truth and validity it is not dependent on history." Coupled with this, Troeltsch accepted Lessing's dictum: Accidental truths of history cannot furnish the proof for the necessary truths of reason.¹⁴ Thus, what was required of Troeltsch was an absolutely fearless attitude toward historical relativism, and because the historical element in the incarnation is "no more than the means of introducing the Christian idea into history" — an idea which can now maintain itself by means of its own intrinsic resources — the "illustrative" historical facts may be given over to textual criticism.¹⁵

The result is that Christianity, as a religion, is purely limited and conditioned, and a search for "absolutes" or an "essence" asks for what history cannot, by definition, provide. An impartial study of religions will, however, show Christianity to be the "highest", the synthesis of

the legalistic and redemptive religions of mankind, and the perfect expression in its central affirmations of the philosophical truth of the unity of God with man.¹⁶ Troeltsch's enemy was "absolute authority", and he felt it his duty to guard a secular world from ecclesiastical encroachments. The course of history had freed the world from absolutes and laid bare its own autonomous religiousness. In Protestantism and Progress, he wrote:

If the absolute authority has fallen which, in its absoluteness, made the antithesis of the divine and human equally absolute, if in man an autonomous principle is recognized as the source of truth and moral conduct, then all conceptions of the world which were especially designed to maintain that gulf between the human and divine, fall along with it. With it falls the doctrine of the absolute corruption of mankind through original sin, and the transference of the ends of life to the heavenly world in which there will be deliverance from this corruption. In consequence, all the factors of this present life acquire an enhanced value and a higher impressiveness, and the ends of life fall more and more within the realm of the present world with its ideal of transformation.¹⁷

"The conceptions of the world which were especially designed to maintain that gulf between the human and divine" seem to include, first, a certain conception of divinity itself. It was basic to Troeltsch's thought that the world is "a product of the divine will into which divinity does not enter,"¹⁸ and those earthly-heavenly structures which somehow embodied this divinity must be done away with. These are removed from this world, but they do not disappear altogether. In "the life beyond the world," Troeltsch wrote in the enigmatic closing paragraph of his Social Teachings, divinity acts upon the world as "the inspiration of the life that now is."¹⁹ Secondly, "absolute and immediate divine revelation embodied in the church is no longer tenable,"²⁶ and Christianity is left "capable of freely combining with all of the inter-

ests and factors of life."²¹ Thirdly, dogmatics as "firmly established, unchangeable truth" is replaced by a kind of dogmatics which is "emerging from the great self-revealing movement of history, and is conscious of working in the direction of an absolute end."²² Fourthly, the Bible, which in Protestant scholasticism replaced the authority of the church with the authority of an infallible, divinely inspired Scripture — is to be made completely subject to the criticism of historical science.²³

The removal of "divinity" or "absolute authority" embodied in the institution does not leave the secular world comfortless. Divinity is replaced by an "autonomous principle" in man which is "the source of truth and moral conduct." Apparently, then, secularism can permit (indeed, it cannot deny) an innate religiousness in terms of "the clear requirements of the moral consciousness."²⁴ If Troeltsch had no place for the self-conscious and redeemed community in his thought, he also regarded radical individualism with mistrust, and spoke of a movement of history, guided by the religion which it bears and which transcends it, toward "a new civilization of restraint." No student who had taken part in Troeltsch's seminars could ever have included him in any general characterization of Liberalism as unduly optimistic. Yet one who banished from the world any revelation which approached it from outside and found a doctrine of original sin a relic of a false understanding of God could never have foreseen the irony in his prophecy of a "new civilization" based on the autonomy of man, as his country moved toward 1933.

In spite of the fact that Troeltsch died before Bonhoeffer could sit in his lectures, the bold sociological approach to the doctrine of the church which he presented in his Social Teachings determined the subject and approach

of Bonhoeffer's student dissertation. Bonhoeffer chose for himself an exceedingly difficult task: to produce an understanding of the church which "rejected the possibility of grasping her sociological facts from outside" -- i.e., in terms of general religious principles -- while setting forth her structure in terms of a sociological analysis carried into the service of dogmatics.²⁵ 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"²⁶ or, in Troeltsch's own words, "the intrinsic sociological idea of Christianity, and its structure and organization."²⁷ Bonhoeffer now wished to reassert the vertical dimension of the church, to "liberate⁸ genuinely theological concept of the church ...with every philosophical and sociological tool at his command."²⁸ But this was not the whole of his concern. He wanted to insist, at the same time, that Troeltsch was correct in seeing the church as an empirical structure because "revelation means nothing beyond, but an entity in this historically shaped world."²⁹

The truth of the matter is that Bonhoeffer had taken over Troeltsch's sociological tools without really confronting the presuppositions which determined the way in which Troeltsch had wielded them. It is too bold a claim for Bonhoeffer's champions to say that here, in his first writing, he had encountered Troeltsch directly.³⁰ While his contemporaries engaged in discussion over the temporal problems of faith and history, Bonhoeffer turned to the spatial question of faith in the community -- thereby anticipating concerns which the "theology of revelation" still has not properly considered.³¹ But by beginning where

he did, he left begging as many questions as did Barth, who pronounced Troeltsch's theology a cul-de-sac.

Not until the writing of the Ethics and the time of his imprisonment was Bonhoeffer to attempt to come to terms with the basic questions Troeltsch had raised, and we shall see how greatly these questions disturbed him. Emil Brunner once wrote of Troeltsch as the one "to whom belongs the credit of having discerned and shown the irreconcilable contradiction which modern theology had so long attempted to hide...: the chasm which separates modern theology from the theology of the reformers and of the ancient church."³² And in a prison letter in which Bonhoeffer wrote that contemporary theology would have at last to face the questions raised by a Liberalism which, if it lost the battle, at least had the courage to enter it, he added parenthetically the one name: Troeltsch.³³

Karl Holl published a collection of his monographs on Luther in 1923, as the first volume of his Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte. Hans Lietzmann described the publication as "like a sudden and mighty revelation," while Harnack, his older colleague at the university, called him "the renewer of Lutheranism."³⁴ Troeltsch had dismissed Luther as a medieval man and placed the beginning of Neo-Protestantism in the eighteenth century. But Holl was certain that Luther could speak in his own words to the twentieth century. He based his study upon exacting historical and philological examination of sources, relating Luther to the whole spiritual development of the west, including that of the modern world, and took Luther out of the hands of the subjectivists to present him as a genuinely theocentric theologian. Within the decade following publication Holl's work had been questioned from many quarters. It was said that his assertion of Luther's theocentricity against the Christocentric con-

ception of Luther's doctrine (which originated with Ritschl and was accepted at the time) masked a Kantian prejudice, and that Holl had oversimplified Luther's teaching on justification, with the result that in his presentation, "justification becomes merely the initial groundwork for God's continuing dealings with men."³⁵ Like Seeberg, Holl seemed to Scandinavian scholars to overemphasize the new life of the Christian, and thus to suggest that sanctification was a "growth into a real righteousness of one's own, given...by God," which becomes the "real continuing ground of one's standing with God."³⁶ Regin Prenter accused both men of setting Luther's doctrine into an idealist frame and thus piously identifying the 'new man' in Christ with the 'converted man.'³⁷

But at the time of their writing, Holl's essays seemed to many of his contemporaries to constitute "an important medium between Barthianism and Liberal theology." Harnack had expressed surprise that, in his own study, he had seemed to be able to make little sense out of Karl Barth's vocabulary, and Holl's work was expected to provide him with an "aerial". Instead, it brought forth only criticism both from Barth and from many Liberals, none of whom was willing to accept the Luther Holl had presented.³⁸

The difficulty was that Holl had seen in Luther's theology a "religion of conscience" to which he himself subscribed. The effect of this was most apparent in his understanding of New Testament Christology, as he outlined it in his popular Distinctive Elements in Christianity. Jesus lived, he wrote, because "an extraordinary individual was necessary — one who knew how to walk along the dizzy path where satanic and divine are divided from one another."³⁹ The irrational element in Christianity "made

evident the actual truth, that what offended the common sense of mankind, commended itself to the thoughtful as the revelation of a deeper and supremely convincing truth concerning God and man -- herein lay the conquering power of Christianity."⁴⁰ Holl saw in this the key to Pauline theology. "Over and above what the ordinary man may achieve... Paul recognizes a still higher plane where, in virtue of a special endowment, freedom and certainty of action join forces in a distinctive way..."⁴¹ The "higher plane" is the sphere of conscience, a place in man where God might encounter him and show him his possibilities, enabling him to reflect upon the divine answer to his human striving and choose for good or for evil.

Bonhoeffer, along with the dialectical theologians who were his contemporaries, reacted strongly against the notion that a point of contact between God and man can be spoken of. Consequently, he put serious questions to Holl's presentation of Lutheran theology. His reaction played a major role in his rebellion against the theology of his teachers, as we shall see in coming pages. But in Holl's seminars, Bethge writes, "Bonhoeffer got a magnificent introduction and came to love Luther above anyone else..."⁴² Nor could Bonhoeffer rid himself of the problem of "conscience." This troubled him in both of his earlier books, in the 1932-3 lectures on Genesis, and twelve years later in the pages of the Ethics. From prison, Bonhoeffer was to write of "the time of religion", which he thought had come to an end, as a time of "inwardness and conscience."⁴³

Bonhoeffer wrote his doctoral dissertation under the guidance of Reinhold Seeberg, the historian of dogma who completed his valuable Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte while Bonhoeffer was his student. We may thus expect a

substantial amount of Seeberg's teaching; and reaction against his teaching in the pages of Sanctarum Communio. Seeberg led the "Modern Positivist" revolt against Ritschl's refusal to relate religion to metaphysics and the dismissal of dogmatics by the "History of Religions" school, and attempted "at once to reaffirm the Apostle's witness to Jesus and to conserve to the full the unity of the divine life."⁴⁴ The Modern Positivist school was "'positive' in that it sought to preserve the full unity of Christian faith in the final revelation of God in Jesus Christ; ...'modern' in that it attempted to express this faith not by a repristination of old dogmas, but in a form intelligible to modern man and in harmony with the best thought of today."⁴⁵ The program was not dissimilar to that of certain interests of contemporary apologetical discourse. In the preface to The Fundamental Truths of the Christian Religion, a series of open lectures delivered in Berlin in 1911, Seeberg writes:

Everywhere in our day we are confronted by the great task of preserving Christianity for the modern mind. This can be accomplished only if the modern world can be brought to the consciousness that even at the present day the deepest wants, needs, and problems which move man find their answer in the Gospel, and that the Gospel need fear no progress of science and culture. But for this purpose no pains must be spared in translating the thoughts of the Christian religion into the speech and modes of our time. No element of real Christianity may thereby be surrendered, yet the particular way of stating the problem raised by the spirit and need of our time must receive minute attention. The old truth must be taught in new wise.⁴⁶

Seeberg went about his task in a highly personal way. The studies of Lutheran theology and church dogma in which he engaged were undertaken with the Hegelian assumption that dogma is "only the form in which the Christian society expresses its knowledge of the saving truths of faith."

Thus, dogma can be "separated from the historic forms in which (the saving truths of faith) found expression in the past."⁴⁷ Dogma can and should be rewritten for a modern age, and the proper language for such a reformulation would be contemporary metaphysics.

Bethge thus calls Seeberg the "mediating spirit between idealism, orthodoxy, and modernism."⁴⁸ The latter developed what Sidney Cave called a "bold and simple Christology, expressed by means of a vocabulary which mediated between the traditional language of dogma and a universal religious metaphysic. His conception of the "religious a priori", a notion which Bonhoeffer strongly rejected, provided the point of contact between God and man and served as the common denominator for discussion between Christianity and the secular world. "God can only be conceived as a reality," he wrote, "if there is in man an organ for this purpose."⁴⁹ This organ was the mind, the realm of the Spirit, personal will, voluntarism. It possessed an "intrinsic capacity" for "becoming aware of the being and activity of the supramundane God, and accordingly for receiving the content of His revelation, as divine, into the soul."⁵⁰ God enters the mind as "a supernatural, living energy which has unlimited power over everything worldly."⁵¹ The basis of theology is thus for Seeberg the immediate reality of the new life in Christ in the consciousness. From this basis, he unfolded his Christology and ecclesiology.

A Christo-ecclesiology was at the center of Seeberg's system. He saw the church as the visible, tangible, incarnate Holy Spirit, and related the church to the Holy Spirit in the same way that the logos is related to Jesus.⁵² He maintained a "historical" understanding of the Trinity, whereby the church exists in the "time of the Holy Spirit," as the Holy Spirit in the process of being realized. The

relationship between Christ and God thus determined, at the same time, his understanding of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Church, and between the individual consciousness and God.

We shall be treating Seeberg's ecclesiology in more detail in the following chapter of this study. Here it is useful to point to its Christological basis, and see how closely God and "operative spiritual will power" in the church and the individual were identified, as they manifested themselves in Jesus. "Jesus' disposition and Jesus' will," Seeberg writes, "is holy, almighty love-energy." "Therewith is Christ's nature known. This is, at the same time, knowledge of God. The God who is revealed to us in Christ is holy, almighty love-will."⁵³

This God-will created the man Jesus for its organ, and "what he felt, willed, thought, said, and did was worked in Him by the personal God-will that dwelt in Him."⁵⁴

Seeberg formulated the doctrine of the Trinity by substituting three co-eternal and co-terminous volitional acts for the traditional Persons. The second Person is Jesus in whom the personal God-will worked, in the form of an energy which was "the Divine Person Himself."⁵⁵ The Holy Spirit was thus the God-will as it manifested itself in the church.

Seeberg attempted in this way to relate the significance of the church to spiritual history in general, and thus to find a new basis and significance for dogma and church history. Bonhoeffer took this attempt seriously, and wrestled with Seeberg's doctrine of the church throughout the pages of his dissertation. He reworked much of his teacher's terminology and used it for his own purposes, attacking at the same time his metaphysical pre-

suppositions. Not until he attacked Seeberg's religious a priori in Act and Being was Bonhoeffer entirely independent of the concerns of his teacher.⁵⁶ But Seeberg's work in the history of dogma enabled Bonhoeffer to ground himself in the Reformation theology which he was to use as the basis of his protest against the Liberal theology in which the latter had been trained, and there was little theological rapprochement between Bonhoeffer and his teacher once his dissertation was completed. One suspects that Seeberg never had the personal influence over Bonhoeffer that Harnack and Barth enjoyed. In a letter to a friend in 1930 Bonhoeffer wrote of one of Seeberg's sermons which he had recently heard as "shameful..., a religious chat."⁵⁷ Both Seeberg and Bonhoeffer were teaching at the university for the next several years, but after 1931, Bonhoeffer never mentioned his teacher again.

Much of the blame for the creation of the false Kulturprotestantismus which collapsed in 1918 has been laid at the feet of the man who most influenced the Christian world in which he lived, Adolf von Harnack. His What is Christianity? which Barth has called a climax in the history of nineteenth century evangelical theology, went into several printings — perhaps indicating that the culture to which Harnack spoke understood these lectures as a powerful and optimistic expression not only of the Christian faith, but also of trust in the progress of the modern world. Yet Harnack's understanding of history was not a simple one. He insisted that "all meaning resides exclusively in the supernatural world," and that religion must transcend history and nature as the realm of death.⁵⁸ At the same time, history and nature are redeemed by religion with the elevation of the individual spirit "above heaven and earth."⁵⁹ In his own personality,

Harnack embodied just such an individual spirit and became one of the most impressive figures in modern Protestant church history.

Troeltsch thought of dogmatic theology as a possibility for Neo-Protestantism, but only one which made no divine claims for itself. Seeberg wished to reclothe dogma in modern, metaphysical dress. But Harnack, in his masterwork, The History of Dogma, saw the Reformation as the conclusion of the development of dogmatic theology. The history of dogma was the story of the obscuring of the Gospel through Hellenization. Luther discarded dogma and substituted for it an evangelical view.⁶⁰ But, only half understanding what he had done, he left behind him the material for the reconstruction of dogma in Protestant scholasticism. What Luther discovered was that "theology is not the analysis and description of God and of the divine acts from the standpoint of reason as occupying an independent position over against God, but it is the confession on the part of faith of its own experience, that is, of revelation."⁶¹ Not reconstruction of dogma, but completion of the destruction of dogma was the task of contemporary theology. And Harnack closed his great work with these words:

Therefore the goal of all Christian work, even of all theological work, can only be this -- to discern ever more distinctly the simplicity and the seriousness of the Gospel, in order to become ever purer and stronger in spirit, and ever more loving and brotherly in action.⁶²

The center of Christianity was thus what it did for one's life. And no one ever lived his teaching more than Harnack. The breadth of his interests and the depth of his scholarly insight made him at home in almost any faculty of the university. On his death in 1931, Bonhoeffer delivered the address on behalf of the last

generation of students to have sat at the feet of Harnack, and spoke of him as "the old master, to whose opinions the entire cultural world listened attentively," the enemy of all false knowledge, narrow-mindedness, and prejudice, "above all, a theologian."⁶³ He regretted that future generations of students could know nothing of "the world which this personality embraced" and which he carried with him wherever he went, "constraining honor for a life which was conducted in the spirit and battle for the truth."⁶⁴

Bonhoeffer never lost a profound respect for the world of Harnack, which he himself had known in his youth. In prison, he read one of von Harnack's histories and confessed that it drove him to melancholy with the feeling that this kind of life could never again be achieved.⁶⁵

...Our generation (he wrote his parents) can no longer expect as yours could a life which finds full scope in professional and private activities, and thus achieves perfection and poise. And to make matters worse, we have the example of your life still before our eyes, which makes us painfully aware of the fragmentariness of our own.⁶⁷

Bonhoeffer saw the task of his generation as that of "saving ourselves out of the debris, as a brand plucked from the burning..., to keep our lives going rather than to shape them, to endure, rather than to forge ahead."⁶⁸ He was in fact remarking on the vast gulf between his age and that of von Harnack, and perhaps on the gulf between the theology which he had come to accept and that of his teacher. For von Harnack had rejected the age of Luther, so similar to Bonhoeffer's own, and had constructed his theology for an age which had passed away:

In (Luther's) age, when life still continued every day to be threatened by a thousand forms of distress, when nature was a dread, mysterious power, when legal order meant unrighteous force, when terrible maladies of all

kinds abounded, and in a certain sense no one was sure of his life -- in such a time there was necessarily no rising beyond the thought that the most important earthly function of religion is to give comfort amidst the world's misery. Assuagement of the pain of sin, mitigation of the evil of the world -- this Augustinian mood remained the prevalent one, and assuredly it is neither possible nor intended that this mood should ever disappear. But the task that is set to Christian faith today is no apocryphal one... It must be able to take a powerful part in the moulding of personality, in the productive development of the dominion over nature, in the interpenetrating of the spiritual life with the spirit, and to prove its indispensableness in these directions, otherwise... the great course of our history will pass on its way.⁶⁹

Bethge sums up the formative influences on Bonhoeffer from his Berlin education as follows: "Troeltsch's interest in the sociological realities of Christianity, Holl's reawakening of the genuine Luther, Harnack's intellectual incorruptibility, and Seeberg's philosophical openness."⁷⁰ Beyond this, Bonhoeffer remained "one of those who love and share the tradition of a great society, who regard its shame and glory as their own, and who die a little with it, when it falls to the revolution."⁷¹ No one has put better than Paul Tillich what it meant to have loved and shared this nineteenth century tradition:

Belonging to the nineteenth century implies life in relatively peaceful circumstances and recalls the highest flourishing of bourgeois society in its productive grandeur..., a consciousness of the humanist values which underlie even the anti-religious forms of this society, and which made and make it possible to resist the inhuman systems of the twentieth century. I am one of those in my generation who, in spite of all the radicalism with which they have criticized the nineteenth century, often feel a longing for its stability, its liberalism, its unbroken cultural tradition.⁷²

Upon reading Harnack's history of the Prussian Academy in his prison cell, Bonhoeffer wrote to his parents:

There are so few nowadays who have any real interest or sympathy for the nineteenth century... Hardly anyone has the slightest idea what was achieved during the last century by our own grandfathers. How much of what they knew has already been forgotten! I believe people will

one day be utterly amazed at the fertility of that age,
now so much despised and so little known.⁷³

Chapter 4

Christ Existing as the Church

Five years before Karl Barth rewrote and retitled his christliche Dogmatik as Kirchliche Dogmatik, Dietrich Bonhoeffer had completed his Sanctorum Communio, with its argument that the "inner logic" of dogmatics demands that theology begin at that point where it acknowledges the irreducible claim of the church to a reality based upon the revelation of God in Christ. The theme of Bonhoeffer's work, "Christ exists as the Church," was developed in view of both the relativizing "religious community" of his Liberal teachers and the destructive individualism and radical views on transcendence of the dialectical critics of Liberalism.⁷⁴ He thus attempted to construct a Christo-ecclesiology which would "understand...the reality of the Church of Christ as presented in the revelation of Christ" at the same time that it unfolded this revelation "in the social, philosophical, and sociological sense."⁷⁵ In Godsey's succinct formulation, Sanctorum Communio was to be "an investigation of the social structure of the 'fellowship of the saints' in which the insights of social philosophy, with its genetic interest in human sociality and sociology, are made fruitful for Christian dogmatic thinking about the Church."⁷⁶

Perhaps it was inevitable not only that such a task should suffer from methodological unclarity but also that Bonhoeffer should have found no one to take his work seriously.⁷⁷ Dialectical theology was not prepared for a sociological and philosophical approach, in spite of the fact that Bonhoeffer's thesis was wholly in keeping with the logic of the dialectical method.⁷⁸ The care with which Bonhoeffer developed his "Christian sociology" obscured the tension which carried through the work and made it

seem what he certainly did not intend: a compromise. The style was that of a doctoral dissertation, pedantic and technical.⁷⁹ Bonhoeffer borrowed and adapted his terminology from his teachers (notably Seeberg), social science (Tönnies, Simmel and the "formalistic" school), and personalist philosophy (the language of I and Thou). The manner in which he then adjusted this terminology to fit the dogmatic and biblical presuppositions of the latter half of his dissertation never, in spite of his efforts, became wholly clear.

In an excellent essay on Sanctorum Communio, Peter Berger argues convincingly that Bonhoeffer made a poor choice when he selected the sociological theory which served as one partner in his conversation,⁸⁰ turning his back on Marx and Weber to stand within "a long tradition of German conservative ideology."⁸¹ Bonhoeffer wished to display the church as, above all, an empirical reality -- but he chose a social philosophy which was "anxious to safeguard a very high and distinctive level of abstraction."⁸² The result was that empirical data never really became a factor in Bonhoeffer's argument. It is important, in view of a renewed interest at the present time in the sociology of the church (which looks to Bonhoeffer's work as a legitimating classic) to emphasize that he worked with a sociology few sociologists of today would accept.

But, as Berger admits, Bonhoeffer's sociological presuppositions are "foils for an essentially dogmatic argument."⁸³ And despite the eccentricities of his methodology, Bonhoeffer's polemic against the Berlin systematizers does clearly and forcefully emerge: "Not religion, but revelation; not religious community, but Church. And that means the reality of Jesus Christ."⁸⁴ The strategy was to take sociology out of the hands of those

who had used it to describe the church, by means of an outside standard, as a "religious community". Arguing that the church cannot be understood from any viewpoint other than that of Christian revelation, Bonhoeffer then used sociological concepts for his purpose of describing the visible and unique form which the revelation assumes among the secular structures of society.

One of the peculiar and unfortunate aspects of Sanctorum Communio is its avoidance of any direct encounter with the greatest of the Liberal socio-theological thinkers, Ernst Troeltsch.⁸⁵ There is an implicit conversation with Troeltsch throughout Bonhoeffer's dissertation -- which was surely inevitable -- but his thesis simply argued the contrary of Troeltsch's position without confronting his presuppositions. These were that a correct historical understanding makes impossible any "spatial" definition of the church as a community embodying the revelation of Christ, "resting in an immediate authority with a strictly defined sphere."⁸⁶ A/ecclesiological structure which explains itself in terms of a revealed "word" inaccessible to objective study is an anachronism. There can be no "revelation" of this kind where all truth is subject to the relative conditions of history. "Revelation" is therefore replaced by a religious view of mankind as a whole, symbolized by the person of Christ and the worship of him as "the necessary symbol of the cult."⁸⁷ The old church with her divine authority, her scriptural or hierarchical ideal of unity, has been irrevocably shattered by the Reformation and the rise of historical science. Her religious power is now manifested in the life and social structures of the secular world.

Bonhoeffer, like Barth, seemed in 1927 to feel that the only way to move beyond Troeltsch's position was to

disregard it. Turning his back on the historical analysis which was to affect him so profoundly in later years, Bonhoeffer turned to the "spatial" aspect of the church and defended sociologically what was essentially a traditional Lutheran conception. Here he found himself struggling with the ecclesiological thought of his doctoral advisor, Reinhold Seeberg.

Seeberg's understanding of church dogma and his insistence on the validity and relevance of metaphysics as the realm of contemporary dogmatics would allow him no dissolution of the church into an independent organization for the production of ethical ideals and human inspiration. "The church stands in a fixed relation of infinite importance to the world," and must "hold itself inwardly free from the world" if it is to give its service to the world.⁸⁸ At that point where Troeltsch had ended his discussion, Seeberg began describing how the church receives and participates in Christ. He did not develop this participation in Troeltsch's social and ethical terms, but rather with his characteristic metaphysical-psychological terminology. The combination of traditional ecclesiology with Christology and metaphysics led him to center his general religious view of mankind in the church, concentrated, formally defined, and structured. The church as it participates in Christ, not the absolute personality of Christ, was the source of energy and stimulation for mankind. Holiness in the world thus resides in the church.⁸⁹ The church is the coming Kingdom of God, which "is and will be," and "in which the will of God determines the course of humanity."⁹⁰ The church is "social life in the deepest sense," where egoism is overcome in the fellowship of believers.⁹¹ From his conservative Lutheran background (the effect of which will clearly be seen in his pupil) as well as his

metaphysical presuppositions, Seeberg could speak of the church as the "incarnation" of the third Person of the Trinity.⁹²

Bonhoeffer's relationship to his teacher's conception of the church is not easy to determine. His theme, "Christ existing as the church," was directed against any relativizing away of the fact of revelation. Seeberg and Troeltsch alike had substituted for "revelation" (a conception inaccessible to scientific enquiry) the notion of "religion." But Seeberg's rejection, because of his metaphysical presuppositions, was more difficult to get clear. It was thus more difficult to attack. Bonhoeffer was certain that no outside measure (such as a general concept of religion) could be allowed to determine the nature of the church and describe her forms and her future. The church can be understood, he argued, only from within and in terms of her revelational foundation in Christ:

The concept of the church is only thinkable in the sphere of God-given reality — that means it is not deducible. The reality of the church is a reality of revelation, to whose essence belongs either belief or disbelief. If one wishes to find an adequate criterion for the authorization of the claim to be the community of God, one can speak only from within and submit to this claim. ⁹³

From this basis, Bonhoeffer could have developed a thesis which engaged Troeltsch in conversation, showing how and in what way a conception of revelation was tenable in view of the historical process. He chose instead to consider his statement programmatic, thus dismissing Troeltsch with a stroke, directing himself to the second question: Can a particular limited space which especially contains Christ (Seeberg's concept of the church) be said to contain him "religiously" or as "revelation"? Within the boundaries Seeberg defined, discussion with Troeltsch could only occur in secondary issues, such as the parti-

cular morphology of the visible church. Bonhoeffer made axiomatic the inadequacy of Troeltsch's definition of the church, because "in the foreground stands an historically fortuitous social construction."⁹⁴ Thus the question of the relationship between the revelation embodied in the church and the historical dissolution of "the fixed and objective ideal of unity" of the church never arose.

In its argument with Seeberg, Bonhoeffer's thesis depended largely upon the successful adaptation of the socio-philosophical terms of his teacher to his own purposes. The degree to which this was achieved, and the general direction of Bonhoeffer's dissertation as a whole, is most clearly indicated in his development of a term taken from Seeberg's writings: the "objective spirit." Following Seeberg (and Hegel)⁹⁵, Bonhoeffer defines this objective spirit as "that which links the sense of history and the sense of community, the intention of a community in point of time, and its intention in point of space. The objective spirit is the will effectively operating on the members of a community."⁹⁶ We thus have to do with that spirit which, filling a community and the sphere of her existence, determines her nature. In the church, in Seeberg's view, this spirit would be that which made her distinctly "religious" as opposed to the objective spirits of other human communities.

Bonhoeffer's point of departure for the problem of community is a presentation of man as essentially homo socialis. He quotes with approval from Seeberg's Dogmatik: "The sociality of the human spirit is revealed as a primal force. ...It is a tremendous reality, which first teaches us to understand the secret of humanity and its history, and to place hope in the future of mankind."⁹⁷ He notes that Seeberg was "the first since Schleiermacher"

to present sociality as something belonging to human nature. It is not clear, however, whether Bonhoeffer would have wished to question the latitude Seeberg granted to this idea in his ecclesiological argument. In the Fundamentals of the Christian Religion, Seeberg founded the church on the a priori structure of the sociality of man: "The will of Christ that his church exist needed human nature with its tendencies and inclinations as the means for raising the structure. Man lives not solitarily, but socially."⁹⁸

Objective spirit is a conception pertaining to all human communities. Where Seeberg elaborated its meaning for the church, he often substituted the more dynamic term, "operative spiritual will power." Given Seeberg's metaphysical understanding of the relationship between God and the world, one cannot avoid suspecting that Seeberg wished to identify this "spiritual will power" with the Holy Spirit itself. At one point, Seeberg wrote: "We...experience the Spirit from above as operative spiritual will-power."⁹⁹ The relationship between members of the community seems identical with that between man and God:

Where one wishes to make another subject to the sovereignty of God, he wills it from God, and his own word takes effect in so far as it is heard at all, and works psychologically as almighty divine will. We all...speak God's word in so far as we speak of God's sovereignty, for our speech is the vehicle of the power of God.¹⁰⁰

The danger here is readily apparent: Seeberg virtually identifies the action of God with dynamic, interpersonal relationship and personal will. The church is Christus prolongatus as the incarnation of the Holy Spirit.

In his development, Bonhoeffer distinguished between the "possibility" and the "necessity" of the church from the standpoint of human sociality, dismissing the second

from any proper understanding of the church:

Taking up the notion that religion is mainly social, we come to the more or less fortuitous psychological grounds (the necessity for communication — Schleiermacher; the receptive-active nature of man — Seeberg). These tell of the possibility, but not the necessity, of religious community. We reject all such general religious notions of a concrete religious form from the concept of the Church. The general necessity for the form of community cannot be proved — indeed, such proof is only possible if the Christian revelation is believed; that is, taken seriously. Only from the concept of revelation can one arrive at a Christian concept of the Church.¹⁰¹

Here again, as with Troeltsch's view of history, Bonhoeffer simply sets his own view alongside the opposing one. For he is arguing that the basis of the church cannot be derived from any socio-religious characteristic of human nature. When he arrives at his presentation of the objective spirit of the church, he neatly reverses Seeberg's argument:

Only from above to below, from within toward without, not reversed, is an understanding of the empirical Church possible. If that is understood, then it is possible to set forth the church principally as a religious community; but always in looking backward upon the real foundation by God. Thus the objective spirit, beyond what has been said, signifies the entrusting to the Church, the claim, of the objective spirit of the community to be the historical reality and the social reality of Jesus Christ.¹⁰²

Bonhoeffer is perfectly willing to grant his Liberal teachers their conception of the church as a "religious community", provided they have first understood it as a community whose determination is solely from God. And one notices the acceptance of the dialectical argument: The church cannot simply be identified with the Holy Spirit. The church claims that the Holy Spirit has been entrusted to her. She is the community of revelation only in faith. And here Bonhoeffer reconstructs all of the tensions Seeberg had carefully resolved. The time and

space which are the two correlates of the objective spirit check one another, and Seeberg's question of the relationship between objective spirit and Holy Spirit is undercut by the necessary theological distinction between realized and actualized church. Because of human sin and limitation, and because the church is an institution in history, an identification between the two can be made only eschatologically. Thus Bonhoeffer speaks of the "sanctification" of the objective spirit by the Holy Spirit.¹⁰³

But this rejection of Seeberg's identification of the spiritual content of the church with the action of God comes into conflict with Bonhoeffer's thesis — which is, after all, to demonstrate that the community of revelation is, at the same time, a wholly empiric community. He resolves this conflict by pointing to the visible, "sociological" forms of the church — preaching and the sacraments — as vehicles through which the Holy Spirit operates. As Godsey summarizes Bonhoeffer's position:

Christ and the Holy Spirit use the historically given forms of the objective spiritual life in the upbuilding of the empirical church: the historical tendency of the Christ-Spirit works in the form of the objective spirit, and the Holy Spirit uses the objective spirit as the bearer of his social activity. But both confirm their presence to the church solely through the Word, which means that the ever-changing, imperfect, sinful objective spirit of a human "religious fellowship" must believe that it is the church, "Christ existing as community," sanctorum communio! The identity cannot be confirmed historically and will remain invisible until the eschata. Yet a beginning has already been made, in that the Holy Spirit uses the objective spirit as the bearer of certain visible forms that he himself guarantees to be efficacious.¹⁰⁴

One may question the wisdom of attacking a conception of the guaranteed presence of God within a religious spirit by setting against it divinely instituted, virtu-

ally ex opere operato forms which have then simply to be believed. But Bonhoeffer was not as concerned with protecting his theory against the charge that he pictured revelation as a heteronomous power which arbitrarily violated the structures of the world, as he was with attacking the conception of the church as an organism which lived as an exalted communal feeling of value or worth. Perhaps his sociology betrayed him and left dubious his claim that "revelation means nothing beyond, but an entity in, this historically shaped world."¹⁰⁵ But if his dissertation confused more than it illuminated, at least his intention was clear. He concludes his argument:

The Church is not first made real by assuming empirical form, when the Holy Spirit does his work; rather the reality of the Church of the Holy Spirit is one which is founded on revelation, and it is a matter merely of believing in that reality of the Church in its empirical form.¹⁰⁶

Bonhoeffer does not see how the experience of revelation will be distinguished from "religious experience" or "spiritual exaltation," but he attempted, by means of an explication of what he called "everydayness", to differentiate theologically between them. The church is God's downward movement, not the upward movement of an association of human beings. In a fine passage, he wrote:

...It is precisely in the commonplace surroundings of every day that the Church is believed and experienced; it is not in moments of spiritual exaltation, but in the monotony and severity of daily life, and in the regular worship of God that we come to understand the Church's full significance. ...Our age is not poor in experiences, but in faith. Only faith can create true experience of the church, so one would think it more important for our age to be led into belief in the Church of God than to have experiences squeezed from it which as such are no help at all...¹⁰⁷

The purpose of Bonhoeffer's thesis was thus to reverse the standpoint from which the question of the church is

asked. The church is indeed a community and, in view of its activity, a religious one. But the determination of the church is solely from God and his revelation. No value over and above the value of any other human community can be ascribed to the Church, independent of the reality given by Christ.

Bonhoeffer intended to maintain his conversation with his Liberal teachers by insisting that his concept of revelation was empirical, but they remained unconvinced. Sanctorum Communio already bore the marks of Bonhoeffer's impatience with Liberal methodology and he soon surrendered attempts at mediation between Liberal and dialectical theologies. But he never lost his insistence that revelation is "an entity in this historically shaped world" and retained, for the next several years, the assertion that revelation in Christ is an ecclesiological reality as the basis of his own theology. His more decisive battle with his Liberal teachers followed the publication of his dissertation, and took place in the pages of Act and Being.

Chapter 5

Ecclesiology as the Ground of Revelation

Logically considered, the sequence of Bonhoeffer's first two major works is reversed. While Sanctorum Communio developed the forms and structures of the community of revelation, Act and Being is concerned with the preliminary thesis: A Christian conception of revelation must, by definition, be set forth in an ecclesiological form. Thus many of the tensions and concerns within and behind the argument of Sanctorum Communio (especially the Christological ones) first emerge in Act and Being.

Discarding the problematic sociological development of his earlier work, Bonhoeffer remained loyal to his basic thesis. Act and Being confronts various philosophical and theological solutions to the problem of revelation which were prevalent in 1930, and orders them into two categories: those based upon a transcendental thesis and those which emerge from an ontological foundation. Bonhoeffer then questions the validity of each group for a specifically Christian conception of revelation:

The problem is one of forming genuine theological concepts and of choosing whether one is to use ontological categories in explaining them or those of transcendental philosophy. It is a question of the 'objectivity' of the concept God, of an adequate concept of knowledge, of defining the relation between the being of God and the mental act which conceives it. In other words, there has to be a theological interpretation of what the 'being of God in revelation' means and how it is known, of what may be the interrelation of belief as act and revelation as being, and correspondingly of where man stands when seen from the standpoint of revelation.¹⁰⁸

Arguing that neither act nor being is a correct category by means of which Christian revelation may be discussed,

Bonhoeffer presents his thesis that "the idea of revelation must be reinvisaged within the concretion of the idea of the Church, i.e. in a sociological category where both kinds of analysis encounter each other and are drawn together in one."¹⁰⁹

In our own development, a decision must be made as to the procedure we may best adopt in tracing out and holding together the various threads of Bonhoeffer's concern: his ecclesiological theme, his encounter with Liberal and dialectical theologians, the philosophical considerations which now appear, and the underlying problems of revelation and Christology. The staggering number of persons and ideas which pass through the pages of Act and Being makes it impossible to reproduce Bonhoeffer's argument, even in summary form. In addition, it is systematically necessary that we anticipate themes which will occur in Bonhoeffer's later work. We must choose from the conversations remaining in the earliest phase of Bonhoeffer's life and work those which are closest to the center of his concern and which will, at the same time, relate most clearly to the chapters which are to follow.¹¹⁰

Among the questions raised in Act and Being is one concerning the religious a priori, a general form of religious awareness in man, as set forth by Bonhoeffer's teacher, Reinhold Seeberg. Bonhoeffer's attack on this notion marked his final departure from the influence of the latter. Within early writings from New York and Berlin, Bonhoeffer also confronts the problem of conscience as it appeared in the work of another of his teachers, Karl Holl. Neither of these discussions is central to the specific thesis Bonhoeffer is developing, but both point directly to what lies beneath his concern.

Our attention is thereby focused on the relationship between Bonhoeffer and his teachers and the problem is, once more, revelation versus religion.

The outcome of Sanctorum Communio was the rejection of "religious community" in favor of "Christ existing as the church". Seeberg's religious a priori and Holl's conscience were for the Liberal doctrine of man what religious community was for the Liberal concept of the church: spaces within which man might directly encounter God as a religious reality. "Religious community", "conscience", and "religious a priori" have thus to do with man's religious awareness of God within a sphere which mediates the divine and the human. We shall continue to develop Bonhoeffer's wrestling with the problem of whether such a sphere existed, and how it related to revelation.

Finally, Bonhoeffer's relationship to the figure who most influenced the direction and form of his attack on Liberal theology becomes clearly defined in Bonhoeffer's writings during the years from 1930 to 1932. Bonhoeffer discovered, beneath the religious conceptions of his teachers, the idealist philosophy which Karl Barth had held responsible for the major errors of nineteenth century theology. Both men rejected this philosophy and the theology which had accepted it and turned to the Reformation for guidance and support. But for the first time it becomes clear that Bonhoeffer and Barth have turned to the Reformation in quite different ways. We shall have to develop this as well.

1. The Religious A Priori.

The religious a priori was a development of nineteenth century evangelical theology which, in its simplest form,

described the capacity in man for apprehending and comprehending the divine.¹¹¹ It had its basis in Schleiermacher, who spoke of man's innate and essential capacity to "sense and taste the infinite", and it was later affirmed and developed by Troeltsch. Reinhold Seeberg articulated this concept as a part of his Christian Dogmatics. This clear and systematic work attempted to affirm on the one hand the independent, transcendent being of revelation, and on the other the reality of the revelatory event within the consciousness of man -- "the clearest juxtaposition," Bonhoeffer wrote, "of theology's two great concerns."¹¹² In Seeberg's formulation, the act of awareness or encounter of God and man within the consciousness of man takes place in such a way that "man consciously and willingly himself performs, in consciousness of his freedom, the movement performed in him by the mind of God."¹¹³

It will be recognized that Seeberg's style is consistent with that of his ecclesiology and Christology which we have previously outlined: God and man perform a single, simultaneous action. Yet here we have the disarming insistence that God transcends consciousness as Lord and Creator: "the unconditional requirement of Christian theology" which, Bonhoeffer remarks, is "elaborated by Seeberg throughout his dogmatics."¹¹⁴ At the same time, Seeberg sees the supernatural as having "no existence other than that it enjoys in the religious movements of the human will, the religious intuition of the human mind."¹¹⁵

"God can only enter the consciousness as a reality," Seeberg writes, "if there is in man an organ for this purpose!"¹¹⁶ Seeberg thus speaks of man as "charged with the capacity" for "becoming directly conscious of pure mind."¹¹⁷ This capacity he calls the religious a priori.

As a formal mental disposition, the religious a priori has no content of its own. The positive content of faith is dictated by revelation; the a priori is simply the intrinsic capacity, within this context, for becoming aware of the being and activity of the supramundane God, and accordingly for the receiving of the content of His revelation, as divine, into the soul.118

It is the picture of what Bonhoeffer calls "a mold in man wherein the divine revelation may pour" that Bonhoeffer finds intolerable and, significantly, attacks on the basis of the Reformer's cor curvum in se of the natural man:

If revelation is to come to man, he must be wholly transformed. Faith itself must be created in him. In this case there can be no ability to 'hear' before the 'hearing'. These are thoughts which Seeberg expresses, and refers to in Luther. But faith stands as the work of God in a sense inapplicable to natural religiosity, for which the religious a priori noted by Seeberg certainly holds good. According to Luther, revelation and faith are bound to the concrete message, and the Word is the mediator of the contact between God and man, admitting no other 'directness'. But then the idea of the a priori can only be understood to imply that certain mental forms are preposited for the formal understanding of the Word, in which case, it must be admitted, a specifically religious a priori loses meaning. All that personal appropriation of the fact of Christ is not a prioristic, but is owed to the contingent action of God on man.119

After five years of wrestling with Seeberg's difficult theology, Bonhoeffer has at last freed himself from his teacher. The implications of his rejection of the religious a priori reached far beyond the four pages his argument occupied in his dissertation. He has broken off what were at the time fruitless attempts to converse with his teachers, and has turned his attention toward determining his place among his contemporaries in terms of the theology of revelation. Throughout essays and lec-

tures written at the same time as Act and Being, one now watches Bonhoeffer return again and again to the oppositional character of revelation: God stands over and against all human structures, institutions, and attempts to contain him. At the same time as he made his final departure from Seeberg, Bonhoeffer produced an essay on "The Religious Experience of Grace and the Ethical Life." Here he distinguished between the objective-psychological understanding of grace as "a superhuman power which is in essence dynamic and which, as far as it is experienced, enters the realm of human feeling, willing, and thinking, and so gives finiteness an eternal worth and character"; and a theological understanding of grace, "directly opposed to every human being, to human experience of value and good."¹²⁰ Bonhoeffer does not mention Seeberg, but his teacher may well have been the target of his criticism.

Bonhoeffer now reacted instinctively against any theological a priori which, dependent upon a divine-human continuum, circumvented the whole problem of revelation. He expressed his indebtedness to the criticism of the Liberals which Karl Barth had made at this point, and virtually identified himself with Barth's revolution:

Theological thinking is not constructed a priori, but a posteriori as Karl Barth has maintained. Therefore, it has to be conscious of its limitations. As thinking per se, it is not excepted from the pretensions and boundlessness of all thinking. But the property of theological thinking is that it knows its own insufficiency and its limitations. So it must be its highest concern to guard these limitations and to leave room for the reality of God, which can never be conceived by theological thinking. This means that there is not one theological sentence which can presume to speak truth unless it refers to the reality of God and the impossibility of embracing this reality in theological sentences.¹²¹

Seeberg carefully insisted that "the religious a priori has no content of its own; the positive content

of faith is dictated by revelation..." Formally, the religious a priori remained an empty space which did in fact "leave room for the reality of God." But viewing this formulation from the vantage point of Seeberg's metaphysical approach to the problem, taken as a whole, Bonhoeffer could only suspect that God filled this space as a religious extension of humanity, "the religious movement of the human mind." God thus became superfluous. The use of general a priori categories to define the action of God could only lead to the final elimination of the transcendence which Seeberg, as a sensitive and acute theologian, sought to protect.

2. Karl Holl and the Religion of Conscience.

Bonhoeffer's criticism of Seeberg and Barth's influence upon the direction of the former's line of attack uncovered a variety of Liberal targets. Bonhoeffer soon confronted the "religion of conscience" of the man who had introduced Luther to him, Karl Holl. The direct criticism of Holl occurs in "Die Frage nach dem Menschen", Bonhoeffer's inaugural lecture at Berlin in 1930. Here he pictures Holl as "an impressive representative of the overwhelming majority of contemporary theologians" who, imagining that he was thinking along genuinely Lutheran lines, saw revelation as "man understanding himself through reflecting on his conscience, where God encounters him."¹²² As with Seeberg's religious a priori, revelation is said to be available to man within a prescribed space in him, into which God enters and encounters him.

In his inaugural lecture, Bonhoeffer brought the criticism of the dialectical theologians to bear against Holl's conception of conscience, which he described as man's becoming-aware of his own "possibilities." He wrote:

There is in man no point where God can win space in him; indeed, it belongs to his essence to be incapax infiniti. With his limited nature it is impossible for him to unite himself directly with the infinite. ...His thought and his ethically responsible conscience, indeed, his religiousness, remain hopeless attempts to anchor the I in the Absolute. They belong to the *φρονημα σαρκος*, whereby man seizes the honor of God that he might escape insecurity, in securing at least his self-understanding. He explains himself for good, he explains himself for evil; both are the attempt, whether for good or for evil, to be secure -- without recognizing his guilt before God in his good and evil, which rests precisely at that point where he attempts to secure himself.¹²³

In Sanctorum Communio, Bonhoeffer had spoken of conscience as "just as much the last prop for human self-justification as the place where Christ attacks man by means of the Law."¹²⁴ In Act and Being, Bonhoeffer quoted Luther to telling advantage against Höl, sharpening his attack on conscience as man's "final grasp at himself":

The conscience and remorse of man in Adam are his final grasp at himself, the final confirmation and justification of his self-lordly, self-masterly attitude. Man makes himself the defendant and exhorts himself upward to his better self. But the cry of conscience serves only to dissemble the mute loneliness of his desolate isolation, it sounds without echo into the world that is governed and construed by the self. Man in Adam reaches the confines of his solitude but, misreading his situation, continues to 'seek himself in himself'; he hopes by remorse still to preserve his sinful existence... Therefore this conscience is of the devil, who leaves man to himself in untruth, so this conscience must be mortified when Christ comes to man.¹²⁵

The relationship of conscience to revelation is thus that of Law to Gospel. Rather than a sphere reserved for the encounter of God with man, it is the place where man confronts only his prideful self. Höl used conscience as Seeberg used his a priori, and both were unconscious attempts to circumvent the question of revelation from outside, apart from man's understanding of himself and

his world. Bonhoeffer turned to Barth and the Reformation in order to overthrow these conceptions. But the background of this battle was for Bonhoeffer, as for Barth, the bankruptcy of Idealism.

3. The Attack on Idealism and the Influence of Barth

Holl's "conscience" served as the point of departure for Bonhoeffer's rejection of the idealist background of Liberal theology in general. Although Seeberg dissociated himself from the idealism Holl openly embraced and attributed to Luther, it was difficult for Bonhoeffer to see the theology of his teacher as differing to any great extent from the main outlines of "the gospel of mind." Throughout Bonhoeffer's early writings there thus runs the characterization of Liberalism, insofar as it was based upon an idealist philosophy, as "limitless". By this he meant that idealism, in its presumption, siezed transcendence and placed it under the control of the ego. Once a "space" has been posited within man where both God and man may be encountered and understood, where religious values and possibilities may be grasped as indubitably divine, the all-embracing ego cannot but assert its limitlessness, boundlessness, and autonomy. This was the understanding with which Karl Barth had attacked idealism as the inevitable falsification of philosophy and theology, and responsible for all of the major errors of Liberalism. Bonhoeffer, in a 1930 essay on "The Theology of Crisis and its Attitude Toward Philosophy and Science," vigorously set forth Barth's position:

Here (in idealism) the ego is found as not only a reflecting, but even a creating ego. It creates the world itself. The ego stands in the center of the world, which is created, ruled, overpowered by the ego. The identification of the ego with the ground of everything

which has been called God is inevitable. There are no limits for the ego, its power and its claim are boundless, it is its own standard. Here all transcendence is pulled into the circle of the creative ego... Man knows himself immediately by the act of the coming of the ego to itself, and knows through himself essentially everything, even God. God is in man; God is man himself. Barth and his friends discovered in this philosophy the most radical, most honest, and most consistent expression of the philosophical enterprise as such.¹²⁶

Thus Bonhoeffer summarizing Barth's position. But he began his own Act and Being with much the same valuation of post-Kantian idealism:

The gospel of mind finding itself in God and God in itself was preached too seductively by idealism for theology to resist its blandishments, and all too readily it reasoned thus: If being is essentially consciousness, God must 'be' in religious experiences, and the reborn I must find God in reflexion upon itself. Where else could God be found but in my consciousness? Even if I can never pass beyond it, it must be what constitutes being in general. God, then, is the God of my consciousness. He 'is' only in my religious consciousness.¹²⁷

Bonhoeffer therefore dismisses absolutely any theological attempt to make direct use of idealist epistemology and there is the implication that his reasoning holds equally good for his rejection of conscience, religious a priori, and the religious understanding of the church. Karl Barth's attack on idealism as "the most dangerous grasping after God, in order to be like God, and thus to justify man by his own power"¹²⁸ is unquestionably behind Bonhoeffer's thinking. Again in Act and Being, Bonhoeffer states:

...In the whole of idealism, the inmost identity of I and God, underlying everything, is simply an expression of the proposition: like is conceivable only by like. If God is to come to man, man must already be in essence divine. If theology is to grasp the relationship of God and man, it can only do so by postulating the profound likeness of one to the other and finding there, exactly, the unity of God and man. One is like the very God one conceives...

Thus intensified, such propositions are exposed as theologically intolerable. It is not because man is by nature divine that God comes to him — on the contrary, he would not then need to come — but because he is utterly unlike God and never shapes his concept of God according to his own image.¹²⁹

The center of Barth's attack on Liberalism was the rejection of all form of religion and religious awareness which depended on natural theology; the breaking down of all theological, philosophical, cultural, and especially ecclesiological structures which owed their conception to the positing of a continuity between God and man. This has, indeed, remained the nerve of Barth's theology. Followers of Barth's encounters with various opponents since 1920 will recognize that Barth has battled most impressively when the basis of his view of revelation, the absolute qualitative distinction between God and man, has appeared to be threatened. But where does Bonhoeffer distinguish his own view from that of Barth?

Thus far, the vigor and clarity with which Bonhoeffer singles out the issues and champions Barth's position against his opponents makes it difficult to distinguish between his exposition of Barth and the development of his own position. Both men exposed what they saw to be the pretentiousness of Liberal theology with its religious structures, showing them to be but endless attempts to avoid the embarrassment of revelation, by circumventing it and rendering it superfluous. God as Wholly Other than man, God over and against man, ruled out from the beginning any approach of human knowledge to God. Bonhoeffer, in his essay on "The Christian Idea of God," signalled the close of a phase in his theological development in writing:

No religion, no ethics, no metaphysical knowledge may serve man to approach God. These are all subject to the judgement of God, they are works of man. Only the acknow-

ledgment that God's Word alone helps and that every other attempt is and remains sinful, only by this acknowledgment is God received. And this acknowledgment must be given by God, as the Holy Spirit, in faith. That is the foolishness of the revelation of God and its paradoxical character — that just there, where the power of man has lapsed entirely, where man knows his own weakness, sinfulness, and consequently the judgement of God upon him, that just there God is already working in grace, that just and exactly there and only there is forgiveness, justification, restoration. There, where man himself no longer sees, God sees, and God alone works, in judgement and in grace. There, at the very limits of man, stands God, and when man can do nothing more, then God does all. 130

4. The "Community of Revelation"

It is in the positive content of Bonhoeffer's position that his early divergence from what he considered certain unhealthy tendencies in dialectical theology becomes visible. His general acceptance of the basic outline of dialectical theology, the theology of revelation as set forth by Karl Barth, was strongly and clearly stated in various writings between 1930 and 1932. But Bonhoeffer also developed, from his earliest writings, what he imagined to be a corrective of dangerous shortcomings in the dialectical method. The corrective was the thesis which he expressed in Sanctorum Communio and carried into the pages of Act and Being: the church is the "community of revelation", Christ exists as the church.

Sanctorum Communio wished to begin any discussion of Christian revelation with a concept of the church:

If at the conclusion of a dogmatics the concept of the Church is presented as a necessary consequence of evangelical faith, nothing else is meant than that the inner reality of the Church is connected with the general reality of revelation. Only if the concept of God is understood alone in connection with a concept of the church can the latter be deduced from the former on the basis of a technical presentation. It would be well if a dogmatics were to begin not with the doctrine of God, but with the doctrine of the Church, in order to set a clear structure

over the inner logic of dogmatics.¹³¹

Bonhoeffer was disturbed by the characterization of the church in Barth's Commentary on Romans, the latter's only major work until 1927, as an institution in which "human indifference, misunderstanding and opposition attain their most sublime and their most naive form."¹³² Dialectical theology possessed strong individualistic tendencies, directing the man before God to his utter inability to save himself and the saving grace of what seemed a formal and impersonal God. What was necessary, to Bonhoeffer's mind, was an affirmation of both sides of the dialectic; directing the sinner toward a community which was, however sinful, the chosen instrument of God's redeeming grace. Therefore, "revelation is an entity in this historically shaped world." The fact of human indifference, misunderstanding, and opposition did not alter the fact that here, in this community, God was revealing himself in Christ:

In the communio sanctorum the old ontic relationships are not radically annulled... Every empirical formulation will necessarily be subject to the ambiguity inherent in all human actions. ...In this we perceive a special will of God which it is not open to us to belie by condemning everything that has taken form as the handiwork of man.¹³³

During the year in which Bonhoeffer's dissertation was completed, Barth published his Die christliche Dogmatik, strengthening Bonhoeffer's suspicion that the former lacked a clear and positive conception of the role of the church as the ground of revelation. Barth's picture of God's transcendence was, if anything, even more formal and impersonal, and Bonhoeffer detected a "characteristic wavering between use and rejection of temporal definitions of the act of belief."¹³² Continuing his insistence on the freedom of God from all human control, Barth presen-

ted the church (in terms borrowed directly from the Commentary on Romans) as a "parable", an analogy which pointed to God's action but which in no way participated in it.¹³⁵ This was the logical outcome of Barth's basic position: man's knowledge is non-knowledge. God remains always and eternally in the realm of free address, always and eternally subject. The empirical actions of man in "belief", "obedience", etc. can only witness to God's activity and do not in themselves involve the participation of God. God's freedom in revelation means that he is bound by nothing, is utterly free and unconditioned.

If Bonhoeffer had accepted Barth's protest, he did not accept this outcome. God was personal, not formalistic. God offered himself to men, he did not turn away from them. God was hidden, but he was apprehensible in his hiddenness. God did not exist for himself, but for his creation. Through faith, God revealed himself in Christ within a community of men:

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 of theology. In revelation it is a question less of God's freedom on the far side of 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 strongly attested to in his having freely bound himself to historical man, having placed himself at man's disposal. God is not free of man but for man. Christ is the Word of his freedom. God is there, which is to say: not in eternal non-objectivity but (looking ahead for the moment) "haveable", graspable in his Word within the Church.¹³⁶

This understanding of the relationship between ecclesiology and revelation ran directly counter to Barth's insistence that revelation, once having occurred, is not thereby absorbed into or merged with finite processes.

As Bonhoeffer summarizes Barth's position in the 1927 Dogmatik: "God can give and withdraw himself absolutely according to his pleasure; in either action he remains free. He is never at man's discretion; it is his honor and glory to remain utterly free and unconditional in relation to everything free and conditional."¹³⁷

Bonhoeffer is less interested in the logic of Barth's argument than in defending the concrete nature of revelation. What is behind his argument? If we remember that the "community of revelation" is at the same time "Christ existing as the Church", it becomes clear that the basis of Bonhoeffer's position, and the ground of his disagreement with Barth, is Christological. Barth writes of God's honor and glory in remaining free and unconditional; Bonhoeffer quotes Luther's famous statement on the nature of the sacrament:

It is to the honor and glory of our God..., however, that giving himself for our sakes in deepest condescension, he passes into the flesh, the bread, our hearts, mouths, entrails, and suffers also for our sake that he be dishonorably...handled, on the altar as on the Cross.¹³⁸

Here is the Christ who exists solely "for others", the suffering Christ who gives himself to the world who will appear with such power in Bonhoeffer's last writings. Recognizing that Luther's view of the sacrament, his theology of the cross, and his conception of the church were of one piece (growing out of Luther's understanding of the Augustinian corpus Christi mysticum), Bonhoeffer elaborates a Lutheran doctrine of the church as a Christology of condescension. The various strands of his thought are brought together into a view of revelation as God's "haveableness" in the church. While Barth turns to the Reformation and follows the Calvinist path, protecting

God's freedom and transcendence, Bonhoeffer runs the risk of a Lutheran Christology, pointing to God's committed presence in Christ for his community.¹³⁹

5. Summary and Prospectus.

We have watched Bonhoeffer free himself from his fruitless conversations with his Liberal teachers and their various views of religion and religious awareness, to insist that revelation is an event which comes to man from outside. His essential agreement with the theology of revelation led him, at the same time, to insist that revelation is concrete and apprehensible in the community of revelation, the church. The dangers of his position are reasonably clear. His 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. We would like also to see a Christological expression of Christ "outside" of the church, as her Redeemer and Judge and Perfector; a doctrine of Scripture which will distinguish his position clearly from the self-contained ecclesiology and revelation of Rome.

For a few years, Bonhoeffer attempted to work out the difficulties of his position. But history intervened and turned these thoughts inward once more, into an even more radical and exclusive and forceful presentation of his Christo-ecclesiology. We shall see in the following section how this came about.

Part 1: "Revelation and the Church"

1. Ein Briefwechsel mit Adolf von Harnack, in Karl Barth, Theologische Fragen und Antworten, Zurich, 1957, pp. 7-31. Cf. the Appendix to this study.
2. The phrase originated with R.G. Collingwood. In his The Righteousness of God, Gordon Rupp speaks of Luther's revolution as just such a crisis of vocabulary, stating that "the changing pressures of social and political existence necessitate new adjustments of ideas and words, and eventually, though the element of novelty is always less than it first appears, new ideas and words, so that every age of revolutionary ferment brings with it a crisis of vocabulary." (London, 1952, p. 81)
3. Adolf von Harnack, The Essence of Christianity, ET London, 1901, p. 114.
4. Karl Barth, Commentary on Romans, ET of the 7th edition, London, 1937, pp. 35-7.
5. Karl Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik I/1, 1st ed., p. ix.
6. So Ernst Wolf, quoted in Rupp, op. cit., p. 29.
7. H.R. Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology, London, 1937, pp. 181-3.
8. Ibid. Cf. Richard R. Niebuhr, Resurrection and Historical Reason, New York, 1957, pp. 39ff.
9. Sidney Cave, The Doctrine of the Person of Christ, London, 1927, p. 214; Reinhold Seeberg, Fundamental Truths of the Christian Religion, ET London, 1908, p. x.
10. Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 42
11. Emil Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, New York, 1930, p. 7.
12. Cf. Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 188.
13. Ernst Troeltsch, Die Bedeutung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu für den Glauben, Tübingen, 1911, p. 6.
14. Ibid., pp. 9f.
15. Ibid., pp. 9f.
16. Cave, op. cit., pp. 207-8

17. Ernst Troeltsch, Protestantism and Progress, ET London, 1912, pp. 22-3.
18. Ibid., pp. 78-9.
19. Ernst Troeltsch, Social Teachings of the Christian Churches, vol. II, ET London, 1931, p. 1006.
20. Troeltsch, Protestantism and Progress, op. cit., p. 11.
21. Ibid., p. 37.
22. Ernst Troeltsch, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. II, Tübingen, 1913, p. 516.
23. "If the symbolic figure of Christ is to be firmly and essentially based on fact, then it must be possible to establish, by historical-critical methods, the historical reality of His person and teaching..." quoted in Hermann Diem, Dogmatics, Edinburgh, 1959, p. 8.
24. Troeltsch, Bedeutung..., op. cit., p. 9.
25. Bethge, "Challenge", p. 8; cf. SC, p. 1.
26. "Challenge", p. 8.
27. Troeltsch, Social Teachings, op. cit., p. 34.
28. So H.C. von Hase, MW I, pp. 27-8.
29. "Challenge", p. 8.
30. See below, note 85.
31. Peter Berger writes: "Today there is some evidence that as neo-orthodoxy has come to be something less than the latest vogue, there is renewed interest among theologians in the possible contribution to their task by the social scientists. If this interest should itself become a new fashion, Bonhoeffer's Sanctorum Communio would seem to be a natural choice for a legitimating classic." ("Sociology and Ecclesiology", Marty, pp. 54-5).
32. Emil Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, New York, 1930, p. 7.
33. June 8, 1944. Letters, p. 108.
34. quoted in Rupp, op. cit., p. 30.
35. Ibid., p. 31.
36. Ibid., p. 183.
37. Quoted in Ibid., p. 183.
38. Cf. Wilhelm Pauck's forward to Karl Holl, The Cultural Significance of the Reformation, Meridian ed., New York, 1959, p. 12.

39. ET London, 1937, pp. 69-70.
40. Ibid., p. 31.
41. Ibid., p. 48.
42. "Challenge", p. 4.
43. April 30, 1944. Letters, p. 91.
44. Cave, op. cit., p. 214.
45. Ibid., p. 212.
46. Seeberg, Fundamental Teachings of the Christian Religion, ET London, 1908, pp. v-vi.
47. Ibid., p. xi.
48. "Challenge", p. 5.
49. Reinhold Seeberg, Die christliche Dogmatik, Erlangen, 1927, vol. I, p. 200.
50. Ibid., p. 104, quoted in AB, p. 46.
51. Ibid., p. 74
52. "As the logos became flesh in Jesus, so the Holy Spirit becomes flesh in the church of Jesus Christ." Ibid., p. 154; cf. Dogmatik, vol. II, pp. 357ff.
53. Seeberg, Fundamental Teachings..., op. cit., pp. 145-6.
54. Ibid., p. 210.
55. Ibid., p. 212.
56. Seeberg's influence upon his pupil was brief but, as we shall shortly see, distinctly visible. With the exception of Bethge, Bonhoeffer's interpreters tend to view Seeberg's influence as negligible. This view, I shall argue, is mistaken. Cf. Müller, p. 444, note 129.
57. GS I, p. 54. In a footnote in the Church Dogmatics (I/1), Barth has nothing but contempt for the program of Seeberg and his followers: "Had the 'modern positivist group...so much to reproach their liberal opponents with as they thought they had? ...How many a one in their ranks could without special transformation waken up one morning a tolerably genuine religious philosopher, religious historian, or religious psychologist! How it further increased the confusion of points of view, especially in the sphere of exegesis, by a historicism which was none the better because it was a supernatural historicism on friendly terms with tradition, without making the slightest impres-

sion on the enemy and without being able to prevent the frontiers between 'Positive' and 'Liberal' OT men, 'Positive' and 'Liberal' NT men, from being increasingly and finally altogether obliterated." It is at least clear from this characterization what there was in Seeberg's theology that attracted Bonhoeffer: a positive witness to tradition which distinguished itself from Liberalism (however mild its reproach may have been), coupled with a keen awareness of the problem of Lessing.

58. R.R. Niebuhr, op. cit., pp. 9-13.
59. Ibid., p. 10.
60. BT London, 1899, Vol. VII, p. 227.
61. Ibid., p. 226.
62. Ibid., p. 274.
63. GS III, pp. 59-61.
64. Ibid., p. 60.
65. Letters of March 3, 1944 and Feb. 23, 1944. Letters, pp. 38, 75f.
67. Feb. 20, 1944. Letters, p. 33.
68. "Thoughts on Baptism". Letters, p. 157.
69. History of Dogma, vol. VII, op. cit., pp. 194-5.
70. "Challenge", p. 8. Cp. Müller, p. 444, note 129: "One should however — apart from the strong impression which Harnack's personality made on the young Bonhoeffer (...) — not place too much value on the influence of his theological teachers. Especially it seems to me — apart from certain formal dependence in SC — that Seeberg's influence on Bonhoeffer's theology was negligible. Already from his seminar work in 1926 (...) and Seeberg's judgement of it, it is apparent that Bonhoeffer was not really a pupil of Seeberg's. And even from his initial dependence on his advisor, Bonhoeffer was entirely free in AB. How independent Bonhoeffer was from his Berlin teachers (outside of Harnack, whose theological influence, corrected of course by the dialectical school, affected his judgement of the place of hellenistic heritage as well as the tendency of his theology toward the being of Jesus) one sees in a letter of 24.7.31 (GS I, pp. 20-21)... The question how Bonhoeffer came to terms with the philosophy of German idealism, which he (es-

pecially in the cases of Kant and Fichte) most certainly misunderstood;—but just this misunderstanding and its origins—would be very instructive for the historian. The formal dependence upon Hegel might be no less interesting. The apparent influence of Grisebach (hardly developed by Bonhoeffer), the curious parallels, here and there, to Cogarten (without demonstrating any real dependence), and finally the whole complex of use of bourgeois terminology from Wunies to Scheler — all willfully received and in part adapted — would raise a host of questions for the historian."

71. Charles West, Communism and the Theologians, London, 1958, p. 354.
72. C. W. Kegley and R.W. Bretall, The Theology of Paul Tillich, New York, 1952, p. 3.
73. March 3, 1944. Letters, pp. 38-9
74. SC, p. 90. Cf. von Hase, MW I, pp. 27-8; "Challenge", pp. 4-5, 7-8; Peter Berger, "Sociology and Ecclesiology," in Marty, pp. 54-7. As Müller remarks (p. 35), Bonhoeffer seemed always in his thinking to anticipate the future movement of theological thought.
75. SC, p. 14. Cf. von Hase, MW I, p. 28: "After dialectical theology had proscribed Troeltsch's sociological thought, this was a brave undertaking, which scarcely anyone has imitated up to now. He didn't allow himself to be frightened by the dangers of natural theology and historicism, which he certainly was conscious of, but looked at pure sociological thought as a necessary help in interpreting the church theologically." Cp. "Challenge", pp. 7-8: "It was a unique and unparalleled enterprise, in those days, to take into account both aspects, the Offenbarungs-theologischen (revelational) one and the sociological one... He uses sociology for interpreting the shapes of this pretentious and mysterious body, the church. He brings together phenomenology and theology of revelation. But Bonhoeffer takes his stand within the church and rejects the possibility of grasping her sociological facts from outside. Thus he tries to overcome historico-sociological relativism."
76. Godsey, p. 27.
77. "When the book first appeared," Bethge writes ("Challenge", p. 8) "A friend pitied Bonhoeffer: 'Not many

will really grasp and accept your concern: neither the Barthians because of your sociology, nor the sociologists because of your Barth." In keeping with the curious way in which, during his lifetime, Bonhoeffer called his earlier works into question without rejecting them (Cf. GS I, p. 26 on Act and Being and Letters, p. 125 (June 21, 1944) on The Cost of Discipleship), Bonhoeffer remarked in the preface which he wrote for the published version of his dissertation that the three years which had elapsed since its completion revealed that conversation was being carried out in a quite different area, although his own approach remained "the right and profitable one." (SC, p. 1)

78. Cf. Berger in Marty, pp. 56-7.

79. Ibid., p. 54.

80. Ibid., pp. 58ff. Upon its republication in 1954, Sanctorum Communio was praised in an introduction by Ernst Wolf; a tribute which has since been echoed by Karl Barth's footnote in Church Dogmatics IV/2, p. 261. It is difficult to know whether, without Bonhoeffer's later contribution, such interest in Sanctorum Communio would have arisen. The value of this peculiar work is greatly diminished for present-day theology because of the sociologists and theologians with whom Bonhoeffer chose to converse and those he neglected. As Berger shows, Bonhoeffer's sociology is outdated, and Müller's complaint that Bonhoeffer shrugged off Marx seems to me fully justified. Among the theologians, Reinhold Seeberg has passed completely from theological discussion and the confrontation with Troeltsch, as I have argued below, never brought about a genuine conversation.

81. Berger in Marty, p. 64.

82. Ibid., p. 58.

83. Ibid., p. 75.

84. SC, p. 82. As Müller remarks (p. 55), Bonhoeffer's methodology probably confused more than it clarified.

85. I cannot agree with many of Bonhoeffer's interpreters that the primary and direct encounter with Liberalism in the pages of Sanctorum Communio takes place in his confrontation with Troeltsch. Here again, Bonhoeffer's supporters are reading back into his early work what they would like Bonhoeffer to have written. It is certain that no contemporary interpretation of the church can afford to detour around Troeltsch's doctrine of the church, or the lack of one, in the Social Teach-

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ings; it is also true that in the prison letters, Bonhoeffer begins to take up many of the problems with which Troeltsch was concerned. But it is not necessary to read these questions into Bonhoeffer's earliest work, nor do the facts warrant such an interpretation. Cf. Müller, pp. 64-7; von Hase, MW I, p. 28; Bethge, "Challenge", p. 8.

86. Troeltsch, Protestantism and Progress, pp. 47-8.
87. Troeltsch, Bedeutung..., op. cit., pp. 29-30.
88. Seeberg, Fundamental Teachings..., op. cit., p. 280.
89. Seeberg, Dogmatik II, op. cit., p. 355.
90. Ibid., I, p. 154.
91. Ibid., II, p. 270.
92. Ibid., I, p. 154; cf. Ibid., I, 385; II, 357f. Seeberg spoke of a "historical" doctrine of the Trinity, in which the church existed in the "time of the Holy Spirit."
93. SC, p. 85.
94. SC, p. 14n., Cf. MW I, p. 28.
95. Cf. Hegel, Encyclopedia, para. 483.
96. SC, pp. 65-6.
97. Seeberg, Dogmatik I, op. cit., p. 513, quoted in SC, p. 56. Without this idea, Bonhoeffer argues (pp. 37-38n), the ideas of the church and original sin cannot fully be understood.
98. Seeberg, Fundamental Teachings..., op. cit., p. 267.
99. Ibid., p. 270.
100. Ibid., p. 272.
101. SC, pp. 89-90.
102. Ibid., pp. 153-4, italics mine. The uniqueness of Bonhoeffer's work rests in the fact that he fearlessly took the next step, that of describing the empirical structure of the church with the use of sociological categories, however inadequate these last may have been. It is interesting to see how near Bonhoeffer is to later criticisms of Liberal doctrines of the church which were made by his two older contemporaries, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. In the fourth volume of his Church Dogmatics, Barth writes of the "secret" of the church, "its being in the third dimension, visi-

ble only to faith." (IV/1, p. 661). He continues: "Without this special visibility all that can be seen is the men united in it and their common activity, and this will be explained in terms of the categories which are regarded as the most appropriate for the understanding and appraisal of common human activities, with an attempt to subordinate it to some picture of the world and of history. On this view it can be understood as a religious society within human society generally and side by side with other organizations." (p. 655). Further, in IV/2, Barth writes: "We can, of course, see the members of the church, and its officials and constitutions and orders, its dogmatics and its cultus, its organizations and societies, its leaders and their politics, and its laity...and all these in the context of its history. Where else is the church visible if not in these? If it is not visible in these it is obviously not visible at all. But is it really visible in these? ...What is visible in all this may be only a religious society. ...It will always be in the revelation of God that the true church is visible. And it will always be in faith awakened by this revelation that it is actually seen by men -- at the place where without revelation and faith there is to be seen (perhaps in a very confusing and deceptive way) only this many-sided ecclesiastical quantity in all its ambiguity." (p. 619) Brunner directly acknowledges the contribution of Sanctorum Communio in his The Misunderstanding of the Church (London, 1952): "(The church) is...unintelligible from a purely sociological viewpoint... For it is in fact intelligible only from the standpoint of the Christ who dwells within it and determines its life." (p. 12) Again, "The fact that it is both koinonia Christou or koinonia pneumatos and 'fellowship one with another', thus combining the vertical with the horizontal, divine with human communion -- that fact constitutes its entire characteristic, its utterly unparalleled life." (p. 12). Brunner chooses a peculiar point on which to attack Bonhoeffer's dissertation; he claims that the latter is "considering only the theological confessional unity with the early church and forgetting the decisive factor of the dynamism of the Holy Ghost." (p. 124n). This is not in fact true; a major part of Bonhoeffer's thesis wrestles with the proper relationship between the "objective spirit" and its dynamism and the Holy Ghost.

104. Godsey, p. 45. In the concluding sentence, the italics are mine.
105. "Challenge", p. 8.
106. SC, p. 96.
107. SC, p. 212.
108. AB, p. 12.
109. AB, p. 16.
110. For a more complete look at the argument of Act and Being, cf. Müller, pp. 117-147; "Challenge", pp. 9-10; and the essay by Franklin Sherman, "Act and Being", in Marty, pp. 83-111. Some interesting but undeveloped remarks concerning Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth in AB are to be found in Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie, Köln, 1951, pp. 306, 374, and 403.
111. This conception was not peculiar to Seeberg, although it may have reached its clearest formulation in his Dogmatik. "In contrast to Enlightenment theology, the 19th century theologians focused their attention on one particular point in relation to all the various world views of their time: man's supposedly innate and essential capacity to 'sense and taste the infinite' as Schleiermacher said, or the 'religious a priori' as later affirmed by Troeltsch. There was scarcely a theologian who did not also consider himself a professional philosopher. These philosophers of religion, more or less faithful or sophisticated advocates of one of the current world views, were busily working out a general epistemology, a system, of ethics and metaphysics focusing on this very capacity. In these terms, they sought to validate the potential for religion, including the Christian faith." (Karl Barth, "Evangelical Theology in the 19th Century", in The Humanity of God, Richmond, 1960, pp. 21-2.)
112. AB, p. 47.
113. Seeberg, Dogmatik I, op. cit., p. 91, quoted in AB, p. 46.
114. AB, p. 46
115. Seeberg, Dogmatik I, op. cit., p. 105, quoted in AB, p. 45. "We now find in (Seeberg's) argument," Bonhoeffer writes, "bluntly juxtaposed statements which place the existence of the supramundane -- and of concepts to boot -- in the human mind alone, yet

- admit of no doubt as to an 'objective being', i.e. a being of the supramundane which manifestly transcends consciousness." (p. 45). Bonhoeffer seems here to be expressing his exasperation with the whole of Seeberg's style in his Dogmatik, and, indeed, the program of the Modern Positivists. The attention Seeberg paid to traditional dogmatics made him exceedingly difficult to attack.
116. "Nur dann kann Gott als Realität zum Bewusstsein kommen, wenn es in den Menschen ein Organ hierfür gibt!". Dogmatik I, op. cit., p. 200.
 117. Ibid, p. 81, quoted in AB, p. 46.
 118. Ibid., p. 104, quoted in AB, p. 46.
 119. AB, p. 47
 120. GS III, pp. 91-2, 6. Bonhoeffer's dismissal of Seeberg in 1930-31 seems complete. It meant, for the time being at least, a concentration on dogmatics as Barth defined it as the proper subject matter for theology. Bonhoeffer's comment on Seeberg's theology in a letter which he wrote to his teacher in 1928 is worth recording, for it expresses Bonhoeffer's early suspicion that his teacher had given up the task of theology for something else: "You once brought out the question of consciousness in a seminar; it should however be a theological, rather than psychological, undertaking." (GS III, p. 15)
 121. GS III, p. 102.
 122. GS III, p. 75.
 123. GS III, p. 76.
 124. SC, p. 73.
 125. AB, pp. 157-8. It should be noted, however, that Bonhoeffer is treating the question of conscience as he had the question of religious community. He removes its claims, as a human sphere, to embody the divine revelation simpliciter. "It is the reflection on oneself (he writes) which is the farthest limit of Adam's penetration. Primarily it is not the voice of God but man's own voice." (AB, p. 177). Nevertheless, conscience, like religious community, remains a fact. Bonhoeffer speaks of it as "the past as determinant of being in Christ." (AB, pp. 177-180). As reflection upon the self, conscience cannot be the faith intended purely toward Christ; yet it remains, and possesses a form proper to itself. Now it no longer "dis-

tracts my attention from Christ," but rather is taken up in faith. "I see my sin," Bonhoeffer states, "in the context of my having been forgiven by Christ." (AB, p. 178).

Bonhoeffer thus carefully takes up conscience into the New Being of the Christian. In doing this, he is consciously developing the positive alternative to Barth's "incomprehensible" picture of the new existence of the believer. Bonhoeffer criticizes Barth for refusing to take account of the total historical existence of the believer by cutting off his unbelieving past. He thus asks whether the new being posited by Barth does not remain a "heavenly double" of the empirical "total I". (AB, p. 102).

This valuation of "pre-faith" existence may lie behind several of Bonhoeffer's later ideas: the problem of "The Pharisee" in the Ethics, and the concept of the "penultimate" in The Cost of Discipleship, the Ethics, and the prison letters.

126. GS III, pp. 119-120. Cp. GS III, p. 101: "Man after the fall refers everything to himself, puts himself at the center of the world, does violence to reality, makes himself God, and God and the other man his creatures."
127. AB, pp. 38-9.
128. AB, p. 22. On Barth's protest as the background to AB, cf. Sherman, in Marty, pp. 86-7.
129. AB, p. 41.
130. GS III, p. 109.
131. SC, p. 90.
132. op. cit., p. 418. H.R. Mackintosh wrote in 1937 his own impression of Barth's treatment of the church: "More in sorrow than in anger, (Barth's) early work called attention to the fact that the concrete Church, the institution we know, belongs like all earthly things to the present age, the accn of flesh and sin...; like the world, of which as a visible undertaking it forms part, it stands in absolute opposition to God. ...The Church, as we not only observe but share its life, is in itself utterly unworthy, and for that reason perpetually confronted with the possibility of rejection." (Types of Modern Theology, London, 1937, pp. 309-310).
133. SC, p. 83.
134. AB, p. 102.

135. Despite the many developments in Barth's position since 1927 — his study of Anselm, and his subsequent new beginning with dogmatics as church dogmatics — I believe that he would still defend this definition of the church.
136. AB, pp. 90-91. This is the summation of Bonhoeffer's position, carried from Sanctorum Communio into the pages of Act and Being. "But how can I encounter God as a person in Christ? The phrase as it stands is too abstract for Bonhoeffer. With the aid of a concept developed in his doctoral dissertation Sanctorum Communio...he presses the notion of an encounter with God to its ultimate point of concreteness. 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"..." (Sherman, in Marty, p. 92.). "Bonhoeffer fully accepted and saw the great contribution of Barth in the uncompromising emphasis on the contingency of revelation, so that it might never become an object for our handling, in his interest in the unverdingliche ('not at our disposal') majesty of God. But this interest Bonhoeffer sees safeguarded not in the beyond but in the Christ existing as the community of men." There, in persons, the claim of God remains outside and does not come into our possession, its limits condemn and edify us, but it meets us continually as extra nos, pro nobis. There Christ is and exists for others...there is no God, Bonhoeffer emphasizes, other than the incarnated one known to us and meeting and claiming us in the "Christ existing as the community of men," the church. This, he thinks, secures both the contingency and the continuity or concern for existence." ("Challenge", pp. 8, 9). Italics mine.
137. AB, pp. 80-81.
138. WA 23.157; quoted in AB, p. 81n.
139. Cf. "Challenge", pp. 8f. This Christological argument with Barth is continued below, pp. 209-218 The consequences of Bonhoeffer's position for the work of theology are discussed in the Appendix to this study.

Part II (A)

The Concretion of a
New Christology

Chapter 6

The New Christology

I remember a conversation I had with a young French pastor at A., thirteen years ago. We had put before us, quite simply, the question what we really wanted to do with our lives. He said he wanted to become a saint (and I think it possible he did become one). This impressed me very much at that time. Nevertheless, I argued with him and said something to the effect that I wished to learn to believe. For a long time I did not recognize how far we were apart. I thought I could learn to believe by trying to live a similarly holy life. At the end of this phase I wrote The Cost of Discipleship. Today I see clearly the dangers of this book — although, of course, I still stand by what I wrote as before.

July 21, 1944. Letters, pp. 124-5

I. Introduction.

"The planned path of Bonhoeffer's life," Bethge writes, "seems to have been robbed of its own initiative by Nazi history... There is no question but that there is a turn in Bonhoeffer's thought."¹ There are in fact two turns in Bonhoeffer's development between 1931 and 1939. The first of these moved him away from the restrictions of his ecclesiological theory in order to develop a variety of interests in ethics, the relationship between church and state, the person and work of Jesus, and an original and radical exegetical method. Bonhoeffer did not seem particularly interested in developing a system which included both his early ecclesiology and these new concerns; indeed, he disregarded any ambiguities and inconsistencies in his doctrine of the church which these new interests revealed. If the basis of his thinking in his writings of 1932 and 1933 was not ecclesiological, it remained purposefully Christocentric. The suggestion, then, is that the writings of 1932 and 1933 show Bonhoeffer to be searching for a means whereby the concreteness of "the community of reve-

lation" might be preserved, freed from the ecclesiological limitations of "Christ existing as the church."

The second major alteration of his thinking came in 1934 and 1935, when Bonhoeffer gave himself without reserve to the Confessing Church, created officially in 1934. Participation in the church opposition meant, for Bonhoeffer, the placing of the whole of his theology at the service of his church and the effort to define her peculiar status and mission. Whatever the achievement of this "narrow pass" in Bonhoeffer's theological development, and it was considerable, the restrictions which were thus imposed proved tragic for his future course. Not only the strength of Bonhoeffer's position during the Kirchenkampf but also the exclusiveness and otherworldliness of this phase of his life and work resulted from the marriage of the 1927-31 ecclesiological theory to the practical questions of the church struggle. What is more important, this combination set up the conditions against which Bonhoeffer was to react in 1939: a defensive concentration on the internal problems of the church.

What appears to have happened to Bonhoeffer's development is this: Throughout his various theological concerns from 1931 to 1933 a common theme may be traced; an emerging Christology of the person and work of Christ, separate from and in some opposition to his "Christ existing as the Church." The church struggle, however, forced him to subsume his interests, along with the new Christology he had developed which underlay all these interests, under a strict ecclesiology. The latter was the product of his early doctrine of the church drawn into the ecclesiastical battles which were fought with such vehemence from 1933 until 1939. As long as the issues of the Kirchenkampf remained clear, an

uneasy balance between these two Christologies was possible. But in 1939, removed almost entirely from church life and work by government order and surrounded by men of affairs of widely different creeds and political persuasions, all of whom were working for the future of Germany, Bonhoeffer once more broke free of his strict ecclesiological theory. The Ethics represents his attempts to set these two Christologies together without the sectarian overtones of The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together. These experiments proved fruitful but not wholly successful and, in the prison letters, Bonhoeffer set his ecclesiology to one side to meditate on the problems he had been skirting, without regard for the consequences of these meditations. In a final, brief vision he united his two Christologies.

The first part of this general working hypothesis will be developed in this section, Part II (A). We have first to discuss the emergence of the second Christology and then to show how Bonhoeffer "concretized" it by uniting it with his new concerns, scripture and discipleship. At the conclusion of this section we shall be able to see more clearly the "dangers" of the Cost of Discipleship to which Bonhoeffer referred in his prison retrospection on this phase of his work, as well as the reasons why he would "still stand by" what he wrote.

II. Christ and the Transcendent.

In the summer of 1933, Bonhoeffer applied his energies to a task which proved to be his last major teaching assignment at the University of Berlin: the delivery of a series of lectures on Christology.² He later confessed them to be the most difficult he had ever had to prepare. In the course of these lectures, Bonhoeffer freed his Christology

from the limitations of his ecclesiology and provided a basis for a conception of revelation quite different from that of his two early dissertations. The former theme, "Christ existing as the church", the "community of revelation", is here made subservient to a concept of Christ as the "transcendent Person".

The effect of Bonhoeffer's having asserted his Christology in a new manner was not immediately felt. The reason for this was that his new formulation lacked the concrete consequences of his earlier, ecclesiological theory. In these lectures, Bonhoeffer attempted in a similar fashion to "ground" his Christology. The notion of "Christ existing as the church" was joined by the introduction of the "form" and "place" of Christ as Word and Sacrament, the Mediator within the individual, human history, and the state. But the actual "concretion" of this Christological theme of Christ as the transcendent Person came in The Cost of Discipleship where Bonhoeffer combined his doctrine with the exegetical method he had developed, creating an original conception of discipleship. From that point on, the theme of discipleship could not be separated from the theme of revelation.

We shall investigate three aspects of the 1933 Christology lectures: Bonhoeffer's doctrines of the Person of Christ and Christ as Mediator, and his formulation of the theology of the cross.

1. The Christian Concept of Person.

The concept of person had occupied in Sanctorum Communio a position subordinate to the basic theme of "Christ existing as the church". Bonhoeffer introduced the former in the opening pages of his dissertation, preparatory to developing the theme that Christ is the "corporate person"

of the community.³ This phrase provided Bonhoeffer with the tool with which to shape the central thesis, i.e. that Christ as Person is present temporally and spatially in and as the community of revelation. He left the idea of "corporate person" undeveloped, however, in favor of the more abstract "objective spirit" — perhaps in order to converse more directly with his teacher, Seeberg, from whom he had adopted the term. "Christ existing as the church" was thus, as we have seen, elaborated in terms of the "objective spirit" of the community of revelation. In his Act and Being, Bonhoeffer appears to have lost interest in the phrase and to have recalled in its place the conceptions of "person" and "corporate person" from Sanctorum Communio.⁴

Bonhoeffer argued in his earliest dissertation that, as opposed to the idealist picture of an apersonal Mind in which every man participates and to which he must surrender his individuality, the Christian concept of person posits the individual as an ultimate willed by God. The multiplicity of persons and the integrity of the individual remain irreducible — even within the community of revelation. Community is thus the area of encounter between individuals in which, in the moment of decision, "the individual again and again becomes a person through the other."⁵ In community, I encounter and am encountered by, create and am created by, unique, ultimate, inviolable persons who directly affect me at the same time that they remain free from my control.⁶

Act and Being reworks this idea in a more directly Christological and ecclesiological context. "The being of revelation," Bonhoeffer wrote, "...is person — the revealed person of God and the personal community of which that person is the foundation."⁷ Christ is the corporate person of the community of persons. In revealing himself

in the church as a person, "Christ has come the very nearest to humanity, here given himself to his new humanity, so that his person enfolds in itself all whom he has won, binding himself in duty to them, and then reciprocally in duty to him."⁸ Thus Bonhoeffer makes direct use of his conception of person for his theory of revelation. As a person, Christ is free to "withhold himself from a cognitive intention"⁹; as in Sanctorum Communio, the person is free from the grasp of the one he encounters and creates.

2. Person and Transcendence.

Closely related is the idea of transcendence. This was introduced together with the concept of person in the opening pages of Sanctorum Communio. In that work, two arresting sentences occur which prefigure Bonhoeffer's later Christological usage of these terms. "The other man," Bonhoeffer wrote, "presents us with the same problem of cognition as does God himself." And again: "In principle, we should just as well proceed from the idea of God as from the idea of person to arrive at the true nature of the Christian idea of community."¹⁰ Notice the free movement between Bonhoeffer's idea of person in general and his conception of God. He brought together all three — the ideas of person, transcendence, and God — in an essay in 1931:

The transcendence of God does not mean anything else than that God is personality, provided there is an adequate understanding of the concept of personality... For Christian thought, personality is the last unit of thinking and the ultimate reality. Only personality can limit me, because the other personality has its own demands and claims, its own law and will, which are different from mine and which I cannot overcome as such. Personality is free and does not enter the general laws of my thinking. God as the absolutely free personality is therefore absolutely transcendent.

...Where can I find his inaccessible reality which is so entirely hidden from my thinking? How do I know about his being the absolutely transcendent personality? The answer is given, and must be given by God himself, in his own word Jesus Christ, for no one can answer this question except God himself, in his self-revelation in history, since none can speak the truth except God.¹¹

Bonhoeffer's view is that personality cannot be defined apart from the context of human community. Personality is created only in confrontation with others, which involves both "being-for" and "being-free-from" the other person. Transcendence would thus seem to signify that quality which a person possesses by virtue of the fact that he is^a person, of simultaneously being-for and being-free-from the other.

It is of considerable importance that Bonhoeffer, in his Christology lectures, framed his idea of the logos in just these terms of person and transcendence:

(The questioner) asks after the particular being of a strange being, after the boundary of his own existence... Transcendence puts his own being into question. With the answer that his logos has reached its boundary, he comes up against the boundary of his own existence. The problem of existence is the problem of transcendence. Theologically expressed: alone before God does a man know who he is.¹²

The development of this theme is highly interesting. Since Christ is Person, and since transcendence is a personal quality, his otherness, impenetrability, and accessibility are all "given", and may not come into question.¹³ The initial problem of Bonhoeffer's lectures is the dismissal from Christology of all questions which fail to confront the logos, Christ, as personal and transcendent. These questions he sums up as the one forbidden question, "How can you be the Christ?" This is "the godless question", "the question of the serpent", "the question of immanence."¹⁴ The only question appropriate for Christology is "Who art Thou?"; insisting upon the given integrity and inaccessibility^e

the transcendence of the person to whom it is directed:

If the counter-logos enters history not as an idea but as the Word made flesh, there is no possibility of taking it into one's own logos-order. Here there remains only the question Who art Thou? Speak thyself! The question Who art Thou? is the question of the dethroned, the unseated reason. But just so is it the believing question. Who art Thou? Art thou God himself? Christology has to do with this question. Christ is the counter-logos. Classification is no longer a possibility, because the being of this logos means the end of the human logos.¹⁵ Only the question Who art Thou? is the appropriate question.

It must be kept in mind that thus far, Bonhoeffer has refused to define transcendence in terms other than those in which the personal quality of every human being can be defined:

The question Who art Thou? is present in daily life... It is the question about other men and their claims, about other beings, about other authority. It is the question of the love of the neighbor. Transcendence and existence questions become the personal question. That means Man cannot answer this question himself. Existence cannot step out of itself; it remains occupied with itself and only mirrors itself in itself. Imprisoned in its own authority it asks still further after the How? 16

3. The Inviolable Person of Christ.

The transcendence of the person means that he is inaccessible and exists extra me. It means, above all, that the other person is inviolable by my ego; his personal center is not available to me. From this basic understanding of person Bonhoeffer moves subtly and probably too swiftly to a doctrine of the Person of Christ. His argument runs as follows: If the structure of the other person is inviolable and out of my grasp, then it must follow that neither may the divinity of Christ be isolated from his humanity, nor his humanity from his divinity. This would destroy the unity of his personal structure, asking the forbidden question: How can you be the Christ? Christology can have

nothing to do with this question, but must rather base itself upon "the personal structure of being of the whole historical Jesus Christ."¹⁷ It may ask only one question: Who is this God-Man?

Who is contemporary, present, actual? Answer: the one person of the God-Man Jesus Christ. I do not know who the man Jesus Christ is if I do not at the same time say: Jesus Christ, God. And I do not know who Jesus Christ, God is if I do not at the same time say: Jesus Christ, Man. Neither can be isolated, for they do not exist in isolation. God in his timeless eternity is not God; Jesus in his temporal limitation is not Jesus. Rather, in the man Jesus is God God. In this Jesus Christ, God is contemporaneous. The one God-Man is the entrance way into Christology.¹⁸

With this indivisible personal structure of the being of Jesus Christ, established as his axiom, Bonhoeffer can run through the whole of historical Christology, dismissing all questions which cannot be reduced to the question Who this God-Man is. The problem of Christology, he repeats again and again, is not "the relationship of an isolated God to an isolated man," but rather the relationship of the given God-Man to the world of the flesh.¹⁹ Bonhoeffer would thus, in the last analysis, reject all questions which attempt to go beyond the Chalcedonian formula. For Christological questions must be framed in such a way that they neither call the Godhood of Christ into question nor destroy his manhood. When they do, they fail to acknowledge Christ as Person, and thus as personally transcendent; such views are not only wrong, but basically heretical.²⁰

But it would seem that Bonhoeffer, in ruling out any question which is not finally rhetorical, has deprived Christology of any real purpose. With what questions is Christology concerned if the Incarnation itself is removed from discussion?

4. Christ pro me.

The heart of Bonhoeffer's lectures is his argument that the total orientation of the personal structure of Christ is pro me: Christ's being-for-me is not some "power" which he possesses but rather the definition of his being. His determination pro me is the center of his personal structure. Two questions are thus proper to Christology: In what form is Christ present pro me, and where is Christ present pro me?²¹

Christ as the absolutely transcendent person is absolutely out of my control. Absolute also is the claim which he makes upon me. His person is determined wholly by his being pro me. Christ does not exist in and of himself, but only in his existential bearing pro me. This is not an ontic nor historical power which he possesses; his person is this power. As pro me Christ is contemporaneous, not as an historically extended energy nor as a reconstructed "inner life" but as the indivisible person of the God-Man.²² Here again, Bonhoeffer's formulation enables him to bypass "illegitimate" questions:

The question How the man Jesus, bound to space and time, can be contemporary is impossible. There exists no such isolated Jesus. The other question, how God can be in time, is also impossible. There is no such isolated God. Only the question Who is contemporary, present, and actual is possible and meaningful. Answer: the one person of the God-Man Jesus Christ.²³

The contemporaneity of Christ is given; it is the essence of his pro me structure which, in turn, is inextricable from his personal being. We may only ask after the form and place of his presence.²⁴

a. Throughout his lectures, Bonhoeffer uses the sentence from Luther as his battle cry: "At this man thou shalt point and say that he is God!"²⁵ The problem of Christology is not the Incarnation but its form; that "this man"

exists in the scandalous form of the Humiliated. Encounter with Christ is encounter with the humiliated God-Man:

Wherein does the special manner of existence as the Humiliated express itself? In that Christ takes up the flesh of the sinner. The Humiliated is determined by the world beneath the curse. The Incarnation is based upon the first creation, the humiliation upon the fallen creation. In the humiliation Christ, of his own accord, enters the world of sin and death. He enters such that he is not known as the God-Man, but concealed in weakness. He does not enter as a morphe theou in the clothes of a king. The claim which he asserts as God-Man in this form cannot but excite rebellion and animosity. He goes incognito as a beggar among beggars, as a rejected man among rejected men, as a doubter among the doubters, as a dying man among dying men... And here lies the central problem of Christology.²⁶

This incognito is never broken through; Christ remains always in the form of humiliation and, in this form, is borne witness to as the Christ. "The believer sees in him the signs of the divine act at the end of the world. He sees, bound to the incognito, something of the glory of God. 'We saw his glory' (John 1:14). But the non-believer sees nothing."²⁷

Bonhoeffer's powerful and insistent theology of the cross reminds us of the incognito, the humility of the empirical church in Sanctorum Communio.²⁸ The humiliated form of the God-Man, like the empirical church, remains when one turns to speak of the contemporaneity of Christ; indeed, it is central to the latter:

Jesus the man is believed as God. And indeed as man and not in spite of his manhood or apart from it. As man Jesus kindles faith in the Word. Jesus Christ is not God in a godly nature, ousia, essence; thus not in a discoverable and describable manner, but in faith. If Jesus Christ is to be described as God, this godly essence, omnipotence, and omniscience may not be spoken of but rather the weak man among sinners, the crib and the cross. When we deal with the divinity of Jesus we must speak only of his weak-

ness. One looks in Christology upon the whole historical man Jesus, and says of him: This is God.²⁹

b. The discussion of the contemporary, humiliated form of Christ as Word, Sacrament, and Community need not concern us here.³⁰ More important is Bonhoeffer's consolidation of earlier thinking in his notion of the "place" of Christ.³¹ Here he turns to an original treatment of Christ as Mediator within man, history, and nature. "The essence of the person of Christ," he writes, "is to be temporally and spatially in the center. He who is contemporary in Word, Sacrament, and Community is in the center of human existence, history, and nature. Being-in-the-center belongs to the structure of his person. ... That is his essence and the manner of his existence."³² The mediation of Christ in being-for man is expressed in an important but somewhat cryptic paragraph:

Where does he stand? He stands pro me. He stands there at my place where I should and cannot stand. He stands on the boundaries of my existence, on the other side, yet for me... The boundary lies between me and myself, between the old and the new I. In the encounter with this boundary, I am judged. At this place I cannot stand alone. At this place stands Christ, in the center between me and myself, the old and the new existence. Thus Christ is at the same time my own boundary and my newly-found center, the center between I and I and I and God... In Christ man recognizes (his boundary) and thus, at the same time, finds his new center again.³³

The presence of the Lutheran Kondeszens-Christology to which Bonhoeffer directed us in Sanctorum Communio and Act and Being is clear: Christ the humiliated, Christ emptying himself, Christ pro me. But now Bonhoeffer has moved beyond the limitations of "Christ existing as the church" to a conception of Christ as the center and boundary of the individual believer. Revelation is the act in which Christ, who comes to me in Word, Sacrament, and Community, the humiliated God-Man whose total existence

is for me, is confessed as God. As the absolutely transcendent, he stands free from me on the boundary and at the center of my existence; in his transcendence, I find my center and my boundary. We are ready to move on to the concretion of Bonhoeffer's Christology in his ideas concerning exegesis and obedience, which arose at the time of these Christology lectures. These three — Christology, scripture, and obedience — were woven together into the powerful conception of discipleship which found expression in the pages of The Cost of Discipleship. The Christ of the 1933 lectures acts through the believer; the believer takes the form of Christ upon himself in meditation upon and obedience to the Word of scripture.

Chapter 7

Concrete Exegesis

Several years ago, when Bonhoeffer's early writings were made available, readers of the Ethics and the Letters and Papers from Prison searched eagerly among the numerous biblical studies he produced during the course of his life, hoping to find there clues to the meaning of "the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts," or Bonhoeffer's understanding of the hermeneutical problem. These students were sadly disappointed in their attempts. The hermeneutical problem did not seem to exist for Bonhoeffer before 1940, and in his biblical studies it was scorned utterly. Creation and Fall (1932/3), his study of Genesis 1-3, covers the text with a curious kind of philosophical veneer.³⁴ The "homilies" of The Cost of Discipleship disregard literary and historical study and cover over the difficulties involved in determining what the text actually is and says.³⁵ The heavy-handed Christologizing of Old Testament passages becomes especially tedious in Bonhoeffer's treatment of König David.³⁶ In the collection of sermons and short studies in Gesammelte Schriften IV, whatever their other merits might be, there is hardly the historical awareness of a student of Deissmann, Sellin, Lietzmann, and Harnack much less the radical non-religious interpretation of the prison letters.

If it is probable that contemporary exegetical method and biblical study will learn little from Bonhoeffer's method of scriptural interpretation; it is certain that his understanding and use of the Bible is a vital key to his own development. Scientific exegesis with the aim of

disclosing the original form of a text or uncovering the Sitz im Leben of a particular passage was not Bonhoeffer's intention. His question, bypassing textual criticism (and leaving for us the problem of the relationship between this and what he wished to do), was how to hear and obey the Word of God. He feared losing this problem in textual and critical theorizing, becoming interested in abstract literary concerns. Exegesis and ethics could not be separated. His meditation upon and obedience to the Word of scripture was, therefore, not a side issue in Bonhoeffer's theology, but close to its center. Recognizing exegesis as well as ethics to be a Christological problem, Bonhoeffer used his doctrine of scripture as the means whereby his new Christology might be concretized. This was a process which Bonhoeffer called the "concretion of the proclamation". This development, and the relationship between this movement in Bonhoeffer's theology and his involvement in the Kirchen-kampf, emerges out of the biblical studies which he wrote and some extremely self-conscious letters which attempted to explain his attitude. At the end of this movement in Bonhoeffer's thought is The Cost of Discipleship.

I. "Theological Interpretation" : Creation and Fall.

The origins of Bonhoeffer's scriptural approach are obscure.³⁷ In Berlin, he sat under some of the most brilliant exponents of the historical-critical approach, yet he could later recommend to his Finkenwalde students only the biblicist Adolf Schlatter, whom he had come to know during his year at Tübingen.³⁸ His first interests were in any case systematic theology, philosophy, and sociology. Neither Sanctorum Communio nor Act and Being is predominantly a biblical study. But in 1932-3, Bonhoeffer lectured in Berlin on the first three chapters of Genesis, producing

what he called a "theological interpretation".

The method of Creation and Fall (the title under which the lectures were later published) was to accept the Genesis material from beginning to end as a theological unity, divide the text thematically, and unfold the various themes as part of the single, declaratory message. Although he did not write a lengthy introductory apologetic for his methodology, the phrase "theological interpretation" provides the clue to what Bonhoeffer imagined himself to be doing. As opposed to a history-of-religions approach which would seek the source or sources of the material and engage in comparative study to determine its meaning, or a psychology-of-religions approach which would demonstrate the validity of the material in terms of outside, a priori psychological truths, Bonhoeffer proposed to interpret the texts "from the church's point of view."³⁹

"Theological interpretation," he wrote, "accepts the Bible as the book of the church and interprets it as such." This involved the a priori assumption that Genesis speaks of one God and one God speaks through the Genesis texts.

"God is the one God in the whole of Holy Scripture," Bonhoeffer wrote. "The church and theological study stand and fall with this faith."⁴⁰

The first question we should wish to raise is the relationship between this "theological interpretation" and the historical-critical methodology of Bonhoeffer's teachers. Writing of Bonhoeffer's method, Richard Grunow sees in Creation and Fall a "disregard of all historical and literary questions raised by the text."⁴¹ It is indeed certain that if Bonhoeffer made use of historical-critical and literary research, he did so apart from and even in spite of his interpretation.

But it would not be fair to say flatly that Bonhoeffer has here disregarded the necessity and value of such questions as are raised by the critical approach. That he was aware of such difficulties is clear from his comments in his lectures on Christology, delivered during the following semester:

But is not every door and gate to enthusiasm thus opened? This is not the case, because the self-authentication of Jesus is none other than that which is finally delivered to us by scripture, and comes to us in no other way than through the word of scripture. We have finally to do with a book with which we find ourselves in the sphere of the profane. It must be read and interpreted. It is to be read with all of the help of historical and philological criticism. The believer, too, has to do this insistently and impartially. At every turn we must face the problem of having to preach on a word of Jesus which one knows, from historical-philological study, was never spoken thus by Jesus. In the interpretation of scripture, one finds oneself on strangely broken ground.⁴²

And even more emphatically:

...The Bible remains a book among books. One must be ready to allow the disguise of history and thus the way of historical criticism. But throughout the broken Bible the Resurrected encounters us. We must involve ourselves in the difficulties uncovered by historical criticism. Its importance is not absolute, but at the same time it is not inconsequential. Indeed, it is not the weakness but the strength of faith that the disguise of historicity belongs to the humiliation of Christ.⁴³

How does the "theological interpretation" of Creation and Fall reflect this understanding? Here we must distinguish between two questions. It is inappropriate to demand that Bonhoeffer, having announced a different approach to the scriptures, should concern himself at every point in the text with a preliminary resolution of all etymological, form-critical, and religio-historical considerations. Still, it is fair to ask that he come to terms generally with historical-critical methodology. Bonhoeffer does

in fact claim that he has given the central question of historical-critical methodology its due, and he sees no dispute between this approach and his own:

'A myth, a childlike, fantastic picture of the grey, hidden times of old': thus speaks the world. 'God's Word, even in the beginning of our history, before history, beyond history, yet in history; we ourselves are confronted, intended, addressed, accused, sentenced, expelled. God himself is the one who blesses and curses. It is our pre-history, truly our own. It is the beginning, destiny, guilt, and the end of every one of us': thus speaks the church of Christ.

Why dispute the one at the expense of the other? Why can we not understand that all our speaking about God, about our beginning and end, about our guilt never mentions these things themselves but always speaks only in pictures? Why can we not understand that God must reach out towards us with these ancient, magical pictures as well as with our technical, conceptual pictures, that he must teach us if we are to become wise? ...We must always assume that in either case it is we who are aimed at and we must readily and openly allow what was said in that age about the man of the magical world picture to apply to us.⁴⁴

"God encounters us" and "is alone to be found" in this human document which, as such, is subject to all criticism of human disciplines. It is proper, however, that we ask whether the "brokenness" of the Bible resulting from historical criticism has been reflected in Bonhoeffer's "theological interpretation."

Has Bonhoeffer not, after all, set his own methodology against that of historical criticism and "disputed the one at the expense of the other"? In his Christology lectures he acknowledges the problem of the disunity of biblical texts. As the means of overcoming this "brokenness" theologically, he turns to the words of Thurneysen: "One may never halt at some particular place; one must move on through the whole of the Bible, from one place to another, just as one crosses a river filled with ice floes and does not remain standing on one, but jumps from one to the other."⁴⁵

This should mean that the brokenness of scripture remains for, and is indeed reflected by, any "theological interpretation". Yet the image of jumping between ice floes is not the picture one finally receives from Creation and Fall. Bonhoeffer gives each verse equal revelatory weight and value within its immediate context. The text is treated as a unit -- a single story of God's dealing with man and man's relationship to him. Bonhoeffer accomplishes this unification by means of a highly original and systematic method of reflection, which combines an existential hermeneutic, psychology, and his own revelational theory. Nevertheless, his method would never be acceptable to anyone who takes the critical approach seriously.

What is not clear to us is how Bonhoeffer has moved from the assumption that "God is the one God in the whole of Holy Scripture" to the indivisible theological unity of the text, nor is it clear why such a unity is necessary.⁴⁶ The brokenness of scripture which one uncovers on the historical-critical level is not finally reflected in Bonhoeffer's "theological interpretation."

II. The "Concretion of the Proclamation" and "The Sacrament of the Ethical".

Bonhoeffer did not regard the relationship of historical criticism to theological interpretation as the most pressing of the problems concerning the approach to the scriptures. It is at least certain that his own development was not determined by this question. From the very beginning of his interest in the problem of scriptural interpretation, he was intensely involved with the question of how one related oneself to scripture; how scripture became actual and concrete in life. "Scientific" exegetical thinking should grow from this basis, not vice-versa. His thoughts on scrip-

ture were thus taken up along with his meditations on questions concerning Christian ethics and proclamation.

Following a visit to Karl Barth's seminar in Bonn in the summer of 1931, Bonhoeffer was persuaded that the greatest unsolved problems for the theology of revelation lay in the field of ethics.⁴⁷ He was perplexed by Barth's understanding of ethics; and Emil Brunner's Das Gebot und die Ordnungen, which appeared in 1932, did not raise the question with which he was most concerned, namely: "the question of the possibility of proclaiming a concrete commandment through the church."⁴⁸ By this Bonhoeffer meant the duty of the church to proclaim the commandment of God in the same way that it proclaimed the gospel, and to have this ethical proclamation assume positive, concrete form. To a friend he wrote:

It is the problem of the concretion of the proclamation which moves me at present. It is simply not enough, and therefore false, to say that the principle of concretion can only be the Holy Ghost itself... The concretion of the proclamation of grace is of course the sacrament. But what is the sacrament of the ethical, the commandment?⁴⁹

Various papers which he delivered at ecumenical meetings revolved around this theme, as we shall see in the chapter following. But it was the Sermon on the Mount which brought this difficulty home to Bonhoeffer, and led him to relate his concern for the concretion of the proclamation directly to the problem of how to read the Bible. In the autumn of 1934, Bonhoeffer wrote again to his friend Sutz of his fresh encounter with Matthew 5-7:

Do write to me sometime just how you preach on the Sermon on the Mount. I am just now attempting it — in an infinitely plain and homely manner, but always about the keeping of the commandments without evading them. Following Christ — what that is, is what I want to know. It is not exhausted in our concept of faith. I am sitting at a work

which I might call exercitien as a preliminary step.⁵⁰

Bonhoeffer's exercitien were, in fact, the initial experiments with the theme which later formed the central chapters of his Cost of Discipleship. The question of the concretion of the proclamation had led him back to the scriptures themselves, "keeping the commandments without evading them."

We must begin keeping dates before our eyes: the letter from which the last citation was taken was written at the conclusion of Bonhoeffer's first year in London; the Barmen declaration, creating the Confessing Church, had been issued during the preceding May. In January of 1935, Bonhoeffer finally and self-consciously resolved the question of ethics and the concretion of the proclamation in "simple obedience" to the Sermon on the Mount. He described his decision in a letter to his brother, Karl Friedrich:

It may be that in several ways I appear to you somewhat crazy and fanatic. I am myself anxious about it. But I know that if I were to be "reasonable" I would honestly, in the next few days, have to put the whole of my theology on a shelf. When I began with theology I thought of it differently — perhaps a more academic pursuit. Now it is something else entirely. But I believe that I am at least on the right track for the first time in my life. And that in itself is a pleasant thought. I am only afraid that in worrying about the opinions of others, I won't go any further, but remain stuck. I believe that I first become really clear when I begin by taking the Sermon on the Mount seriously.

...The restoration of the church will come from a new kind of monasticism, which has in common with the old only an uncompromising life based on the Sermon on the Mount in the following of Christ. I believe that it is time to assemble men for this task.⁵¹

Bonhoeffer took over his duties as leader of the vicars' seminary in Pomerania during the following April.

One might describe this outcome as a self-conscious legalism in Bonhoeffer; if by legalism we mean nothing more

than that the scriptures are read as direct, clear, and wholly relevant commands; and by self-conscious we mean that Bonhoeffer was fully aware of the dangers involved in the decision he had made. This overriding concern for obedience to the biblical Word had much in common with the approach of Creation and Fall, although in the final analysis, the former is far more radical. The ultimate suspension of all critical questions proved both more fruitful and more dangerous than anything Bonhoeffer had hitherto attempted, as we shall see by examining the effect of this action on Bonhoeffer's own life and work.

III. "The Last Authorities"

The most penetrating and revealing letter we have from Bonhoeffer's hand was written in April of 1936 to his brother-in-law, Rüdiger Schleicher. In it Bonhoeffer deals directly with his own approach to the scriptures, showing how the question of how one reads and responds to the Bible had touched the very center of his existence. He wrote in response to a certain bewilderment, perhaps disappointment, which Schleicher had expressed over the direction Bonhoeffer's life and thought seemed to be taking. Bonhoeffer summarized the question he felt he had been asked: "How do I live a Christian life in the world of reality, and where are the last authorities for such a life, which alone make it worthwhile?" His letter continued:

I want finally to confess quite simply: I believe that the Bible alone is the answer to all our questions, and that we need humbly and persistently to ask in order to receive an answer. One cannot read the Bible simply as one reads other books. One must be ready really to ask. Only thus is it unlocked. Only when we expect the last answer is it given to us. And that is because in the Bible, God speaks to us. One cannot simply think God out of oneself, but one must ask after Him. Only when we seek Him does He answer. Of course one can read the Bible like other books;

from the standpoint of the textual critic, etc. One may say nothing against that. Only that this usage merely skims the surface of the Bible, and does not unlock its essence. 52

We noticed previously in Bonhoeffer a tendency to set historical-critical questions to one side. Textual criticism was simply an improper standpoint from which to approach the scriptures; a discipline necessitated by intellectual honesty but one whose questions were finally irrelevant to the hearing and understanding of the Word of God. While this outlook was previously directed toward the theological questions of exegesis, Bonhoeffer now speaks of the Bible as, in the first place, the devotional center of the Christian life of faith. At the same time, he clearly recognizes that two approaches to the scriptures, a "devotional" and a "theological" approach cannot finally be allowed.⁵³ Critical work had become meaningless for his devotional life -- "breaking the ground" of the Bible was now utterly beside the point. He therefore found it necessary to admit his willingness to suspend certain critical reservations in order to confront a Bible whose every part is theologically trustworthy and whose integrity and unity is unquestioned:

For all of this, is it now somehow understandable to you that I don't want to surrender the Bible as this strange Word at any point; that I want rather to ask with all that is in my power what God wants here to say to us? Every other place outside of the Bible has become uncertain to me. I fear only that I will come up against a 'godly double' (göttlichen Doppelgänger) of myself. Is it then somehow conceivable to you that I would rather be ready for a sacrificium intellectus just and only in this matter (and who doesn't at some place need his sacrificium intellectus?) -- that is, the admission that one does not yet understand this or that place in the scripture, in the certainty that this also will some day be revealed as God's Word? That I would rather do that than to judge for myself: this is divine, this human! 54

One cannot help being deeply moved by the power and simplicity, the fascinating impossibility of this answer to the question how, in 1936, one "lives a Christian life

in the world of reality." One opens the Bible; one questions God directly. If the text does not provide a simple and direct answer, demanding absolute obedience, one asks again and again until the answer comes. No dialectical escapes, no evasion, no relativizing of the Word of God is permitted:

I will tell you personally: since I learned to read the Bible -- and that is still not so long ago -- it becomes each day more wonderful for me. I read mornings and evenings, often even throughout the day; and each day I take a text, which I have with me for a whole week, and try completely to immerse myself in it, in order really to hear. I know that without it I could not live rightly anymore. And also not believe...

It may be that this is a very primitive matter. But you don't know how happy one is to have found one's way back to this primitiveness after so many theological side-tracks. And I think that in matters of belief, we are really just primitive all the time.⁵⁵

Bonhoeffer's thinking on the scripture was consummated in 1936 as disciplined involvement with and within the scriptural text; meditation and unquestioned obedience. It is inconceivable that this devotional application should not have affected Bonhoeffer's work and thought at every level. Fortunately, we have preserved for us a large fragment of a lecture which Bonhoeffer delivered in the autumn of 1935, on the subject of how the New Testament and the present-day Christian become contemporaries. Here Bonhoeffer's whole attitude toward the question itself cannot be understood apart from the undercurrent of his devotional life. He could see no motive behind the demand that the scriptures be made "understandable" to modern man other than that of wishing to avoid direct obedience, of wishing to be both autonomous and Christian at the same time and, therefore, of asking that the biblical texts "prove themselves before the forum of modernity." His opposition was unequivocal:

It is the same approach (i.e., no matter whether such a demand be made in the eighteenth, nineteenth, or twentieth centuries, ed.); namely, that the archimedian point, the immovable, outside question has already been found (be it reason, culture, or Volkstum) and the moveable, questionable, uncertain element is the biblical message. And it is precisely the same method: namely, to take actualization (Vergegenwärtigung, "making present") to mean that one allows the biblical message to sift through the sieve of one's own experience, despising and shaking out what will not pass through; and one prunes and clips the biblical message until it will fit into a given space, until the eagle can no longer fly in his true element but with clipped wings, is exhibited as a special showpiece among the usual domesticated animals...⁵⁶

Asking the question in the first place, as though the present were the judge and the New Testament must be made to be acceptable, has no place in Christian thought in Bonhoeffer's view. The present must rather be judged by the New Testament. Thus, "no special act of actualization (Vergegenwärtigung) may be allowed other than the content itself... Where Christ and his Word are allowed to speak, there is actualization."⁵⁷ And again: "God alone says what his Word is and that means God alone makes his Word contemporary; the Holy Ghost is the principle of actualization (Vergegenwärtigung)."⁵⁸

This unquestioning devotional attitude toward scripture had the effect of cutting off all conversation between Bonhoeffer and the critical approach to the scriptures within his theological work — there is no room here for any "hermeneutical principle". From the devotional center of his life, spokes radiated outward into every part of his work and thought. It is well to remind ourselves that April 1936 (the date of the letter to Schleicher) was the month and year of Bonhoeffer's famous essay on church community which included the sentence which caused so much embar-

rassment and disagreement even in his own Confessing Church circles: "He who knowingly separates himself from the Confessing Church in Germany separates himself from salvation."⁵⁹ Here again, no escapes from concrete allegiance are allowed. At this time, Bonhoeffer was well under way with his experimental project, the Brüderhaus — a vita communis of vicars which informally restored some of the traditional monastic vows and established a daily order of prayer, confession, and communal life among its members.⁶⁰ The Cost of Discipleship was published in 1937, after Bonhoeffer had lived for several years with its ideas. Life Together, the book which grew out of the experience of the Brüderhaus, appeared in 1939. During these years, biblical meditations and outlines followed in a continuous stream; including König David (1935), Temptation (1937), and, predictably, a study of the Psalms (1940).⁶¹

The Kirchenkampf closed out several legitimate directions from Bonhoeffer's theological consideration. But the element in his thought which provided the impetus for his decisions and determined his course of action was not simply the practical question raised by the church struggle. This "concretion of the proclamation" had a Christological center, and it was the marriage of his Christological thought to his strict doctrine of scripture which gave The Cost of Discipleship its radical freedom and excitement, and kept the work from being a primitive, fanatic biblicism. The following chapter takes up the theme of the Christological-ethical interpretation of scripture as it actually appeared in The Cost of Discipleship.

Chapter 8

Christology and Discipleship

Abstract Christological thinking was impossible for Bonhoeffer, and he had little interest in the purely academic problems of scriptural exegesis. There was for him only one problem for theology: how Christ could be shown to be truly present, actual, and apprehensible for man in the world. In 1927, Christ existed in and for the world as the church; Christology was made concrete through ecclesiology. So also in 1936, Bonhoeffer grounded his new understanding of the person and work of Christ in his exegetical method as the solution of the problem of concrete proclamation and concrete obedience. The disciple encounters Christ in the scriptures and follows him by participating in his being for the world, in his existence in the Church; in short, in his transcendence. In Christ, in the church, the believer is free from the world, for the world. This was the program which Bonhoeffer set forth in the pages of The Cost of Discipleship.

The Cost of Discipleship represents not only Bonhoeffer's Christological understanding of scripture and discipleship, but also the ecclesiological framework into which Bonhoeffer set his new theory. The first chapters of the book develop the theme of Christology and discipleship, the final chapters (part four) connect this with the life of the church. The present chapter of our own study will show how Bonhoeffer wove together his thoughts on scripture, Christology, and discipleship into a single theme; Part II(B), which immediately follows the conclusion of this chapter, will show how Bonhoeffer carried the earlier "Christ exist-

ing as the church" into the Kirchenkampf and attempted to combine it with his new Christology, as well as indicate what consequences followed for his theological development.

I. Discipleship as the Imitation of Christ.

Adherence to Christ will always involve, in some form, the imitation of Christ. The most famous formulation of this way of relating the disciple to Christ came, no doubt, from the middle ages; protestant theology has traditionally shunned the precise formulation of this particular theme. But this notion has in fact had its place in Christian history since New Testament times. It is with some embarrassment that the protestant reads in St. Paul not only the familiar "Ye are Christ's" and "Ye are of Christ" and "Ye are in Christ", but also the puzzling "Be imitators of Christ" and the bold and barely conceivable "For me, to live is Christ." Certain protestant movements tended in the direction of an emulation of the life of Christ. Much of the German Pietist movement could be described as an attempt at the closer imitation of Christ, a recovery of the life and person of Christ and the determination to let Christ live within one's own life. There was this element in the birth of the Evangelical movement in Britain during the eighteenth century. And in our present day, no fashionable denigration of the Liberal search for the historical Jesus should miss the intention which underlay this program: to find Christ, and to follow him through a kind of participation in his Being.

Bonhoeffer's Cost of Discipleship attempted just this kind of simple, concrete imitation of Christ in the keeping of the commandments. For his cue, he turned not to Liberal theology but to the Reformation, where one cannot but notice the remarkable similarity with certain aspects of Luther's

doctrine of scripture. For both men, discipleship was a precise combination of the doctrines of Christ and sanctification, mediated through the Word of scripture. In Luther studies, this side of the latter's doctrine of scripture has been called "tropological interpretation".

II. Tropological Interpretation in Luther and Bonhoeffer.

The Christological interpretation of scripture is one of the more familiar features of Luther's theology. One meets with this characteristic method of exegesis at every turn in Luther's works: "In all scripture, there is nothing else than Christ, either in plain or involved words." "The whole scripture is about Christ alone everywhere, if we look to its inner meaning, though superficially it may sound different." "The entire Old Testament refers to Christ and agrees with him." "If I know what I believe, then I know what stands in scripture, for scripture has nothing more than Christ and Christian faith in it."⁶²

Luther used the traditional (medieval) "four-fold" method of scripture interpretation: historical, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical. But he tended to concentrate upon the third part of this scheme, which brought scripture to bear upon the individual Christian through the action of Christ (de quolibet spirituali et interiori homine).⁶³ J.K.S. Reid, in his The Authority of Scripture, writes the following concerning the importance of this concept for Luther:

(For Luther) the authority which scripture possesses is objectively grounded in a book which speaks of Jesus Christ. This authority, however, is established in the heart into which Christ enters, or (which is much the same thing) upon which the Holy Spirit works, to create the faith in which it is both recognized and obeyed.⁶⁴

Tropology, then, is an exegetical-devotional process whereby subject and object are overcome, through the action

of Christ in confrontation with the scriptural Word. Christ's mediatory work grants to the believer power both to comprehend and to obey. Through the scriptures, Christ comes to dwell in the individual by faith (in ipsa fide Christus adest),⁶⁵ so that the individual shares in His victories and is united with Him "even more closely than the husband is coupled with his wife."⁶⁶ "If scripture contains Christ," Reid remarks, "it has something quite specific and objective to offer, but what it offers is something that takes up its residence within the subject, who then by faith acclaims its authority and yields to it."⁶⁷

Luther made extensive use of this method, especially in his writings on the Psalms,⁶⁸ and it is more than coincidence that Bonhoeffer, who turned so often to Luther in order to clarify his own thinking, found in the Psalms his greatest joy and comfort. In the introduction to his Gebetbuch der Bibel: eine Einführung in die Psalmen (1940), Bonhoeffer provided a definition of this "devotional-existential" method of exegesis which could have served as Luther's own:

In the Psalms it is the incarnate Son of God who lives with us men, praying to God the Father, who lives in eternity. In the mouth of Jesus Christ the word of man becomes the Word of God, and when we pray his prayer with him, the Word of God becomes the word of man! ...Christ stands in our place and prays for us... It really is our prayer, but because he knows us better than we know ourselves, because he was a truer man than we, it is also really his prayer and can only become our prayer because it was his.⁶⁹

The question "How do I lead a Christian life in the world of reality?" thus receives its answer in the "new kind of monasticism" Bonhoeffer envisioned in 1935 as the end of his quest for "the sacrament of the ethical". One

follows Christ by entering into a devotional circle where-
in one confronts the scriptures, directly encounters Christ,
and receives the power to fulfil what he commands. Like
Luther, Bonhoeffer saw exegesis as a problem of disciple-
ship and formulated his own "tropological" interpretation.
III. Tropological Interpretation in The Cost of Disciple-
ship.

Tropology is the process of relating scripture and
the Christian life to one another through their common ori-
entation toward Christ. In The Cost of Discipleship, the
individual confronts Christ's Word in the scriptures and,
at the same moment and through the action of Christ,^{is} apprehended^{by} that Word and receives the power to obey whatever it
commands. This "infusion", as it were, of Christology
with scripture and the Christian life deeply affected each
of the three components. What were these consequences?

A. Christological exegesis: First, Bonhoeffer's Christo-
logy provided his "unscientific" exegetical method with
its justification. His notion of the absolute integrity
of the Christ person, indivisibly God-Man and contemporary
in his pro me structure, became in The Cost of Discipleship
an exegetical concept. One approaches the scriptures as
one approaches Christ himself. Historical criticism does
not enter into Bonhoeffer's methodology because he equates
it, however ~~questionably~~, with the forbidden question 'How'?⁷⁰
This approach can only serve to provide the Christian with
an escape from the clear call to obedience. The Bible is
"the strange Word of God" which is at the same time "the
sole answer to all our questions" — as with the person
of Christ in Bonhoeffer's Christology, it is itself pro me,
extra me or, one can say, transcendent. Bonhoeffer can
therefore speak of discipleship as "a problem of exegesis":

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 the key to its interpretation. But then the key 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 now 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.⁷¹

B. Christology and Discipleship: Second, one notices the persistent theme in The Cost of Discipleship of the "adherence" of the disciples to Christ. Notice in the following passage the close proximity between discipleship and Christology:

Discipleship means adherence to Christ and, because Christ is the object of that adherence, it must take the form of discipleship. An abstract Christology, a doctrinal system, a general religious knowledge of the subject of grace or the forgiveness of sins, render discipleship superfluous, and in fact they positively exclude any idea of discipleship whatsoever, and are essentially inimical to the whole conception of following Christ... Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.⁷²

Bonhoeffer defines this relationship to Christ primarily as sharing in Christ's suffering and humiliation. "Just as Christ is only Christ 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."⁷³ An echo of Bonhoeffer's treatment of Christ's humiliation in his 1933 lectures rings throughout these pages. It was in this context that Bonhoeffer wrote his famous sentence, which has since become identified with his martyrdom: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him

come and die."

...It is the same death every time — death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call. ...The call of Christ, his baptism, sets the Christian in the middle of the daily arena against sin and the devil. Every day he encounters new temptations, and every day he must suffer anew for Jesus Christ's sake. The wounds and scars he receives in the fray are living tokens of this participation in the cross of his Lord.⁷⁴

The Cost of Discipleship nowhere mentions the idea of transcendence, although it is never far away from Bonhoeffer's thinking throughout his work. We have seen this described in his early writings as "the last limit of thinking," "the ultimate reality," "the demand and claim which I cannot overcome."⁷⁵ Transcendence designates that quality belonging to personal being which enables one to be at the same time wholly for others and free from their control. Bonhoeffer thus spoke of transcendence as the very center of Christ's being. As the absolute personality, Christ is absolutely transcendent. This is the understanding which Bonhoeffer carries into the work we are presently considering.

In confrontation with the scriptures, a devotional "circle" comes into operation: from Christ, to the scriptures; from thence to the believer through the mediatory action of Christ; finally leading to the realization of Christ's being in concrete obedience to his Word. Through the participation of the believer in Christ and Christ in him, Christ "continues to live in the lives of his followers"; he "has entered my life and taken charge."⁷⁶ In effect, one could describe this "devotional circle" as a "circle of transcendence", for Christ's impartation of himself to the believer through the scriptures enables the latter to share in his transcendent power. And what does "share in his transcendent power" mean?

It means that the disciple participates in Christ's freedom from and determination toward the world.⁷⁷

IV. Transcendence and Tropology.

It will be apparent to readers of the Letters and Papers from Prison that we have here, in this tropological formula, a scheme into which the theological ideas of Bonhoeffer's last years might be set.⁷⁸ Despite the vast differences in style and direction between these two works, the same problems are revolving in Bonhoeffer's mind: Christology, discipleship, and the interpretation of scripture cannot be separated. One cannot take up one element without taking up the other two at the same time. The impetus for both works is Christology -- The Cost of Discipleship is described at the outset as "a...quest for him who is the sole object of it all, for Jesus Christ himself"; the prison letters begin their theological meditation on "religionless" Christianity by asking "what is Christ for us today?"⁷⁹ Christ is, for both works, the sole principle of exegesis and the basis of the action of the Christian. The center of this Christology, in both works, is the transcendence of the person of Christ which leads the Christian to strike a certain attitude toward the world. What, then, is the difference in this attitude, the difference in the meaning of transcendence for The Cost of Discipleship and the prison letters?

Bonhoeffer was aware throughout The Cost of Discipleship of a "boundary" between Christ and the world, a barrier set not by Christ but by the world which rejects him.⁸⁰ In a chapter entitled "Discipleship and the Individual", Bonhoeffer wrote:

By virtue of his incarnation (Christ) has come between man and his natural life... By calling us he does cut us off from all immediacy with the things of this world. He

wants to be the center, through him alone shall all things come to pass... Since his coming, man has no immediate relationships of his own any more to anything, neither to God nor to the world. ...This breach with the immediacies of the world is identical with Christ the Son of God the Mediator... The call of Jesus teaches us that our relation to the world has been built on an illusion. All the time we thought we had enjoyed a direct relation with men and things... We cannot establish direct contact outside ourselves except through him... He stands in the center between my neighbor and myself. He divides, but he also unites. Thus, although the direct way to our neighbor is barred, we now find the new and only real way to him — the way which passes through the Mediator.⁸¹

The resemblance between this and the definition of Christ as Mediator in the 1933 Christology lectures is striking⁸², but Bonhoeffer has given one element of "transcendence" a special emphasis. In Christ and by virtue of his call, the "breach with the world" is revealed. In directing my gaze toward Christ, I see the rejected, crucified, humiliated Son of God. It is the world which has rejected, humiliated, and crucified him. In seeing and following Christ, I am separated from everything outside of his being. The keynote of The Cost of Discipleship thus remains Bonhoeffer's famous opening essay on "costly grace", which utterly rejects the idea that Christianity and a worldly life are compatible:

The world has been made Christian', but at the cost of secularizing the Christian religion as never before. The antithesis between the Christian life and bourgeois respectability is at an end. The Christian life comes to mean nothing more than living in the world and as the world, in being no different from the world, in fact, in being prohibited from being different from the world for the sake of grace. ...I need no longer try to follow Christ, for cheap grace, the bitterest foe of discipleship, which true discipleship must loathe and detest, has freed me from that.⁸²

For The Cost of Discipleship, transcendence means primarily freedom from the world (although, as we shall see

in the chapters which immediately follow, Bonhoeffer saw this separation to be the only way in which the Christian could be for the world). This "breach with the world," made relevant and concrete in the issues of the church struggle, characterized this phase of Bonhoeffer's life and thought. His Christology became concrete in his radical doctrine of discipleship, and when he came later to question his attitude during this phase, he referred to it as a time when he thought he "could learn to believe by trying to lead a ... holy life."⁸⁴ Christology was given concrete form in discipleship, and discipleship meant nothing less than a "breach with the things of this world."

But in the prison letters, the "boundaries" which delineated this breach with the world have disappeared. What remains is the interest in the participation of the disciple in the transcendent being of Christ. There is, of course, a difference: in The Cost of Discipleship, being for the world in Christ could only mean separation from the world. The prison letters neatly reverse this, following a meditation on the "worldliness" of Christ which begins in the Ethics: freedom from the world can only be spoken of as the participation in Christ's being-for-others.⁸⁵

The basic difference between the prison letters and The Cost of Discipleship is the sphere of Bonhoeffer's concern, the presence or absence of the "boundaries" which he described in 1937. And this leads us to our discussion of the marriage of Bonhoeffer's early ecclesiological-revelational theory to the Confessing Church and the practical necessities of the church struggle. This forced marriage was, we shall see, an unhappy one.

Part II (A): "The Concretion of a New Christology"

1. "Challenge", pp. 14, 17.
2. GS III, pp. 166-242. In the form in which we have them, the lectures are reconstructed from the notes of the students who participated in Bonhoeffer's seminar in 1933. "Although any such reconstruction of a man's words from notes taken by his hearers and students must be used with caution," J. Pelikan writes, "...the substantial authenticity of Bonhoeffer's Christologie is attested to both by the testimony of those who heard the lectures and by a comparison of the Christologie with other writings whose authenticity is incontestable." ("Bonhoeffer's Christologie of 1933", Marty, p. 147).
3. SC, pp. 16-33.
4. Berger, in Marty, pp. 59ff., develops Bonhoeffer's argument from the basis of his conception of person and corporate person. It would seem, however, that Bonhoeffer set this idea to one side in favor of "objective spirit", and never really incorporated the former into his theory.
5. SC, pp. 32f.
6. SC, pp. 32f, 52.
7. AB, pp. 120-21. The concentration on the Christian concept of person demonstrates that Bonhoeffer has now set aside his attempted conversation with Seeberg (and the phrase "objective spirit") and, following the publication of Karl Barth's Die christliche Dogmatik, has taken up a conversation with Barth. Barth's failing, as Bonhoeffer saw it, was a lack of a conception of God as Person. "It is a fateful error on Barth's part," he wrote, "to replace the Lord and Creator with the concept of the Subject... But the ultimate reason for the inadequacy of Barth's explanation lies in the fact that it fails to understand God as a person. From this failure arises a defective definition of the being of revelation, whence a defective concept of knowledge... We must extract our answer from the result of defining the being of revelation as personal, accepting whatever consequences may follow for the concept of knowledge itself." In Bonhoeffer's understanding of "person", one is constantly free to give or withhold oneself from another person. By knowing another person, I do not

thereby control him, as he remains "Thou" for me and never becomes, from my perspective, an "I". Only I know my own "I", which is not discoverable by another (SC, pp. 30-33). The problem of the person is, in one way, the problem of the revelation of God (SC, p. 33). And because he is personal, God's giving of himself does not mean that his freedom is jeopardized. In the church, then, "God gives himself in Christ to his communion, and to each individual as a member of that communion. This he does in such a way that the active subject in the communion, of both the annunciation and the believing of the Word, is Christ. It is in the personal communion, and only there, that the gospel can truly be declared and believed. There, it follows, revelation is in some way secured and possessed. 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 man." (AB, pp. 120-1. Cf. also pp. 125-6, 130, 137ff; especially important is the translator's remark, p. 138n.). It is personality, not entity, which Bonhoeffer sees to be the key to the solution of the problem of act vs. being in revelation.

8. AB, p. 121.
9. AB, p. 138n.
10. SC, pp. 32, 16.
11. "Concerning the Christian Idea of God," GS III, pp. 103-104.
12. GS III, p. 170. Bonhoeffer is careful first to establish Christ's "otherness": "Were this logos our logos, then Christology would be the reflection of the logos upon itself. But it is the logos of God. His transcendence is the sine qua non of Christology; his from-outside-into the center of knowledge, his transcendence, authenticates its object, insofar as he is Person. The logos with which we have to do is a person. This man is the 'Transcendent.'" (Ibid., p. 167).
13. "Christology...can offer no evidence as proof of the transcendence of her object. Her theme of transcendence — that is, that the logos is a person, man — is given and is not provable." (Ibid., p. 168).
14. Ibid., p. 170.
15. Ibid., pp. 169-70.
16. Ibid., p. 170. At no place does Bonhoeffer develop at any length the distinction between the transcendence

possessed by all men as persons from the transcendence of Christ. One can only point to the 1931 essay on God: "God as the absolutely free personality is therefore absolutely transcendent (*Ibid.*, p. 103)." Without doubt, Bonhoeffer would insist that the distinction is qualitative.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 180-81.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 181, 233, and *passim*.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 227. Bonhoeffer does discuss historical issues in his lectures, but he sets out this section in parentheses, guided by what Pelikan deplores as an "a priori pattern". (Marty, p. 162). Some of this argument is relevant to our considerations, and may be summarized as follows:

The Lutheran interest in the communicatio idiomatum and the subsequent counter-arguments of the Calvinists were inspired by the forbidden question "How?" Bonhoeffer felt obliged to defend the Lutheran development, because he saw Calvinist Christology primarily as the explication of a "humiliated logos" which concerned itself with the pointless distinction between properties which belonged to Christ's divine nature and those which characterized his human nature. This view of the movement of the Incarnation (The Word becomes flesh by being humiliated) is false. The Lutheran view is the correct one: The Word which has become flesh humiliates itself, choosing a particular form or status of man in which to reveal itself. Humiliation, not Incarnation, is the Christological problem. Bonhoeffer saw the problem inherent in the Lutheran genus maiestaticum of turning Christ into a "divinized man", but defended the insistent hoc est corpus meum of Luther's doctrine of the sacrament against the Calvinist extra Calvinisticum (pp. 221, 189-192).

Liberal Christology fell victim of the Docetic heresy in that it saw Jesus as the appearance of a divine "quality" within history, a medium through which God speaks to man. This based Christology on an impossibly abstract view of God (p. 207). Thus (with Schleiermacher) Jesus becomes merely the historical representative of the idea of God, or (with Ritschl) Christ is the appearance of the value judgement of "community", (p. 211) or Christ is a historical and dynamic power (Seeberg?) (p. 179). Herrmann's ideal picture of the

"inner life" of Jesus, his personality, fell into the error of making Christology a synonym for soteriology. Against all these views, Bonhoeffer insists that Jesus is concretely a person, who includes his work in himself (pp. 179-180).

But there can be no going behind the Chalcedonian formula: "The beginning is given: The man Jesus is the Christ, is God. This 'is' cannot be set to one side. It is basic to all thinking and cannot be constructed a posteriori. From Chalcedon on, it can no longer be a question of how the natures can be different and the person one, but strictly: "Who is this man of whom it is said that he is God?" (p. 277).

21. Ibid., pp. 178ff.
22. Ibid., pp. 178ff.
23. Ibid., p. 180.
24. "Here we stand by the first Christological problem: If Christ is contemporary not only as a power but also in his person, how is this presence to be conceived, if we are not to injure the integrity of his person?" (p. 180) Bonhoeffer's answer: "The presence of the given God-Man Jesus Christ exists for us in the scandalous form of proclamation. The proclaimed Christ is the real Christ. The proclamation is not a second Incarnation. The scandal of Jesus is not his Incarnation — that is indeed the revelation! — but rather his humiliation. Jesus Christ is Man as the Humiliated and Exalted. ...Christ as the Humiliated and Exalted is present only in proclamation, but that means in the form of renewed humiliation. In the proclamation, the Resurrected is present in the humiliation. This presence has a three-fold form in the church: as Word, as Sacrament, and as the Church." (pp. 181-184).
25. Ibid., pp. 187, 209, 232, 235, and passim.
26. Ibid., p. 236.
27. Ibid., p. 240.
28. Bonhoeffer concluded his introductory lectures at Berlin, "Die Frage nach dem Menschen in der gegenwertigen Philosophie und Theologie" (1931) with these words: "Christ exists among us as the church, the church in the hiddenness of the historical. The church is the hidden Christ among us." (GS III, pp. 83-4). Compare this passage from the 1933 lectures: "With this humiliated one, the church goes its own way of humiliation. It cannot request the visible authorization of its way

since He, at every point, refused this. As the humiliated church, it must neither look with vain complacency to itself, as if its humility were a visible proof that Christ is present. Humiliation is not a proof to which attention may be drawn. There is no law or principle which the church must follow. There is only this fact of humility, which is God's way with the church." (Ibid., pp. 241-2).

29. Ibid., pp. 232-3.

30. The section is closest to the Christology of Sanctorum Communio in identifying the revelation with certain ecclesiastical forms, and for our purposes a brief summary will suffice:

As the Word, the full transcendent person of Christ confronts me as the "personal address" (p. 186) of God. "His presence is not any power of the church nor its objective spirit, out of which he is preached, but his being (Dasein) as the sermon." (p. 186) (If we could be more certain of the exact wording here, this represents Bonhoeffer's last mention of the phrase "objective spirit", which he used so widely in Sanctorum Communio). "At this man you shall point and say: That is God. We may modify that to read: At this word of man you shall point and say: That is God's Word. The sentences are basically alike." (p. 187).

As Sacrament, "the whole person of the God-Man in his exaltation and humiliation is present. ... Christ exists so that he is existentially present in the Sacrament. His being-as-the-Sacrament is not a peculiar possession, a quality among others; it exists thus in the church. The humiliation is not an accident of his God-Man substance but its existence." (p. 192).

As the Church, in the formulation which is already familiar to us from Bonhoeffer's earlier writings, the logos of God finds spatio-temporal extensivity. "The community is (not signifies) the Body of Christ." (p. 193).

31. Ibid., pp. 194ff. It is difficult to trace out the history of this idea in Bonhoeffer's early writings. I see the background of this section in the Christology lectures to be Bonhoeffer's remarks concerning "conscience" in Act and Being and Sanctorum Communio. In the former, conscience is described as "the last grasp of the self at the self" (AB, p. 160), "the becoming aware of death and isolation" (AB, p. 168), the final limitation of man. But conscience may have a form appropriate to being in Christ, if it "obscures

my view of Christ, or shows him to be my judge from the cross, thus pointing constantly to my sin." (AB, p.178). Bonhoeffer describes the conscience so conceived as rebellion against Christ which, at the same time, is taken up in the act of belief. As this act (like theology) involves "reflection upon one's limits" it must constantly be subject to the act of faith itself, the "pure intentionality in looking only toward Christ." (AB, p. 175). This complicated and often abstract argument emerges once more in Creation and Fall (1932-33), where Bonhoeffer develops the notion that "man's limit is in the middle of his existence"; that the tree of life represents the Lord and Giver of life, who is "at once the limit and the middle of our existence." (CF, p. 51). This middle/limit is connected closely with the knowledge of good and evil: when, in the Fall, man grasps knowledge for himself, he is cursed with the knowledge of good and evil and is thenceforth "like God". Knowing good and evil is man's death; for with this knowledge he can only strike out against the other person who is placed by his side to embody his limit, against the "grace" of his limitation.

This argument next arises in the Christology lectures, where Christ is the gracious limit to the ego. In the Ethics, Christ overcomes the knowledge of good and evil (embodied in the Pharisee) and directs man solely toward himself as the "limitation from the center". (E, pp. 142-161).

32. GS III, p. 194: "The essence of the person of Christ is to be temporally and spatially in the center... Being in the center belongs to the structure of his person. ...Christ is the one who exists for me (der pro-me Daseiende), the Mediator."
33. Ibid., p. 194.
34. Grunow, in MW I, p. 62: "In Creation and Fall, the interpretation is still strongly coated with philosophy and sets aside all historical and literary problems of the text, in a fundamental, systematic, existential-philosophical and revelational-theoretical consideration." Cp. Marty, pp. 120f.
35. W. Harrelson, in "Bonhoeffer and the Bible" (Marty, pp. 115-139), does not speak in a disparaging sense when he speaks of The Cost of Discipleship as a collection of "homilies". Rather, and quite rightly, he wishes to point out that this book does not represent the

kind of scientific historical-critical exegesis which has been developed in the course of the last hundred years of biblical study. (Ibid., pp. 121ff).

36. Ibid., pp. 121, 125f.
37. Cf. MW I, p. 64; Godsey, pp. 20-22.
38. MW I, p. 64. Bonhoeffer recommended for the preparation of sermons Lietzmann's commentary, Calvin, Bengel's Gnomon, Kohlbrügge, Vilmar, and Schlatter (GS IV, p. 260).
39. CF, pp. 7-8.
40. Ibid., p. 8. The idea of "theological interpretation" is rooted firmly in Bonhoeffer's earliest thought: Theology, the Bible, and the church are inseparable in the concept of revelation set out in Act and Being. "Theological knowledge has its object in the remembered happenings of the Christian communion, the Bible, preaching; and the sacrament, prayer, confession: the word of the Christ-person which is stored as entity in the historical church." (AB, p. 143). In Creation and Fall, the relationship between Bible, Church, and Christ is more explicit: "The Bible is nothing but the book upon which the church stands. This is its essential nature, or it is nothing. ... Thus the creation story should be read in the first place only from Christ and not until then as leading to Christ..." (Ibid., p. 8).
41. MW I, p. 69. On occasion in Creation and Fall, however, Bonhoeffer specifically acknowledges the importance of such questions, e.g. on pp. 41-43, 19, and 26. Discussing the Elohist account of the creation of man, he writes: "...undoubtedly in this passage the biblical author stands exposed with all the limitations caused by the age in which he lives. The idea of verbal inspiration will not do. The heavens and the seas were not formed in the way he says: we would not escape a very bad conscience if we committed ourselves to any such statement." (CF, p. 26).
42. GS III, p. 204, italics mine.
43. Ibid., pp. 204-5, italics mine.
44. CF, pp. 48-9.
45. GS III, p. 205.
46. In the introduction to Creation and Fall, Bonhoeffer writes: "Theological interpretation accepts the Bible as the book of the church and interprets it as such.

Its method is this assumption; it continually refers back from the text (which has to be ascertained with all the methods of philological and historical research) to this supposition. That is the objectivity of the method of theological interpretation. And in this objectivity alone is substantiated its claim to a scientific method. When Genesis says 'Yahweh', historically or psychologically it means nothing but Yahweh. Theologically, however, i.e. from the church's point of view, it is speaking of God. God is the One God in the whole of Holy Scripture; the church and theological study stand and fall with this faith." (Cf. p. 8). Whether Bonhoeffer recognizes what he has done, the fact remains that "the method of theological interpretation" loses its "objectivity" if "all the methods of philological and historical research" cannot be allowed to affect the final outcome. God is One and reveals himself in Holy Scripture as One — but need this mean that the Bible is to be treated as though it had but one human author, and that each of its verses must be uncritically accepted and expounded with equal revelatory power given to each?

47. This marked Bonhoeffer's first personal encounter with Barth. He was amused by Barth's students who sniffed out theological deviation: "No negro passes for white (he wrote his friend, Sutz); they examine your fingernails and the soles of your feet." (GS I, p. 19). Bonhoeffer wondered how long his own "bastardized theological heritage" would stand the test (p. 19). His delight with Barth's manner was, however, unconditional: "Now one can breathe regularly; one fears death by suffocation no longer. I believe that I regret nothing in my theological past so much as not having come sooner." (p. 19). Still, his joy did not make him uncritical. He reported to Sutz the events of an evening spent discussing ethics with Barth: "We came very soon to the ethical problem and discussed it for a long time. He wouldn't give in to me, as I expected he must. There are (Barth said) many small lanterns apart from the great light in the night, even 'relative ethical criteria' (whose meaning and essence and purpose he could not, however, make clear to me). It had to do with his approach to the Bible. He thought, finally, that I was making a principle out of grace and striking everything else dead. Naturally I contested the first point with him and wanted to know why everything else shouldn't be struck dead." (Ibid., p. 20)

Bonhoeffer found Barth's work terribly difficult to read and grasp, and confessed that he was far more impressed with him in action during his seminars and lectures (although he was not impressed in this way with Gogarten, who lectured in Berlin later in the fall : Cf. Ibid., pp. 20, 22-3). During the following spring, Bonhoeffer again spoke with Barth about the problem of ethics: "Barth doesn't stand by me in this matter — that is now clear to me. He spoke to me again about it and asked me whether I still think as I did, saying clearly enough that to him it had become even more suspect." (Ibid., p. 31). What exactly was the point at issue? It is at least certain that Bonhoeffer was disturbed by what he considered a central point in the whole of Barth's approach to theology. His perplexities were no doubt behind the exchange of letters with Barth concerning the writing of The Cost of Discipleship (GS II, pp. 283-291), in which Bonhoeffer reconsidered the doctrines of justification and sanctification, and the relationship between faith and obedience.

48. GS I, pp. 31, 32: "At bottom it has to do with the problem of ethics, that is, with the question of the possibility of the proclamation of a concrete commandment through the church. And it seems to me to be a real gap in Brunner's ethics that he has not put this question in the center..." (Ibid., p. 33). Later, shortly after Hitler became Chancellor, Bonhoeffer wrote again: "You know, I think that the whole matter comes to a critical point in the Sermon on the Mount. Perhaps you will wonder about that. I believe that the theology of Barth — and certainly that of Brunner — has only put off, even as it has made possible, the recognition of this fact." (Ibid., p. 40)
49. Bonhoeffer had just returned from an ecumenical Youth Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia, where he delivered a lecture on "The Theological Basis of the World Alliance" (GS I, pp. 140-161, summarized in Godsey, pp. 97-104). Here he raised the question: "How can the gospel and the commandment be proclaimed with authority, with full concretion? ...Can the church proclaim the commandment of God with the same assurance as she preaches the gospel? ...The gospel, as the commandment, can publically be proclaimed with authority only when it is spoken in a wholly concrete fashion... Where does the principle of concretion reside with the gospel and where with the commandment? (GS I, p. 145). Bonhoeffer was especially concerned that the church give con-

crete and unconditional commands to the world in the name of Christ; that it say, for example, "we must have a socialist economic order" or "do not go to war" in the same way that it can say "your sins are forgiven." He found the precedence for this action in the Sermon on the Mount and the necessity for it in his own "orders of preservation", but he warned at the same time against the dangers of legalism: "Recognition of God's command is an act of God's revelation." (*Ibid.*, p. 143). Only from Christ comes the gospel, and only from Christ can the commandment come. It would thus be necessary to attain to "the deepest knowledge of reality." (*Ibid.*, p. 143). Bonhoeffer finally decided for the formula: "What the sacrament is for the proclamation of the gospel, recognition of the concrete reality is for the proclamation of the commandment. Reality is the sacrament of the ethical." (*Ibid.*, p. 147).

50. GS I, p. 41, italics mine. Bonhoeffer is thinking of St. Ignatius Loyola's Exercitien, the "Spiritual Exercises". To complete the background of Bonhoeffer's interest in the Sermon on the Mount, we must refer to a very early lecture (1929) where he wrote: "It is a great misunderstanding if one makes the commandment of the Sermon on the Mount into a law in itself; that one accepts it word for word in the present day. That...goes against the free spirit of Christ, who brings freedom from the law." ("Grundfragen einer christlichen Ethik," GS III, p. 54). Here, Bethge remarks, "Bonhoeffer is still the traditional Lutheran who has learned his lesson of how to escape the directness of the Sermon on the Mount: the literal understanding makes it law, and the law is abolished in Christ." "Challenge", p. 17.
51. GS III, pp. 24-25, italics mine.
52. Ibid., pp. 26-27
53. Although, in a section of his lectures on homiletics entitled "The Pastor and the Bible" (GS IV, pp. 255-6), Bonhoeffer speaks of three "uses" of the Bible: at prayer, on the desk, and on the lectern. In all three uses, however, it is clear that "the Bible is the book which contains the Word of God until the end of all things. Therefore it is different from other books (Cp. the citation annotated n.43! ed.). This axiom can never be disregarded."
54. GS III, pp. 28-9.

55. Ibid., pp. 29-30.
56. "Vergegenwärtigung neutestamentlicher Texte," GS III, pp. 304-5. It should be noted that Bonhoeffer has taken the question of "making the biblical texts present" as characteristic of the German-Christian movement. It is probable that he could not converse with conscientious Confessing Church members who were asking honestly and in a legitimate fashion the same questions.
57. Ibid., p. 306.
58. Ibid., p. 307. In 1931, Bonhoeffer could write: "It is simply not enough, and therefore false to say: the principle of concretion can only be the Holy Ghost himself" (GS I, p. 31). It is interesting to compare this with the spirit of this essay in 1935: "The concretissimum of the Christian message and exposition of the text is not a human act of actualization, but it is always God himself, the Holy Ghost" (Ibid., p. 307).
59. GS II, p. 238. After reading this statement, Hans Lietzmann, who had remained at the University of Berlin after Bonhoeffer had gone, wrote to a Swedish friend: "Now our most gifted young teacher has turned into a fanatic..." ("Challenge", p. 3).
60. The story of the Brüderhaus is given in "Challenge", pp. 21-4. That this movement toward a recovery of some aspects of monasticism was closely bound up with the questions which centered on the Sermon on the Mount is clear from a letter to Sutz of 1934: "The training of young theologians belongs today in church-monastic schools, in which the pure doctrine, the Sermon on the Mount, and the cultus are all taken seriously — which for all three is not the case in the university and is, under present conditions, not possible." (GS I, p. 42). Bonhoeffer also wrote of the Cost of Discipleship and his difficulties with Confessing Church officials who suspected his experiment from the start, in a letter to Barth (September, 1936, in GS II, pp. 283-7 and MW I, pp. 116-8). Barth's answer included the following: "Now you tell me that you are occupied with the inexhaustible theme of justification and sanctification, both theoretically and practically... You cannot expect otherwise than that I am looking forward with an open mind; yet with some uneasiness as well. ...I can see already, especially among the young theologians of the Confessing Church, that there is approaching another wave of this kind, in which all of the past is revived. It might well be that you are

the one who is called and able to be the speaker and leader in this field..." (GS II, pp. 288-9, MW I, pp. 119-120, "Challenge", p. 19).

61. Temptation has been published separately in translation, the other studies are to be found in GS IV, pp. 294-320; 544-569.
62. W.A. 11.223.1f; Ficker, Rom. 240, 10f; W.A.10.1.567.12f; W.A.8.236.
63. W.A. 3.11.33; quoted in Rupp, op. cit., p. 134
64. Reid, p. 72. "Christ enters by the Gospel through a man's ear into his heart and dwells there; nor does he come empty-handed, but brings with him his life, Spirit, and all that he has and can" (Erl. A. 63.157). Reid is following Seeberg, among others, in his interpretation. He writes: "The fact is, ...that for the understanding of Scripture and the recognition of its authority subject and object have to be held together. This coming together takes place in the stillness (Stillehalten) of the individual before the Word." (Reid, op. cit., p. 71, following Köhler).
65. W.A. X.1; 160.22ff.
66. Gal. ET 110 (11. 20).
67. Reid, op. cit., pp. 70-71. Rupp adds the following citations from Luther himself: "Tropologicus sensus est ultimus et principaliter intentus in scriptura" (W.A. 3.458.8); "qui apostolum et alias scripturas vult sapide intelligere oportet ista omnia tropologice intelligere" (W.A. 3.531.33 ; 3.532.12), Rupp, op. cit., p. 135.
68. Rupp, following E. Vogelsang, sees decisive effects for Luther's development in the movement from Christological interpretation to purely tropological interpretation. He sees this as the background for Luther's discovery about justitia Dei, which possibly took place during Luther's work on the Psalms, in 1514 (op. cit., p. 135).
69. GS IV, pp. 544-569. Cf. also R.H. Fuller, "Liturgy and Devotion", in Marty, pp. 182ff. We have here used Godsey's summary, op. cit., pp. 190-191. Bonhoeffer made use of the tropological method most radically in his biblical study, Temptation, which develops the theme of "temptation in Christ" in the New Testament. On pages 23-4, he writes: "The true meaning is rather that in my temptations, my real succor is only in his

temptation; to share in his temptation is the only help in my temptation. Thus I ought not to think of my temptation other than as the temptation of Jesus Christ. In his temptation is my succor; for here only is victory and overcoming. The practical task of the Christian must, therefore, be to understand all the temptations which come upon him as temptations of Jesus Christ in him, and thus will be aided." Bonhoeffer made use in other biblical studies, especially in his König David, of another device of Luther and the Church Fathers: typology. He defended his use of the latter in his essay, "Vergegenwärtigung neutestamentlicher Texte", GS III, pp. 319-320. Cf. also MW I, pp. 70-71.

70. "The Christ whom the scriptures proclaim is in every word he utters one who grants faith only to those who obey him. It is neither possible nor right for us to try to get behind the word of the scriptures to the events as they actually occurred. Rather, the whole Word of the scriptures summons us to follow Jesus." (CD, p. 73).
71. Ibid., p. 73.
72. CD, p. 60.
73. Ibid., p. 77.
74. Ibid., p. 79.
75. Cf. GS III, pp. 195ff.
76. CD, p. 274. Cf. the section in Life Together entitled "The Day Alone: Meditation" (pp. 81-84): "In our meditation we ponder the chosen text on the strength of the promise that it has something utterly personal to say to us for this day and for our Christian life, that it is not only God's Word for the church, but also God's Word for us individually. We expose ourselves to the specific word until it addresses us personally... We do not ask what this text has to say to other people. For the preacher this means that he will not ask how he is going to preach or teach on this text, but what it is saying quite directly to him. It is true that to do this we must first have understood the context of the verse, but here we are not expounding it or preparing a sermon or conducting Bible study of any kind; we are rather waiting for God's Word to us." (LT, p. 82).
77. The believer, by sharing in Christ's transcendence by faith in him, is here granted the freedom to operate in the world. We must keep before us that the Kirchen-

kampf could not but have affected Bonhoeffer's picture of the world "outside of" the church which the disciple and his church see as the world fallen away from God. Cf. section II (B).

78. The problem of the place of scripture, which is not taken up in the Ethics, dominates the prison letters as the meditation on "the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts."
79. CD, p. 29; Letters, April 30, 1944 (p. 91).
80. Cf. "The Suffering of the Messengers", CD, pp. 190ff. Closely related is the question of the "boundaries" of the Confessing Church (cf. MW I, pp. 123ff.): "But here it is not the church which sets the boundaries, but the world which arbitrarily shuts itself out of the church, insofar as it does not hear and believe. The church cannot ascertain where her boundaries must run; rather, they will always be already fixed, insofar as they are drawn from outside..." (GS III, p. 126).
81. CD, pp. 84-90.
82. GS III, pp. 194ff.
83. CD, pp. 35-47; the citation is from p. 42.
84. Letters, July 21, 1944 (p. 125).
85. Letters, "Outline for a Book", pp. 164-5.

Part II (B)

The Space and Form
of Christ

Chapter 9

Revelation and the Confessing Church

All concrete questions are for us so difficult to answer, because we have not yet formulated clearly the previous question: What space the church must claim for the power of the Word of God itself. Is the space only the mathematical point of the Word of God, which darts in here and there? The mathematical point of justification? Is it the case that as long as the church is allowed this space, everything is in order? The experiences of the last years have taught us that the church reacts more sensitively, above and beyond our theological knowledge, to certain boundaries of her body of which she was not previously aware. She discovers boundary situations where, dogmatically, she had thought to find no boundaries. ...Theology and the question of the church develop out of the empirical experiences of the church in her conflicts. Blows befall her, and she recognizes: the body of the church goes this way or that. Question: How, then, is the recognized space of the church to be distinguished from other spaces round about her?...

"Sichtbare Kirche im neuen Testament" (1935/6), GS III, pp. 325-6.

The formula "Christ exists as the church" was a weapon with which Bonhoeffer seemed able to fight but one battle at a time. He had never intended that an ecclesiology wedded to the theology of revelation should disregard the formidable problem of the relationship between revelation — the church — and "other spaces" of the world; rather, his dissertation and Habilitations-schrift found it necessary to circumvent these questions in order to fight on another front. As a result, Bonhoeffer's insistence that the church was a human sphere, subject to the same sociological laws as other human spheres, was frequently obscured by his emphasis that the sphere of the church comprised the revelation of God, subject to no human laws.

When he began his work at the University of Berlin in

1931, Bonhoeffer's interests were naturally broadened by the practical demands of his position. Lecture and seminar preparation led him ^{to} problems of ethics and exegesis, and he developed and deepened a Christology independent of the limited Christo-ecclesiology of his earlier works. This much we have outlined in the previous section of the present investigation: Part II(A). At the same time, stimulated by his work with the infant ecumenical movement and as the leader of a communicants' class of young workers, Bonhoeffer began to raise the question he had circumvented in his early work: If the church, the "community of revelation," is Christ, how does that which exists outside of the boundaries of this community reveal Christ and serve him as Lord?

Bonhoeffer first set out this question, in 1932, in its traditional Lutheran form; as the problem of the relationship between the two kingdoms, church and state. He elucidated the state as a divine ordinance in which the created structure of the world is affirmed and preserved. But this interest was set aside and eventually discarded when Hitler came to power in Germany. Bonhoeffer found in his formulation no weapon with which to combat the Nazi-supporting German Christian Movement which had spread through the established church and, unlike many of his colleagues, he refused even to move carefully in developing the relationship between church and state theoretically. Any discussion, he felt, might offer some comfort to the German Christians. He therefore ended discussion altogether and took up, once again, his original Christo-ecclesiology, infusing it with a confessional orthodox terminology and proclaiming it with prophetic vigor.

The church struggle and the birth of the Confessing Church at Barmen in 1934 reopened with special urgency the problem of the nature of the church. Not only so; it also forced the opposition to look upon those who remained associated with the Reichskirche -- the established church -- in a wholly new way. Attention was now directed toward the practical issues of membership, pastoral support, representation at ecumenical gatherings -- in short, toward the constituency and boundaries of a church which claimed to be the one true church of Jesus Christ in Germany and which denied that coexistence with the Reichskirche was a possibility.

We have seen that Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology was not, as was Barth's, based upon the analogous relationship of the church to the revelation of God; but rather upon the identification of the two. The church is Christ, the revelation. When this theory met with the practical issues of the Kirchenkampf, Bonhoeffer was left with the formula: the Confessing Church is the revelation. The boundaries of the church which the theoretical Sanctorum Communio never drew were now boldly and concretely described. Bonhoeffer accepted the situation and adamantly pressed his ecclesiology into service, drawing within its framework his new interests -- Christology, ethics, and exegesis.

The result was a champion of the Confessing Church and the book The Cost of Discipleship. Even in that remarkable work, however, it is apparent that the marriage of the two Christologies was not wholly successful. It was inevitable that when the time presented itself, the boundaries would be broken down by the tension created by juxtaposing two Christologies so different in conception and spirit. And when his association with the Hitler

resistance and the enforced isolation from the church on the eve of the war renewed the themes which the Kirchenkampf had caused to be set aside, Bonhoeffer attempted to rework his theory in order that he might do away with the restrictiveness of his ecclesiology. He remained certain that revelation must be stated concretely and spatially; but the spatial language could be made more flexible, released from the Christo-ecclesiology of his earlier thought and the concrete boundaries of the Kirchenkampf, and formulated in terms of his second, more dynamic Christology. These various experiments were collected as the Ethics. Finally, in the prison letters, Bonhoeffer's new understanding of the meaning of history caused him to turn away altogether from the attempt to locate in the world an empiric-revelational "space" for Christ.

The church struggle thus set the stage for the inner conflict in Bonhoeffer's theological development which, however restrictive it might have been, was nevertheless responsible for the creative explosions of the Ethics and prison letters. This section will investigate this conflict and the situation within which it developed in The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together, and examine the attempts at reformulation in the Ethics.

I. Christ and the World, Church and State: 1927-1933.

If any remarkable, characteristic impulse in Bonhoeffer's theological development can be discerned, it would be his determination never to lose sight of his own innate, bourgeois, humanitarian concern. Worldly life and the life of the church were, at the outset of Bonhoeffer's theological career, contrapuntal themes. Because theological and church-political strategy made it neces-

sary that the latter theme receive a special emphasis in 1927 and from 1934 to 1940, it is easy, in looking back over Bonhoeffer's early work, to lose sight of his worldly interest — and thus to understand the Ethics and the prison letters as a radical departure from Bonhoeffer's basic theological convictions. We have thus to trace the theme of the worldly in Bonhoeffer's early thinking and, in greater detail, to examine the forms in which it emerged in his writings from 1931 to 1933.

Traces of the theme of worldliness appear in the very earliest products of Bonhoeffer's pen. In an unpublished diary from his period as a vicar in Barcelona (1928), Bonhoeffer humorously described a dilemma in his theology: "I think I am becoming a humanist. Was Barth ever away from home?"¹ There were several contributing factors which stood in the background of this outburst: Bonhoeffer's cultural and bourgeois heritage, the social-political situation in Germany, Spain, and America prior to 1933, his confrontation with the social gospel and his communicants' class, his absorption of the humanist spirit of Nietzsche, and the broadening effect of his travel and work with the ecumenical movement.² His humanitarian interest in "the world and its creatures"³ was unquenchable. It was in Barcelona that Bonhoeffer lectured for the first time on "the basic questions of Christian ethics," illustrating his thesis that ethics is a matter of history, "a child of the earth", with the legend of Antäus, the giant whose strength could be overcome only when his feet were lifted from the earth.⁴

We have seen that Sanctorum Communio, in attempting to establish an ecclesiological basis for a theology of revelation "from above downwards", wrestled primarily with Bonhoeffer's liberal teachers and humanistic, "religious"

social philosophers. The reader is apt to pay less attention to the infrequent but often passionate outbursts which stress that the church is a completely human structure, affected by human history and vitally concerned with the humanity about her.⁵ Bonhoeffer qualified what he saw as an unduly negative view of the church, expressed by Karl Barth in the Commentary on Romans. The fact that everything which the church says and does in the world is human, Bonhoeffer argued, does not adversely affect her determination toward God. The revelation assumes its empirical form in space and time as a human community.

In 1932, Bonhoeffer developed this side of his thesis further in the form of an essay on the relationship between the church as revelation and the world in which it exists. Interest in the worldly nature of the church is not a secondary affair. Rather, Bonhoeffer insists, the church cannot be understood without asserting that she is of the world. "We can only talk about what the church is when we ask at the same time what it is in relation to men and in relation to God."⁶ Church and world are conceptions which must always occur together, since they exist solely for each other:

The church is a piece of the world; forsaken, godless, beneath the curse: vain, evil world — and that in the highest degree because she misuses the name of God, because in her God is made into a plaything, an idol. Indeed, she is eternally forsaken and anti-Christian world for she removes herself from her solidarity with the evil world and pretends to be aloof. And yet: The church is a piece of qualified world, qualified through God's revealing, gracious Word, which she is obliged to deliver to the world which God has occupied and which he will never more set free. The church is the presence of God in the world. Really in the world, really the presence of God.⁷

Here is the concise presentation of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiological thesis for which one searches in vain in the pages of Sanctorum Communio. The influence of Barth's Römerbrief is clear, but also Bonhoeffer's characteristic "and yet..." There are also clearly audible echoes from Bonhoeffer's past. "Only he...who loves the earth and God in one," Bonhoeffer writes, "can believe in the Kingdom of God."⁸ There can be no flight from the world in the name of God, nor can there be any place in an understanding of the Kingdom of God for "Christian secularism" which views the church as an organ for religious and moral upbuilding:

He who evades the world cannot find God, but rather his own, better, lovelier, more peaceful world, an "other" world, but never God's world which breaks within this world. He who evades the world in order to find God finds only himself. He who evades God to find the earth does not find God's earth, but only a stage for the conflict between good and evil, pious and blasphemous. He who edifies himself finds himself. Whoever loves God loves him as Lord of the earth, just as it is. He who loves the earth loves it completely as God's kingdom on earth, but at the same time as God's kingdom on earth. This is because the King of the kingdom is the Creator and Preserver of the earth, because he has blessed the earth and has taken us out of the earth.⁹

Here is the "affirmation of the earth, an entrance into its orders, its communities, its history"¹⁰ which was later to form the theme of the Ethics. But Bonhoeffer's concern at this time is to define further the revelation in Christ by means of a positive theory of church and state. He does this by introducing the idea that "miracle" and "order" (Ordnung) are the "two forms in which God's kingdom appears on earth; enters into it."¹¹ The miracle is the Resurrection which breaks through the cursed world (which Bonhoeffer described in his Creation and Fall).¹²

The church bears witness to this miracle of God's new creation which shatters all of man's earthly orders, establishes the new community, and overcomes man's egocentricity, sin, and death. But the state is positively related to the miracle as the kingdom of order, by which the world, with its laws and history and communities, is affirmed and preserved. Church and state must exist side by side, divided but mutually limiting one another, as long as the earth remains. Thus: the miracle breaks through and the order retains.

The direction in which Bonhoeffer's thoughts are moving suggests that he wished to unfold his theme as a revelational theory in which the whole of humanity could be taken up, on the basis of a conception of God as Lord of the earth. But just at this stage in his development, Bonhoeffer found himself confronted with a political and ecclesiastical struggle in Germany which induced him to halt any meditation upon the nature of the state which suggested that it could serve positively as an instrument of God's will. John Godsey's summaries of Bonhoeffer's numerous essays concerning the nature of the response which the church should make to the church-political questions of 1933¹³, arranged as they are in chronological order, show clearly that the latter's thinking was deeply affected by a confrontation with these concrete, inescapable realities.

In his two essays (1932-3), "What is the Church?"¹⁴ and "The Church Before the Jewish Question,"¹⁵ Bonhoeffer still appears^{as} the conservative: The church does not engage directly in political action, as long as the state acts justly for the maintenance of order. Regarding the dismissal of Jewish-Christian pastors from their churches, Bonhoeffer saw the role of the church as one of criticism

of the government and aid for the victims.¹⁶ But he sensed early in the struggle that discussion of the relationship between the church and the state would require an approach very different from the traditional "limitation of responsibilities" within a concept of the Kingdom of God.¹⁷ The problem was that he could provide no theological answer to these complicated questions which was not an evasion. No doubt, this confusion was a factor in his decision to go into the pastorate in the autumn of 1933; his theology left him powerless in the lecture hall. "Until now," Godsey writes, "the boundary between church and state seemed clearly defined, and one had only to guard the boundary and explain the duties of each in respect to the other. But all at once the situation changed, and the church found its clear view vis-a-vis the state clouded by treason within its own borders! The German-Christians, who professed to be the church...were able to confuse the issues to such an extent that the church struggle appeared to be an inner-church instead of a church-state affair."¹⁸

The effect upon Bonhoeffer was so great that he immediately broke off theological conversation on the theme of church and state; in Bethge's words, he "dropped the further development of his doctrine of Christ's Lordship over the world as he had just launched it."¹⁹ Bethge continues:

Positive statements about the state...disappear. The clever notion of the Erhaltungsordnungen (orders of preservation) he never mentions again. He drops it at the same moment when some prominent Lutherans (Küneth) take it up to develop their own concept of the two realms on this basis. He lost all interest in discussing with Gogarten, Brunner, and their friends the doctrine of Schöpfungsordnungen (orders of creation) which gave a good scheme for providing a place in the Christian catechism for a tamed version of the German Frühlingdoctrin of a pure race (Blut und Boden, national "blood and soil").

...Walking the easy way in picking out Luther's statements about world, state, and creation seemed now to Bonhoeffer the opposite of clinging to the concreteness of the message.²⁰

What Bethge writes of the effect of the church struggle upon Bonhoeffer's life seemed equally true of his theological path: it was "robbed of its initiative by Nazi history."²¹ When Bonhoeffer returns to the problem of ecclesiology, in 1935/6, it is clear that he has used a strict form of his original thesis to solve the church-political problem and that he has foreclosed any discussion on the theme of church and state: revelation and the Confessing Church can be equated. His interest now becomes the articulation of the revelation of Christ within the church and only within the church; his insistence upon the exclusiveness of the Body of Christ is determined by the practical demands of the Confessing Church and its struggle for existence in Germany. Virtually all of his theological thinking was drawn back into the sphere of ecclesiology, just as the whole of his life was placed at the service of the Confessing Church.

We already have had occasion to speak of the unfortunate result of this limitation to Bonhoeffer's thinking in his treatment of the hermeneutical question. The positive outcome of this concentration, however, ought not to be overlooked. Setting aside any dialectical escapes from the identification of the Confessing Church and revelation made it possible that Bonhoeffer could proclaim his message with clarity, creativity, and vigor -- and the result was The Cost of Discipleship. The situation which Bonhoeffer accepted as the only one for his theology heightened the tension between a restrictive ecclesiology and a dynamic new Christology until it reached the breaking point. Thus

the Ethics, and eventually the prison letters were created as a result of the battle between Bonhoeffer's two Christologies which was enjoined, but never resolved, in the pages of The Cost of Discipleship. We shall return to this shortly. At this point, the central theological problem for Bonhoeffer has become the conquest of a living space for his Confessing Church and the articulation, within its strict boundaries, of his thinking on Christology and discipleship.

II. The Articulation of the Body of Christ.

The most obvious difference between the dissertation which Bonhoeffer produced in 1927 and his later writings on ecclesiology is the alteration in terminology. After 1933 we find no attempt to make theological use of secular language, either sociological or philosophical, to describe the form assumed by Christ in the community. Instead, the Christology which Bonhoeffer had made the center of his theory becomes more explicit, and the language which he uses to develop his doctrine of the Body of Christ becomes more traditional. Not surprisingly, he first turns his attention to the most visible of the activities of the church — preaching and the sacraments — and gives them both a Christological interpretation.

The communio sanctorum, Bonhoeffer wrote in his earliest book, takes the form of Christ.²² He then spoke of an "objective spirit" which extended itself spatially and historically in the life of the community, bearing certain forms which Christ "guarantees to be efficacious" and through which the Holy Spirit operates.²³ Christ existing as the church means that Christ is present and the Spirit is at work in the church when the Word, in sacrament and preaching, is proclaimed. The center of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology thus became an original and dynamic exposition of these traditional marks of the church of the Reformers and

the Lutheran confessions.

In the terminology of the 1933 Christology lectures, the explication of Word and Sacrament took the following form: "The one and complete Person of the God-Man Jesus Christ is present in the church in his pro-me structure as Word, Sacrament, and community."²⁴ Bonhoeffer's characteristic Lutheran "is" was at the center of his discussion: Christ is present not only in the Word of the church but also as the Word of the church. This means that Christ is the spoken Word of the sermon and the acted and proclaimed Word of the sacrament. "They do not signify something," he insisted, "they are something."²⁵ Word and Sacrament are the vehicles for Christ's manifestation of himself in and as his community. But Christ also reveals himself in Word and Sacrament, in his humiliated and pro-me form. Here Bonhoeffer's theologia crucis comes into play: the church, through Word, sacrament, and community, participates in this humiliation and takes it upon itself. Thus, preaching is described as "Christ himself striding through the community as the Word," "Christ bearing human nature," the sacramentum verbi which "takes us up and bears us", upon which "all anxiety, sin, and death of the community may fall."²⁶ Again, "preaching is not the only means whereby Christ takes visible form. That is also done by the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, both of which flow from the true humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ."²⁷ The concrete, personal, dynamic Christology of 1933 has here been drawn into ecclesiology.

Bonhoeffer's spatial language, which had all but disappeared in the Christology lectures, reappeared in the latter chapters of the Cost of Discipleship in a more dynamic form. He speaks of a "space of proclamation"; that is, of the visible Body of the exalted Lord manifested in the

preaching of the Word. "The church of Jesus Christ claims space in the world for its proclamation. The Body of Christ becomes visible to the world in the congregation gathered round the Word and Sacrament."²⁸ An essay written in 1936²⁹ on the subject of the visible church speaks of "the space of proclamation and confession", and in The Cost of Discipleship, Bonhoeffer writes of this same space as one which the church claims as "an ordinance of divine appointment."³⁰ There are other spaces to which the church lays claim: spaces for "the office (Amt), office bearers (Amtler), and gifts"³¹ and for "the articulation and order" of the community.³² But Bonhoeffer began to concentrate upon what he called the "living space" of the church: "The church needs space not only for her liturgy and order, but also for the daily life of her members in the world. That is why we must now speak of the living space (Lebensraum) of the visible church."³³

III. The Living Space of the Church.

"Bonhoeffer," Bethge tells us, "always added to the two classical notions of the church in the Lutheran confessions — Word and Sacrament — a third, the fellowship of men."³⁴ This conception took a number of forms and served a variety of purposes during the course of Bonhoeffer's theological development. In Act and Being, the Word in Sacrament and Preaching could not be considered apart from the fellowship, and all three terms merged in his organic conception of the church as the revelation:

In reality I hear another man declare the gospel to me, see him offer me the sacrament: 'Thou art forgiven', see and hear him and the congregation praying for me; at the same time I hear the gospel, I join in the prayer and 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 to-

gether, am encountered, affected. I believe; that is, I know myself borne: I am borne (pati), therefore I am (esse), therefore I believe (agere).³⁵

The church is not an empty space; the dynamic movement of the community in its cultic activity, to which the presence of the Holy Spirit has been promised, constitutes the act-being unity of revelation.

The 1933 Christology lectures carry this notion further, and separate, for the purposes of definition, Christ as sacrament and preaching and Christ as the community or fellowship. "The community is not only the receiver of the Word of revelation," Bonhoeffer writes, "but is herself the revelation and the Word of God. The Word is itself community, insofar as the community is revelation and the Word has the form of a created Body."³⁶ Later, when Bonhoeffer attempted to relate his thinking on "the concretion of the commandment"³⁷ to "Christ existing as the church", he wrote of a "space of the Christian commandment (new life, discipleship)."³⁸ Still later, the "space of discipleship" becomes the "living space of the church." This idea represents Bonhoeffer's attempt to give life to what could have become a static, institutionalized ecclesiology, ^{on} ecclesiasticism, to thrust the inner-directed and defensive Confessing Church, with her visible boundaries between herself and the world, out into the world. Into this living space Bonhoeffer carried his tropological interpretation of scripture, with its interdependent Christology, devotional life, and concrete obedience (described in the preceding chapter).³⁹

The final chapters of The Cost of Discipleship and virtually the whole of Life Together may thus be described as Bonhoeffer's struggle to forge a weapon for the church struggle by uniting the early chapters of the former book (where Christology, scripture, and discipleship were com-

bined with such a telling effect) and the Christo-ecclesiology (with its language of "space") adapted from his earliest work. In this endeavor, the notion of the living space of the church was of the greatest importance. It is this uneasy alliance of two Christologies which makes the final chapters of The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together (as well as the Brüderhaus experiment) far more than the turn to piety and otherworldliness Bonhoeffer's interpreters have often found in them.⁴⁰ Even Bonhoeffer's examination of community life in Life Together constantly forces the Christian outward toward and into the active life of the world. The church's place is in the midst of the world, "the Body of Christ has penetrated into the heart of the world in the form of the church."⁴¹ "To stay in the world with God," Bonhoeffer reminds us, "means simply to live in the rough and tumble of the world and at the same time remain in the Body of Christ, the visible church, to take part in its worship and to live the life of discipleship."⁴² Nor is the communal life of scriptural meditation and worship, confession and intercessory prayer described in Life Together to be understood except as something taking place within this living space which is thrust into the world. It is a living space because it sends the Christian into the world to minister (as Bonhoeffer wrote in Life Together) through an "attitude" of service, meekness, listening, helpfulness, bearing, and proclaiming.⁴³ This is thus a worldly space, but also a space of the church because, Bonhoeffer insists, even in isolation the Christian bears the community along with him in his confrontation of the Word, meditation, obedience, and action.

For this reason, one cannot simply set the "worldliness" of the Ethics and prison letters over against the supposed

"otherworldliness" of The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together. The disciple and his church move about in the world. What restricts Bonhoeffer's theology at this point is the boundary between the church and the world with which Bonhoeffer had to concern himself -- a boundary, because of the peculiar relationship between revelation and the church in his theology, between revelation and the world. The church not only had to occupy a particular space, she had also to fight against the world to win and hold that space. The limits to worldliness in his own theology were thereby fixed: worldliness only within the bounds of the Confessing Church. "The limits and claims of the secular calling," Bonhoeffer wrote, "are fixed by our membership of the visible church of Christ, and these limits are reached when the space which the Body of Christ claims and occupies in the world for its worship, its offices, and the civic life of its members clashes with the world's claim for space for its own activities."⁴⁴

IV. Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus.

Thus far, we have seen Bonhoeffer's view of the church as it developed during the Kirchenkampf as essentially a purified and vigorous form of his 1927-30 "Christ existing as the church." The church is visible, and she occupies space in the world as the revelation, the Body of Christ. But during the church struggle, the occupation of space by the Confessing Church involved her in a claim to space, to legitimacy. "The Body of Christ takes up space on earth... The Incarnation does involve a claim to a space of its own on earth... A truth, a doctrine, or a religion need no space for themselves. They are disembodied entities." But "the ecclesia Christi, the disciples community... is made into one body, with its own sphere of sovereignty and its own claim to living space."⁴⁵

This concern with the church's "claim to space", the question of the boundaries of the Confessing Church and its right to point exclusively to itself as the Body of Christ, distinguishes this period of Bonhoeffer's theology and sets the Cost of Discipleship and Life Together apart from his other works.

Bonhoeffer was not known as a moderate in the struggle between the Confessing Church and the Reichskirche. The Barmen Synod of 1934, strongly influenced by Karl Barth's theology and personality, established the Confessing Church with the charge that the Reichskirche, controlled by supporters of the Nazi government and members of the German Christian movement, could no longer be called a church of Christ. Bonhoeffer's adherence to this declaration never wavered throughout the church struggle; he remained, if anything, more extreme in his support than the majority of his fellow churchmen. He made clear his position in a letter to the general secretary of the Faith and Order Conference concerning the problem of church representation at ecumenical conferences:

...I must state that with regard to the German Reich Church, the position of my church is different from its attitude towards all other churches of the world, as the Confessional Evangelical Church in Germany disclaims and wholly contradicts the Reich Church to accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. ...The teaching as well as the action of the responsible leaders of the Reich Church have clearly proved that this church does no longer serve Christ but that it serves the Antichrist... The Confessional Church has therefore (at the Dahlem Synod, last autumn) declared that the Reich Church government has dissociated itself from the Church of Christ. This solemn declaration has been given in full power and obedience to the Word of Jesus Christ; it states clearly that the Reich Church government can no longer claim to compose the Church of Christ in Germany nor any part of it.⁴⁶

The tenacity with which Bonhoeffer held to this position soon proved to be an embarrassment to many members of

his church, and the Brüderhaus experiment which he began in 1935 seemed to confirm the suspicions of many that he was moving blindly in a legalistic path toward a complete withdrawal from the world of reality. 1936 saw the publication of his highly controversial essay, "Concerning the Question of Church Communion."⁴⁷ This statement of Bonhoeffer's position regarding the constituency and boundaries of the Confessing Church came as the climax of this phase in Bonhoeffer's development, and is of considerable importance to our discussion. At no other place is the problem of "the claim to space" so clearly put, and the answer so forcefully stated. And nowhere else is the dilemma which the Kirchenkampf forced on Bonhoeffer's theology more apparent.

From the summary which Godsey has provided⁴⁸, we shall examine Bonhoeffer's argument. Bonhoeffer begins by asserting that the "true church can never wish to draw its own boundary, for God alone knows the real members of the church." A church of the Reformation can never describe its own limits; when it declares itself to be the true church, the world fixes its own boundary by refusing to answer the call of a confessional community. "The limit of the church," he writes, "is fixed from without." The question of communion with "another church" (in this case, the neutrals of the Reichskirche) must depend upon whether or not the church in question is "bent on destruction". Any decision based upon the limits which the world has set must remain an opus alienum, taken in order that the church may better perform her proper task of making distinctly the call of salvation. The synods of Barmen and Dahlem asserted that the Reichskirche had excluded itself from the true church; this assertion must be taken with complete

seriousness. No fellowship with the Reichskirche is possible. Confessing her faith in the midst of her existential situation, the Confessing Church can only say, with Tertullian: "Extra ecclesiam nulla salus; outside of the (confessing) Church there is no salvation." It is true that the church may not speculate concerning the content of the church or the number and identity of those saved and damned. This is left to God. But she may and must declare, as a concrete act of obedience to the proclamation of the Gospel: "Here is the true church!"

Bonhoeffer's statement aroused quick disagreement. An answer followed, written by Helmut Gollwitzer, protesting that the confession of the church can only witness to God's Word and cannot be identical with it; that the Confessing Church is not in its "visible, empirical circle of persons" but only in hope the true church of Jesus Christ in Germany.⁴⁹ In her relationship to the Reichskirche, the Confessing Church represents "the confessing remnant of the German Evangelical Church (the former united church)." With this formula, Gollwitzer attempted to build a bridge between the neutrals — those who remained within the Reichskirche but did not support the policies of the German Christians — and the Confessing Church.

For a "wise tactician"⁵⁰ such as Gollwitzer, the legalistic views of Bonhoeffer — closing the door firmly upon a promising attempt to heal the breach between the neutrals and Confessing Church members and bring pressure to bear upon the heretical wing of the Reichskirche must indeed have seemed unfortunate. What must be noticed, however, is that Bonhoeffer's position was the inevitable result of his ecclesiological theory. Having identified the church with the revelation, he felt called to accept the boundaries

around his church as the concrete boundaries of the revelation in Christ. Gollwitzer expounded what was — and is — Barth's view of the church, retaining the dialectical relationship between the church and the Word of God which Bonhoeffer had rejected as "ambiguous" in Act and Being.⁵¹

The Barth-Gollwitzer position left one the freedom, guided by the Holy Spirit, to make decisions based on one's assessment of the situation and the various possibilities presented to one for altering that situation. Barth's leadership of the Confessing Church was, in the last analysis, a shrewd and inspired decision of this kind. But for Bonhoeffer there was no alternative, no room to maneuver once he had cast his lot with the Confessing Church. Its boundary was the boundary of the revelation.

We saw at the beginning of this chapter that "just on the eve of the Kirchenkampf, Bonhoeffer wished to speak with the greatest vehemence of the openness of the church."⁵²

His essay defending the exclusiveness of the Confessing Church, however, moves in a direction antagonistic to his early interest. But even here, at his most exclusive and "otherworldly", Bonhoeffer searched for breathing space for the basic movement of his theology out into the world. One of the means by which he thought to accomplish this was undoubtedly his notion of "living space"; the invasion of the world by the community. Another was his insistence that it was the world, not the church, which set the boundaries. The Christology lectures of 1933 spoke of Christ's mediation between the disciple and the world, in which the disciple looks steadfastly and exclusively toward Christ and leaves it to the world to set its own limitations.⁵³

Bonhoeffer's argument concerning the position of the Confessing Church in relation to the world and other churches is based upon the same thinking; the church has no interest in

her boundaries, but only in her confession of Christ. In looking upon Christ, she finds her boundaries described for her by a world which rejects her message, and thereby cuts herself off from salvation. Indeed, it is this breach with the world which demonstrates the being of Christ for the world.⁵⁴ Anything less can only mean a relapse into the "cheap grace" which produced the German Christian movement.

But in spite of the safeguards Bonhoeffer provided in order to maintain his own freedom of movement, it can hardly be questioned that the period of the church struggle was a harshly restrictive one for his own theological development. His position, and what he felt were the demands of a sound strategy in the Kirchenkampf, made impossible for him any interest in theological directions which seemed to provide an opening for compromise. Church and state conversations could not be enjoined nor, as we saw in the preceding chapter⁵⁵, could there be any discussion of the hermeneutical problem. The question of whether texts ought not to be interpreted in accordance with modern forms of thinking only masked the desire to strip away the scandal from the gospel, hence^{to} remove the gospel itself.

More important was the fate of Bonhoeffer's own theological vision. His ecclesiology was no longer open, but besieged by the world. The boundary of the community of revelation became a battle line, to be defended at all costs. The world became the enemy of the church and the enemy of Christ. The effect of this on Bonhoeffer's development may best be judged by glancing, in passing, at the striking military images which first make their appearance in the final chapters of The Cost of Discipleship: "The ecclesia Christi, the disciple community, has been torn from the clutches of the world."⁵⁶ "The sanctification of the church is really a defensive war, for the place which has been given to the Body of Christ on earth."⁵⁷ "The

community of the saints is barred off from the rest of the world by an unbreakable seal, awaiting its ultimate deliverance. Like a sealed train travelling through foreign territory, the church goes its way in the world."⁵⁸ The church "invades the world and conquers territory for Christ," "invades the world and robs it of its children."⁵⁹ The church is "always in the battlefield, waging a war to prevent the breaking of the seal... 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."⁶⁰ Finally, we have before us the perfect statement of the apocalyptic vision which underlay Bonhoeffer's position concerning the church's "claim to space" during the Kirchen-kampf, which reads in startling contrast to so much of the prison letters: "When the Christian community has been deprived of its last inch of space on the earth, the end will be near."⁶¹

The restrictive boundaries of the church struggle dominated Bonhoeffer's thinking until the beginning of the war. We cannot be certain (although we shall try, in the next chapter, to suggest a number of possibilities) what factor or combination of factors were responsible for the disappearance of the boundaries. We shall probably never know whether it was the radical call to obedience of The Cost of Discipleship or the worldliness of the Ethics and letters from prison which was behind his departure from a convinced pacifist position to active participation in the plot to kill Hitler. That question would surely have puzzled Bonhoeffer himself; whatever inconsistencies we may have noticed in his thinking, he did not seem to be troubled by them. But it is true that the beginning of the war found Bonhoeffer deeply committed to "activities in the secular

sphere."⁶²

The opportunity presented itself almost by accident. The problem was how Bonhoeffer could be saved from conscription. A brother-in-law, active in the Intelligence Service and the resistance movement, offered Bonhoeffer employment which would allow him to meet and work with those working to overthrow Hitler — men with worldly interests, all too few of them orthodox Christians and churchmen. No more fittingly symbolic occupation could have been found: the dedicated Confessing Church leader, fresh from an experiment with monasticism, became a plain-clothes agent. At the same time, he engaged himself with a conspiracy which aimed to make good the crimes of a social class and a nation — most of it humanistic, some parts of it socialist and even atheist. Bonhoeffer, far from his church work, looked outward once more, beyond any boundaries, toward the duties and problems, successes and failures, experiences and helplessness which humanity bears in common.

When Bonhoeffer no longer found meaning and purpose in the question of boundaries and the claim to space, he dismantled his theory of revelation and attempted to combine the individual parts in different ways, such that the whole of worldly life could be subjected to Christ, to the revelation. These experiments have come down to us in the posthumous collection, the Ethics.

Chapter 10

"Conformation" and "The Archimedian Point"I. Bonhoeffer's Progress to the Ethics and the Letters and Papers from Prison.

Returning from Stockholm in June of 1942, having delivered the plans for the overthrow of Hitler to the Bishop of Chichester,⁶³ Bonhoeffer wrote to Bethge from his compartment on the Munich train:

Again and again I have to think about my activities, which are still so strongly concerned with the worldly sector. I am surprised that I can and do live without the Bible for days -- if I forced myself, it would be auto-suggestion rather than obedience. I know that such auto-suggestion could be and is a great help; it's just that I am afraid of falsifying a genuine experience and of receiving, in the last resort, no genuine help. Then, when I open the Bible once again, it is new and rewarding as never before, and I want eagerly to preach again. I know that I have only to open my own books to hear what should be said against all of this. I don't want to justify myself; rather, I know that I have been through periods which were much richer 'spiritually'. But I can feel in myself the resistance growing against everything 'religious'. Often to the point of an instinctive horror -- and that surely isn't a good thing either. I am not naturally religious. But I return again and again in my thoughts to God and Christ; the genuine things, life, freedom and mercy mean a great deal to me. It's just that the religious clothing is so uncomfortable. Do you understand? All these are not new thoughts or views, but because I think that something new is about to burst in upon me, I am letting things run their course without resisting. This is how I understand my present activity in the worldly sector. Please forgive these confessions, the long train ride is at fault...⁶⁴

1937 saw the premature end of the Erüderhaus experiment following a Gestapo ban; 1942 found Bonhoeffer in the midst of the "worldly sector". During the intervening years, his theological outlook seems to have done a com-

plete about face. The movement is perceptible in his writings and can be traced in the pages of the Ethics, the writing of which began in 1940 and continued until after Bonhoeffer's arrest in 1943 — here one finds at least four approaches to the problem of Christian ethics, each moving further away from the exclusiveness which characterized Bonhoeffer's Kirchenkampf theology and further in the direction of the open worldliness of the prison letters.⁶⁵ But if this shift is discernable, the reasons for it are not. It is well, then, that we pause for a moment in our more directly theological considerations and examine the influences upon Bonhoeffer's theological development between his trip to America and his imprisonment.

1. Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church: 1937-1941

By 1940 the Confessing Church's voice, to use Bethge's phrase, had become hoarse. Until that year, Bonhoeffer had done more than his share in making the call of the church loud and sharp (and ultimately, one must confess, in making the voice hoarse). His activities did not go unnoticed by the government. Step by step, Bonhoeffer was forbidden the exercise of his customary church duties until, by the summer of 1940, he was so hemmed in by government restrictions that he could no longer count his church activities as his primary occupation. His authority to teach in Berlin as a Privatdozent was finally withdrawn in August, 1936. In October, 1937, the Brüderhaus and the Finkenwalde seminary were disbanded by the Gestapo. The latter divided into sections which continued to meet separately, but this work was finally dissolved in 1940. In 1938, Bonhoeffer was forbidden participation in church activities in Berlin. During the summer of 1940, he was ordered by the authorities to cease preaching altogether,

and to report at regular intervals to the police. Finally, in the spring of the following year, Bonhoeffer's books were proscribed and he was not allowed to write or publish further. He no longer had any official capacity in his church and was forced to separate his activities from those of his fellow Confessing Churchmen. Bonhoeffer's anguish over the fate of his church brought him home from America after only a few months. But as Bethge writes, "one of the things he did not realize then was how far he would drop out of the immediate church work and how painfully he would have to separate his doings from the church."⁶⁶ This distance from the Confessing Church, imposed from without, provided Bonhoeffer with a different perspective on theology and the task of the theologian than that of the Confessing Church apologist. In his search for a meaning for his work, he was thrown back upon himself and a new circle of associates.

2. The Hitler Resistance.

Hans von Dohnanyi first became involved with the men who were to be the principal figures in the resistance against Hitler early in 1938.⁶⁷ Upon Bonhoeffer's return from his second trip to America, his brother-in-law was appointed special adviser to General Oster, Admiral Canaris' staff officer, in the secret service. Bonhoeffer had always been close to von Dohnanyi, and was easily persuaded that with his ecumenical contacts he could be of service to the resistance, and that employment within the secret service organization was an excellent way of avoiding conscription. Moreover, the Gestapo allowed the secret service an incredible amount of freedom of movement of the kind Bonhoeffer needed. He therefore accepted employment as a civilian agent and took up residence in

Munich, from whence he made several trips as a courier for the resistance, under the guise of his official position. The restrictions on his movement were immediately lifted.

Work with the resistance could not but mean for Bonhoeffer a return to much of his liberal, humanitarian, middle class past. He found himself surrounded by old acquaintances who professed a variety of religious, political, and personal beliefs and opinions; all involved in worldly professions and deeply committed to the cause of the resistance. There were Klaus, his brother, the legal adviser to Lufthansa; von Dohnanyi and Rüdiger Schleicher, his brothers-in-law, both eminent jurists; Ernst von Harnack, politician and son of Dietrich's teacher; Justus Delbrück, industrialist and son of the great historian. Friedrich Perels, the lawyer and stalwart Confessing Churchman, was well known to the Bonhoeffer brothers. Through Klaus, Dietrich came to know Joseph Wirmer, the catholic jurist, and Julius Leber, the socialist. Dohnanyi was close to the generals Beck and Oster and Goedeler, the Christian Humanist who had been the mayor of Leipzig. The humanitarian and patriotic enterprise to which Bonhoeffer now dedicated himself played a decisive role in breaking down the last of the barriers to his freedom of thought and action which had been erected during the years preceding the war. He was now free to exercise what had always been a part of him: "the freedom to encounter men of very background, stripe, and conviction...cheerfully, imaginatively, and without doctrinaire exclusiveness."⁶⁸

3. Theological Influences.

Bonhoeffer's report to his church concerning his trip to America took the form of an essay which he entitled "Protestantism Without Reformation."⁶⁹ Here, in a spirit very different from that which he displayed in 1930, he

asked his own church not to disregard American theology and church life after a surface appraisal, but rather to take seriously the historical, social, and political background of the American church; to ask "what God is doing in and with his church in America, what he is doing for us through her, and for her through us."⁷⁰ This was a prelude to the kind of openness he was to display in his Ethics, the writing of which was begun upon his return. Bonhoeffer always learned much from travelling abroad, and we may count the American adventure, however brief it may have been, as one of the experiences which broke down his resistance to the theme of worldly Christianity.

Of more direct literary-theological influences upon Bonhoeffer's development sufficiently strong to turn him from Confessing Church exclusiveness to the theme of the Ethics and the prison letters, it is difficult to speak. Certainly his new preoccupation with the problems of post-war society required more of him than a retreat to dogma, and the reality and cruciality of questions of this kind must be kept in mind when one attempts to understand the Ethics. Bonhoeffer read and responded to William Paton's The Church and the New Order, published in 1941, on behalf of the Confessing Church and the resistance movement.⁷¹ This work involved him directly in the problems of the new society of post-war Europe and the role of the church in determining the shape and purpose of that society. Other books absorbed Bonhoeffer's interest during the war years. This was the time, Bethge reports, "in which Bonhoeffer read with new fascination Don Quixote, the honorable knight who became isolated from reality fighting for a principle."⁷² There were also the books which occupied Bonhoeffer's mind while he was in prison — though it would be pointless to list them or to see more than a

general thematic relationship between their subject matter and Bonhoeffer's new interest. These were minor classics of poetry and prose from the German romantic period, nineteenth century histories (including works by Delbrück and Harnack), biographies, and introductions to the principles of natural and physical science.⁷³ Of theology, in the traditional academic sense of the word, Bonhoeffer read little. But he continued with his accustomed biblical exegesis and devotional reading, and was profoundly moved and comforted by hymns and the Losungen. Taken on the whole, one can see that Bonhoeffer's reading readied his mind for the extension of his theology into the "worldly sector".

A final theological influence, perhaps the clearest of all, must be acknowledged. In the midst of the Confessing Church herself and while Bonhoeffer was still at work on the Ethics, there appeared, in 1942, Bultmann's startling essay ^{on} the New Testament and mythology. ^{Although} Bonhoeffer had hitherto contented himself with denying the right of the church even to raise the question of whether or not the Bible is intelligible to modern man, Bultmann's essay impressed him with the seriousness of the hermeneutical problem. Bultmann had, he confessed, "done intellectual integrity a service"; he had "dared to ask what many repress in themselves, without overcoming it," and Bonhoeffer left no doubt that he included himself in the latter category.⁷⁴ On the other hand, he was deeply disappointed with the rigid refusal to listen to Bultmann on the part of the Confessing Church. The dangers of exclusivism and, by association, his own position were brought home to him. He did not agree with Bultmann, but Bultmann's rebellion freed Bonhoeffer of any misguided loyalty to a rigidly orthodox line of thinking. He was doubtless inspired by this work to move on fearlessly in his own direction.

These, then, are at least some of the pieces of the puzzle of Bonhoeffer's change of direction between 1939 and 1944. More we do not know. Suffice it to say that the boundaries and restrictions were gone, and Bonhoeffer's theological vision was directed outward, toward the world.

II. "Formation" and "Conformation".

Bonhoeffer looked upon his Ethics as his first real theological contribution and hoped for nothing else in life than to be given the opportunity to complete his work.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, this was not to be: we have been left with a collection of scattered essays, some of them unfinished, for which no organization can be wholly satisfactory. But it is clear that these essays comprise a series of attacks upon a single question, a prolegomenon to the problem of the relationship between Christianity and the life of the world. Once again, Bonhoeffer saw no way of confronting the question other than Christologically; once more, he turned to his doctrine of revelation for his point of departure.

Eberhard Bethge has recently suggested a method of reordering the essays of the Ethics so that they follow one another chronologically.⁷⁶ The result is most revealing. One notices, firstly, that Bonhoeffer's first approach to the problem speaks the language of The Cost of Discipleship while stressing the oneness of the world and God in the Incarnation. In the present Ethics, this comprises the fourth chapter and has been given the title, "The Love of God and the Decay of the World".⁷⁷ Bonhoeffer moves from the basis of his earlier thinking, prior to the Kirchenkampf, concerning the problem of man's knowledge of good and evil. There is a clear relationship between this section of the Ethics and portions of Sanctorum Communio, Act and Being, and the study of Genesis 1-3.⁷⁸ Bonhoeffer's

theme reflects both his loyalty to the Cost of Discipleship and his desire to move beyond the confines of that book; the exclusiveness of Christ is conjoined with the inclusiveness of his Lordship over the whole of 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."⁷⁹ Once again, one sees how closely Bonhoeffer has bound Christology and discipleship together. Christ is the unifying factor for the Christian in the world. Because of the inclusiveness of Christ's being, the Christian can live "in reconciliation and unity with God and with men," which means "living the life of Jesus Christ."⁸⁰ Here is an initial clue to the direction in which Bonhoeffer's thoughts will turn: toward an imitatio Christi as the proper form of the Christian life.

This chapter remained unfinished. Bonhoeffer had, however, become concerned with a theme which was to occupy his thoughts for the remaining years of his life. The oneness of Christ and the world must be illuminated because the Incarnation leaves one no other choice. But this must be accomplished without falling into "cheap grace" on the one hand or a legalistic concern for "boundaries" for discipleship and the church on the other. Bonhoeffer's second approach to the problem finds him deeply involved with the questions he had left unanswered in 1933: the impossibility of division in the world for one who sets his eyes on Christ; the inconceivability of a choice between Christ and the earth:

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 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.⁸¹

Here is a Christological restatement of Bonhoeffer's 1932 lecture on the relationship between church and state.⁸² God and the world cannot be considered apart from one another. Here, however, he insists on the Christological basis of any such proposition. It is Christ, the worldly man who makes possible the unity of God and the world. One remembers that it was in 1932 that Karl Barth's influence over Bonhoeffer was growing very rapidly. It is striking how closely this portion of the Ethics (Chapter 1) resembles Barth's position since the latter's well-known "change of direction" - which resulted in the fourth volume of the Kirchliche Dogmatik and which was expounded so self-consciously in the essay, "The Humanity of God."⁸³ For example, Barth writes in the latter work:

In Jesus Christ there is no isolation of man from God or of God from man. Rather, in Him we encounter the history, the dialogue, in which God and man meet together and are together, the reality of the covenant mutually contracted, preserved, and fulfilled by them... Thus in this oneness Jesus Christ is the Mediator, the Reconciler, between God and man.⁸⁴

This argument appears at several points throughout the Ethics, even in sections which are known to have been written as late as 1943. In one passage, so interesting when compared with a criticism of Barth which comprised a footnote to Sanctorum Communio, Bonhoeffer wrote:

But Jesus Christ is man and God in one. In Him there takes place the original and essential encounter with man and with God. Henceforward man cannot be conceived and known otherwise than in the human form of Jesus Christ. In Him we see humanity as that which God has accepted, borne, and loved, and as that which is reconciled with God.⁸⁵

But Bonhoeffer moved doggedly ahead with his theme of "concretion", and he produced results of which Barth did not approve. Bonhoeffer was purposely (and characteristically) careless in drawing sharp distinctions between Christology, revelation, and the Christian life. All, he argued, were part of the same problem: Christ and worldly life. He was searching for a visible, concrete, tangible way of expressing the relationship between the world and the revelation in Christ, the worldly man; taking seriously the world's structures, history, and dynamic. His first task, therefore, was an analysis of the historical situation of the western world. Up until the essay entitled "Inheritance and Decay" we have no indication in Bonhoeffer's writings that he has attached any importance to the movement of world history. As we might expect, we are here given a foretaste of the thinking which we will encounter in the prison letters:

What has been utterly forgotten here is the original message of the Reformation that there is no holiness of man either in the profane or the sacred as such, but only that which comes through the merciful and sin-forgiving Word of God. The Reformation is celebrated as the emancipation of man in his conscience, his reason and his culture and the justification of the secular as such. The Reformers' biblical faith in God had radically removed God from the world. ...While the natural scientists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were still believing Christians, when faith in God was lost all that remained was a rationalized and mechanized world.⁸⁶

Bonhoeffer describes, in a lengthy passage, the movement of the world away from God-consciousness and the counter struggles of the church in its attempts to call the world back to God. Both, he argues, are based upon a misunderstanding of the Reformation. Within a few years he will see the matter differently, but at this point the secularization of the world is condemned rather than

embraced. In the next section of this study,⁸⁷ we shall examine the differences between "worldliness" in the Ethics and "worldliness" in the prison letters. Here our interest must be the effect upon Bonhoeffer's theme of "the concretion of revelation is the space of the church;" "the concretion of Christology is Christ existing as the church."

This section of the Ethics, Bonhoeffer's second approach to the problem, shows him to be troubled by the terminology he has brought with him from his own past. There can be no movement of his thinking into worldliness if he retains his spatial language. Christ has been bound to a particular "space", the church, which stands over against the world. And clearly, Bonhoeffer wishes to avoid the division of the world into two "spheres", "the one divine, holy, supernatural and Christian and the other worldly, profane, natural and un-Christian."⁸⁸ He attacks this view in a short but very important essay entitled "Thinking in Terms of Two Spheres."⁸⁹ This kind of thinking, he charges, assumes that there are "realities which lie outside of the reality of Christ," and supports the erroneous conclusion that one may live in the one sphere and have nothing to do with the other. But this, Bonhoeffer declares, is contrary to the thought of the Bible and the Reformation:

Ethical thinking in terms of spheres...is invalidated by faith in the revelation of the ultimate reality in Jesus Christ, and this means that there is no real possibility of being a Christian outside the reality of the world and that there is no real worldly existence outside the reality of Jesus Christ. There is no place to which the Christian can withdraw from the world, whether it be outward or in the sphere of the inner life... 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.⁹⁰

Clearly, Bonhoeffer has found the language of his own doctrines of the church and revelation unserviceable, and even embarrassing. But he has not given up his determination that Christology be concretely expressed. He therefore introduces those two elusive formulations so characteristic of this second approach to Ethics: "formation" and "conformation"; "Christ taking form" in the world and "conformation with the Incarnate".⁹¹ In this manner, his Christology may be freed from his ecclesiology so that it might describe a Christ moving about freely in the world, and not simply a Christ identified with a church fighting against the world. At the same time, Bonhoeffer is eager to show that he has not repudiated the church itself.

He is anxious that the church occupy a central place in his thinking. He therefore describes the church as "nothing but a section of humanity in which Christ has really taken form," having to do with "the whole man in the world with all its implications."⁹² And if he has found his "spatial" terminology embarrassing, he has not thereby repudiated the serious questions he sought to answer with his older ecclesiological theory. "Are there," he asks, "really no ultimate static contraries, no spaces which are separated from one another once and for all? Is not the church of Jesus Christ such a space, a space which is cut off from the world?"⁹³ His answer both defends the visible, spatial nature of the church and attacks the militant "claim to space" of the last chapters of The Cost of Discipleship:

The church does indeed occupy a definite space in the world, a space which is delimited by her public worship, her organization, and her parish life, and it is this fact that has given rise to the whole of the thinking in terms of two spheres. It would be very dangerous to overlook this, to deny the visible nature of the church, and to reduce her to the status of a purely spiritual force...

It is essential to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ that it occupies space in the world... The church of Jesus Christ is the place, in other words, the space in the world, at which the reign of Jesus Christ over the whole world is evidenced and proclaimed... It is the place where testimony is given to the foundation of all reality in Jesus Christ... The space of the church is not there in order to deprive the world of a piece of her territory, but precisely to prove to the world that it is still the world, the world which is loved by God and reconciled with Him. The church has neither the wish nor the obligation to extend her space to cover the space of the world. She asks for no more space than she needs for the purpose of serving the world by bearing witness to Jesus Christ and to the reconciliation of the world with God through Him. The only way in which the church can defend her own territory is by fighting not for it but for the salvation of the world. Otherwise the church becomes a 'religious society' which fights in its own interest and thereby ceases at once to be the church of God and of the world.⁹⁴

The church occupies space in the world, but the nature of that space and the justification for its occupation need thoroughly to be rethought. This space of the church still is related to revelation in a special way, but it is no longer the only area within which revelation may be discussed. There is an important truth behind "thinking in terms of two spheres," but its dangers (and, by implication, the dangers of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology) lead one to search for "another picture which is equally simple and obvious," which will "conceive this distinction between church and world without relapsing into these spatial terms."⁹⁵

Thus, Bonhoeffer's Christology is liberated from his ecclesiology, and his search for "another picture" leads him to develop a variety of new and exciting ideas. He writes, as we have seen, of Christ taking form and of man's conformation with Christ. His third approach (Chapter 3) introduces some truly fruitful products of his new thinking, freed entirely from his ecclesiological restrictions and defending his movement beyond them. Here, Bonhoeffer distinguishes between the "ultimate" and "penultimate", intro-

ducing his concept of the "natural". The penultimate is validated Christologically as "the encounter of Christ with the world."⁹⁶ His correction of the traditional understanding of Luther's distinction between Law and Gospel is clear, and an attack upon Barth's understanding of the relation of theology to worldly forms begins to take shape with his description and rejection of the "ultimate" as the one and only interest of theology.⁹⁷

The radical solution sees only the ultimate, and in it only the complete breaking off of the penultimate. Ultimate and penultimate are here mutually exclusive contraries. Christ is the destroyer and enemy of everything penultimate, and everything penultimate is enmity towards Christ. Christ is the sign that the world is ripe for burning. There are no distinctions. Everything must go to the judgement. There are only two categories: for Christ, and against Him...What becomes of the world through this is no longer of any consequence. The Christian bears no responsibility for it, and the world must in any case perish. No matter if the whole order of the world breaks down under the impact of the word of Christ, there must be no holding back.⁹⁸

But this solution sets God the Judge and Redeemer against God the Creator and Preserver. Christology points the way to another solution. "Jesus Christ the man — this means that God enters into created reality. It means that we have the right and the obligation to be men before God."⁹⁹ The penultimate comes into its own as that which exists for the sake of the ultimate, but which really does exist and must be preserved. Manhood, humanity and goodness — the natural — can and must be claimed for Christ.

This chapter was set aside unfinished when Bonhoeffer departed for his first trip to Switzerland in 1941, for the meeting with Visser't Hooft. When he took up his discussion once more, it was at another point. The fourth skirmish with the problem of ethics produced, among other things, the concept of the Mandates.¹⁰⁰ This notion pro-

vides us with the clearest example of Bonhoeffer's struggle with the problem of how to embrace the whole of the world with the revelation of God in Christ without surrendering the concreteness and simplicity of his spatial terminology. The solution here is to speak of four "earthly agents" — labor, marriage, government, and the church — in which Christ "assumes concrete form in the world."¹⁰¹ A "mandate" is defined as "the claiming, the seizure, and the formation of a definite earthly domain by the divine commandment."¹⁰² These divinely-authorized spheres in which revelation occurs are "conjoined"; that is, they mutually limit and mutually support and are directed toward one another.¹⁰³

Possibly by the time of his arrest, Bonhoeffer himself sensed the theological shortcomings of his theme. Barth spoke later of the "north German patriarchalism" behind the idea of the mandates, and disliked the restrictions which they placed upon God's freedom of movement.¹⁰⁴ It is interesting to draw a relationship between this criticism of the mandates and Bonhoeffer's questioning of the extent to which he was loyal to his bourgeois past soon after the work on the Ethics was set aside for the last time. The final approach to ethics had affirmed worldly order, responsibility, and "the objective subordination of the lower to the higher."¹⁰⁵ During the early days of his imprisonment at Tegel, Bonhoeffer attempted to write a play in which he put the argument for a reconstruction of bourgeois and aristocratic values into the mouth of a medical student named Christoph. The antagonist is Heinrich, a young worker who confronts Christoph with a quite different world. "You have a foundation," he tells Christoph. "You have ground beneath your feet, you have a place in the world, for you some things are

self-evident...because you know that your roots lie so deep that they will sprout once more. For you only one thing matters: to keep your feet on the ground... Upon the ground beneath your feet depends the question of whether one will live -- and this is the ground which we do not have... Give me ground beneath my feet; give me the archimedian point upon which I can stand -- and everything would be otherwise."¹⁰⁶ The play ends with Christoph deep in meditation upon Heinrich's passionate plea for a place to stand which does not direct him toward a tradition which he does not and cannot share. May we say that at this point, Bonhoeffer is at last ready for the fresh approach and breakthrough of his letters from prison?

III. The Archimedian Point.

"What is Christ for us today?" is the question with which Bonhoeffer opens his letter from prison on April 30, 1944. No sooner has he asked this question and advanced his belief that "Christ must become the Lord of those with no religion," than he acknowledges:

The questions needing answers would surely be: what is the significance of a church (church, parish, preaching, Christian life) in a religionless world?... Does the secret discipline or, as the case may be, the distinction (which you have met with me before) between ultimate and penultimate acquire fresh importance?¹⁰⁷

Bonhoeffer's failure, during the remainder of the prison letters, to turn his attention toward these questions has confused or saddened some of his interpreters and delighted others.¹⁰⁸ Bonhoeffer chooses to explore the possibilities for "non-religious Christianity" without being too concerned about the implications of his thoughts for the doctrine of the church. A "non-religious Christianity" seems necessarily bound to a decisive and final rejection of "spatial" descriptions of the church. "You ask whether

this leaves any 'space' for the church, or has it gone for good?" Bonhoeffer writes Bethge after describing the situation.¹⁰⁹ But the question remained unanswered.

We have seen in previous chapters the mutual dependence of ecclesiology and revelation. Revelation is concrete in and as the church or, as with the "mandates" of the Ethics, in and as particular spaces to which God lays claim. One should not fail to notice in the prison letters that as ecclesiology is set to one side, so also is the concept of God. The enemy is for Bonhoeffer the notion that God or the church occupies a particular space. He sees this spatial picture not simply as the one which formerly characterized his own theology, but rather as the traditional way in which theology has understood and formulated its ecclesiology and its concept of God. But a process which Bonhoeffer described as the "coming of age" of the world has now reached such a stage that such thinking is simply impossible, if Christ is to be Lord of the world today. This world, matured by her history, no longer requires this spatially conceived God in order to understand or complete herself. She has learned to get along without this picture of God. The true and proper "space of revelation", the sphere of Christ's operation, must be the whole of the world of human experience. As regards the metaphysically and ecclesiologically conceived God, the world must learn to live, and has indeed already learned to live, etsi deus non daretur, as though God were not given.¹¹⁰

The prison letters thus represent the final separation of Bonhoeffer's Christology and his conception of revelation from ecclesiology and the search for a spatial "concretion". Here is no "community of revelation" or "Christ existing as the church", no "Mandates". Here we do not even find "con-

formation" or "Christ taking form". Bonhoeffer's interest is almost wholly in the "penultimate" half of his formula. Finding "Christ for us today" must mean that one sets aside the careful drawing of connections between Christology and the concept of God and Christology and ecclesiology, and seeks instead to find the revelation, Christ, in the forms of worldly life. Christianity must speak therefore of personal faith in Jesus Christ and discipleship.

It is at this point that we see Bonhoeffer reconstructing the combination of Christology, scripture, and ethics which he set forth at the beginning of The Cost of Discipleship. Once again, revelation must be described as an imitatio Christi, the living of the life of Christ in the world; the life for others and for the world. In a "world come of age" this formula must be revised, especially as concerns the relationship of scripture to the other two elements. But Bonhoeffer seems at last to have decided for a non-spatial concretion of the revelation and to have rejected his past efforts to ground revelation in the visible church.

The ground for this revolution in Bonhoeffer's thinking was his understanding of the historical situation of the western world. His acceptance of his own analysis of a world which has "come of age" is the decisively new element which broke down the last of his reservations and opened up the floodgates through which the exhilarating ideas of the prison letters flowed. We must therefore move directly into our next section and the discussion of the historical problem which Bonhoeffer finally came to acknowledge as a vital one for theology.

Part II (B): "The Space and Form of Christ"

1. The diary is in the possession of Eberhard Bethge.
2. "Challenge", pp. 4-6; Godsey, pp. 80-83.
3. "Challenge", p. 6.
4. GS III, pp. 48-58. As Bethge remarks in the forward to GS III, the Antäus legend never left Bonhoeffer's mind, and it may be significant to note that it reappears in the play which the latter sketched at Tegel prison in 1943 (Ibid., p. 494).
5. See above, pp. 58-59. A considerable amount of material relating the church to the world was pruned from Bonhoeffer's dissertation when it was presented for publication. This has since been restored in the english editions and in the third (1960) german edition. See "Community and Society" (SC, pp. 239-242) and "The Church and the Proletariat" (SC 274-279).
6. GS III, p. 286.
7. Ibid., p. 286
8. Ibid., p. 270.
9. Ibid., p. 270.
10. Godsey, p. 108.
11. GS III, p. 279.
12. CF, pp. 85-9.
13. Godsey, pp. 109-11; cf. Bethge, "Challenge", pp. 12-13.
14. GS III, pp. 286-291.
15. GS II, pp. 44-53.
16. Godsey, p. 110. Miller (pp. 175-178) cites this and other illustrations as evidence for Bonhoeffer's basic conservatism at the beginning of Hitler's persecution.
17. Hamilton notes that The Cost of Discipleship "represented a deliberate attack on certain elements in traditional Lutheran theology" (p. 447). Curiously, Bonhoeffer was attempting to overcome the dangers of the Lutheran faith/justification-works/righteous-

ness, with its uselessness in confronting the issues of the Kirchenkampf. By doing so, he unwittingly fell victim to a sectarian misinterpretation of the Lutheran doctrine of the "two kingdoms". He overcame this in the Ethics with his essay on "Thinking in Terms of Two Spheres." Cf. below, pp. 173ff. and Hamilton, pp. 445-6.

18. Godsey, p. 111.
19. "Challenge", p. 18.
20. Ibid., p. 18
21. Ibid., p. 14
22. Cf. above, pp. 53ff.
23. Cf. above, pp. 57ff.
24. GS III, p. 182.
25. Ibid., p. 189.
26. GS IV, pp. 240, 241, 242.
27. CD, p. 224.
28. Ibid., p. 224.
29. "Sichtbare Kirche im neuen Testament," GS III, pp. 325ff.; Cp. GS II, p. 327.
30. CD, p. 228.
31. GS III, p. 326.
32. CD, p. 226.
33. CD, p. 228.
34. "Challenge", p. 17. Bonhoeffer's phrase "Christ exists as the church" ("Christus als Gemeinde existierend") could be translated "Christ exists as community". This would lend itself to Miller's thesis that in the course of Bonhoeffer's theological development, Gemeinschaft is replaced by Gesellschaft (the society). But Bonhoeffer almost certainly had in mind Luther's notion of the church as a "community" rather than an "institution". Therefore the phrase translates more properly as "Christ exists as the church."
35. AB, p. 131.
36. GS III, p. 193.
37. Cf. above, pp. 188ff.

38. GS III, p. 326.
39. Cf. above, pp.
40. Cf. "Challenge", pp. 14, 24.
41. CD, p. 233.
42. Ibid., pp. 234-5
43. LT, pp. 94f., 97-9, 99-100, 100-3, 103-8.
44. CD, p. 240.
45. Ibid., p. 223.
46. GS I, pp. 232-3.
47. MW I, pp. 123-144; GS II, pp. 217-263.
48. Godsey, pp. 111-115.
49. GS II, pp. 245-263.
50. Miller, p. 195. Miller's analysis of the controversy between Bonhoeffer and his fellow Confessing Churchmen is very useful. He tends, however, to read Bonhoeffer's obstinacy as conservative stubbornness and fails to see that it was Bonhoeffer's ecclesiological theory which had trapped him. To be true to himself, Bonhoeffer had no alternative but this position. Cf. Miller, pp. 181-196.
51. Cf. above, part I, reference 132 and p.
52. Miller, p. 181.
53. Cf. above, pp. 119-122.
54. CD, pp. 251, 2.
55. Cf. above, pp. 112-114.
56. CD, p. 245.
57. Ibid., p. 243.
58. Ibid., p. 253.
59. Ibid., p. 230.
60. Ibid., p. 253.
61. Ibid., p. 241. Cf. "Thoughts on Baptism", Letters, p. 160.
- 62.
63. GS I, 372ff.
64. GS II, p. 420.
65. "Challenge", pp. 29-31. Cf. below, pp. 169f.

66. "Challenge", p. 27.
67. GS II, Zeittafel. Dohnanyi established contacts with Sack, Oster, Canaris and Beck. Cf. A. Leber, Das Gewissen Steht Auf, Berlin, 1960, pp. 111-112.
68. Das Gewissen Steht Auf, p. 190.
69. GS I, pp. 323-354.
70. Ibid., p. 325.
71. Ibid., pp. 355-371.
72. "Challenge", p. 30.
73. Bonhoeffer's reading included works by Jean Paul, Immermann, Fontane, Keller, Gabriel von Bülow-Humboldt, and Tertullian, Cyprian, and the Church Fathers. Titles he mentions are Kant's Anthropology, Ulhorn's Geschichte der christliche Liebestätigkeit, Reuter's Kein Hising, Der grüne Heinrich, Die Mik-robenjäger, Niehl's Geschichte aus alten Zeiten, Ortega y Gasst's Nature of Historical Crises and History as a System, H. Pfeiffer's Das britische Empire und die U.S.A., Thomas a Kempis' Imitation of Christ, Kindt's biography of Klopstock, and Dostolevsky's House of the Dead. He seems to have had more than a passing interest in Stifter and Gotthelf's Berner Geist, Hartmann, Dilthey, and Harnack's Prussian Academy and Delbrück's History of the World; and he mentioned C.F. von Weizsäcker's Geschichte der Natur and W.H. Otto's book on the greek gods in connection with his theological meditations.
74. Cf. Appendix.
75. Ethics, preface, p. xi; letter of November 18, 1943. Letters, p. 40.
76. "Challenge", pp. 29-30.
77. Ethics, pp. 142-182.
78. Cf. reference 125 in the notes for part I.
79. Ethics, p. 180.
80. Ethics, p. 162.
81. Ibid., p. 8
82. Cf. above, pp. 145-7.
83. In Karl Barth, the Humanity of God, op. cit.
84. Ibid., p. 84

85. Ethics, pp. 191-2.
86. Ibid., p. 33
87. Cf. below, pp. 193-199.
88. Ethics, p. 82.
89. Ibid., pp. 62-72.
90. Ibid., pp. 66, 67.
91. Cf. especially Ibid., pp. 17, 23, 24.
92. Ibid., p. 21.
93. Ibid., p. 67.
94. Ibid., pp. 68-9. Italics mine.
95. Ibid., pp. 71-2
96. Ibid., p. 87.
97. Ibid., pp. 85-6. Cf. also below, pp. 200ff
98. Ibid., pp. 85-6.
99. Ibid., p. 99.
100. Ibid., pp. 73-8, 252-7.
101. Ibid., p. 73. It should be noted that this is the closest Bonhoeffer came to a reconstruction of his ecclesiology which would correct the exclusiveness of his equation of revelation with the Confessing Church. It appears that in his new formulation, revelation is not the sole possession of the church but is rather "shared" through the interaction of the mandates, of which the church is but one. But Bonhoeffer did not elaborate his view in this direction.
102. Ibid., p. 254.
103. Ibid., p. 257.
104. Church Dogmatics III/4, pp. 21f.
105. Ethics, pp. 256-7.
106. GS III, pp. 494-5.
107. April 30, 1944. Letters, p. 92.
108. Godsey would certainly be numbered among those whom this omission has upset, as well as von Hase (cf. LM I, p. 46). Miller has, of course, based his thesis upon the assumption that Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology has become the discussion of non-religious Christianity in the prison letters.

109. June 8, 1944. Letters, p. 110.
110. July 16, 1944. Letters, p. 121.

Part III (A)

Christ and the World
Come of Age

Chapter 11

History and the Secular

The question is, Christ and the world come of age.

(Letters, June 8, 1944 (p. 103))

The three phrases which have become most closely identified with Bonhoeffer's name — "the world come of age", "religionless Christianity" and "sharing in the sufferings of God" — emerge out of a conception of human history and an assessment of its importance for a true understanding of Christian faith and theology. This is clear from any preview of the prison letters. There, Bonhoeffer tells us that the world has "come of age" — this means that it stands at the end of a historical process through which it has achieved a maturity and independence from ecclesiastical and religious guardianship. Christian faith and christian theology which truly respond to the revelation of God in Christ must be expressed in ways which recognize and serve this maturity. Given the fact that the world is essentially historical, a description of the activity of God and man in the world must affirm this historical self-understanding. In searching for such a statement of Christian faith, Bonhoeffer envisioned a "non-religious" Christianity. Later, in an important modification and correction of his theory which pointed more certainly to the Christological nature of his quest, Bonhoeffer spoke of "sharing in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world."

We stated in chapter 9 that Bonhoeffer's early theological interest in the theme of the secular was cut short by the beginning of the church struggle.¹ But in spite of

an innate "concern for the earth and its creatures," it must be acknowledged that a preoccupation with secularism and history and a validation of these as proper concerns for theology are decisively new elements in Bonhoeffer's theological development. This investigation of history and secularism is linked with his past concerns through his Christological perspective. Bonhoeffer was involved in a choice between elements of his Christology which were now shown to be contradictory, and he chose those which enabled him to affirm his new discoveries and to illumine them theologically.

In this section of our study we shall trace the development of the theme of the secular in Bonhoeffer's thought (chapter 11) and clarify it by examining the criticism of Karl Barth, the theologian with whom Bonhoeffer had always been closely identified, which appears first in the prison letters (chapter 12). In the chapter concluding this section (chapter 13) we will set Bonhoeffer's analysis of history alongside the explorations of two men who seem closest to Bonhoeffer's new interest: Ernst Troeltsch and Friedrich Gogarten.

I. The Emergence of the Theme of Secularism.

Bonhoeffer's attitude toward the historical question as a theological interest was indifference, even hostility, prior to 1940. Sanctorum Communio and Act and Being ignored the question, raised by Troeltsch among others, whether it is possible in a world which thinks of itself as involved in history to seek the answer to the problem of revelation in an ecclesiology. Bonhoeffer circumvented Troeltsch's question and presupposed, as did Seeberg, a special relationship between the church and the revelation in Christ.² His indifference became outright rejection during the Kirchenkampf; in The Cost of Discipleship and numerous essays

Bonhoeffer strengthened his ecclesiological position and burned any bridges which could have led to a theological interest in worldly life.³ He dismissed the historical question even in the persuasive form in which it was being urged upon the Confessing Church by Confessing Churchmen as the attempt by modern man to dissolve the central scandal of the Christian faith into an "essence", which might then be manipulated and distorted in accordance with one's own purposes.⁴ We are therefore left with only two sources from which we may gather evidence for Bonhoeffer's understanding of history: the Ethics and the Letters and Papers from Prison.

Two essays in the Ethics introduce Bonhoeffer's view of history and the historical question. For the first time, Bonhoeffer sees the present situation of Christianity as one which can only be understood when one has first analyzed the interaction of church and world during the course of history. In "Inheritance and Decay",⁵ Bonhoeffer calls the new phenomenon in western culture "secularism" and the process which brought it into being "secularization". This initial study, which dates from 1940, ought closely to be examined.

Bonhoeffer defines history as a conception possible only in the west, for it presupposes a unity in Jesus Christ. It is the Christian message, "linked with the consciousness of temporality and opposed to all mythologization," which has made possible the idea of history, because "only where thought is consciously or unconsciously governed by the entry of God into history at a definite point of time, that is to say, by the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ," is history conceivable.⁶ Only through the life and death of Jesus Christ does history become truly temporal. The history of the west can then be understood as a movement in Christ; "in its nearness to Christ and in its opposition

to Him."⁷ "Jesus Christ has made of the west a historical unit... The unity of the west is not an idea but a historical reality, of which the sole foundation is Christ."⁸ Therefore, the history of the west may be traced as a continuous battle between forces which, however divided, are none the less dedicated to an ideal of unity in Christ.

The Reformation destroyed this historical unity, breaking the corpus christianum into its true constituents, the corpus Christi and the world. Schism became "the fate and inheritance of the western world."⁹ The result was the existence side by side of two kingdoms which could neither be mixed nor torn asunder -- the Word and the sword, the church and the world. Yet both Protestant and Catholic, by calling upon the name of Christ and confessing guilt for this visible disunity, preserved the unity of the west and the Lordship of Christ.¹⁰

But at this juncture, through a misunderstanding of the Reformation, "the great process of secularization" set in, "at the end of which we are standing today."¹¹ The world thought herself emancipated and sanctified in and of herself, and insisted upon her "right" to independence. "The emancipation of man in his conscience, his reason, and his culture, and the justification of the secular as such"¹² was celebrated as the message of the Reformation. Faith in God was lost in a rationalized and mechanized world. Mastery rather than service became the goal of science and technology, man proclaimed his "innate rights", and mass movements and nationalism became the inheritance of the western world. "The people deemed that they had now come of age, that they were now capable of taking in hand the direction of their own internal and external history."¹³

The unity in Christ was replaced by a new unity, founded upon godlessness which "already bears in itself the seeds of decay."¹⁴ This unity based upon godlessness is no theo-

retical denial of God's existence, but rather is itself a religion. Because it is western, it turns upon God yet assumes the form of a religion.¹⁵ Its God is the New Man — man worshipped in the form of Christ. Having lost the unity which western history possessed in Christ, "everything established is threatened with annihilation."¹⁶ Secularism is godlessness — Christian godlessness — which "involves the dissolution of all values, and achieves its goal only in final self-destruction":

The master of the machine becomes its slave. The machine becomes the enemy of man. The creature turns against its creator in a strange reenactment of the Fall. The emancipation of the masses leads to the reign of terror of the guillotine. Nationalism leads inevitably to war. The liberation of man as an absolute ideal leads only to man's self-destruction. At the end of the path which was first trodden in the French revolution there is nihilism.

The new unity which the French revolution brought to Europe — and what we are experiencing today is the crisis of this unity — is therefore western godlessness.¹⁷

Is the outcome of this situation the inevitable warfare between the corpus Christi and the secularized world, with the first fighting for the restoration of the unity in Christ and the second seeking to complete revolution? Bonhoeffer himself does not appear to have decided precisely what the significance of his historical analysis ought to be.¹⁸ It is at this point that we must turn to another of his essays from the Ethics and the warning against "thinking in terms of two spheres."¹⁹ In this essay, Bonhoeffer's purpose is to expose the falsity of viewing reality as divisible into two juxtaposed and conflicting spheres, "the one divine, holy, supernatural, and Christian, and the other worldly, profane, natural, and un-Christian."²⁰ If in his essay on "inheritance and decay" he wished to point to the tragic and inevitable hostility between the two constituents of the broken corpus christianum, he now uses a Christology to assert the basic unity of the sacred and secular:

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... There are not two spheres, standing side by side, competing with each other and attacking each other's frontiers. If that were so, this frontier dispute would always be the decisive problem of history. But the whole reality of the world is already drawn into Christ and bound together in Him, and the movement of history consists solely in divergence and convergence in relation to this center.²¹

Bonhoeffer seems unable to decide between an affirmation of secularism which would run the risk of lapsing into "cheap grace"²² and a condemnation of secularism as the anti-christ which would lead him to the retrenchment and radicalism he wants to avoid. He is wrestling, in short, with the problem of what valuation one can place upon a secularism he has described as godless. To keep from thinking in two spheres he is unable to come to what would logically follow from the picture of the corpus Christi confronting a hostile world: although this picture is the result of his historical analysis, his Christology will not allow it to remain. This is why he cannot settle finally on a definition of secularism, worldliness, godlessness.

In most cases, secularism has a pejorative sense in the Ethics. Secularism leads to the abyss and means, if its relentless march is not halted, the ultimate destruction of history. But Bonhoeffer can also recognize a "better secularism". "When Christianity is employed as a polemical weapon against the secular," he writes, "this must be done in the name of a better secularism and above all it must not lead back to a predominance of the spiritual sphere as an end in itself."²³ Realizing her obligation to the future, the church unreservedly allies herself with the secular forces of justice, truth, science, art, humanity, culture, liberty, and patriotism.²⁴

Bonhoeffer's refusal to condemn all godlessness is even more striking. He speaks suddenly and all too briefly

of a "promising godlessness" which serves Christ against its will. By speaking against the church this godlessness "defends the heritage of a genuine faith in God and of a genuine church."²⁵

These qualifications seem to make it possible for Bonhoeffer to affirm a "genuine worldliness"²⁶ as the proper description of the Christian life:

There is no real possibility of being a Christian outside the reality of the world and there is no real worldly existence outside of the reality of Jesus Christ... (The worldliness of the Christian) 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.²⁷

This worldliness means primarily that the Christian allies himself with a "better secularism" and recognizes the value of a "promising godlessness" as he moves into enemy territory to conquer in the name of Christ. Bonhoeffer's Christological vision which has abolished the possibility of "two spheres", which makes imperative the worldliness of the Christian, calls for "a Lordship of triumph and completion."²⁸ For the picture of Christ which Bonhoeffer presents to us and upon which his Ethics is based is that of the massive, mosaic Christus Pantokrator of the cloister at Daphni, the triumphant Lord in whom the contradictions of the world are reconciled:

The world is not divided between Christ and the devil but, whether it recognizes it or not, it is solely and entirely the world of Christ... The dark and evil world must not be abandoned to the devil. It must be claimed for Him who has won it by His incarnation, His death and His resurrection. Christ gives up nothing of what He has won. He holds it fast in His hands... This world has fallen under the sentence which God passes on all enmity to Christ. It is engaged in a life-and-death struggle with the church. And yet it is the task and the essential character of the church that she shall impart to precisely this world its reconciliation with God and that she shall open its eyes to the reality of the love of God, against which it is - ~~blindly raging~~ In this way it is also, and indeed especially, the lost and sentenced world that is incessantly

drawn in into the event of Christ.²⁹

In the prison letters, the triumphant Lordship of Christ, the Reconciler will give way to a quite different view of Christ's Lordship. By the same token, the negative judgment of secularism and godlessness will give way to a picture of a world whose "coming of age" can be affirmed through Christ; a world which may live etsi deus non daretur before God. To this we must now turn.

II. The Affirmation of the Historical in the Prison Letters.

Donhoeffer begins his analysis of the historical situation in his famous letter of April 30, 1944, with a meditation upon the possibility of what he terms a "religionless" Christianity:

The time when men could be told everything by means of words, whether theological or simply pious, is over, and so is the time of inwardness and conscience, which is to say the time of religion as such. We are proceeding towards a time of no religion at all: men as they are now simply cannot be religious any more... Our whole nineteen-hundred year old Christian preaching and theology rests upon the "religious premise" of man. What we call Christianity has always been a pattern -- perhaps a true pattern -- of religion. But if one day it becomes apparent that this a priori 'premise' simply does not exist, but was a historical and temporary form of human self-expression, i.e. if we reach the stage of being radically without religion...what does that mean for Christianity?³⁰

"Being radically without religion," a stage at which man has arrived through the course of human history, is allowed to call into question the apologetic basis upon which Christian preaching and theology has been built. As we have seen, the Ethics identified secularism with godlessness, against which the church had to contend with all her strength and thus found herself allied with a "better secularism". But here he is willing to explore "a time of no religion at all" which the church must affirm as the outcome of the historical process, an age which she must redeem and serve and in

which she must live. What does "a time of no religion at all" mean for Christianity?

It means that the linchpin is removed from the whole structure of our Christianity to date, and the only people left for us to light on in the way of 'religion' are a few 'last survivals of the age of chivalry' or else one or two who are intellectually dishonest. Would they be the chosen few? Is it upon this dubious group and none other that we are to pounce, in fervor, pique, or indignation, in order to sell them the goods we have to offer? Are we to fall upon one or two unhappy people in their weakest moment and force upon them a sort of religious coercion?³¹

Two things should be noted here. One suspects that such pictures of a "better secularism" as that which Bonhoeffer sketched in the Ethics have here been discarded as part of what is meant by "religion".³² Christianity can no longer be content simply with allying herself with "last survivals of the age of chivalry." Secondly, Bonhoeffer is attacking the kind of apologetic which forces "a sort of religious coercion" upon people; that argument which 'directs men toward the "religious basis" of the world and of their lives, without which neither is supposed to be able to live and of which one need not necessarily be aware. In the following chapter,³³ we will suggest that Barth's approach has always made use of this kind of argument and that Bonhoeffer certainly found a place for it in his Ethics. But now Bonhoeffer wishes to speak of Christ without the presupposition that the man who is addressed is innately and unalterably religious. What he demands is a "religionless" Christianity:

How can Christ become the Lord even of those with no religion? If religion is no more than the garment of Christianity -- and even that garment has had very different aspects at different periods -- then what is a religionless Christianity?³⁴

An understanding and acceptance of the movement of history is behind the demand for religionless Christianity. The stage which the world is approaching -- indeed, at which

it has already arrived — is the stage of religionlessness. The world has "come of age"; that is, she has reached such a level of maturity and independence that a reassessment of the church and Christian faith and theology is called for. But how has the world reached this stage? Bonhoeffer describes a movement, beginning about the thirteenth century, toward the autonomy of man; a historical process through which men "learned to cope with all questions of importance without recourse to God as a working hypothesis."³⁵ As this "great defection from God"³⁶ gathered momentum, God was edged out of ethical, scientific, aesthetic, and eventually religious discourse. Man declared his emancipation from God, the church, and the pastor. The church protested and opposed this trend, but this only made it the more radical and relentless and forced it to think of itself as anti-Christian.³⁷

Bonhoeffer sees signs that this movement has reached some kind of completion,³⁸ and that God is rapidly becoming superfluous as a solution for unsolved problems. He describes the situation in a letter dated July 16, 1944:

There is no longer any need for God as a working hypothesis, whether in morals, politics, or science. Nor is there any need for such a God in religion or philosophy (Feuerbach). In the name of intellectual honesty these working hypotheses should be dropped or dispensed with as far as possible... The only way is that of Matthew 18:3; i.e., through repentance, through ultimate honesty. And the only way to be honest is to recognize that we have to live in the world etsi deus non daretur.

And this is just what we do see — before God! So our coming of age forces us to a true recognition of our situation vis-a-vis God. God is teaching us that we must learn to live as men who can get along very well without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34). The God who makes us live in this world without using him as a working hypothesis is the God before whom we are ever standing. Before God and with him we live without God. God allows himself to be edged out of the world

and on to the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world, and that is exactly the way, the only way, in which he can be with us and help us. Matthew 8:17 makes it crystal-clear that it is not by his omnipotence that Christ helps us, but by his weakness and suffering.

...To this extent we may say that the process we have described by which the world came of age was an abandonment of a false conception of God, and a cleaving of the decks for the God of the Bible, who conquers space in the world by his weakness. This must be the starting point for our 'worldly' interpretation.³⁹

The Ethics, it should be remembered, deplored the defection from God and the growth of "godless" secularism (except insofar as that secularism protested against a church whose essential idolatry was hidden under her piety and religiosity). Bonhoeffer attempted to confront the church with danger of this growth in order that she, and the "better secularism" allied with her, might halt this process by all means. But he is now prepared to affirm this movement and help it to its conclusion: the historical process must be accepted if Christianity is to be honest intellectually and true to its message. Bonhoeffer seems to have resolved the difficulties of holding together the anti-secular argument of "Inheritance and Decay" and the pro-worldly argument of "Thinking in Terms of Two Spheres" by reinterpreting the former essay in the light of the latter, and the effect is astonishing. As William Hamilton writes:

Bonhoeffer gives a particular reading of the intellectual history of the West since the middle ages that has rarely been characteristic of Christian theologians. The process of secularization has generally been treated as a calamity, or at least as a serious deviation that ought to be arrested. But in this historical survey Bonhoeffer tries to reclaim the heritage of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment as good, desirable, and necessary to the Christian.

The process of secularizing is affirmed, not reluctantly, sadly, or for the sake of relevance or realism. The coming of age of the world means the secularization of all life, even the religious life of man...⁴⁰

The world come of age, which is the world without God, is the world redeemed by Christ and reconciled with him. It is in this world that he takes form as its Lord. It is clear from these sentences that one can only understand the meaning of the phrase "the world come of age" by speaking at the same time of "the end of the time of religion" and of the increasingly explicit Christology which underlies all of Bonhoeffer's meditations.⁴¹ In coming chapters we will examine more closely the meaning of "religionlessness".⁴² We must now take a preliminary look at the Christological vision which makes acceptance of the world come of age possible and imperative.

Bonhoeffer has moved from the "Lordship of triumph and completion" which formed the Christological basis of the Ethics to a humiliated, suffering Christ very like that of his 1933 Christology lectures,⁴³ and has described this Christ in terms of his new acceptance of worldliness. In the prison letters, this vision of Christ will become much clearer and more insistent. What this means for Bonhoeffer's affirmation of worldliness and how it relates to his past can best be clarified by turning to his unexpected attack on the position of his teacher, Karl Barth.

Chapter 12

"Positivism of Revelation"

Bonhoeffer's analysis of "a world come of age", with its theological interest in secularism and new perspectives for Christian faith and existence, has made Karl Barth's reading of the prison letters an uneasy one.⁴⁴ Since Bonhoeffer's theological path up to 1940 had been charted along lines described by Barth's protest against liberalism and his subsequent positive dogmatic-exegetical emphasis, the latter's uneasiness can well serve us to illuminate the decisive turn in direction which the letters represent for the course of Bonhoeffer's thought.

Barth's attitude toward the letters has been, for the most part, one of bewilderment; he seems now to have recognized, sadly and reluctantly, that the new direction indicated by his student is one which he cannot himself follow. For his part, Bonhoeffer suspected that his discoveries would not meet with Barth's approval. Consequently, important sections of the prison letters criticize explicitly certain fundamental characteristics of Barth's position. These, in turn, enable one to uncover basic opposing tendencies present from the beginnings of the theological careers of the two men.

Regin Prenter has expressed the view that the characterization of Barth's theology as "positivism of revelation" was not intended as criticism of a side issue in Barth's thinking. Bonhoeffer "wished without doubt to characterize a feature which carries throughout the thought of Karl Barth."⁴⁵ This phrase "positivism of revelation" occurs at a crucial point in the first letter in which Bonhoeffer speaks of his new concern. Following the question concern-

ing the possibility of a "religionless" Christianity, he turns to Barth (and his past association with Barth) for clarification:

How can Christ become the Lord of those with no religion? If religion is no more than the garment of Christianity — and even that garment has had very different aspects at different periods — then what is a religionless Christianity? Barth, who is the only one to have started on this line of thought, has still not proceeded to its logical conclusion, but has arrived at a positivism of revelation which has nevertheless remained essentially a restoration. For the religionless working man, or indeed, man generally, nothing that makes any real difference is gained by that. The questions needing answers would surely be: What is the significance of a church (church, parish, preaching, parish life) in a religionless world? How do we speak of God without religion, i.e. without the temporally-influenced presuppositions of metaphysics, inwardness, and so on? How do we speak (but perhaps we are no longer capable of speaking of such things as we used to) in secular fashion of God? In what way are we in a religionless and secular sense Christians in what way are we the Ekklesia, "those who are called forth", not conceiving ourselves as specially favored, but as wholly belonging to the world? Then Christ is no longer an object of religion, but something quite different, indeed and in truth the Lord of the world. Yet what does that signify? What is the place of worship and prayer in an entire absence of religion? Does the secret discipline, or, as the case may be, the distinction (which you have not with me before) between penultimate and ultimate, at this point acquire fresh importance?⁴⁶

There is much to be examined in this passage, but we must concentrate upon the phrase "positivism of revelation". A second letter opposes Barth's position to what has come to be called "this-worldly" transcendence, an understanding of the "otherness" of revelation which will recognize, accept, and serve the matured world:

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 for this world — I mean that not in the anthropocentric sense of liberal, pietistic, ethical theology, but in the Bible sense of the creation and of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Barth was the first theologian to begin the criticism of religion — and that remains his really great merit — but he sets in its place the positivist doctrine of revelation which says in effect, "Take it or leave it": Virgin Birth, Trinity, or anything else, everything which is an equally significant and necessary part of the whole, which latter has to be swallowed as a whole or not at all. That is not in accordance with the Bible. There are degrees of significance, i.e. a secret discipline must be re-established whereby the mysteries of the Christian faith are preserved from profanation. The positivist doctrine of revelation makes it too easy for itself, setting up, as in the ultimate analysis it does, a law of faith, and mutilating what is, by the incarnation of God in Christ, a gift for us. The place of religion is taken by the church — that is, in itself, as the Bible teaches it should be — but the world is made to depend upon itself and left to its own devices, and that is all wrong.⁴⁷

Barth's positivism, then, violates the world's maturity; Christologically expressed, it incorrectly describes the manner of Christ's Lordship over the nature world. The last piece of literary evidence needed for this final appraisal of Barth's theology is the letter of June 8, 1944. Bonhoeffer is discussing the attempts of several contemporaries (Billich, Althaus, Helm) to make "a completely fresh start based on a consideration of the Bible and Reformation fundamentals of the faith," following the collapse of Liberal theology. Against all these attempts, Bonhoeffer champions Barth's line of attack:

Barth was the first to realize the mistake that all these efforts (which were all unintentionally sailing in the channel of liberal theology) were making in having as their objective the clearing of a space of religion in the world or against the world.

He called the God of Jesus Christ into the lists against religion, "pneuma against sark". That was and is his greatest service (the second edition of his Epistle to the Romans, in spite of all its neo-Kantian shavings). Through his later dogmatics, he enabled the church to effect this distinction in principle all along the line. It was not that he subsequently, as is often claimed, failed in ethics, for his ethical observations — so far as he has made any — are just as significant as his dogmatic ones; it was that he gave

no concrete guidance, either in dogmatics or in ethics, on the non-religious interpretation of theological concepts. There lies his limitation, and because of it his theology of revelation becomes positivist, a "positivism of revelation," as I put it.⁴⁸

"By 'positivism of revelation'," Prenter tells us, "Bonhoeffer means a proclamation of the revelation of God which presents its truths as postulates, without being capable of making clear their relationship to the life of man in the world come of age."⁴⁹ The unrelatedness of the propositions of faith is meant, insofar as they must simply be taken as crude data ('posita') without any other foundation."⁵⁰ The positivist sets ^{up} a "law of faith, in consequence of which the 'truths' of revelation must merely be introduced, all in the same groundless fashion."⁵¹ Positivism, as Bonhoeffer uses the term, means the blatant disregard of the relationship of God to the world as Creator to creation which robs God of his Lordship and strips the world of its nativity. Against this view, he wishes to present a conception of revelation "which will, above all, express the relationship of the revelation of God to the world come of age."⁵² Given an affirmation of the world as essentially historical and of Christ as Lord of a humanity freed for life in this world, the positivist view of revelation is not tenable.

It is important that we see in Bonhoeffer's assessment of Barth the appreciation of the achievement of his teacher which precedes each criticism. He has no brief for that common criticism which charges Barth with "failure in ethics." In fact, he imagines himself to be taking Barth's revolution to its logical conclusion — and by this he means the protest against religion which began with the Commentary on Romans and carried into the Church Dogmatics.⁵³ This is a revolution which Barth himself has not concluded, and it is because Barth has refused to carry out the program with which he began that his theology has become positivist. Bonhoeffer

finds the positivist position of the later works of Barth determined by the reaction to Liberal theology and the desire to provide a positive alternative based on the content of orthodox biblical thought and the Reformation. The real questions of Liberal theology cannot be taken up and answered and the movement itself overcome by adopting this attitude. Therefore, Bonhoeffer wishes to move beyond Barth on the basis of Barth's early presuppositions, by taking up the questions Barth chose to neglect. Honesty leads him to do this "as one who, though a modern theologian, is still aware of the debt we owe to liberal theology."⁵⁴ In his way, Bonhoeffer is seeking to rescue Barth from well-meaning Barthians and interpreters who have "to a great extent forgotten all about the Barthian approach, and lapsed from positivism into conservative restoration."⁵⁵ Unless we keep the affirmative side of Bonhoeffer's criticism before us, we will fail to understand his concern.

This having been said, we may move at once to the crux of Bonhoeffer's argument. Regin Preter suggests that the differences between the two men may be discerned in works as early as Act and Being and the Commentary on Romans.⁵⁶ The disagreement comes on the seriousness with which history and man's earthly nature should be taken and, behind this, on the Christological presuppositions with which one begins to construct a doctrine of revelation. First, let us turn to an examination of the respective doctrines of revelation with which Barth and Bonhoeffer began their definitions of the theological task prior to 1932.

There is a wealth of material from Bonhoeffer's work which suggests that his uneasiness with Barth's view of revelation was as strong and consistent a factor in his theological development as was his appreciation of Barth's attack upon "religion", and that this uneasiness was caused

by the conviction that Barth was not taking seriously man's earthly nature. Bonhoeffer's instinctive defense of "the world and its creatures" should by now be well known.⁵⁷ He could never feel wholly at home with Barth's strident polemic against "das Bestehende...., the organized rebellion against God, which man expresses in the structures of society, particularly in those which he endows with moral and spiritual authority!"⁵⁸ Against the eager acceptance of the Barthian attack on religion we must set Bonhoeffer's "loving participation in all the ethical and spiritual richness of Prussian tradition which was the expression of his life."⁵⁹ There is thus something of the intuitive in his early, odd footnote concerning Barth in Sanc-torum Communio:

Love really loves the other man, and not the One in him — who perhaps does not exist (double predestination! Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 452) — and it is precisely this love for the other man as the other man by which 'God...must be honored' (p. 453). What authority has Barth for saying that the other 'in himself' is trivial and temporal (452) when this is the very man that God commands us to love? God has made our neighbor of 'supreme significance' in himself, and for us there is no other way in which he is important 'in himself'. The other man is not a parable of the Wholly Other...., the emissary of the unknown God; instead he is of supreme significance in himself, because God has made him significant (Ibid.) ...Is not the other man as a real man to receive his rights infinitely through God's command? ...We can apprehend the will of God in all earnestness only as it is manifested in the concrete form of the other man...⁶⁰

And if Bonhoeffer's dissertation has the character of a declaration of independence from his Liberal teachers and his affirmation of the Barthian revolution of the nineteen-twenties, we should nevertheless remember that the formula "Christ existing as the church" is a protest against the ambiguity of the dialectical method. Bonhoeffer felt that Barth was in danger of reducing God to a formal construction,

a negative. To say that the church is sinful, human, and inadequate has no bearing upon the fact that she is, at the same time, the "community of revelation." Barth, in his early writings, had characterized the church as an institution in which "human indifference, misunderstanding, and opposition attain their most sublime and their most naive form."⁶¹ But Bonhoeffer added his characteristic nevertheless:

In the *communio sanctorum* the old ontic relationships are not radically annulled...; every empirical formulation will necessarily be subject to the ambiguity inherent in all human actions. ...in this we perceive a special will of God which it is not open to us to belie by condemning everything that has taken form as the handiwork of man.⁶²

This dissatisfaction with the dialectical method and the presentation of earthly life as a "parable" of the Wholly Other takes more definite shape in Act and Being. Theology, we are told, should not begin with a conception of the freedom of God, but rather with a doctrine of the church to which God has given himself. Christ is free, but he is also visible and tangible in the community of persons who comprise the church. Bonhoeffer is thus openly critical of Barth's 1927 Christliche Dogmatik, with its radical assertion of the boundless freedom of God. "God can give and withdraw himself absolutely according to his pleasure," Barth wrote. "In either action he remains free. He is never at man's discretion; it is his honor and glory to remain utterly free and unconditional in relation to everything bound and conditional."⁶³ Bonhoeffer reacted at once on the basis of his Lutheran heritage, calling to mind one of the Reformer's famous — and to Barth, notorious — statements on the nature of the sacrament:

It is to the honor and glory of our God..., however, that, giving himself for our sakes in deepest condescension, he passes into the flesh, the bread, our hearts, mouths,

entrails, and suffers also for our sake that he be dishonorably...handled, on the altar as on the cross.⁶⁴

Such a picture of the incarnation became as basic to Bonhoeffer's doctrine of revelation as it became foreign to Barth's. For the former, Christology and ecclesiology were based upon God's availability:

In revelation it is a question less of God's freedom on the far side of 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 most strongly attested in his having freely bound himself to historical man, having placed himself at man's disposal. God is not free of man but for man. Christ is the Word of his freedom. God is there, which is to say: not in eternal non-objectivity but (looking ahead for the moment) "haveable", graspable in his Word within the church.⁶⁵

Thurneysen, the lifelong associate and friend of Barth, has argued that much of Bonhoeffer's continuing concern which found its way into the prison letters and assumed such radical form can be traced to the emphasis of the early Barth on the solidarity of the church with the world and religious man's solidarity with secular man in sin and under grace.⁶⁶ But one must add to the elements of Bonhoeffer's theology a Lutheran theology of condescension which Barth did not share. What the implications of this refusal were for Barth's further development we shall see shortly. Let us look first at Barth's progress to the Church Dogmatics.

Karl Barth's victory over the difficulties introduced by his consistent denial of natural theology and his assertion of God's majesty and freedom from earthly structures has proceeded by stages.⁶⁷ It is generally acknowledged that the first major shift in his theology occurred with his rejection of the first volume of his Christliche Dogmatik and the fresh start upon what has been his masterwork, the Church Dogmatics, following his study of Anselm. What Barth discovered in Anselm was not the incorrectness of his own conception of God's freedom, however, but rather a better way

of expressing it. The dearly-bought freedom which the dialectical method provided gave way to the supplication of fides quaerens intellectum and credo ut intelligam. Since the publication of his book on Anselm, students of Barth's development have watched the Church Dogmatics focus more and more sharply upon Christology as the proper solution to the early and formalistic insistence upon God's otherness. Now Barth could confidently affirm that in Christ, the relationship between God and man is covenanted and God and man become dialogical partners. Christ is really man, and takes mankind up with himself in his exaltation to the right hand of God. This has been the theme of the fourth part of the Church Dogmatics, the high water mark of what has been called "the triumph of grace" in Barth's theology: the doctrine of reconciliation.⁶⁸

Soon after his students and critics began to speak of a "new Barth",⁶⁹ Barth himself seemed to recognize a change of attitude in his theology. He announced it in a lecture in 1956 on the "Humanity of God", and in the course of his argument provided what he seems to regard as an answer to Bonhoeffer's charge of "positivism". "Surely I do not deceive myself," Barth writes with his magnificent self-assurance, "when I assume that our theme today should suggest a change of direction (Wendung) in the thinking of evangelical theology."⁷⁰ This essay deserves careful study, for it not only represents Barth's understanding of his own development, but also the consequences for the future of his latest change in direction.

Barth begins with a restatement of his earliest concerns, which we have already encountered through the eyes of Bonhoeffer. "What began forcibly to press itself upon us about forty years ago," Barth says, "was not so much the humanity of God as his deity — a God absolutely unique in his relation to man and the world, overpoweringly lofty and distant,

strange, yes even wholly other."⁷¹

...It must now quite frankly be granted that we were at that time only partially in the right, even in reference to the theology which we inherited and from which we had to disengage ourselves — partially right in the same sense in which all preponderantly critical-polemic movements, attitudes and positions, however meaningful they may be, are usually only partially in the right. What expressions we used — in part taken over and in part newly invented! — above all, the famous "wholly other" breaking in upon us "perpendicularly from above," the no less famous "infinite qualitative distinction" between God and man, the vacuum, the mathematical point, and the tangent in which alone they must meet.⁷²

...Did not the whole thing frequently seem more like the report of an enormous execution than the message of the Resurrection, which was its real aim? ...We viewed this "wholly other" in isolation, abstracted and absolutized, and set it over against man, this miserable wretch — not to say boxed his ears with it — in such fashion that it continually showed greater similarity to the deity of the God of the philosophers than to the deity of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁷³

Undoubtedly, Barth means to question seriously the capacity of his theology, in its early days, to take account of the humanity of God. "Who and what God is — this is what in particular we have to learn better and with more precision in the new change of direction in the thinking and speaking of evangelical theology, which has become necessary in the light of the earlier change."⁷⁴ One never should have, and certainly can no longer "deal with God in the abstract, not with one who in his deity exists only separated from man, distant and strange and thus a non-human if not indeed an inhuman God."⁷⁵

Now, then, can Barth correct the misunderstandings arising from a view of God which he admits was once his own? In Christology, where God and man encounter one another:

In Jesus Christ there is no isolation of man from God or of God from man. Rather, in him we encounter the history, the dialogue, in which God and man meet together and are together, the reality of the covenant mutually contracted, preserved, and fulfilled by them. Jesus Christ is in his one

person, as true God, man's loyal partner, and as true man, God's (p. 46). We do not need to engage in a free-ranging investigation to seek out and construct who and what God truly is, but only to read the truth about both where it resides, namely, in the fulness of their togetherness, their covenant which proclaims itself in Jesus Christ (47). ...It is when we look at Jesus Christ that we know decisively that God's deity does not exclude, but includes his humanity (49). No, God requires no exclusion of humanity, no non-humanity, in order to be truly God. But we may and must, however, look further and recognize the fact that actually his deity encloses humanity in itself (50).

When the theme of the humanity of God is properly stated within Christology (and, as we shall soon see, Barth constructs his Christology in such a way that the direction always remains that of above to below, divine to human), certain theological possibilities emerge. "The statement regarding God's humanity, the Immanuel, to which we have advanced as a first step from the Christological center, cannot but have the most far-reaching consequences."⁷⁶ The third of the consequences which Barth discusses concerns us particularly. "God's humanity and the knowledge of it," Barth writes, "calls for a definite attitude and alignment of Christian theological thinking and speaking. It can never approach its subject matter in a vacuum, never in mere theory. Theology cannot fix upon, consider, or put into words any truths which rest on or are moved by themselves... It can never verify, reflect, or report in a monologue."⁷⁷ Having said this, Barth is ready to consider how much sympathy he feels for those who have raised questions concerning the capacity of his own theology really to speak to man in his secular situation. His reply is addressed obviously to Bonhoeffer, and he considers this interest the same he has encountered in Bultmann, Gogarten, and Tillich:

The question of language, about which one must speak in reference to the so-called 'outsiders', is not so burning today as is asserted in various quarters. This is true in the first place because, again thinking in terms of the

humanity of God, we cannot at all reckon in a serious way with real 'outsiders', with a 'world come of age', but only with a world which regards itself as of age (and proves daily that it is precisely not that). Thus the so-called 'outsiders' are really only 'insiders' who have not yet understood and apprehended themselves as such. On the other hand, even the most persuaded Christian, in the final analysis, must and will recognize himself ever and again as an 'outsider'. So there must then be no particular language for insiders and outsiders. Both are contemporary men-of-the-world — all of us are. A little 'non-religious' language from the street, the newspaper, literature, and, if one is ambitious, from the philosopher may thus, for the sake of communication, occasionally be in order. However, we should not be particularly concerned about this. A little of the language of Canaan, a little 'positivism of revelation', can also be a good thing in addressing us all and, according to my experience, in which I am certainly not alone, will often, though not always, be still better understood even by the oddest strangers.⁷⁸

We shall have to return to the question of whether or not Bonhoeffer, in his letters, is thinking primarily of what has come to be called the "hermeneutical problem" when he speaks of a "religionless Christianity".⁷⁹ Here we should begin by saying that others, unlike Barth, have considered Bonhoeffer's question a probing of a much more fundamental theological problem than Barth is willing to concede. The reason for Barth's inability to recognize this question is hinted at in the above citation: his doctrine of election does not allow him to take "secular" man seriously. There are not and can be no 'outsiders'. "On the basis of the eternal will of God," he writes, "we have to think of every human being, even the oddest, most villainous, or miserable, as one to whom Jesus Christ is Brother and God is Father, and we have to deal with him on this assumption. If the other person knows that already, then we have to strengthen him in the knowledge. If he does not know it or no longer knows it, our business is to transmit this knowledge to him."⁸⁰ With this understanding, Barth can shrug off a

characterization of his theology as "positivist" as a useful protest against the dangers of theological imperialism, and "non-religious language" (much as demythologization) as an occasionally useful apologetical weapon.⁸¹

If this were Barth's last word on the subject, we would be obliged to end our conversation at this point. But there are still several nagging, unanswered questions which lead us, in spite of Barth's intransigence, to seek to continue it. In the first place, we have Bonhoeffer's insistence that he is seeking to carry forward some basic Barthian themes (an appreciation of Barth which some of Barth's followers have taken to mean that Barth is now, in the fourth volume of his Dogmatik, carrying forward some basic Bonhoefferian themes). Secondly, we have argued that Bonhoeffer's position is directly related to his historical assessment, and we would wish from Barth a more direct encounter with the problem of history. Thirdly, we have spoken of basic Christological divergencies which, if examined, may provide us with invaluable clues to the understanding of the prison letters.

Barth has addressed himself quite pointedly to the second of our questions. In a long footnote in volume IV/3 of the Church Dogmatics, he has outlined and criticized an interpretation of history which is unquestionably indebted to Bonhoeffer's prison letters.⁸² The argument occurs directly following the introduction of the "third problem" of the doctrine of reconciliation, that of the prophetic office of Christ.

In the history of the last four hundred fifty years, Barth writes, a shadow has been cast upon the question of the relationship between the church and human culture and history. The combined forces of the Renaissance and the Reformation broke apart the basic unity which the corpus

christianum represented. The church was separated from the world and, proleptically, the world was provided with the means by which she could justify her developing autonomy and rejoice in her emancipation. "Intimations of many kinds were not lacking in the later and early middle ages. But the modern epoch is distinguished from those which preceded by the fact that certain tendencies which were previously latent, isolated, and in the main suppressed have now become increasingly patent, general, and dominating."⁸³ The problem which becomes so pressing is "secularism". It is this phenomenon which makes the modern age different from those which came before. Man has arrived at an understanding of himself and his world which has not found the church congenial or even tolerable, and the church has consequently found herself pushed into a ghetto of indifference or hostility.

Given this situation, Barth continues, what alternative courses of action are available for the church? It may ally itself with reactionary forces to fight this movement. It may retreat into piety, liturgies, or dogmatics and accept its banishment. "Or it might accept the increasing secularism on an optimistic interpretation, taking it up into its own self-understanding, working away so critically at the Bible, tradition, and the creeds that it appears to be in harmony with the progressive spirit of the age, to justify modern man and to offer to the adult world (der mündig gewordenen Welt) a suitably adult form of Christianity, thus exposing all the more obviously and palpably the alienation of the life of man from that of the church and vice-versa."⁸⁴

It is this latter alternative that Barth especially dislikes, and his rejection combines elements of his dismissal of Troeltsch and Bultmann and Seeberg's "modern positivism".

He reminds us that each generation has thought of itself as the discoverer of this "lamentable" situation, and that each has, in turn, failed to recognize the positive character of the gulf between the church and the world. The break-up of the corpus christianum resulted in a relationship between church and world more in keeping with the Gospel and a true understanding of the nature of revelation. The reconciliation of the world is achieved by the recognition that the church is the church and the world is the world. If the church is to serve the world, she must remain the church — this is the basis for Barth's contention that the doctrine of reconciliation must pay special attention to the classic munus Christi propheticum, the prophetic office of Christ. The church can move into the world only when she is certain of her boundaries, therefore her relationship to the world is that of prophet.

Barth's description of the situation and the consequent positive view of the gap between church and world reminds one strongly of the development of this theme in the Ethics. The Church Dogmatics dismisses those (nameless) theologians who develop the theme of "a world come of age" as wistfully longing for some restoration of the pre-Reformation corpus christianum, having failed to see the positive significance of the irreconcilability of church and world. Whether Barth intended it to be so or not, this is hardly Bonhoeffer's picture of the effect of the Reformation. "It was the Reformation," the latter wrote, "that broke asunder the unity of the faith... The unity of the church can only lie in Jesus Christ as he lives in his word and sacrament... Only a Pope who submitted unreservedly to the word of the Bible could be the shepherd of a united Christendom. But the Pope...was incapable of this submission, and that is why the unity of Christendom was destroyed. The corpus christianum

is resolved into its true constituents, the corpus Christi and the world... There are two kingdoms which, so long as the world continues, must neither be mixed together nor yet be torn asunder..."⁸⁵ In destroying the corpus christianum, the Reformation merely exposed the situation as it really was and remains. No sentimental yearning for the unity of the middle ages on these terms instructs Bonhoeffer's thinking.

Nor has Barth understood that the phrase "world come of age" does not suggest for Bonhoeffer "an emotional or moral maturity"⁸⁶ to which the world may or may not daily prove its right. He is speaking primarily of the impossibility of articulating the traditional idea of God in the contemporary world because the mind of western man has simply outgrown it; of "a psychological stage of development in which religion and its attempt to keep man in strings is dismissed as childish."⁸⁷ The true unity of the West is not the corpus christianum, but rather the corpus Christi.⁸⁸

It is this unity which must be demonstrated even as church and world are kept separate, and it must be spoken of in such a way that the maturity of the world, her independence of a traditional way of speaking of God, is respected.

The enemy, for Barth, is still Kulturprotestantismus; under which heading he places all demands for a synthesis of worldly forms of life, thinking, and action on the one hand and the church and her doctrine on the other. He simply believes that Bonhoeffer has resurrected these demands. And those who find the "New Earth" more receptive than the "old" to questions concerning the relationship between historical process and revelation have but to ponder sections of the Church Dogmatics published twenty years before Bonhoeffer's question, where Barth uses the same arguments we have just presented against an array of Liberal opponents.⁸⁹

Whatever the much discussed "change of attitude" in Barth's theology might mean, it surely does not indicate that he is now prepared to discuss the meaning of history with nineteenth century theologians who made this their special concern. This concern itself remains for Barth a "blind alley".⁹⁰ The historical question and the fact of secularism are of no concern for the Christian theologian. If "positivism of revelation" means nothing else, it is at least a judgement of any theology which refuses to give more than a passing glance to man in his secular condition and the question of relating revelation which entered history in the forms and language of the middle east in the first century to that secular condition. Unless this is done, Christianity can scarcely free itself of ideological overtones, possessiveness, and ultimate trust in theological expressions rather than in the God of which they tell.

But the basic underlying difference between Bonhoeffer and Barth, which leads the one to take seriously the question of history and secularism and the other to disregard that, remains a Christological one. Perhaps the best way to understand how antagonistic the interest of the prison letters is to Barth's theological outlook is to examine that part of the Church Dogmatics where Barth takes up and rejects a Lutheran tradition concerning the human nature of Christ. In volume IV/2, Barth introduces the genus maiestaticum, a characteristically Lutheran development in Protestant scholasticism which originated in Luther's thinking on the sacrament.⁹¹ As Barth outlines it, the central concern for Lutheran scholastic Christology was that "the divine triumph over the distinction and antithesis between God and man took place directly, and is a fact, in the humanity of Jesus Christ."⁹² The mutual participation between the two

natures enclosed within Jesus Christ (known as the communio idiomatum or communicatio naturarum) had to be, and was, developed by both Lutheran and Reformed dogmaticians. But the Lutherans entered an area of discussion which the Reformed scholastics had closed off from themselves, arguing that one cannot speak of the participation of the divine nature in the human without also speaking of the communication of the properties of the divine to the human nature. The purpose of the Lutherans was to show that "the Godhead can be seen and grasped and experienced and directly known in the humanity of Jesus Christ."⁹³ By means of the so-called "second genus" of the communicatio idiomatum — the genus maiestaticum — the human nature "experiences the additional development (beyond its humanity) of acquiring and having as such all the marks of divinity, of participating directly in the majesty of God, of enjoying in its creaturality every perfection of the uncreated essence of God."⁹⁴

The purpose of the doctrine was to demonstrate logically the inseparability of the union of the two natures of Christ and, to this end, it was developed with precision and with the safeguards necessary to prevent misunderstandings. Barth hardly blames the Lutheran dogmaticians themselves for what followed from this notion. But he feels, as the Reformed contemporaries of the formulators felt, that the difficulties raised by this attempt proved insurmountable:

...How are we to guard against a deduction (Barth writes) which is very near the surface, which once it is seen is extremely tempting, and once accepted very easy to draw, but which can compromise at a single stroke nothing less than the whole of Christology? For after all, is not the humanity of Jesus Christ, by definition, that of all men? And even if it said only of him, does that not mean that the essence of all men, human essence as such, is capable of divinization? If it can be said in relation to him,

why not to all men? But this means that in Christology a door is left wide open, not this time by a secular philosophy which has entered in with subtlety, but in fulfillment of the strictest theological discussion and ostensibly from the very heart of the Christian faith. And through this door it is basically free for anyone to wander right away from Christology... And where does this door lead? It obviously leads smoothly and directly to anthropology. ...If the supreme achievement of Christology, its final word, is the apotheosized flesh of Jesus Christ, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient, deserving of our worship, is it not merely a hard shell which conceals the sweet kernel of the divinity of humanity as a whole and as such, a shell which we can confidently discard and throw away once it has performed this service? 95

Barth sees this as the door through which came Hegel, professing to be a good Lutheran; Feuerbach, referring his identification of divine with human essence to Luther; and Idealism and Liberalism on Lutheran soil. We have already cited in this chapter Bonhoeffer's approving use of Luther's view of the sacrament in support of his ecclesiological theory of revelation.⁹⁶ The Lutheran Christology of condescension, the conviction that after all has been said, finitum capax infiniti, remained the central strand of Bonhoeffer's theology throughout his lifetime.⁹⁷ Bonhoeffer accepted the Lutheran tradition with all its risks, certain that the alternative cannot but lead to "positivism of revelation".⁹⁸ The word became flesh; nothing less than a complete incarnation will do. "The fulness of God is to be found in that limited, weak, and humiliated man Jesus, who took the risk of utter human concreteness."⁹⁹

There is a check upon the distortion of this humiliated Christ, and we shall be dealing with this at a future time.¹⁰⁰ Here we must close our chapter by saying that Bonhoeffer has determined that the recovery of Christ for us today will depend upon taking seriously the question of history, accepting man in his secular condition, and turning away from the certainty of "positivism of revelation" to the uncertainty of Christian existence in a world come of age.

Chapter 13

History and Revelation

It is clear from the preceding chapter that Bonhoeffer is not the only Protestant theologian in this century to have considered vital the question of the relationship between revelation and the historical rise and growth of secularism. Probably the two most important analyses of the theological meaning of history undertaken since 1900 have been those of Ernst Troeltsch and Friedrich Gogarten. In order to sharpen our focus on the historical question which Bonhoeffer raises in the prison letters, we will pause to examine and compare the contributions of these two men.

1. Ernst Troeltsch and the Problem of Historical Relativity.

One of the peculiar aspects of Sanctorum Communio, we argued,¹⁰¹ was Bonhoeffer's avoidance of a direct encounter with the historical problem and a consideration of its importance for constructing any ecclesiology. The major weakness of Bonhoeffer's dissertation was its failure to confront the contribution of Ernst Troeltsch. For, as Gogarten writes, "it is no doubt Troeltsch who, as a theologian troubled by the immensely difficult problem of the relation between faith and history, has studied the problem of history in its most comprehensive aspects."¹⁰² Troeltsch had undertaken this study in order to illuminate what he saw as the single most important problem confronting any theologian who attempted to describe revelation and the nature and function of the church in the modern world. Yet Bonhoeffer passed Troeltsch by and developed his argument within the framework provided by his teacher, Seeberg, and Albrecht Ritschl.

Many years later, in his prison cell, Bonhoeffer reflected on the Liberal theology of his student days in Berlin and

became keenly aware of "the debt we owe." In a passage which expresses his ambivalent feelings toward this heritage, he singled out Troeltsch for a special appreciation:

But first a word or two on the historical situation. The question is, Christ and the world come of age. It was the weak point of liberal theology that it allowed the world the right to assign Christ his place in that world: in the dispute between Christ and the world it accepted the comparatively element peace dictated by the world. It was its strong point that it did not seek to put back the clock, and genuinely accepted the battle (Troeltsch), even though this came to an end with its overthrow.¹⁰³

Let us examine the battle which Troeltsch accepted, and the weapons with which he sought to fight it.

Troeltsch's understanding of the movement of history and his desire to converse with secular disciplines such as philosophy and sociology led him to refuse to begin any ecclesiological discussion from the standpoint of traditional dogmatics. The language of dogmatics, whose authority came from the divine revelation embodied within it, was not serviceable for a modern world. Indeed, the modern world was modern insofar as this divine authority disappeared. And Troeltsch located three interwoven strands of history leading up to modern civilization: the rise of secularism, the development of Protestantism, and the destruction of the corpus christianum.

The modern age began with the destruction of the absolute authority which had been embodied in the medieval church; the great period of civilization in which divine revelation was immediate and absolute:

This was an age of authority, directing men to the other and higher world with ordered and organized functions. It was based on an elastic union of the ascetic and natural life. Nothing of importance took place outside of this sacerdotal structure. The compromise was dominated by its ascetic, world-renouncing side, and outside influence generally complemented the church civilization.¹⁰⁴

The Reformation had the unintentional effect of shatter-

ing the corpus christianum and the authority embodied within its structure. This authority was soon replaced by a doctrine of scriptural inspiration which, for a time, restored unity, order, and ecclesiastical authority within Protestant churches. Closer to Troeltsch's own time, however, ecclesiastical and dogmatic authority founded upon a conception of verbal inspiration was shaken by the historical criticism of the Scriptures. Therefore: "With the nineteenth century church history entered upon a new phase of existence... It has since then no longer possessed a fixed and objective ideal of unity."¹⁰⁵

Without this ideal of unity fixed in an infallible Bible, dogma, or a church hierarchy there can no longer be a fixed and objective form for the church. Her authority and her structure are no longer imposed from outside, but rest upon her membership. Men no longer live in "a strictly ecclesiastical supernaturalistic civilization, resting on an immediate authority with a strictly defined sphere, distinct from the world and all its interests,"¹⁰⁶ and the church must find for herself a form and purpose which affirms "the duty of historico-philological principles, the organization of churches formed by voluntary association, independent of the state, and the doctrine of revelation by inner personal conviction and illumination."¹⁰⁷ This latter is the peculiar gift of Protestantism and the reason why it remains suited to the modern world. For Protestantism has grown with the modern world; she has often, in spite of herself, directly aided in the development of secularism through constant reference to her basic metaphysic of absolute personality. Having "consciously and definitely" formulated this as its principle, "loosed it from its connection with a hierarchy, world-dominating institution, and made it capable of freely combining with all the interests and factors of life,"¹⁰⁸

Protestantism alone remains able to serve the new world.

"Taking it all in all," Troeltsch concludes, "we may fairly say that the religion of personal conviction and conscience, basing itself upon history, but not petrifying history into dogma, is the form of religion which is homogeneous with and adapted to modern individualistic civilization."¹⁰⁹

When he came to the writing of his massive Social Teachings of the Christian Churches, Troeltsch's method was to elicit from Christian history those ethical principles still valuable for an individualized, fully secularized civilization. He saw the contemporary problem of the church that of discovering a form proper to her new role: harmonizing with the structures of "modern bourgeois capitalistic society and militaristic states," such that together they would form a unity of civilization.¹¹⁰ Troeltsch himself did not know what this form would be. He compared the task of writing his Social Teachings to that of sorting out the materials of a destroyed house out of which a new building, of a form yet to be determined, is to be built. But the function of the church was at least clear: she is to "lead forth Christian social and ethical ideals and continually produce them afresh."¹¹¹ He did not — and could not — seek a solution to the problem of history in an ecclesiology. The ruined house was the church which embodied revelation.

The sphere of "revelation" (if, indeed, the term could still be used) was the world itself. Troeltsch operated from a notion of "the essential and individual identity of finite minds with the infinite mind, and, precisely through this, their intuitive participation in its concrete contents and its motivated vital unity."¹¹² It would appear that whatever the historical process removed by destroying the absolute authority embodied in the church was returned in the form of a generalized religious view of man. Troeltsch,

following Dilthey, saw in historical criticism a force for the recovery and purification of human religion, a quest which "endeavors to go back beyond the traditional formulations, histories, and dogmas to something humanly divine which is always and everywhere active in the soul and of which all these particular manifestations of religious life are products."¹¹³ If "revelation" is no longer possible, "religion" is. The more revelation is done away with by the historically conscious modern man, the more religion — "the essential and individual identity of finite minds with the infinite mind" — is unveiled. It is at this point that Gogarten accuses Troeltsch of "departing from history and seeking refuge in metaphysics": the world celebrates her emancipation from the supernatural in the form of divine revelation only to be asked to acknowledge her metaphysical foundation and a religious dynamism said to be active in her history. The authoritative, supernatural power of revelation embodied in the church, in scripture, or in dogma gives way to a metaphysically-conceived God-consciousness which is thought not to violate the world's modernity.

It is at this point that Bonhoeffer enters into conversation. He believes that Troeltsch fell back on religious forms — inwardness, metaphysics, and conscience¹¹⁴ — as acceptable substitutes for an outmoded concept of revelation. Such religious views of the operation of God violate the maturity of the world Troeltsch wished to acknowledge and serve. Bonhoeffer shared in the post-Liberal recovery of revelation and the Word of God, and he still wishes eagerly to defend this revolution. But until the theology of revelation criticizes itself with the questions Troeltsch asked, it stands in danger of being simply an anachronism, an attempt to recover the pre-modern age by simply turning back the clock.

II. Friedrich Gogarten: The Incarnation and Verweltlichung

One contemporary theologian who has refused to shrug off the questions raised by Troeltsch is Friedrich Gogarten. He believes, with his teacher, that the nineteenth century rise of the historical sciences completed a revolution in man's self-understanding which cannot now be reversed or denied:

There can be no doubt that in history, as it is understood in the light of this historical method which modern historiography has elaborated, man occupies a position different from that which was previously adjudged to him in the general context of the world. It is not an overstatement to say that his position has become so central that this history is now his own, the history of man. And this idea, the idea that it is his own history, means in its deepest sense that he, man, is responsible for history.¹¹⁵

Were Gogarten to use the phrase "the world come of age" (he prefers the term Verweltlichung, the secularizing or "making worldly" of the world), he would mean by it that the world has become completely historical, and that this fact must now be accepted by men who, at the same time, bear the responsibility to take up and shape this history. Secularism thinks of itself as the opponent of Christian faith, which in turn regards secularism as the disintegration of the genuine heritage of a "Christian" past. Neither Christianity nor secularism have here understood themselves as historical, in the proper sense of that word. Gogarten therefore sets out to show that "the reality of man just as the reality of his world has become historical,"¹¹⁶ that secularism is the legitimate consequence of the Incarnation, and that Christian faith, by finding her way back to her own historical nature, can assist secularism toward a recovery and understanding of the real foundation and hope of the modern world.¹¹⁷

Gogarten illuminates the problem by means of an analysis of western history. Within the corpus christianum of the middle ages, historical life was organized theologically —

so completely that man had no historical existence apart from the theological presuppositions provided for him by the church.¹¹⁸ But these assumptions were based upon the metaphysics of a pre-scientific era, derived as they were from church councils, the Church Fathers, and Roman sacramentalism. The Reformation and the Renaissance shattered both the corpus christianum and pre-scientific metaphysics. Troeltsch, following Dilthey, recognized that the primary task in the modern age was to acknowledge the revolution in man's understanding of himself (which had resulted from the marriage of historical awareness with scientific method) and to sweep away any holdovers from a pre-scientific view of man and the world. But (as we have seen) Troeltsch and Dilthey replaced a particular supernatural revelation with a universal and unquestionable religious view of man, which they defended as scientific. This ultimately set Liberal theology in opposition to any secular view which asserted the absolute independence of man from metaphysical world-views and the universality of the religious "inner life".¹¹⁹

Where Troeltsch envisioned a Protestantism which would expose and undergird the "innate religious nature" of secular man, Gogarten claims that this metaphysical foundation is necessary neither for secular man nor for the Christian faith. It is, in fact, an affront to both. Men are freed from metaphysics for history, and this freedom can only have come about through the events and experiences of the Christian revelation.¹²⁰ If Bonhoeffer sees the beginning of this claim to autonomy in the Renaissance and provides it with a Christological justification, Gogarten describes this freedom as the meaning of the Incarnation itself, which freed the world of any bondage to the "powers of this world," that is, from the worship of or control by natural or supernatural deities:

If, however, secularization can and may be viewed in the theological sense, such that she has her foundation in Christian faith, ...then that means, insofar as she is grounded in Christian faith, making the world into the world (Verweltlichung der Welt). Making the world into the world: that means that under all conditions and in every respect and in everything which belongs to her, she is and remains what she is — sheer world. 121

This is not at all easy to grasp. R.G. Smith, following Gogarten, has put the position more clearly:

I should say, first of all, what happens with the coming of Christianity is that the old gods are expelled from the world. The world is de-divinized. In the early generations of Christianity the Christians were called the atheists; the point was simply that the world was freed of the old fears and the old gods; the world became independent of God, autonomous. Then, at the same time, man himself was set free from these fears and became responsible for his own history. 122

The remarkable thing about the growth of secularism, then, is that "the independence of man in the radical sense, which he possesses in the modern world, could only have been won through the experiences and perceptions made accessible in Christian faith."¹²³ The Christian faith allows for, indeed, demands this kind of freedom for the secular world to be secular. In such a world, the content of the Christian faith will have at its center a proclamation of the freedom of man from the "powers of the world," a freedom granted with the recognition of one's creaturehood and sonship to God the Father — which is, at the same time, freedom to exercise one's responsibility for history.¹²⁴ Man's historical self-awareness can only point to and illuminate the fact that the Christian faith is radically historical. For "this historical approach, at least insofar as it grasps the actual essential nature of history," once more brings to the forefront "the genuinely Christian view of human existence and of its world as a historical world."¹²⁵

It is not difficult to see why Gogarten's view allies him with Rudolf Bultmann. Both men are calling for a way of speaking about the events upon which Christianity is founded which demonstrates, in accordance with the Christian message, the essential freedom of the kerysma from those events. Although the kerysma was (and could only be) set down in the language and concepts of Asia Minor in the first century, at its center is the proclamation of universality and, in the incarnation itself, freedom from all time-bound language and concepts. Once this has been said, Verweltlichung and de-divinizing have been bound to demythologizing, and the arguments of Bultmann and Gogarten are complementary. Once the issue has been made dependent upon the meaning of the incarnation, Bonhoeffer is drawn into conversation with both men.

Gogarten's description of the de-divinizing of the world through the incarnation makes the necessary connection Bonhoeffer failed to make between his historical analysis (which he began with the Renaissance) and his suggestions concerning "religion" and Paul's teaching on circumcision.¹²⁶ Through Gogarten, he would have found himself closer to Bultmann's program than he imagined.¹²⁷ Where Bonhoeffer differs from these theologians will become clear in our final chapters. Certainly, and in spite of the fact that all three men agree as to the point of departure for such thinking, Bonhoeffer is the more radically Christological. His concentration upon the Lordship of Christ will not allow him to be content with an optimistic appreciation of autonomous man, an exuberant worldliness, or a radical sweeping away of distinctively Christian forms and structures. The historically conscious world is neither affirmed nor denied except in the historical consciousness

made possible in the incarnation. The Christian who lives in such a historically conscious world affirms its history, its independence, its joys and pleasures only as he participates in the weakness and suffering of the God who allows himself to be "edged out" of such a world.

8/ "Christ and the world come of age" is the question: always together and at the same time. ¹²⁶

We have watched Bonhoeffer wrestle with the theme of the secular as he determined to turn from "thinking in terms of two spheres" to consider the meaning of the historical development of the western world away from God and the church. We discovered the Christological basis for his thinking in a Lutheran Christology of condescension newly freed from ecclesiastical restrictions, and allowed Barth to confront this historical and Christological problem of secularism. We then developed and clarified Bonhoeffer's thoughts with the aid of Ernst Troeltsch and Friedrich Gogarten. Our final task is to examine the future course of Bonhoeffer's theology from this foundation of a Christ who affirms a world come of age.

Part III (A): "Christ and the World Come of Age"

1. See above, pp. 141-149.
2. See above, pp. 36-38, 51-54.
3. See above, pp. 141-150
4. See above, pp. 112-114 and Part II (A), note 56.
5. Ethics, pp. 25-45.
6. Ibid., p. 26.
7. Ibid., p. 27.
8. Ibid., p. 29.
9. Ibid., p. 32.
10. Ibid., pp. 29-32.
11. Ibid., p. 32.
12. Ibid., p. 33
13. Ibid., p. 37. That this statement is not the positive appreciation of the coming of age of the world which instructs the prison letters will become clear in what follows.
14. Ibid., p. 38.
15. Ibid., pp. 38-9.
16. Ibid., p. 44.
17. Ibid., p. 38.
18. At this point, Bonhoeffer seems willing to settle for the more or less traditional Christian response to western history. It has become godless, and the church finds herself opposed to this godlessness and must bring the western world back to the consciousness of the true unity in Christ she has forsaken. Even so, it often seems that his purpose is to describe rather than to prescribe. The prison letters are not far from such statements as: "The world has known Christ and turned its back on him, and it is to this world that the church must now prove that Christ is the living Lord." (Ibid., p. 44).
19. Ibid., pp. 62-72.
20. Ibid., p. 62.
21. Ibid., p. 64.

22. CD, pp. 35-47. The dangers of "cheap grace" seem to lie in the background of "Inheritance and Decay", while the exclusiveness of "costly grace" occupy Bonhoeffer's mind in "Thinking in Terms of Two Spheres".
23. Ethics, p. 65.
24. Ibid., p. 45. There are echoes here of the solution offered in "dein Reich komme!" (Cf. above, pp. 145-6) in which the relationship of the kingdom of the sword to the kingdom of God is that of miracle to order, both preserving and serving the gospel. Only the miracle ("the saving act of God which intervenes from above, from beyond whatever is historically attainable or probable, and creates new life out of the void") is the ultimate solution. But one cannot therefore turn away from the historically operating force of order which "God makes use of...in order to preserve the world from destruction." (Ibid., p. 44)
25. Ibid., pp. 39-40.
26. Ibid., pp. 262-3: "The cross of atonement is the setting free for life before God in the midst of the godless world; it is the setting free for life in genuine worldliness." Here is the anticipation of the concern of the Letters and Papers from Prison.
27. Ethics, p. 67.
28. Hamilton, p. 465.
29. Ethics, pp. 70-71.
30. Letters, p. 91 (April 30, 1944).
31. Ibid., p. 91.
32. Of course, Bonhoeffer will have to affirm this "better secularism in another way as his thought develops, just as he will have to affirm a properly understood "religion" as the inevitable partner of Christian faith before he completes his prison letters.
33. See below, pp. 211-212.
34. April 30, 1944. Letters, p. 91.
35. June 8, 1944. Ibid., pp. 106-7. Bonhoeffer sees the beginning of this process in the Renaissance, but has no desire to be more specific. It began "with the beginning of the discovery of the laws by which the world lives." Later, he speaks of it as "one great development" which "leads to the idea of the autonomy

of the world." The names Bonhoeffer thinks important in this development are worth recording: In theology, beginning with Lord Herbert of Cherbury (d.1633), reason became the proper instrument of religious knowledge. Developments in ethics by Ibn-taigne (d.1592) and Bodin (d.1596) saw moral principles supplant the Ten Commandments. In politics, Machiavelli (d.1527) described statecraft as responsive to "reasons of state" rather than to morality. Grotius (d.1645) applied the phrase etsi deus non daretur ("as though God were not given") within the area of law. Descartes (d.1650), then Kant and Spinoza, Fichte, and Hegel adapted the same principle to philosophy; Feuerbach carried it into religion. Finally, Nicholas of Cusa (d.1464) and Bruno (d.1600) discovered for natural science the infinity of space.

36. Ibid., p. 107.
37. Ibid., p. 107.
38. April 30, 1944 (Ibid., p. 91): "We are proceeding towards a time of no religion at all", "...if we reach the stage of being radically without religion — and I think this is more or less the case already.;" June 8, 1944 (Ibid., p. 107); July 16, 1944 (Ibid., pp. 121-2).
39. July 16, 1944. Ibid., pp. 121-2.
40. Hamilton, p. 451.
41. Hamilton, p. 452: "The new thing in Bonhoeffer's thought is neither the open acknowledgement of the inevitability of secularization, nor the particular Christology, but the combination of these two factors."
42. See below, chapter 15.
43. See above, pp. 211-212.
44. Cf. Appendix, "Letter from Karl Barth to Superintendent P.W. Herrenbrück".
45. Regin Prenter, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer und Karl Barths Offenbarungspositivismus," MS III, p. 12.
46. April 30, 1944. Letters, pp. 91-2.
47. May 5, 1944. Ibid., pp. 94-5.
48. June 8, 1944. Ibid., p. 109.
49. MS III, p. 21.
50. Ibid., p. 13.

51. Ibid., p. 15
52. Ibid., p. 15.
53. Church Dogmatics, I/2, pp. 280-361. This section, called "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion," is summarized and analyzed in Daniel Jenkins, Beyond Religion, London, 1962, pp. 26-33. Cf. also below, pp.
54. August 3, 1944. Letters, p. 128.
55. June 8, 1944. Ibid., p. 109.
56. MS III, pp. 21ff.
57. Cf. above, pp. , and below, pp.
58. C. West, op. cit., pp. 180-181.
59. Ibid., p. 352.
60. SC, p. 119.
61. Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 413. While preserving the dialectical basis for his ecclesiology which kept him from the extreme theological position Bonhoeffer was forced to take during the Kirchenkampf, Barth came to a more positive evaluation of the nature of the Church in the Church Dogmatics:
 "At the same time as we describe the hearing of God by men as the mark of the church we at the same time stress: her humanity, her worldliness, her profanity... The church takes in her existence in her form and message part in the darkness of men, whom God has forsaken and who are and remain forsaken if they are not found by God. She takes even more part in this darkness, she is more profane than the usual things of the world, because just the man listening to God — and he only in truth! — knows about his profanity. It is the real church which is not strange to men, which overall and above all is the church of men, the church of a particular time, people, speech, culture. But from this point is her sympathy, indeed solidarity with the world at the deepest point and where it appears clearest in the world — her politics, science, art — made most visible: in the church the boundaries of mankind are drawn and guarded; in the church no ideology is served; in the church man must see and understand himself soberly: in his mortality, in his emptiness, in his solitude, in his loneliness. The world was not always thankful to the church for ignoring her gods. There was as you know

a time when the church was followed for this reason. The church would perhaps be followed again if she were able to make it clearer to the world that she differs from the world insofar as she must ignore her gods. But one may not overlook: just in this differentiation is she more worldly than the world, more humanistic than the theologians, nearer than both to the real sense of the human-tragic-comedy of man's attempt to help himself, only then can be genuine when she keeps all pomp and pretension outside of her natural boundaries."(IV/2, pp. 556-7).

This, then, is the thinking behind Barth's lack of interest in any theological concern for "a world come of age". The proper response of the church to any efforts of the world to ignore her, attack her, isolate her, or secularize her because of any alteration in the world's self-understanding is and will always be more careful description of the limits of mankind and the distinctiveness of her own self-understanding. Only in this way can she be for the world. Cf. below, note 87; pp. 212-216.

62. SC, p. 83.
63. AB, pp. 80-81.
64. W.A. 23.157, quoted in AB, p. 81n.
65. AB, pp. 90-91.
66. In Antwort: Karl Barth zum siebenzigsten Geburtstag, Zürich, 1956; quoted in Torrance, Karl Barth, an Introduction to his Early Theology 1910-1931, London, 1952, p. 835f.
67. For the early development of Barth's theology from the Epistle to the Romans to the Church Dogmatics, cf. Torrance, op. cit. and von Balthasar, op. cit.
68. Cf. C.G. Berkouwer, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth, Herdians, 1956.
69. Cf. Emil Brunner, "The New Barth", Scottish Journal of Theology, June, 1951.
70. "The Humanity of God", op. cit., p. 37.
71. Ibid., p. 37
72. Ibid., p. 42.
73. Ibid., pp. 43, 45.

74. Ibid., p. 47.
75. Ibid., p. 46.
76. Ibid., p. 52.
77. Ibid., p. 57.
78. Ibid., pp. 58-9.
79. Cf. below, pp. 295ff.
80. "Humanity of God", p. 53.
81. Compare Barth's treatment of "non-religious language" in "The Humanity of God" with his view of demythologizing, expressed in the preface to Church Dogmatics III/4: "there must always be room in theology for this" (p. xi).
82. Church Dogmatics IV/3, part I, pp. 18-33.
83. Ibid., p. 19.
84. Ibid., pp. 19-20.
85. Ethics, p. 31.
86. A widespread misunderstanding, according to J.A.T. Robinson, Honest to God, London, 1963, p. 104.
87. Ibid., p. 104. Barth used the phrase in a criticism of Liberal theology several years before Bonhoeffer spoke of a "world come of age". No doubt he has since identified Bonhoeffer's position with the one he criticized at that time. In any case, the argument is the same as that used in Church Dogmatics IV/3:

"Western humanity has come of age, or thinks it has. It can now dispense with its teacher — and as such official Christianity has in fact felt and believed... In the reconsideration of itself and its possibilities imposed by the new situation, (the church) did not attain again to the weakness in which alone it can always be strong. Instead it inwardly affirmed the new situation, as it had previously affirmed the old. That is to say, it accepted modern man with his energetic attitude to himself, asking how best Christianity could be commended to that man. It took up the role allotted to it, and was at pains to make itself indispensable to it, i.e. by pointing out or demonstrating that if there is a truth in the Christian religion which can profitably be heard and believed, especially in the modern age,

it consists in this, that properly understood, the doctrine of Jesus Christ and the way of life which corresponds to it, has the secret of giving to man the inward capacity to seek and attain the aim and purpose which he has independently chosen." (Church Dogmatics I/2, p. 336.)

88. Ethics, p. 32
89. Cf. above, note 87; Church Dogmatics I/1, pp. 166-7, I/2, pp. 333-7.
90. As recently as his essay on "The Humanity of God," Barth was reasserting his familiar position concerning the question of reopening conversation with Liberal theologians: "Let one read the doctrine of Troeltsch! ...the dogmatics of Seeberg! If all that wasn't a blind alley!" (p. 41). Barth simply cannot take the world with its history and secularity seriously, because the electing and justifying grace of God has already made the subject and all conversation about it unnecessary and uninteresting.
91. Church Dogmatics IV/2, pp. 66-83.
92. Ibid., p. 66.
93. Ibid., p. 66.
94. Ibid., p. 76.
95. Ibid., pp. 81-2
96. Cf. above, pp. 202-3.
97. "Challenge", p. 9. Bonhoeffer maintained this in spite of his acceptance of the theological direction Barth indicated in the nineteen twenties. In 1936, in a letter cited by Bethge (Ibid., p. 9), Bonhoeffer reiterated his fundamental belief in the correctness of this traditional Lutheran view which, as is well known, Barth has always regarded with suspicion.
98. MW III, pp. 21ff.
99. "Challenge", p. 10.
100. Cf. "The Secret Discipline", above, pp.
101. Cf. above, pp. 36-7, 46-7.
102. Friedrich Gogarten, Demythologizing and History, ET London, 1955, p. 32.
103. June 8, 1944. Letters, p. 103.
104. Troeltsch, Protestantism and Progress, op. cit., p. 10.
105. Troeltsch, Social Teachings..., I, op. cit., p. 42.

106. Protestantism and Progress, op. cit., pp. 47-3.
107. Ibid., p. 50. Italics mine.
108. Ibid., p. 37.
109. Ibid., p. 233.
110. Social Teachings..., I, op. cit., p. 32.
111. Ibid., II, p. 1006.
112. Troeltsch, Der Historismus und seine Probleme, p. 109, quoted in Gogarten, op. cit., p. 32.
113. Dilthey, Gesammelte Schriften, II, quoted in Gogarten, op. cit., pp. 31-2. Dilthey was quite explicit as to the basis of the religious life in "imperishable" metaphysics. In a characteristic statement, he wrote:

"This metaphysical consciousness is imperishable; as the plants prepare the roots for the next spring in the depths of the earth even as they bloom and fade, this metaphysical consciousness is in the depths of mankind... It is the final business of all transcendence philosophy to approach this." (Gesammelte Schriften II, Leipzig and Berlin, 1914, p. 496)
114. May 5, 1944. Letters, p. 94.
115. Gogarten, op. cit., p. 19.
116. Ibid., p. 11.
117. This is the central theme of what is to date the clearest and most persuasive presentation of Gogarten's position: Gogarten, Verhängnis und Hoffnung der Neuzeit, 2. Aufl., Stuttgart, 1953.
118. Demythologizing and History, op. cit., pp. 21-4.
119. Ibid., pp. 30-33.
120. Verhängnis und Hoffnung..., op. cit., p. 8.
121. Ibid., p. 12.
122. R.G. Smith and J. Corbett, "The Disappearing God," in The Listener, Jan. 21, 1960, p. 127. A good definition of the "old gods" from which the world is freed by the incarnation — bringing into the discussion Paul's letter to the Galatians concerning the "weak and beggerly elemental spirits" (4:9) banished by Christ — might be that of the humanist Julian Luxley: "Gods are creations of man, personalized representations of the forces of destiny, with their unity projected into them by human thought and imagination." (Religion Without Revelation, New York, 1957, p. 49.

123. Verdammnis und Hoffenar...., op. cit., p. 8.
124. Ibid., pp. 12ff.
125. Demythologizing and History, op. cit., p. 20.
126. See below, pp. 268ff.
127. It should be remembered that Sultmann's program was not as clearly defined during the war (when Bonhoeffer learned of it) as it is at the present day. Certainly Bonhoeffer misunderstood Sultmann's intention, and probably this misunderstanding had its roots in a very common misconception. Gogarten writes:

"It is widely supposed -- and indeed on both sides -- that the object of the discussion is to achieve an understanding of Christian belief which is compatible with the thought of our day, that the controversy arose in the name of modern thought and is being carried on with modern thought in view. It is not indeed suggested that its purpose is to relieve modern thought of the necessity of making a difficult decision, without which there can be no Christian faith, or to make belief 'easy' for it, but rather that it aims at enabling modern thought simply to know once again what Christian faith involves. ...It is concerned with very much more than that. It is the Christian faith itself which demands its due, and it is for its sake that the controversy must be pursued." (Demythologizing and History, op. cit., p. 10.)
128. As Hammelebeck reminds us, "We cannot speak theologically of the world come of age without asking at the same time how Christ the Lord accepts or rejects such a world. What is involved is how the world is laid claim to by Christ." (LW I, p. 47). Cp. Hamilton, p. 452, quoted in note 41 above.

Part III (B)

This - Worldly Transcendence

Chapter 14

Christ, the Worldly Man

Jesus did not call men to a new "religion", but to life.

(Letters, July 18, 1944 (pp. 123-4))

Three central theological ideas follow the Christological affirmation of "the world come of age" which Bonhoeffer makes in his prison letters. Although several themes weave in and out of Bonhoeffer's letters beginning with the letter of April 30, 1944, these scattered thoughts may be collected and set in order beneath three headings: "this-worldly transcendence," "the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts," and "sharing in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world." These phrases are closely dependent upon one another, with the third representing the final unification of Bonhoeffer's vision and suggesting the corrective to certain dangers to which the other two, taken by themselves, are susceptible. In this final section, we shall examine each of these in turn.

We have suggested that these conceptions are products of the impact of Bonhoeffer's new Christological affirmation of the secular as a theological theme upon his earlier formulation of a Christology and a doctrine of revelation. The "space" of revelation which Bonhoeffer located in the church as "the community of revelation" or "Christ existing as the church" now becomes "the world come of age". In this world, the church and the traditional "content" of Christian faith (biblical-dogmatic concepts, the doctrines of God and the church, devotional and communal Christian activity) become "hidden" or "secret"; Christian faith becomes a dialectical process uniting

certain notions concerning Christology, transcendence, and discipleship in such a way that the Christian is freed for life in a secular, godless world.

"This-worldly transcendence" outlines Bonhoeffer's rejection of the traditional Christian doctrine of God and its replacement by an understanding of transcendence focused on the worldly humanity of Christ and participation, through him, in the life of the mature world.

"The non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts" explores the consequences of this for theology, faith, and the life of the church. Finally, a view of discipleship which attempts to recover a worldly form of imitatio Christi as the center of a theology of revelation is described as "sharing in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world." We shall be concerned in this chapter with "this-worldly transcendence" and with the Christology with which Bonhoeffer defended it.

I. Loving God in this World.

We have already made some preliminary investigations into the nature of Bonhoeffer's protest against "religion,"¹ and we have had much more to say about the development of secularism as a theological theme. The prison letters are filled with passages which express fascination with what Bonhoeffer now calls, exclusively, "worldliness" and a corresponding horror of "religion" and "religiosity". Frequent meditations on the goodness of middle-class life, history and psychology, memory, travel, friendship, the meanings of "time" and "shame", and especially on art and music are oddly punctuated with "a suspicion and horror of 'religiosity'",² "forcing religion down one's throat,"³ or an inability to "utter the name of God."⁴ Bonhoeffer brought his love for the worldly and his growing uneasiness about religion into a letter

which related the two as "ultimate" and "penultimate" matters:

It is only when one loves life and the earth so much that without them everything would be gone, that one can believe in the resurrection and a new world. It is only when one submits to the law that one may speak of grace, and only when one sees the anger and wrath of God hanging like grim realities over the heads of one's enemies that one can know something of what it means to love them and forgive them. I don't think it is Christian to want to get to the New Testament too soon and too directly... You cannot and must not speak the last word before you have spoken the next-to-last. We live on the next-to-last word and believe on the last, don't we? Lutherans (so-called) and pietists would be shocked by such an idea, but it is true all the same. In my Cost of Discipleship I just hinted at this (in Chap..1), but did not carry it any further. I must do so some day. The consequences are far-reaching, e.g. for the problem of Catholicism, for the doctrine of the ministry, for the use of the Bible., and above all for ethics. 5

e/ These comments are followed by an appreciation of the worldliness of the life of the Old Testament as opposed to the New. The emphasis falls upon the "penultimate," the "this-worldliness" of the Christian life as the means of witnessing to the "ultimate," and we notice that Bonhoeffer recognizes that his theme is at some remove from certain traditional Lutheran tendencies.⁶ One must turn first to this world for an understanding of the meaning of the Christian life of faith.

The next development in Bonhoeffer's concern comes within a few days, one week before Christmas, 1943. He reasserts the goodness of life and the love of the world, but now there is a real tension between this world and what he calls, for the first time, "the transcendent":

And on the Christian aspect of the matter, there are some lines which say:

...that we remember, what we would fain forget,
That this poor earth is not our home

-- a very important sentiment, though one which can only come right at the end; for I am sure we ought to love God in our lives and in all the blessings he sends us. We should trust him in our lives, so that when the time comes, but not before, we may go to him in love and trust and joy. But, speaking frankly, to long for the transcendent when you are in your wife's arms is, to put it mildly, a lack of taste, and it is certainly not what God expects of us. We ought to find God and love him in the blessings he sends us. If he pleases to grant us some overwhelming earthly bliss, we ought not to try and be more religious than God himself. For then we should spoil that bliss by our presumption and arrogance; we should be letting our religious fantasies run riot and refusing to be satisfied with what he gives us. Once a man has found God in his earthly bliss and has thanked him for it, there will be plenty of opportunities for him to remind himself that these earthly pleasures are only transitory, and that it is good for him to accustom himself to the idea of eternity, and there will be many hours in which he can say with all sincerity, "I would that I were home." But everything in its season...7

At least part of what Bonhoeffer means by "religion" is included in the meaning of the word "transcendence", and he reveals here that his is not simply the conventional protest against religiosity and piety. Transcendence is necessary, but it has a proper place and a proper time. There is in the Christian life an element of other-worldliness, longing for the eternal, desire for what is not revealed in this world. But this world can also serve as the way to the other, and the love of the earth is said to be a proper way of expressing one's love for God -- although the time will come when the believer will be required to turn away from the world toward his true home. Later, Bonhoeffer lessened the tension between other-worldly and this-worldly by comparing it to polyphonic form in music:

What I mean is that God requires that we should love him eternally with our whole hearts, yet not so as to compromise or diminish our earthly affections, but as a kind of cantus firmus to which the other melodies of life pro-

vide the counterpoint. Earthly affection is one of these contrapuntal themes, a theme which enjoys an autonomy of its own.⁸

Bonhoeffer is searching for a genuine transcendence, one which allows the Christian to bear witness to it in his life in this world. There is a false kind of transcendence in view of which the believer thinks it possible to escape the cares and longings of this world, "renouncing a full life and all its joys in order to escape pain."⁹ Genuine transcendence "accepts the life God gives us with all its blessings, loving it and drinking it to the full, grieving deeply and sincerely when we have belittled or thrown away any of the precious things of life..."¹⁰ Bonhoeffer finally brings the false and proper views of transcendence together in one letter:

Religious people speak of God when human perception is (often just from laziness) at an end, or human resources fail: it is in fact always the Deus ex machina they call to their aid... I should like to speak of God not on the borders of life but at its center, not in weakness but in strength, not, therefore, in man's suffering and death but in his life and prosperity... The beyond of God is not the beyond of our perceptive faculties. The transcendence of epistemological theory has nothing to do with the transcendence of God. God is the beyond in the midst of our life. The church stands not where human powers give out, on the borders, but in the center of the village. That is the way it is in the Old Testament, and in this sense we still read the New Testament far too little on the basis of the Old. The outward aspect of this religionless Christianity, the form it takes, is something to which I am giving much thought...¹¹

"Religionless Christianity," then, is Christianity which has had the proper meaning of transcendence and witness to the transcendence restored to it. It does not turn man's back upon his life in the world and his face toward God, but directs him toward God and the world at one and the same time. God, the transcendent, is active in this world. Therefore the Christian can and may and must live in this world and, by doing so,

bear witness to God in this world. When the notion of a "world come of age" enters into Bonhoeffer's thinking with the letter from which we have just quoted, the question of "this-worldly transcendence" takes on new meaning and becomes much more urgent. For now "men no longer believe in a transcendent realm where their longings will be fulfilled."¹² A radical adjustment becomes necessary, both in the way in which God is spoken of and in the interpretation of Christ as the center of the Gospel message. We are speaking, in short, of a revolution in the meaning of revelation. First, let us see what is to become of the doctrine of God.

II. God Edged Out of the World.

"This-worldly transcendence" attacks a particular way of speaking about God's transcendence and his relation to the world. One should notice carefully, and perhaps in spite of Bonhoeffer's somewhat crude way of putting it: God himself is not removed from the world, but rather (in the words of one commentator) "a certain way of speaking about God and on his behalf."¹³ The traditional way of speaking about God involves an "abstract belief in his omnipotence," "a religious relationship to a supreme being absolute in power and goodness," "a concentration upon tasks beyond our scope and power," "the absolute, metaphysical, infinite, etc."¹⁴ There may have been a time when this way of speaking about God's transcendence was the correct way, but it is no longer acceptable in a world which has come of age. From the perspective of the worldly man, the man who participates in the maturity of the world, God has been withdrawn from one area after another as the maturing world moved into and occupied spheres and began to exercise powers formerly ascribed to him. God is relegated to the terra incognita

of our experiential and intellectual maps. The problem is not whether there will still remain some "spaces for God" for a long time to come, but whether these ought to remain. God belongs in the midst of the world, in the world made up, for the most part, of those spaces from which he has been withdrawn. He exercises his Lordship over the world which has come of age and which has taken control of its own affairs. But thus far, the church has not seemed to recognize that there can be a difference between believing in God and fighting a battle to prove his existence. R. Gregor Smith has put it this way:

We have been all too ready, especially since the great break-through of the Renaissance, to fight a kind of battle against the world on behalf of God. Here too the church has desired, as it were, to rescue God from the consequences of his own recklessness first in creating and then in saving his world. God's liberating action in his Word -- which...can be seen as truly liberating only when it is seen more than as an isolated occurrence in history -- has been disallowed by the common sense of Christian people as altogether too dashing, too audacious and foolhardy. So when the breakthrough of man's spirit beat back the Christian warrior from one entrenched position after another, the Christian response in recent centuries has varied little. Before the advancing battalions of intelligence and reason and scepticism, as one area after another was captured for technology, or science, or psychology, God has been rescued by too willing hands. The children of light have been happily engaged in drawing God back into the darkness, beyond the frontiers of assured life, into the region which is euphemistically called the mystery of God. The mystery of God has been equated with a kind of terra incognita, as an as-yet unknowable rather than a truly ineffable mystery, which is to say a present mystery whose mystery is an actual, encountered, lived experience of an incomprehensible but not inapprehensible gift. The consequences of this series of retreats have been distortion of the understanding of God, confusion among the ranks of both sides, and dishonor of God's name.¹⁵

Transcendence as an "as-yet unknowable" area of

human life is, then, not the transcendence of God. Is there a way in which a man can think about God and witness to him without sacrificing his worldliness on the one hand or God's genuine transcendence of him and the world on the other?

Bonhoeffer suggests several times that the proper description of God will not only take account of his "removal" from the world but that this removal is, at the same time, a positive revelation of him. In the past few decades of theological thought, we have become accustomed to the phrase "God is known by his absence." Bonhoeffer would have liked this, and he would have referred to the ground of this odd phrase in what the New Testament has to say about weakness, powerlessness, suffering, and forsakenness. At one point, he wrote:

And the only way to be honest is to recognize that we have to live in the world etsi deus non daretur. And this is just what we do see — before God! So our coming of age forces us to a true recognition of our situation vis-a-vis God. God is teaching us that we must live as men who can get along very well without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34). The God who makes us live in this world without using him as a working hypothesis is the God before whom we are ever standing. Before God and with him we live without God. God allows himself to be edged out of the world and on to the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world, and that is exactly the way, the only way in which he can be with us and help us. Matthew 8:17 makes it crystal-clear that it is not by his omnipotence that Christ helps us, but by his weakness and suffering.

This is the decisive difference between Christianity and all religions. Man's religiosity makes him look in his distress to the power of God in the world; he uses God as a deus ex machina. The Bible, however, directs him to the powerlessness and suffering of God; only a suffering God can help. To this extent we may say that the process we have described by which the world came of age was an abandonment of a false conception of God and a clearing of the decks for the God of the Bible, who conquers space and power in the world by his weakness.¹⁶

There is good reason to doubt that Bonhoeffer has done full justice to "the God of the Bible" by referring simply to weakness and suffering; certainly one would want to say more especially about the record of the Old Testament. But it is certain that he wishes to focus on the element of powerlessness which is very much present, in both the Old Testament and the New. One must speak of God's transcendence without speaking of God at all, without turning to a doctrine of God. God takes away all descriptions of himself which proceed from a doctrine of God in order to allow the world to be itself. In this much, Christians can justifiably be called "atheists". But Bonhoeffer has also described the cross as the solution to the problem of how one speaks of God, and has laid the groundwork for a theologia crucis. The cross proclaims the disappearance of God from the world. But the cross remains in the world, and this means that one should look to Christ — to his weakness and suffering and forsakenness and powerlessness — for those things for which one formerly looked to God. For if God has disappeared, Christ is at hand, and "all that we rightly expect from God and pray for is to be found in Jesus Christ."¹⁷

The God of Jesus Christ has nothing to do with all that we, in our human way, think he can and ought to do. We must persevere in quiet meditation on the life, sayings, deeds, sufferings, and death of Jesus in order to learn what God promises and what he fulfils. One thing is certain: we must always live close to the presence of God, for that is newness of life...¹⁸

"This-worldly transcendence" will thus be grounded in Christology.

III. The Man for Others.

The Christology of the prison letters, like the

Christology of 1933, concentrates on the person and work of Christ and sets aside consideration of the church as the Body of Christ. We find ourselves back in the realm of the theologia crucis, of the humiliated Christ, and of the Lutheran Christology of condescension which causes Barth such uneasiness.¹⁹ Bonhoeffer uses such a Christology in order to defend his thoughts on the "world come of age" which, he argues, is grounded in the revelation of God in Christ. "The world's coming of age is...really understood better than it understands itself, namely on the basis of the Gospel, and in the light of Christ."²⁰ He also turns to Christology in order to define "this-worldly transcendence" and to guard his idea against possible misinterpretations:

It is not with this 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 for this world -- I mean that not in the anthropomorphic sense of liberal, pietistic, ethical theology, but in the Bible sense of the creation and the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. 21

William Hamilton, in his ordering of the material in the prison letters, suggests that Bonhoeffer moves forward from a general, rather blurred Christological view of his discoveries along two lines which become quite distinct.²² Bonhoeffer does not seem at first to recognize the tension between them and attempt to reconcile them. On the one hand, there is the Christ who "drinks the earthly cup to the lees" and suffers upon the cross. On the other, we have described for us the worldly man who "never throws doubt on a man's health, vigour, and fortune," who "claims for himself and the Kingdom of God the whole of human life in all its manifestations."²³ The tension between these two perspectives, Hamilton suggests, is the tension between the Christology

lectures of 1933, where Bonhoeffer adhered closely to a Lutheran humiliation Christology, and the emphasis on the worldly life and activity of Jesus expressed in the Cost of Discipleship and the Ethics. Only at the end of the prison letters do we find these conflicting Christological views reconciled.

There is good evidence for this view of the development of Bonhoeffer's Christology. His determination to demonstrate that revelation is concrete, graspable and haveable in Christ led him to draw upon traditions which were not always compatible. The Lutheran Christology of condescension stressed the humble givenness of God in Christ in the Incarnation, and Bonhoeffer found this a useful support for a notion with which to combat the abstract and inapprehensible God of the dialecticians. But this tradition included the hiddenness and submission of Christ. Bonhoeffer managed to accept the tradition in its entirety for his 1933 lectures, by making the humiliated Christ that which is actually seen — both in the sacrament and in the church as the Body of Christ.

We know, however, that Bonhoeffer's thoughts were already beginning to be occupied with the possibility of a positive and vigorous protest against the world. The date of these lectures is, at the same time, the date when a direction in his thinking came to an end.²⁴ Revelation and concretion were now the church — a particular church, for this was a church at war with the world. There was no room here for submission, humiliation, and invisibility. If Bonhoeffer could shed his ecclesiological container in writing the Ethics, it was only because his vision of a visible and worldly Christ was related to a view of Christ's triumphant Lordship.

The Christology of the prison letters confronts these two themes with one another. At first, and throughout most of the prison letters, the stress falls upon the theme of "Christ, the triumphant Lord." Jesus Christ rules the world and our lives.²⁵ He is the bridge back to the worldliness of the Old Testament, and as Lord of both books of the Bible, he cannot be divorced from the Old Testament in order to be interpreted in the light of the salvation myths — i.e., as the answer to man's unfulfilled longings and desires.²⁶ "Christ is in the center of life, and in no sense did he come to answer our unsolved problems."²⁷ At the same time, one apprehends Jesus as the Lord of life by recognizing him to be "a man, pure and simple,"²⁸ who calls children, the Wise Men, shepherds, Joseph of Arimathea and the women at the tomb to come to him.²⁹ Jesus' life on earth makes our lives on earth worth living.³⁰

But with increasing insistence and boldness, Bonhoeffer wished to support his contention that Christianity has primarily to do with this world by directing us to Jesus' cross, humiliation and suffering. "Matthew 8:17 makes it crystal clear that it is not by his omnipotence that Christ helps us, but by his suffering and weakness." We are to "stand by God in his hour of grieving"³¹, to "watch with Christ in Gethsemane."³² This real presence of Christ in his weakness and suffering is the theme of the 1933 lectures. One recalls, for example, such passages as:

If Jesus Christ is to be described as God, then one must speak not about his divine essence, but only about this weak man among sinners, about his cradle and his cross. If we are speaking about the divinity of Jesus we must speak especially of his weakness.³³

Now Bonhoeffer makes use of this stress on the humiliation of Jesus as the basis of his plea for a this-worldly understanding of transcendence. As Hanfried Müller writes, "The entry of God into the man Jesus Christ in the world is the ground of the this-worldliness of Christianity. To this this-worldliness corresponds the suffering of God in the world."³⁴ Jesus is the man in whom God reveals himself, and He reveals himself by absenting himself in His power and glory. In this way, God reveals to us the this-worldly nature of his transcendence. Jesus is the man who is "lonely and forsaken (and) without transcendent escape... He, though longing for him, does not experience the deus ex machina."³⁵

Two final formulas overcome what tension there is between this-worldliness based upon the cross and this-worldliness based upon Jesus' life. The first of these, "sharing in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world,"³⁶ describes a faith which involves one directly in the being of Jesus, in his life and in his forsakenness. Men "must live worldly lives and so participate in the sufferings of God."³⁷ Bonhoeffer has taken such care to keep this from being interpreted as "simply the expression of a pessimistic world view"³⁸ that it is deeply disappointing to find Barth dismissing the letters as one more chapter in the history of "the melancholy theology of the north german plains."³⁹ The Old Testament blessing, Bonhoeffer reminds us, may not be set against the cross -- blessing and cross are not mutually exclusive and contradictory. Kierkegaard failed to realize this, and as a result he made the cross into a principle of the structure and life of the world.⁴⁰ This-sidedness, the penultimate, stands under the cross, but this in no way negates or denies the world:

...God comes in the world, but not as God, but rather as man; not in power, but in powerlessness; not in activity, but in suffering. In this suffering — but not in the suffering of the world — God is to be found; and therefore Bonhoeffer, unlike Kierkegaard, can see the world positively, optimistically, affirmatively, happy in itself, and at the same time find God in his sufferings in the affirmed, mature world — such that his theology is to this extent ever more governed by the cross. In this way, his theology is optimistically this-worldly.⁴¹

The other formula is "Jesus, the man for others". This characterization is carefully and deliberately unfolded as the Christological basis for this-worldly transcendence. It occurs in a passage to which we shall have to return in our last chapter and examine from another perspective; in the "Outline for a Book", where it serves as the sketch for a part of the projected second chapter:

What is God? Not in the first place a general belief in God's omnipotence, etc. That is not genuine experience of God, but rather a piece of prolonged world. Encounter with Jesus. The experience that here one has to do with a reversal of all human being, in that Jesus is there solely "for others". This "being for others" of Jesus is the experience of transcendence! Out of the freedom from himself, out of the "being-for-others" to the point of death emerges omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence. Faith is the participation in this being of Jesus. (Crucifixion, incarnation, resurrection.) Our relationship to God is no "religious" relationship to some conceivable highest, most powerful, best nature — that is not genuine transcendence — but our relationship to God is a new life in "being-for-others," in the participation in the being of Jesus. Not the eternal, unattainable tasks, but the already given and attainable neighbor is the transcendent. God in the form of man! ...but not the greek god-man type of "man in himself", but "man for others"! — therefore, the Crucified. Man who lives out of the transcendent.⁴²

The "haveability" of Christ⁴³, his being "pro-me"⁴⁴, his "taking form in the world" — all of Bonhoeffer's previous Christological formulations which stressed the

real presence and availability of Christ for faith — have culminated in the formula: Christ, the man for others. Encounter with the being of Jesus for others is the experience of transcendence — this-worldly transcendence. There can be no doubt that Bonhoeffer has committed himself wholeheartedly to the kind of Lutheran development Barth deplored, with all of its risks. The finite world is capable of the infinite; / This world bears the other world, and it does so in Christ's absolute givenness "for others".

Bonhoeffer retains an important check on the misinterpretation of his formula — the "secret discipline", which structures and witnesses to that hope and love which cannot be stated in terms of this world, in and of itself; simply because there is nothing in the world which might serve as an analogy.⁴⁵ This too is given in Jesus Christ; given for all men, but kept and protected as a treasure for those who "have ears to hear". This does not make less pertinent the question whether Bonhoeffer could have constructed an orthodox Christology from the standpoint of "Christ, the man for others".⁴⁶

But Bonhoeffer was not at this time concerned with the vulnerability of his position. He knew only that the recovery of this-worldly transcendence was essential if Christianity was to have something to do with the man who had come of age, and that this transcendence could be located in Jesus' being for others, through "meditation on the life, sayings, deeds, sufferings, and death of Jesus" and thus learning what God promises and what he fulfils.⁴⁷ What would come later he did not know, and did not live to say. Nor can we say. We must content ourselves with:

For Christians, heathens alike he hangeth
dead:
And both alike forgiving.⁴⁸

Chapter 15

Religionless Christianity

Of all of the original ideas and notions which Bonhoeffer developed during his lifetime, one has been the object of more interest, the cause of more concern, and the target for more criticism than any other. The full title of this notion is "the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts," but this has usually been made the key phrase for Bonhoeffer's later theology in a shortened form: "religionless Christianity." It is certain that Bonhoeffer, in speaking of "the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts," wished to examine more closely the implications of his thinking on "this-worldly transcendence" for traditional Christian theology. He found himself responding to the questions raised by his contemporaries and directing their attention to the questions he wished to raise. His interpreters, coming upon his attempts to clarify his thoughts and set them in order as a trained theologian, have made these attempts the focal point of the prison letters and have ^{subsumed} subjected all of the ideas which appear there to the clarification, ^{beneath the headings} ~~proving or disproving~~ of "religionless Christianity."

Whether Bonhoeffer would have wanted to see this phrase (which has by this time become something of a slogan)⁴⁹ used to characterize the whole of his thinking in the prison letters is doubtful. It has certainly remained the most elusive and most problematic of his ideas, the one he defended most poorly, and consequently the one most easily misunderstood and dismissed. It is unfortunate that "this worldly transcendence" and "sharing in the sufferings of God" have been ignored or forgotten in this;

separated from its conceptual partners, "non-religious Christianity" loses its Christological foundation. Checked and interpreted by the other two, however, this notion can provide the door into the difficult technical problems arising from Bonhoeffer's program, and enable one to see what his concern is in the light of what other theologians are thinking. Several questions are suddenly thrown into sharp relief by the meditation on "non-religious Christianity": What does Bonhoeffer mean by "religion"? How is "religion" related to the essential Christian proclamation? Can the kerygma be interpreted "non-religiously"? Can a demand to interpret the kerygma in such a way be grounded exegetically? How does Bonhoeffer's thinking relate to that of other theologians -- mainly Bultmann and Tillich -- who seem to share his interests? And what corrections would he make of the course of the theological current which today imagines itself to be reflecting Bonhoeffer's concern: the hermeneutical problem?

Non-religious Christianity is not all that Bonhoeffer has to say, but it is an important part of his concern. We must therefore examine this phrase, and the questions it raises, very closely.

I. The Religious A Priori.

The attack upon religion made in the prison letters has its roots far back in Bonhoeffer's thinking. The effort to give shape and direction to this attack begins in the Ethics, where "thinking in terms of two spheres" is rejected and worldliness and "promising godlessness" are affirmed.⁵⁰ The protest against religion which presupposed this rejection and defense became explicit for the first time in the letter Bonhoeffer wrote to Bethge from the Munich train in June, 1942.⁵¹ Henceforth, Bonhoeffer-

for's disapproval of "the religious" and "otherworldliness" went hand in hand with a defense of "loving God in the blessings he sends us." Gradually, in the prison letters, Bonhoeffer sharpened the more positive side of his discovery into "this-worldly transcendence" and provided it with a Christological foundation. His uneasiness with "the religious" took a decisive turn in his letter of April 30, 1944:

The time when men can be told everything by means of words -- whether theological or simply pious -- is over, and so is the time of inwardness and conscience, which is to say the time of religion in general. We are moving toward a completely religionless time; men simply cannot, as they now are, be religious anymore. Even those who honestly describe themselves as "religious" do not in the least act up to it, and so when they say "religious" they evidently mean something quite different. Our whole nineteen hundred year old Christian preaching and theology rests upon the "religious a priori" of mankind. What we call Christianity has always been a pattern -- perhaps a true pattern -- of "religion". But if one day it becomes apparent that this "a priori" simply does not exist, but was a historical and temporary form of human self-expression -- i.e., if mankind becomes radically religionless -- and I think this is more or less the case already... -- what does this mean for "Christendom"?

...If we had finally to put down the western pattern of Christianity as a mere preliminary stage to doing without religion altogether, what situation would result for us, for the church? How can Christ become the Lord of those with no religion as well? Are there religionless Christians? If religion is no more than the garment of Christianity -- and even that garment has had very different aspects at different periods -- then what is a religionless Christianity?⁵²

These paragraphs will occupy us in the next two sections of this chapter.

Our first impression is that Bonhoeffer has rejected afresh the Liberal theology of his teachers, in line with the denial of "religion" which he made from the time of his earliest theological writings.⁵³ Interestingly,

the touchstone in Bonhoeffer's past is not the doctrine of the church outlined in Sanctorum Communio, which criticized the understanding of the church as a "religious community"⁵⁴; Bonhoeffer speaks rather of the disappearance of the "religious a priori," of the end of "inwardness" and "conscience". We find ourselves back in the pages of Act and Being, where Bonhoeffer dismissed the "religious spaces" of his teachers, Reinhold Seeberg and Karl Holl.⁵⁵

In his Habilitationsschrift, Bonhoeffer introduced Seeberg's metaphysical notion of a "religious a priori" as an example of the apologetical method of many nineteenth century protestant theologians. The clarity and precision of Seeberg's Dogmatics made his formulation of this widely-used concept a useful foil for Bonhoeffer's argument. According to Seeberg (and as we have developed at length in the first ^{part} chapter of this study)⁵⁶, the a priori was "the intrinsic capacity...for becoming aware of the being and activity of the supremadane God, and accordingly for the receiving of the content of his revelation, as divine, into the soul."⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer faulted this notion on the grounds of the Reformation: only the Word can mediate the contact between God and man; there can be neither immediacy nor a prerequisite mental form posited, by means of which God's Word is heard and received. Revelation creates its own reception when and where and if it occurs, and it commends itself only as "opposed to every human being, to human experience of value and of good."⁵⁸ To propose a divine-human continuum in this way is to circumvent the whole problem of revelation.

In like manner, Bonhoeffer rejected Holl's picture of the human conscience, in which God encountered man

and could be apprehended and comprehended by him.

Aligning himself with the protest of Karl Barth's Römerbrief, Bonhoeffer countered: "There is no point in man where God can win space in him; indeed, it belongs to his essence to be incapax infiniti."⁵⁹

God can enter the consciousness as a reality, as self-revelation, only when he shatters all human forms, desires, and presuppositions concerning himself -- in short, only when he destroys religion.

In part, then, Bonhoeffer is recalling a controversy in which he engaged fifteen years before his meditations in his prison cell. Is he still concerned primarily with "retrieving from the smothering arms of the religious subjectivity of liberal theology the concern of traditional theology for God's work in Jesus Christ?"⁶⁰ Here it would be well to review Bonhoeffer's dependence upon Barth's critique of religion, and we can be helped greatly by the treatment of this relationship in Daniel Jenkins' Beyond Religion.⁶¹

In "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion" (Church Dogmatics, I/2, pp. 280-361), Barth systematizes some of the thinking which found such violent expression in his Commentary on Romans. Once more, he defines faith as the response to a revelation in which the initiative rests solely with God, and indicates that the primary concern of theology is to reflect and protect God's freedom of action. But religion is man's quest for God. Had religion sufficed as the description of man's relationship to God, revelation need never have occurred. But revelation did happen, and this means that the status of religion must be investigated from the point of view of revelation and man's faithful response. From this point of view, religion can only be adjudged to be "unbelief": the expression of the effort of godless man to

make up for the absence of God in his life on his own terms, and therefore the attempt to seize and manipulate God. At the same time, Jenkins writes:

Revelation does not merely indict religion as unbelief; it also vindicates one kind of religion as pleasing in God's sight, that Christian religion which knows that it is possible to speak of 'true religion' only in the same way that it is possible to speak of a 'justified sinner'. The Christian revelation becomes 'true' only as it is formed and sustained by divine revelation.⁶²

The truth of Christian faith is to be found in God's grace alone, as it is manifested in Jesus Christ. "Where it tries to create an animating principle of its own," Jenkins writes, "the church ceases to be the church of Jesus Christ and becomes an organ of that religion which is the enemy of faith."⁶³ Jenkins therefore summarizes (and approves) Barth's findings as follows:

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 produces more religion and transcends religion once more is alone that which justifies men in God's sight.⁶⁴

In the light of Barth's contribution, Jenkins reads Bonhoeffer's critique of religion. He makes use of the summary list of the characteristics of religion in the prison letters which Bethge has provided⁶⁵, noting:

"First, (religion) is individualistic. The religious man is preoccupied with himself and his interior states in such a way as to forget his neighbor, even though this individualism may take ascetic and apparently self-sacrificial forms. Secondly, it is metaphysical. God is brought in to complete, as the supernatural, a fundamentally man-centered view of reality. Thirdly, the religious interest becomes more and more one department of life only.

Scientific discovery and other forces push it more and more into insignificant areas of life. And fourthly, the God of religion is a deus ex machina, one who comes in from outside to help his children when they are in trouble. He is not the one at the center of life, who controls and directs it and meets and sustains us in our strength as well as our weakness."⁶⁶

Jenkins concludes that Bonhoeffer has followed fully in Barth's train of thought, calling upon Christianity once more to prune, purify, and re-examine the relationship between faith and religion in order to free the Christian for the life of faith in the world:

It may be that there is a dimension of meaning in Bonhoeffer's thought to which we have failed to penetrate, but it is hard to resist the conclusion that his plea for a 'religionless Christianity' in this context means primarily a plea for a redefinition of the church, of faith and of the religion of faith. It starts from a fresh insight into the nature of Christian maturity as freedom to serve with Christ in the real life of the world, and it seeks to abolish much which passes for 'the life of the church' but which, in its tired flabbiness, is no more than a quasi-religious conformity to this world which passes away.⁶⁷

Thus Bonhoeffer points primarily to "the permanent protest against its own religious forms and expressions"⁶⁸ which Christianity bears within it and which it seems prone to lose sight of. Only when Christianity recalls this protest can she reflect true faith, moving ever "beyond religion."

We are one step further on the way to an understanding of "non-religious Christianity," but we may not have taken the last step. Is there a "dimension of meaning in Bonhoeffer's thought" to which Jenkins has failed to penetrate?

II. Religion and "Ultimate Questions"

In the letter of April 30, 1944, Bonhoeffer seems to be attacking "religion" and "the religious a priori"

as the basis not only of the Liberal understanding of Christianity, but of "the whole nineteen hundred year old Christian proclamation and theology."⁶⁹ Christianity has always assumed that its necessity is given in man's weakness and in man's desire to overcome his weakness. It has therefore depended upon a religious a priori, a religious attitude in man toward himself and his problems -- and, thus far, it has always found man willing to grant his religious need. Albrecht Schönherr defines the religious a priori of the prison letters as follows:

It is the tacit, all-embracing presupposition carried through the centuries that man needs the concept of God in order to develop himself, solve his problems, perceive his world... The hallmark of such a 'religious' interpretation, Bonhoeffer holds, is that it is in essence metaphysically and individualistically determined. Individualistically -- that means that in the center stand the personal problems of man: his distress, guilt, birth and death, spiritual welfare. Metaphysical -- that means that God's action appears as the prolongation of our questions and distresses into the beyond; God is the helper in need, the deus ex machina, the solution of our 'ultimate questions.' In this way, the beyond is understood to be that which temporally and materially 'comes afterward'. This is the same concept of religion which Karl Barth's Commentary on Romans had previously spoken against. Man stands in the center, God is the answer to his questions, the helper in his needs, the guarantor of his peace, the watchman on the boundaries of his possibilities. The biblical proclamation of the Kingdom of God provides the complementary antithesis.⁷⁰

The religious a priori is an apologetical prerequisite not only of theologians who were consciously a part of the Liberal movement, however, but also of those who as consciously opposed it. Bonhoeffer especially mentions Heim, Althaus and Tillich -- all of whom were at one time identified with the "theology of revelation" which overthrew Liberal theology. Ultimately, his criticism touches Barth as well, insofar as his theology is dependent upon

his own special "religious" presuppositions. Any of these four roads — Heim, Althaus, Tillich, or Barth — could be followed to clarify this meaning of the term "religious" as it is used in the prison letters; perhaps the most serviceable and interesting route passes through the theology of Paul Tillich.⁷¹

Bonhoeffer's characterization of Tillich in the prison letters is anything but clear, and when we have clarified it by referring to allusions from Bonhoeffer's earlier writings, we will want to revise it. Possibly, Bonhoeffer has painted Tillich with a brush he should have used for Karl Heim, with whose theology he was more closely acquainted.⁷² We are safe in assuming that Bonhoeffer had lost touch with Tillich's theology when the latter emigrated to America in 1933, and that he still thought of him, even in the prison letters, as the "religious socialist" of the nineteen twenties. Contemporary Bonhoeffer interpretations have linked Tillich's notion of God as "Being Itself" or the "depth of existence" with Bonhoeffer's program with impunity.⁷³ It remains impossible to criticize this on biographical grounds because Bonhoeffer simply did not read and respond to the later writings of his contemporary. There are, however, some comments still to be made concerning the relationship between the two men — comments which, if they are unfair to Tillich, will at least give us a clearer picture of Bonhoeffer's concern.

In his Act and Being, Bonhoeffer had occasion to respond to Tillich's Religiöse Verwirklichung, where Tillich proposed the marriage of theological and philosophical anthropology through the insights of existentialism. Both disciplines characterized man as "being at

risk in the ultimate sense"; therefore, philosophical and theological anthropology were dealing essentially with the same subject matter. Bonhoeffer found this proposal unacceptable, replying that "from the standpoint of revelation, the existence of man is seen by a theological anthropology as determined essentially either by guilt or by grace -- and not merely as 'being at risk in the unconditional sense...!'"⁷⁴ He set Tillich's endeavor alongside the interests of Gogarten and Bultmann, all three of whom were (in Bonhoeffer's view) attempting to locate a point at which theology could be related positively to philosophy on the question of man's basic situation, the state to which revelation comes. Bonhoeffer followed Kurt Löwith in rejecting any attempt to make theological use of existentialist categories, arguing that when the question of existence is asked without recourse to revelation, a "preformed ideal of man" is inevitably posited which limits the freedom of God's self-revealing. "If revelation is essentially an event brought about by the free act of God," Bonhoeffer concluded, "it outbids and supercedes the existential-ontological possibilities of existence."⁷⁵ In other words, Bonhoeffer is certain that such a methodology puts revelation in the position of being an "answer" presupposed by the question asked by "man", out of his supposedly universal situation of existential estrangement and apart from revelation.⁷⁶ Revelation, he counters, must ask the question which it answers.

Bonhoeffer's understanding of Tillich and his implicit criticism of him are admirably clear in the description in the introductory lecture in Berlin in 1930, Die Frage nach dem Menschen. He writes:

That man asks about himself, that he remains essentially questionable -- this defines his nature. ...Tillich...sees man, in the last resort, as characterized by his failure to arrive at his essence because there is for him no certain, unified basis from which his self-understanding might be posited. ...Man first comes to himself when, standing on the boundary, he experiences the inbreaking of the eternal. Here he understands himself in 'living through the boundary situation,' the 'threat in the unconditional sense.' ...The absolute boundary is the inbreaking of the Absolute Itself; the unconditional No is, at the same time, the absolute Yes.⁷⁷

This characterization seems to have remained in Bonhoeffer's mind even at the time of the prison letters, almost fifteen years later (and we should again remind ourselves that in the intervening years, Tillich refined his theme considerably and departed from what must have seemed a slavish dependence upon existentialist terminology). To picture man as the questioning and questionable creature is, Bonhoeffer is saying, to picture him as essentially religious:

Tillich undertook it to depict the development of the world -- against its will -- as religious; to give it its form through religion. That was very brave of him, but the world unseated him and ran on alone; he too wanted to understand the world better than it understood itself, but the world felt utterly misunderstood and rejected such allegations.⁷⁸

To this explicit criticism we should add the vigorous attack upon any apologetic which calls upon God for the "solving of insoluble problems or as support in human failure" and which, in this way, tries to "make room for God."⁷⁹ Here, men are concerned with the borders of experience, rather than with God in the center of life. God is relegated to outstanding problems, for which, however, it is possible to find answers more conclusive or more compelling than the Christian ones.⁸⁰ "The Christian, unlike the devotees of the salvation myths, does not need a last refuge in the eternal from earthly tasks

and difficulties."⁸¹ Although this kind of apologetic accepts the movement of the world toward autonomy in almost every area of life, it withholds for itself the "ultimate" or "last" questions:

Even though there has been surrender on all secular problems, there still remain the so-called 'ultimate' questions — death, guilt — on which only God can furnish an answer, and which are the reason why God and the church and the pastor are needed. But what if one day...they no longer exist as such, if they too can be answered without God? ⁸²

Christian theology, however, accepted such an apologetic in order to survive. It asked for (and, in most cases, received) "space" for God within the realm of outstanding questions — distress, despair, the fear of death, the unknown or unknowable which manifests itself in situations of crisis. Christianity became the answer to these problems, and the world was convinced that it cannot live without the tutelage of "religion" or "God":

God thus became the answer to life's problems, the solution of its distresses and conflicts. As a result, if anyone had no such difficulties, if he refused to identify himself in sympathy with those who had, it was no good trying to win him for God. The only way of getting at him was to show that he had all these problems, needs, and conflicts without being aware of it or owning up to it. Existentialist philosophy and psychology have both been pretty clever at this sort of thing. It is then possible to talk to a man about God, and methodism can celebrate its triumph. If however it does not come off, if a man won't see that his happiness is really damnation, his health sickness, his vigor and vitality despair; if he won't call them what they are, the theologian is at his wit's end.⁸³

The "weaknesses" of men are thereby exploited "for purposes alien to him," and the maturity of man is disregarded by "thrusting him back into the midst of problems which are in fact not problems for him any more."⁸⁴ This charge might well have appeared with justification

in a criticism of Tillich's methodology in 1939. Is it a fair appraisal of the system he propounds today?

It is not within the limits of this study to adduce evidence in order to show the appropriateness or inappropriateness of Bonhoeffer's critique. Clarifying the mature theological thought of a man by directing oneself to his earlier works where the crude and probably overstated caricature of that thought might be located is, at best, still to be suspected. What Bonhoeffer attacks was, at least, the basis of Tillich's system and, in our attempts to understand what that basis is today in its profundity and elusiveness, we are surely not mistaken in searching out his past for the ways in which he once expressed himself. Today, Tillich would base his position upon given ontological truths, so basic as to seem unquestionable, e.g.: "Although man is actually separated from the infinite, he could not be aware of it if he did not participate in it potentially. This is expressed in the state of being ultimately concerned, a state which is universally human, whatever the content of the concern may be."⁸⁵ Here, "ultimate concern" surely does not mean (just as "the boundary situation" never meant) a concentration upon borderline questions or unsolved problems. Ultimate concern underlies every human activity; it is central to any definition of man. Similarly universal and unquestionable is Tillich's definition of the human condition which receives revelation. The conceptual expression of man's existential situation is "the dialectical situation." "It is the condition for man's religious existence and for his ability to receive revelation."⁸⁶ Tillich has never tired of insisting that this or any other universal description of the human situation cannot be used as a demonstration of the inevitability of or

the necessity for a Christian "answer". All this represents, one would think, a careful response to criticism from Bonhoeffer (and others) that in his system, revelation has been made dependent upon the secular condition.

Ironically, it has been Tillich who, more than any other theologian in our time, has directed the attention of theology to secular culture and worldly life as its legitimate concerns. Has Bonhoeffer's project no affinities with Tillich's major interest? And were we finally to clarify Bonhoeffer's position as incompatible with the general lines of Tillich's theology of culture, should it be because we characterize the latter's interpretation of the world as one in which "men are seen, in their acts and in their despair, unconsciously longing for God and in their negations of God unconsciously witnessing to him?"⁸⁷

Bonhoeffer's concern is an elusive one, and to proceed further we shall have to break off this discussion and view the question from another perspective. Bonhoeffer seems to be attacking a theological attitude of confidence, the certainty with which theologians relate themselves to the world and justify their work.⁸⁸ He finds such confidence in Tillich's offer to demonstrate to protesting secular man that regardless of any arguments to the contrary, all men are nevertheless in the state of ultimate concern and therefore open to the religious question. He finds it also in Barth's "positivism", based as his theology is upon the confidence given in the doctrine of election. What is behind this protest against dogmatic certainty and existentialist self-assurance? Some highly interesting work by some of Bonhoeffer's interpreters has suggested that it is the demand for a

new interpretation of the relationship between Law and Gospel.

III. Religion and the Law-Gospel Distinction

Without following in the indicated direction, Bonhoeffer suggested that the problem of religionless Christianity would involve a reinterpretation of the relationship between Law and Gospel or, more exactly, between circumcision and justification. "The pauline question, whether the peritome is a condition of salvation," he wrote, "really means today whether religion is a condition of salvation."⁸⁹ He recalled the analogy later, in the context of a discussion of Bultmann's demythologization program: "Biblical concepts must be interpreted in such a fashion that religion is not set forth as a pre-condition of faith (compare the peritome in St. Paul)."⁹⁰ The question of setting aside religious pre-conditions which offend the maturity of the world come of age is thus identified with the pauline problem of relating circumcision to justification in such a manner that the former is not a requirement.

What we have before us in Bonhoeffer's criticism of religion is, then, a fundamental concern for the proper understanding of the Law and its relationship to the proclamation of the Gospel. For Barth's confidence is founded upon the assumption that all men stand under the "Law." Tillich's ultimate concern attempts to win for contemporary apologetics a universal category, "estrangement", which demonstrates that all men are subject to the "Law." Bultmann's unorthodox views nevertheless take for granted the fact that "the possibility of understanding" is given to man under the law "in the very fact that he is a sinner, that he is in death."⁹¹ But Bonhoeffer wants to interpret the Law and relate it to the Gospel in such fashion that

2 the knowledge that man is under the Law a sinner and in death will not offend the maturity of the world by being used as a presupposition of Christian apologetics. Is this at all possible or desirable? Can Christianity do without a theological anthropology (set forth in traditional dogmatic terms or in the form of ontological or existential truths) which so describes man's condition under the Law that Christianity is made to seem the logical choice of the man who wishes to be free from his plight? Can a refusal to make any apologetical use of such an understanding of man's condition be grounded theologically and exegetically in the New Testament?

In attempting to make theological sense out of Bonhoeffer's radical question (and we shall see shortly just how radical a question it is), we must acknowledge the convenience of two remarkable essays which have recently appeared. The first is an investigation of Bonhoeffer's "non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts" in the light of the Law-Gospel distinction, written by Gerhard Ebeling in 1955.⁹² The second, an exegetical study completed in 1961 by Krister Stendahl, raises independently of the above the question whether the traditional protestant interpretation of Paul as "a hero of the introspective conscience" and the Pauline letters as "documents of human consciousness" can still be maintained.⁹³ Our first step is to make clear the direction of Bonhoeffer's thinking, and here we may turn directly to Ebeling's summary.

The preaching of the Law and the preaching of the Gospel, Ebeling reminds us, are closely bound together in Paul's letters. God's Law is the reality of man's existence, universally apprehensible and applicable, under which and before God all men, Jew and Greek, stand.⁹⁴ It is preached for the sake of the Gospel, to enable it to

speak to man in his concrete reality. Christianity therefore has no interest in simply doing away with the Law — for this would mean that the Gospel itself has become nothing more than a nova lex. Without the Law, the Gospel cannot be preached. Christian preaching must, however, preach the Law in such a way that the Law is not the means of attaining salvation.

Ebeling underlines the fact that Bonhoeffer does not equate religion with Law, but with circumcision. "An identification of religion and Law would rest...on the mistaken idea that non-religiousness is lawlessness, which of course is not at all what Bonhoeffer means."⁹⁵ The Gospel is not lawlessness, but rather freedom from the Law. So also, non-religious interpretation distinguishes Law and Gospel and demonstrates freedom from legalistic, religious interpretation. That the Law exists, that religion exists is not the problem. In the light of Paul's use of the Law for the sake of the Gospel and not as its precondition, however, one must find a non-religious interpretation which frees the Gospel from religious preconditions.

The traditional exposition of the Law cannot do this if left to itself, because it is not understandable and binding for modern, non-religious man. It simply does not speak of his reality, which is a world in which he has learned to do without God, metaphysics, and inwardness. Religious interpretation of the Law can only "add on and hold over against him a Law which is not verifiable as the Law under which the modern, non-religious man de facto stands."⁹⁶ Therefore, and for the sake of the Gospel, "the task is precisely to ask ourselves anew in view of modern non-religious man what it means to take the Law that belongs inseparably to the existence of man, and is

in fact his very reality, and testify to it as God's Law."⁹⁷ The traditional interpretation of the Law is not this reality, but an additional one, bordering on the existence of man. To ask him to accept this additional reality as the only means through which he may hear the Gospel is to ask him to agree to a religious precondition.

The decisive question therefore is: how do we preach the Gospel to the non-religious man as freedom from the Law — and that means, Jesus Christ as the fulfilment and end of the Law — without laying on him beforehand a Law that is strange to him and does not concern him? How does the Law get home to the non-religious man? What is it that unconditionally concerns him? How do we bring to expression the Law under which he stands de facto? ⁹⁸

The problem is to interpret the content and significance of the Law "non-religiously", and that means to describe the reality of modern man — to proclaim the reality of modern man — in such fashion that he may recognize himself in that reality and hear the Law preached for the sake of the Gospel.

Here Ebeling ends his inquiry. Has he in fact located "the decisive question" posed by Bonhoeffer? One notices that his conclusion provides an excellent point of departure for a defense of Bultmann's demythologizing program, and it is worth remembering that Ebeling is, as a theologian, heavily indebted to Bultmann, his teacher. Ebeling sees the problem to be that of demythologizing the Law, of describing its reality and significance free from the thought forms and patterns of a past age. Taken for granted (and here one touches Tillich's concern for a "method of correlation") is that non-religious man still has an "unconditional concern". Ebeling assumes that any denial that this unconditional concern exists within man's de facto reality must mean the end of the Gospel

altogether. There must, then, be something in the Law and something in man's reality upon which the Gospel depends for its existence. The conclusion one must draw is that the most honest, most realistic appraisal of the human situation, which demythologization will help us accomplish, will inevitably prove "useful" for Christian apologetics.

It is at this point that one questions whether Bonhoeffer's concern is reflected in its entirety. Not only the mythological statement of the Law is "religious", but also the traditional use of the statement "all men are under the Law" in Christian apologetics. Insofar as the first word of the kerygma is spoken out of the knowledge that all men are under the Law, that they exhibit an ultimate or unconditional concern to be free of the Law, that there, and as the first step toward faith, a man is "utterly convicted in his conscience" -- Christian apologetics is based upon a religious a priori. For here, however subtly, the central claim of Christianity becomes its availability or inevitability as an answer to the basic human question posed by the Law. In this way, Christianity becomes the completion of reality by means of God; the religious answer to the universal religious question.

It would indeed seem that Bonhoeffer has breached the law of contradiction and made the gospel superfluous. As Ebeling says, if the Law is man's reality, it makes no sense to say that this reality may not exist. But the question is not the existence of the Law. It is rather the use Christianity makes of an understanding of the Law and, secondly, whether the realization that the kerygma is dependent upon one's interpretation of the Law does not lead the Christian to describe the

human situation in such a way that the Gospel comes as an answer or solution to man's predicament. Still, we are uneasy with a request to break this kind of link between Law and Gospel and to hold our peace concerning the inadequacy of the Law to save us. Given Paul's use of the Law in the New Testament and the dependence of protestant theology upon this use since the time of Luther, have we any alternative?

An imaginative and persuasive essay which has recently appeared suggests that, as a hypothesis, we can answer that question in the affirmative. In "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,"⁹⁹ Krister Stendahl questions whether this use of the Law is at all Pauline. He suspects that the Western psychological condition has read the Pauline letters as "documents of human consciousness" and has hailed Paul as "the hero of the introspective conscience."¹⁰⁰ In this way a far different understanding of the meaning of the Law than Paul ever intended has become a foundation stone of Christian apologetics.

For Paul the problem was, quite simply, what should be said about the Law (the Mosaic Law)¹⁰¹ since the coming of the Messiah — an event which, according to Judaic thought, would invalidate the custodial role of the Old Covenant (Gal. 3:24). For the relationship between Jew and Gentile, this event meant that there was no reason to impose a no longer valid Law upon those who did not understand themselves to be included in the Old Covenant. Paul, as a righteous Jew, had no difficulty in fulfilling the Law — and certainly never assumed that keeping the Law would end inevitably in despair, hence in the arms of Christ.¹⁰² In any event (and as Paul surely knew), forgive-

ness and grace were available to the Jew who failed fully to keep the Law.

Augustine was the first of the Church Fathers to have located a "deeper layer" in the thought of Paul and defined this as a universal human longing. But it remained for Luther, convicted by a mediaeval system of penance, to identify his terror with the damnation of man beneath the burden of the Law. Since that time, "Paul's statements about justification by faith have been hailed as the answer to the problem which faces the ruthlessly honest man in his practice of introspection,"¹⁰³ and the Western problem of conscience has become the unchallenged and self-evident prerequisite for the proclamation of the Gospel. The meaning of the Law now is that "nobody can attain a true faith in Christ unless his self-righteousness has been crushed by the Law."¹⁰⁴ Since Luther, "all men must come to Christ with consciences properly convicted by the Law and its insatiable requirements for righteousness."¹⁰⁵

Stendahl is interested simply in making less overpowering and confident the assumption that the only door into the church and the proper clue for the understanding of the gospels is "an evermore introspective awareness of sin and guilt."¹⁰⁶ Accordingly, he does not move very far into the question which emerges out of his conclusion. The existential hermeneutical principle "rests on the presupposition that man is essentially the same through the ages, and that this continuity in the human self-consciousness is the common denominator between the New Testament and any age of human history."¹⁰⁷ A great deal of contemporary theology rests its case on this assumption. Stendahl suggests that to question this

assumption on exegetical grounds might prove damaging to the presuppositions which these theologians, particularly Bultmann, operate. Let us move beyond Stendahl to examine, briefly, the effect this new understanding of Paul's use of the Law-Gospel relationship might have upon the apologetical method of a contemporary theologian such as Bultmann.

Does the Law, as Paul understands it, deliver the convicted sinner into the arms of Christ? Is contemporary theology therefore "Pauline" when it attempts in a similar fashion to point modern man to his own reality (the "Law") for the purpose of providing him with the evidence which will enable him to "decide" for or against "authentic existence"? This is the crux of the question, for one cannot be blamed for suspecting that the Christian theologian will have a vested interest in portraying reality as incapable of delivering the meaning of life to the man whose essence it is to search for it — in picturing man's reality as that from which he must be saved, and Christianity as the only means of salvation.

Bultmann is very careful to point out that there is no necessity nor inevitability that man, regarding his situation under the Law, will turn to Christ for his salvation. "The sinner who is in death is confronted by the gospel when it reaches him with the decision whether or not he is willing to understand himself anew and to receive his life from the hand of God." The gospel reaches the sinner in and through the Law, and offers man the possibility of a new understanding of himself. But is there not, beneath this formula, the tacit and unquestioned restless conscience of western man at work, driving him toward his decision? Bultmann stresses the importance for his own position of the fact that Pauline theology,

as he sees it, is mainly anthropology. When Paul speaks of God, he does so only as God is significant for man and for his salvation. Paul's Christology is always soteriology. Is it fair to say, then, that Bultmann's picture of Pauline theology and the former's subsequent theological interests are based upon what Bonhoeffer calls a religious view of man?

IV. Demythologizing and the Non-Religious Interpretation of Biblical Concepts.

It is clear from his comments in the prison letters that Bonhoeffer thinks it is fair to say this.¹⁰⁹ But before we show how and in what way he wishes to make this criticism, we should recall that Bonhoeffer first spoke of Bultmann as the one who "somehow recognized Barth's limitations".¹¹⁰ We are offered a clue to what Bonhoeffer meant by this statement when we read Bultmann's comments concerning the work by Barth that Bonhoeffer found most instructive. Of the first edition of the Römerbrief, Bultmann wrote:

The artificiality of a Catholicizing repristination of the ancient cult, as well as the orthodox transfiguration of Pauline myth and ecclesiastical dogma, are to be condemned from the outset. This applies also to the fanatical renewal of the Pauline myth in Barthian polish. As much as I welcome the religious criticism of culture in Barth's Romans, I cannot see, in what he presents positively, anything other than an arbitrary adaptation of the Pauline myth of Christ. The judgement Barth passes upon 'liberal theology' strikes Barth himself to the same extent. 111

In what way does Barth's criticism of "religion" strike him as well? In that he has chosen to adapt the mythological language of Paul as the vehicle for his protest. This "repristination" follows a refusal, in Bultmann's view, to go the whole distance. The gulf between

the New Testament and the modern scientific age can hardly be overcome by condemning the latter and concentrating the attention of theology upon restating the former. At the same time, Bultmann can see nothing wrong with a modern attempt to construct a religious a priori; he has faulted Barth simply for failing to understand what "modern" means. In a passage which can only be astonishing to those who have followed what we have said thus far, Bultmann praises the second edition of the Epistle to the Romans as just such an attempt:

Although in the original form of a commentary, it falls in line with works such as Schleiermacher's Speeches on Religion and Otto's Idea of the Holy, with modern attempts to work out a religious a priori, and finally with Romans itself, whose radical antithesis between works and faith is really attempting to do the same thing. No matter how different these may be in details, all of them are attempts to express in language the awareness of the distinctiveness and absoluteness of religion. 112

Clearly, Bultmann views a religious a priori as the sine qua non of theology, believing this to be fully in line with Pauline theology. But he cannot accept a formulation of this religious a priori in terms of the mythological structures of a pre-scientific age. Thus Bultmann is defining religion in two ways — one of which he wishes to assert as basic to theology and hence unquestionable and irreplaceable, the other synonymous with "mythological". In rejecting "religion" in this second sense, Bultmann once wrote:

Religion is man's yearning for something beyond the world, is the discovery of a sphere above the world in which only the soul can live, detached from worldly things. In religion man is alone with God, radiant with the power of a higher world of truth. And religion manifests itself not in the shaping of the life of the world but in the aimless action of the cultus. 113

If Barth believes that Christian theology stands opposed to "religion" and means by that the cultural and philosophical expression of man's attempts to grasp at God, believing at the same time that to express the distinctiveness of God, theology must be bound to the language of the Bible and dogmatics, Bultmann sees that this language itself constitutes the real difficulty. For the latter, the mythological language of the New Testament cannot be used in order to proclaim the gospel to men who no longer participate in that myth as their own reality; to do so is to direct attention toward a special, otherworldly sphere and "the aimless action of the cultus."

What of Bonhoeffer? We have seen that his criticism of Tillich did not reflect an understanding of the latter's real concern. It is also likely that Bonhoeffer did not fully understand Bultmann's intention in proposing the demythologizing of the New Testament. We know at least that Bonhoeffer read, appreciated, and wrestled with the famous essay which Bultmann wrote during the war.¹¹⁴ It was on this contribution that he commented in two passages in the prison letters:

A few words about "religionlessness." I expect you remember the Bultmann essay about the demythologizing of the New Testament? My opinion today would be not that he went 'too far', as most people think, but that he did not go far enough. It is not only the 'mythological' concepts such as miracles, the ascension, etc. (which are really inseparable from the concepts God, faith, etc.), but also the 'religious' concepts which are problematic. You cannot, as Bultmann imagines separate God from miracles, but you do have to be able to interpret and proclaim both of them in a non-religious sense. Bultmann's approach is really at bottom the liberal one (i.e., abridging the Gospels) whereas I try to think theologically. ¹¹⁵

Bultmann would seem to have felt Barth's limitations in some way, but he misconstrues them in the light of liberal theology, and hence goes off into the typical liberal

reduction process (the 'mythological' elements of Christianity are dropped, and Christianity is reduced to its 'essence'). I am of the view that the full content, including the mythological concepts, must be maintained. The New testament is not a mythological garbing of the universal truth; this mythology (resurrection and so on) is the thing itself -- but the concepts must be reinterpreted in such a way as not to make religion a precondition of faith (cf. the peritome in St. Paul). 116

Bonhoeffer attempted in these words to relate his program not only to Barth's protest against religion but also to Bultmann's recognition of Barth's limitations. Once again, someone "has not gone far enough". Both Barth and Bultmann have, however, gone part of the distance, for each recognizes a sense in which Christianity may and must be spoken of as "religionless". Barth would speak of a "religionless" Christianity as one which recognized the necessity for a continuous protest from within against its own tendencies to become one more means by which man can grasp at the majesty and freedom of God. God is free, and Christianity must be religionless insofar as it proceeds from God's free revelation of himself. Bultmann would affirm as properly "religionless" a Christianity which could interpret a revelation which was necessarily expressed in the words and ways of thinking of first-century men for contemporary man, for whom these words and ways of thinking no longer express what they once did. To avoid "religion", Barth would insist that Christianity turn the eyes of men away from their prideful search for God toward the Incarnation, in which God comes to them. Any religious a priori is a greater threat to the sovereignty of God than expressing oneself in what Bultmann would call "mythological" (or "religious"), but which is none the less biblical and traditional, terminology.

But Bultmann disagrees that a religious a priori can or should be avoided. It cannot be avoided if "the distinctiveness and absoluteness" of Christianity is to be asserted and preserved. The attention of theology must rather be directed toward the interpretation of mythological language for contemporary man and, in this way, toward a Christianity freed from "religion". Christianity must be shown to be independent of the otherworldly and responsible to the man who lives in this world.

Bonhoeffer's "non-religious interpretation" recognizes the contribution of both men. Like Bultmann, he realizes that the exclusive use of a special and historically dated language for expressing the kerygma and the demand that apologetics become dogmatics will require in the hearer some form of religious a priori — and he is grateful to Bultmann for having demonstrated this. But in keeping with Barth's intention (and regardless of the failure of the latter's attempt to carry this forward), Bonhoeffer believes that a theology based upon any religious a priori is no longer possible in a world come of age — that is, a world which no longer feels itself threatened by the biblical Law, its own reality, its failure to find "meaning" or "authentic existence", its inability to locate or to realize its ultimate concern. Bonhoeffer therefore reaffirms his trust in Barth's instinctive refusal to surrender the mythological world or language of the Bible. "The full content" of the Bible, "including the mythological concepts, must be maintained;" the cultus cannot be dismissed simply as "purposeless action", whatever the risks of doing so. For the greater danger is to fall, as Bonhoeffer imagines Bultmann to have done, into the Liberal trap of supposing that underneath and independent of the historical form and setting

of the New Testament proclamation, eternal and universal Christian "truth" may be discovered. It is for this reason that the "mysteries" must remain mysteries, retaining their own independent logic and linguistic peculiarity, their distinctiveness and otherworldliness.

At least one of Bonhoeffer's interpreters, J.A.T. Robinson, believes it possible that one can plea for "the unemotional recognition of the validity of the myth in its own right" while insisting that one "differentiate and assess the mythological positively for what it is" for the benefit of a world come of age.¹¹⁷ This is a fair statement of Bonhoeffer's purpose. But demythologizing, while it is a part of this process of differentiation and assessment, has failed fully to reflect the concern of a non-religious interpretation to the extent to which it has found comfort in the religious a priori of existentialism. The whole present-day concern for the hermeneutical problem, in order to correct itself, needs to question seriously its confidence in existentialist philosophy and, indeed, the "existentialist" concern throughout the history of western Christendom.

But if Bonhoeffer insists that to disregard the independent validity of the biblical concepts would lead inevitably to the discovery of universal religious truth separable from its historical/mythological setting, he is equally insistent that these concepts not be "profaned". By this he means to avoid presenting them to the world simply as they are, uninterpreted, asking the hearer to "take or leave" them. To "take" them thus would require a form of the religious a priori. To "leave them" in order to be true to a world come of age (which he thought would become increasingly the case) would demonstrate the failure of Christian proclamation to take seriously the

secular condition of the hearer. Bonhoeffer therefore calls for an interpretation of biblical concepts which will take seriously that secular condition by proclaiming the gospel "non-religiously". Here many interpreters hail him as a champion of the concern for the problems of Christian speech and language which surround the study of hermeneutics. But this is the point at which Bonhoeffer eludes all of our attempts to capture him. The demand for the "non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts" seems to be set aside, and in its place Bonhoeffer sets the phrase "sharing in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world." This includes, no doubt, the interest in a "non-religious interpretation." But increasingly, Bonhoeffer loses interest in problems of speech and apologetics, speaking instead of a special kind of silence and holding one's peace before such concerns. His Christological vision returns, and the mysterious "secret discipline" comes into its own. "Sharing in the sufferings of God" represents the consummation of Bonhoeffer's theology which leads us to our own concluding chapter.

Chapter 16

Sharing in the Sufferings of God

And in conclusion, I will say something "spiritual". You know of course the book by Bernanos? When the priest there speaks, the word bears weight. That is because it comes not out of some speech consideration or observation, but simply out of the daily, personal correspondence with the crucified Jesus Christ. This is the depth out of which a word must come, if it is to bear weight. One might say it has to do with whether or not we judge ourselves daily with the picture of the crucified Jesus Christ himself, and allow ourselves to be called to repentance. Where the word comes, so to speak, immediately from the cross of Jesus itself, where Christ is so contemporary that he speaks our words himself, only there can the terrible danger of spiritual chatter be avoided. But who among us lives with this composure?

"An eine unbekannte Frau," 1940(?). GS III, pp. 42-3

At the beginning of this century, Max Weber linked "the radical elimination of magic from the world" with what he called "the practice of worldly asceticism."¹¹⁸ The phrase "worldly asceticism," weltliche Askese, was taken up by Ernst Troeltsch among others and elaborated to mean that a particular style of life, suited to the requirements of the modern world, had been made possible by the birth and growth to maturity of protestant Christianity.¹¹⁹ Indeed, this life style was protestantism's single most important contribution.

It is well known that most forms of the monastic asceticism to which this new style of life related itself historically saw as the supreme achievement of the monk the "imitation of Christ" through contemplation of his virtues and their realization in one's life. But neither Troeltsch nor his fellow Liberal theologians spoke of "worldly asceticism" as an imitation of Christ. Turning

away from the cloister and the chains of supernaturalism and meaningless piety, the nineteenth century Liberal protestant "undertook to remodel the world and to work out his ideals in the world."¹²⁰ Christology, as a treasury of just such traditional supernaturalism, underwent the most radical reshaping as the Jesus of History was pitted against the Christ of faith. The Christian life in the world was defined in terms of "vocation" and an ethical activism which sought the realization of Christian ideals. At its best, Liberal Christianity took these ideals from those "ethical teachings" of Christ which were capable of realization in earthly society, fighting courageously the brutality, greed and inhumanity of late nineteenth century industrialism and nationalism with the religious principles to which the name "social gospel" was affixed. At its worst, the dialectic inherent in any Christian existence in the world was lost sight of, and adherents of a tamed "Liberalism" simply added a dash of piety to what had become essentially a capitulation to the economic, political, and social structures in which they lived.

"Worldly asceticism" thus described the activity of the Christian in shaping the world and participating creatively in its forms and its life. But out of this participation, and perhaps guided by more Christological presuppositions than the Liberal Christian would have cared to admit, a more intensive form and shape of Christian existence than "activity" came to characterize the genuinely Liberal Christian. The nineteenth century Liberal protestant was not, after all, simply the sum of his actions. What created his world far more than what he did was what he was.

Bonhoeffer knew the nineteenth century as the world of his youth and as his heritage. In his prison cell he meditated long hours on the grandeur, nobility, dedication, and real achievement for which this style of life had been responsible. Caught between his genuine appreciation for the integrity and accomplishments of nineteenth century life and the realization that such life was no longer possible, he began to question whether it might not be necessary and proper for the twentieth century Christian to recover the feeling, which the nineteenth century exemplified, for being a human participant in everything which goes to make up the life of the world; the consciousness of belonging to and dedicating oneself to a particular time and place in human history. Beginning with a modest suspicion, but with increasing boldness, he closed the breach between his theological meditations and his reflections on music and art, the nature of friendship, time and behavior in an attempt to recover, for his own age, the meaning of the Christian life.

Bonhoeffer suspected that he had touched upon a concern of Liberal theology. As we have attempted to show, he had indeed done so. But one element in his meditations differed radically from any Liberal discussion of the style of the Christian life: his astonishing and unashamed desire to establish a secular style of life upon a Christological foundation. The Christian can be a worldly man because Jesus Christ was a worldly man; the Christian must participate in the life of the world because he must imitate the One who shared supremely in the life of the world.

The fragmentary, unsystematic imitatio Christi which comprised Bonhoeffer's final theological effort

will, even in its incomplete form, disturb the peace of theologians for many years. We have not the evidence to be able to say with finality that we have understood this notion as Bonhoeffer would have wanted us to understand it. But there is enough of a pattern to the material we have at hand that it is possible to place a certain interpretation upon it that it may impress, startle, and move us more creatively. And at the very least, we may be certain that Bonhoeffer has found the realm of Christian existence a more promising field in which to explore the meaning of revelation than either ecclesiology or a concept of God.

Bonhoeffer proposed as the subject of enquiry what he came finally to call "sharing in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world." This phrase is a development of "religionless Christianity" which establishes Christological guidelines to check the possible misunderstanding that notion. We have already seen (in chapter 14) that Bonhoeffer wished to elaborate the Lutheran Christology of condescension of his 1933 lectures as the theological basis of his new interest, the world come of age. What now appears is a surprising reconstruction of the "tropological" interpretation of Christology and discipleship in which his efforts to proclaim the concretization of the revelation culminated during the church struggle.¹²¹ Discipleship is now described as a profound dialectical, lived relationship between "sharing in the sufferings of God" and its conceptual partner, the "secret discipline."

To live this dialectical existence is to live the life of faith and, as we have suggested, to imitate Christ. The Christian shares both in the sufferings of God by leading a worldly life, and in the secret discipline. It is the latter that we must discuss first.

Our first task is to attempt to determine the content and nature of "the secret discipline". We may then move into an examination of the meaning of "sharing the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world."

I. The Secret Discipline.

Little is written, in the prison letters, concerning how one's faith is to be distinguished from a stoic position about the world with its growing disinterest in and independence of God and religion. The safeguard Bonhoeffer actually proposed he called "the secret (or arcane) discipline". He introduced the notion in a rather offhand fashion, and his interest in elaborating upon this introduction seems to have been subordinated to his determination to explore the phenomenon of the coming of age of the world, the disappearance of God and the religious a priori, the worldly humanity of Christ and that of the Christian in Christ, and the nature of the Lordship of God in Christ over a world defined in terms of these realities.

Nevertheless, vague outlines of what Bonhoeffer was attempting to say may be discerned. The importance with which this notion has been regarded by Bonhoeffer's interpreters as well as the light they have been able to cast upon it — through analysis of Bonhoeffer's previous writings and his treatment of related ideas — lead us to state without reserve that the secret discipline is "the heart of his thought."¹²² Among these interpretations there is considerable disagreement concerning which of Bonhoeffer's earlier notions can best serve to illuminate the meaning of the secret discipline. Because the ? theme is slighted in the prison letters yet can be

related persuasively to any number of earlier concepts, it is difficult to decide between these various treatments. We shall be repeating and comparing many of these findings in our discussion.

The secret discipline is referred to in two places in the prison letters. The first mention occurs in the midst of Bonhoeffer's initial meditation on religionless Christianity; the second during the more technical elaboration of that theme in the discussion of the possibility of a non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts:

The questions needing answers would indeed be: what is the significance of a church, a congregation, a sermon, a liturgy, a Christian life in a religionless world? How do we speak of God — without religion; i.e. without the temporal presuppositions of metaphysics, inwardness, etc. etc.? How do we speak (or perhaps we just can't 'speak' about such things as we used to) in a 'worldly' fashion about 'God', in what way are we 'religionless-worldly' Christians, in what way are we ek-klesia, those who are called forth, without conceiving of ourselves as specially favored religiously, but perhaps as wholly belonging to the world? Then Christ would be the object of religion no longer, but something wholly different, really the Lord of the world. But what does that mean? What do the cultus and prayer signify in a religionless age? Do the secret discipline or the distinction (which you have met with me before) between ultimate and penultimate take on a new significance? 123

There are steps of recognition and steps of significance; i.e. a secret discipline must be reestablished, through which the secrets of Christian faith are protected from profanation. Positivism of revelation makes it too easy for itself, in that it sets up, in the last analysis, a law of faith, and thus mutilates what is a gift for us — through the incarnation of Christ! In the place of religion there now stands the church — that is in itself biblical — but the world is to a certain extent made to depend upon itself and left to its own devices, and that is the mistake. 124

According to this evidence, the secret discipline is integrally related to the process of non-religious interpretation. The "secrets" — church, cult, prayer, dogmas, the Christian life — are not circulated in public

lic in their uninterpreted form. The traditional content of the Bible and the faith of the church must be "protected", but in such a fashion that no special religious claims are made for them. Preaching, baptism, communion -- these are part of the secret. Adherence to these, Hammelsbeck writes, is bondage to Christ as his chosen and elect, without however being able to claim any privileged status for the content of Christian tradition among the secular forms of the world, nor for oneself among one's neighbors.¹²⁵

The discipline consists in the refusal to betray the secret by profaning it or to disregard it by confusing it with or substituting for it secular elements in the process of non-religious interpretation or worldly life.

Regin Prenter takes the secret discipline to mean that what one fails to interpret non-religiously must nevertheless remain as it is, for Christianity cannot be "reduced" to a universal religious "essence".¹²⁶ What is uninterpreted (because it cannot be, and not because it should not be) is nevertheless retained. But it is held as a secret, since to expose it to the world in such a form is to violate the maturity of the world and to profane the concepts themselves. The traditional-biblical-dogmatic concepts in their irreducible and inevitably mythological forms are no less true if they cannot be interpreted. But because their form and logic is not the form and logic of the world, they will be "for the world" in a way that will have to remain secret to the world. A certain initiation into these mysteries, and not the forced acceptance of them out of hand as "the faith of the church", is called for. Prenter underscores the fact that this secrecy is not the selfish, jealously guarded knowledge of the elect but on the contrary, an

act of penance on the part of the church for the sake of the world. In this respect, Bethge writes:

The church must not throw away its great terms "creation," "fall," "atonement," "repentance," "last things," and so on. But if she cannot relate them to the secularized world in such a way that their essence can immediately be seen in worldly life, then the church had better keep silent... And the adult church in a world come of age is not the church which exposes its secrets of faith cheaply, but that which exposes itself in its very existence. 127

Bonhoeffer himself explains this penitential, purgative secrecy best in a passage that is undoubtedly related to our discussion:

But we too are being driven back to the beginning of our understanding. Atonement and redemption, regeneration, the Holy Ghost, the love of our enemies, the cross and resurrection, life in Christ and Christian discipleship -- all these things have become so problematic and so remote that we hardly dare any more to speak of them. In the traditional rite and ceremonies we are groping after something new and revolutionary without being able to understand it or utter it yet. That is our own fault. During these years the church has fought for self-preservation as though it were an end in itself, and is therefore incapable of speaking an atoning or redeeming word to mankind and the world at large. So our traditional language must perforce become powerless and remain silent, and our being Christian today will be confined to two things: praying for and doing right by our fellow man. All thinking, speaking, and organization of the things of Christendom must be reborn out of this praying and this action. By the time you are grown up, the form of the church will have changed very much. We are not yet out of the melting pot, and every attempt to hasten matters to a new organizational show of force will only delay the church's conversion and purgation. It is not for us to prophesy the day -- but the day will come -- when men will be called again to utter the Word of God with such power as will change and renew the world. It will be a new language, perhaps wholly unreligious, but freeing and redeeming like the speech of Jesus, which will shock men yet overcome them with its power; the language of a new righteousness and truth, which proclaims the peace of God with men and the advent of his kingdom.

"And they shall fear and tremble for all the good and for all the peace that I procure unto it" (Jeremiah 33:9). Until 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. 128

Hardly being able to speak, groping for something which cannot yet be uttered, the powerlessness and silence of traditional language, praying and doing right, conversion and purgation, a silent and hidden affair, and — out of this — a new language. Everything traditionally "Christian" must steadfastly refuse to call attention to itself. It is difficult to see how this can be expressed positively, or how Bonhoeffer intended to relate this either to his past or to the program of "non-religious interpretation". Here, a historical excursus will be of some help.

1. The secret discipline has an ecclesiological reference. Bonhoeffer applauded, in The Cost of Discipleship, the action of the post-Constantine church in protecting herself from "cheap grace" by instituting the catechuminate and barring the only outwardly Christianized from the central cultic acts.¹²⁹ Responding to the later threat of secularization, monasticism flowered.¹³⁰ Here one must speak of Bonhoeffer's consistently strong ecclesiological concern and more especially of the Finkenwalde experiment and the book Life Together. Having spoken to his friends of the necessity for a return to the cloister,¹³¹ he worked out the content of a "secret discipline" in actual corporate devotional life. Through the worshipping community, the Christian prays for and serves his neighbor. Through this communal service and prayer life, a "personal Christian engagement" without any "signs of remoteness, of mania or mystification"¹³² was made possible. Hammelsbeck thus understands the secret

discipline of the prison letters as related especially to the communal life described in Life Together:

'The secret discipline'...could serve as the subtitle for Bonhoeffer's writing, Life Together. 'Remaining in Christ' requires a discipline, an obedient attachment of oneself...

That I participate steadfastly in preaching, baptism, and the Lord's Supper; that I pray, confess, and sing praises belongs to this secret. That is and remains a secret to the world, a secret entrusted to me through the prevenient grace of God. I belong gratefully to this secret. The demand and consolation of Christ meet me — this I cannot and may not conceal. But I have no religious requirements to place before the world, which I serve out of this secret. 133

Hammelsbeck is equally certain that Bonhoeffer did not have in mind a "liturgical renewal" as a central factor in a communal secret discipline. The identification of Bonhoeffer's secret discipline with a recovery of the meaning of liturgy has, however, been widespread especially among those churches with a liturgical tradition, and even occasionally among those which historically have relegated liturgy to a secondary role. Typical of this is an Anglican comment:

But 'being there for others,' as Bonhoeffer means it, is a witness to God's being there for us in Jesus Christ: and this will only be seen where the church's being for others constantly springs from her own interior life in which God is constantly 'there' for her as he was there in Christ, in the word and sacraments. In other words, it needs liturgy — that point where the church is being truly herself, the community for whom God in Christ is there at the center — for the kind of evangelism and social service that Bonhoeffer proposes. 134
Otherwise it will become merely human and humanitarian.

Bonhoeffer's letters were in fact keenly aware of the grandeur and misery of the church, and there is a strong indication that he intended to relate the secret discipline to the place of the church in the world come

of age. More often than not, he was sharply critical of the self-understanding of the church, particularly his own. As early as 1930, Bonhoeffer spoke of a necessity for "silence", in order not to hide behind programs, resolutions, and pious Christian principles.¹³⁵ In the Ethics, and especially in the prison letters, the reformation of the church (or rather, as he liked to put it, the preparing of the way for God's reformation), always lurked close by in the background.¹³⁶ When he turned to a direct treatment of this theme, however, Bonhoeffer was not very helpful. One thinks of the well known, eccentric conclusion to his "Outline for a Book":

...As a fresh start she should give away all her endowments to the poor and needy. The clergy should live solely on the free-will offerings of their congregations, or possibly engage in some secular calling. She must take her part in the social life of the world..¹³⁷

There can be no doubt, then, that in proposing a secret discipline and a non-religious Christianity Bonhoeffer had the renewal of the church somewhere in his mind and was committed to this task with no less than the whole of his heart. And yet, one is uneasy with too confident and too ready assertions that the realm of the secret discipline is ecclesiology, devotional life, and liturgy such as one finds elaborated in Life Together. Bonhoeffer simply raised too many questions which would seriously affect what was written in Life Together after the conclusion of the Brüderhaus experiment and his book. Life Together was closely identified with The Cost of Discipleship and therefore lies in the same strange shadow of the "claim to space" with which Bonhoeffer chose to fight the Kirchenkampf. He suggested in his prison letters that The Cost of Discipleship needed to be rewritten in view of his affirmation of the coming of age of the world.¹³⁸ "Life Together II" would have

had to await that revision, just as the original had to be preceded by The Cost of Discipleship. Any attempt to foreshorten or reverse the order of Bonhoeffer's thinking (or the thinking of those who wish to take up and carry forward Bonhoeffer's ideas) violates what Bonhoeffer called "waiting on God's time."

The important problem would have been, or course, what meaning might be attributed to such statements as "Christ exists as the church," "outside of the church there is no salvation" or "the church is the community of revelation," once Christ has been affirmed as the Lord of a non-religious world come of age. Can even the secret discipline help us here, without leading us to the conservative restoration Bonhoeffer feared? The place and purpose of the church and her liturgy would have had to await the construction of a new ecclesiology which would deal with the problem of revelation — and Bonhoeffer has not left enough evidence behind for us even to outline that ecclesiology. In his view, this problem had to wait while more pressing problems were considered. We too must wait, and press ahead with other matters. We will not be helped by seizing eagerly upon the notion of the secret discipline as an answer to questions we have not yet fully asked or understood; nor should we proceed with any illusions that with the best of intentions, Bonhoeffer's thoughts on non-religious Christianity represent no ultimate threat to the nature and structure of the church.

The theme of the church and its place in the religionless world directs us toward the concept Bonhoeffer suggested as a partner for the secret discipline: his distinction between ultimate and penultimate. Our dis-

cussion of this aspect of our problem is best carried out by reminding ourselves that the church is, after all, the church of the Word. In saying this we cannot help conversing with that all-pervading present day theological concern for the problem of hermeneutics.

2. "...Finding new, stammering words for the Word of God," "a groping rediscovery of what Christian faith really means" — this is how Gerhard Libeling defines the hermeneutical endeavor which today has become almost a synonym for theology itself.¹³⁹ The problem of theology is speech: what we shall say and how we shall say it, what has been said and how it may again be said. Bonhoeffer's concern has undoubted affinities with the problem of hermeneutics. We shall have to direct special attention to the question whether the search for a "new language" so closely resembles Bonhoeffer's interrupted investigations that we may say that the hermeneutical concern is the legitimate — perhaps even the sole — heir to his deliberations.

Early in his career, Bonhoeffer differentiated between "qualified speech — the risk of unconditional, blind obedience to the commandment of God," and "qualified silence," waiting until the time is ripe before speaking¹⁴⁰ or, as he was later to speak of it, "waiting upon God's time."¹⁴¹ The Ethics took a special interest in qualified silence, just as The Cost of Discipleship was interested especially in "qualified speech". Qualified silence becomes the question of the "warrant for ethical discourse".¹⁴² Each word, Bonhoeffer wrote, does not belong in each mouth at every time. "The ethical is tied to a definite time and place," because everything in historical existence has its own time.¹⁴² Not to understand and affirm this is "to injure and destroy the creaturely wholeness of life. To confine the ethical phenom-

enon to its proper time and place is not to invalidate it; it is, on the contrary, to render it fully operative. Big guns are not the right weapons for shooting sparrows."¹⁴⁴ In certain circumstances the better way to serve this "qualitatively ultimate" concept may be to refrain from treating it as a theme at all, "because it goes without saying."¹⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer really did wish to find room in theology for "going without saying" as regards ultimate matters; for silence as a means of saying a great deal when to speak would be to profane. Using an illustration from a pastoral counselling situation, he asked:

...why it is that precisely in thoroughly grave situations, for instance when I am with someone who has suffered a bereavement, I often decide to adopt a 'penultimate' attitude, particularly when I am dealing with Christians, remaining silent as a sign that I share in the bereaved man's helplessness in the face of such a grievous event, and not speaking the biblical words of comfort which are, in fact, known to me and available to me... Does one not, in some cases, by remaining deliberately in the penultimate, perhaps point all the more genuinely to the ultimate, which God will speak in His own time...? ¹⁴⁶

Here we are faced with Bonhoeffer's famous distinction between ultimate and penultimate and his appreciation of the penultimate as a genuine and forgotten sphere of theological investigation. It was this appreciation which led him to his affirmation of worldly life in the prison letters, and he referred specifically in the prison letters to "the distinction (which you have met with me before) between ultimate and penultimate"¹⁴⁷ as a concept which could be related to the secret discipline. The ultimate must neither be confused with the penultimate nor forgotten altogether. But there is an appropriate time and place for silence as regards the ultimate, and the suggestion is that a world come of age is such a time.

Unless it can be interpreted in the form of the penultimate — worldly life — the ultimate must "go without saying." Dogmatic theology with its religious language, apologetic theology with its religious a priori, ecclesiology and the cultus — these are relegated to the realm of silence and secrecy.

Of course, the dialectic of worldly life/secret discipline calls for speaking as well as for silence. No mystical quiescence or stoic submission is meant; the "discipline" consists not in keeping the secret but in keeping it from profanation. Bold experimentation is necessary, as Daniel Jenkins reminds us;¹⁴⁸ bold speech which will risk naivete, stammering speech which will be uncertain and incomplete, speech which will prove to be improper and which will therefore have to be discarded in favor of new experimentation. No doubt much more of Bultmann's demythologizing is called for than Bonhoeffer thought necessary. Theologians must speak in order to determine how far into the forms of the world come of age the church can and should go without losing sight of the ultimate, and to what extent she can take up the forms of worldliness without the religious a priori and without profaning the secrets she attempts to interpret. But above all, in Alec Vidler's words, "Christians should restrain their spate of words, their pious and theological jargon, and keep quiet until they have proved in their commerce with the life of the world which of their words ring true."¹⁴⁹

With this there is suggested a corrective for the direction in which the hermeneutical discussion seems headed at the present time. The search for "principles of interpretation" should include a reverence and respect which has often been lacking in any confrontation with

the Bible and biblical concepts. At least two contemporary theologians conversant with the problem of hermeneutics have recognized a tendency on the part of interpreters to speak before listening; a compulsive desire to begin interpreting before having heard. Oscar Cullmann, while admitting the difficulty of his position (since it would seem to be impossible to approach the biblical texts without some hermeneutical principle) has reflected Bonhoeffer's concern for "waiting to hear what God will say to us," for "going without saying," in a passage introducing the third German edition of Christ and Time:

...I regard the non-violation of the limits imposed on the New Testament scholar in studying New Testament texts as precisely a theological duty applicable to all, not only to the scholars: first, before all evaluation, all judging, perhaps even prior to all 'being addressed' in 'my understanding of existence,' prior to all believing, simply to be obedient to what the men of the new covenant want to communicate to me as revelation, even if it is quite foreign to me. I am aware that I thereby stand in contradiction to a 'hermeneutical' trend widely prevalent today... 150

Here is the awareness, however difficult to articulate and however unmodern and conservative it might seem, that the text in its original form is in some way "the thing itself," that to understand it, one must be willing to do without language for a time: to hear, and to wait. The ultimate is not some universal religious truth which is confronted with the kerygma only that we might prove that the two are, after all, identical. However reactionary such a suggestion may seem, one confronts the Bible as the "Word of God", and it is this, in its unchangeable form, one is seeking to understand and interpret.

One needs also a certain sense of balance which

ought to be but has not been presupposed in the struggle for "understanding". What is in the Bible, because it is in some manner God's Word but also because it is foreign and past history, cannot be subjected to one's force and control. Ernst Käsemann has recognized the danger which comes of forgetting this in a recent remark:

The mistakes of historians and interpreters and the misunderstanding of the neighbor belong very much together, are not in the least merely the result of stupidity, and indeed prove that one is victim of a short circuit when one makes what is foreign in a contemporary of past history into something objective in the sense of being subject to our control. I regard the confusion of understanding and decision as no less dangerous. The assumed compulsion of having always to take a stand, rather than first hearing for once and waiting for what is given or taken by that which is foreign, is usually the death of understanding, the stragling of the real question, the missed chance to grow by learning. How many of our students still perceive that understanding is always a process of one's growth, and hence requires time and leisure even to the extent of self-forgetfulness; that only unripe fruit is shaken from the tree of knowledge by him who does not himself ripen in the handwork of the historian's trade? The cardinal virtue of the historian and the beginning of all meaningful hermeneutic is for me the practice of hearing, which begins simply by letting what is historically foreign maintain its validity and does not regard rape as the basic form of engagement. 151

3. When Bonhoeffer speaks explicitly on the subject of the secret discipline in relation to the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts, he seems to mean that the traditional and historical exposition of the Christian faith must be preserved — or at least respected — not in spite of but as an indispensable part of the interpretation itself. But if one looks at the prison letters in their entirety, a wider reference for the concept emerges. If certain related passages were to be extracted and assembled, one would be tempted

to entitle the collection "the secret discipline." We are not speaking primarily of Bonhoeffer's reports of his devotional activity, nor of his meditations upon Losungen or biblical themes, although these would undoubtedly be included in the collection. What would appear as the central theme would be the description and affirmation of a particular style or attitude which one's life assumes in the midst of one's this-worldly existence. This style or attitude might be called a Christian "way of life", although the word "way" might better describe the secularity common to all men and "style" the special marks those men who are also Christian would bear. Jacques Ellul has put it in the spirit of Bonhoeffer though more traditionally: the Christian is "the citizen of another kingdom, and it is thence that he derives his way of thinking, judging, and feeling."¹⁵² Certainly the Christian participates in the secular condition common to all men, but he receives it not on its own terms, but only as it is taken up and affirmed in Christ, his Lord. To preserve this sense of "having received", a secret discipline is necessary, "a kind of cantus firmus to which the other melodies of life provide the counterpoint."¹⁵³ Although this is related to justification and sanctification and a concept of revelation, it cannot finally be set into the framework of traditional theological discussion of these notions; nor of the cultus, nor ecclesiology.

It is a kind of humorous, humble, self-effacing secrecy of devotion and hope, which finds no counterpart in the visible world, nothing in symbol or gesture by which it may fully be reflected and expressed; nothing in the cult or ritual which may presume to take its place. ...Bonhoeffer was looking past these things to the form for his faith which could actually meet the world, actually be in it, without reserve, as Christ was in it...

That faith itself rested on the sketchy and strange tradition within Christianity of secrecy, exclusiveness, fastidiousness, which has never received great prominence... It is the tradition whose origins lie in the same region as the origins of the doctrine of election; but it has a different bent and outcome. 'Cast not your pearls before swine'; 'shake off the dust of that city from your feet'; 'this is my body': these are all sayings which presuppose, indeed demand, a kind of initiation and secrecy which clearly forbids the intrusion of the curious or the self-certain. The words of Christ are for all, indeed, and the powerful strain of universalism has swept Christianity along many triumphant lines. Paul's equally powerful stress on the givenness, the gift, of God's grace, combines with this universalism to keep the idea of secrecy and exclusiveness from too great prominence in Christian history. Nevertheless it is there, and the simplicities of the gospel, the call to be humble, and unostentatious in prayer, never using naked power, but always service, and sacrifice, are both its sustenance and its preservative. 154

The secret discipline endeavors to preserve and give direction to a faith "whose perfection consists in not professing itself, or rather, which confirms its reality not by assertion but by submission."¹⁵⁵ To accomplish this kind of faith in the world come of age, a discipline is necessary, a steadfast determination not to belong to the world even as one lives in and for the world with all one's being and although one cannot speak but as a participant in the conditions of the world. Faith and life are affirmed anew each day, from outside of oneself -- indeed, one must say it: from outside of the world and of one's neighbor, even though that affirmation will be delivered through what Luther called "masks of God", the things of this world.

The basis for this discipline is, once again, Christological. The dialogue of faith between the secret discipline and worldly existence is "the depth and inwardness of the affliction with which Christ was

afflicted;"¹⁵⁶ with which Christ loved the world at the same time that he wept over its sin and evil and hopelessness. The Christian affirms "the secret of the humiliation of God."¹⁵⁷

The center 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 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. ¹⁵⁸

The source of strength which enables the Christian to live in and for the world come of age, to live a worldly life within that world and to share in Christ's Lordship over it, is hidden with God in Christ. It is real and positive. But it is manifested only indirectly, through powerlessness, submission, and the discipline and humility of holding one's peace.

With these words we have already begun discussion of "sharing in the sufferings of God," the general description of the faith and life of the Christian in the world come of age.

II. Sharing in the Sufferings of God.

Martin Luther once described the making of a theologian as "living, nay rather dying and being damned... not understanding, reading, or speculating."¹⁵⁹ The successor to this profound statement may well be the sentence which first appears in a letter in July, 1944: "Man is challenged to participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world." Not only the theologian, Bonhoeffer seems to be saying, but theology itself will emerge from this participation in God's sufferings. Any "non-religious interpretation" will

have as its starting point an affirmation of the godless, religionless world and the suffering of God within such a world, and it will succeed to the extent that the theologian and his theology participate in these sufferings. Indeed, an understanding of revelation itself, of the meaning of Christ for us today, will take shape as one shares in the sufferings of God in the life of the godless world.

Bonhoeffer evidently looked upon this formula as the consummation of his thinking in the prison letters. It includes 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."¹⁶⁰

We have first to set the relevant passages before us, referring first to the conclusion of the lengthy letter of July 16 (quoted above in Chapter 14)¹⁶¹ and continuing below with major portions of the letters of July 18 and 21:

Man is challenged to participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world.

He must therefore really live in the godless world, without attempting to gloss over its ungodliness with a veneer of religion or trying to transfigure it. He must live a 'worldly' life and so participate in the sufferings of God. He may lead a 'worldly' life, for he is freed from all religious obligations and reservations. To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to cultivate some method or other in order to make something of oneself (a sinner, penitent, or saint), but to be a man. Not some human 'type' but the humanity Christ creates in us. It is not some religious act which

makes a Christian what he is, but participation in the sufferings of God in the life of the world.

This is metanoia. It is not in the first instance bothering about one's own needs, problems, sins, fears; but allowing oneself to be caught up in the way of Christ, into the Messianic event, and thus fulfilling Isaiah 53. This being caught up in the Messianic suffering of God in Jesus Christ takes a variety of forms in the New Testament... The one thing they have in common is participation in the suffering of God in Christ. That is their 'faith'. There is nothing of religious method here. The 'religious act' is always something partial, faith is always something whole, an act of life. Jesus does not call men to a new religion, but to life. What is the nature of that life, the life of participation in the powerlessness of God in the world? More about that next time, I hope.

Just one more point for today. When we speak of God in a non-religious way, we must speak in such a way that we rediscover the godlessness of the world and thereby throw surprising light upon it — we must not gloss over it. Now that it has come of age, the world is more godless, and perhaps for that very reason closer to God than the immature world...

...During the last year or so I have come to know and understand the this-sidedness of Christianity as never before. The Christian is not a homo religiosus, but a man, pure and simple — just as Jesus was a man, in distinction to John the Baptist. I don't mean the shallow and banal this-sidedness of the enlightened, the busy, the comfortable or the lascivious, but a deep and disciplined this-sidedness, in which the knowledge of death and resurrection is ever present. I believe that Luther lived such a this-sided existence.

I remember a conversation that I had thirteen years ago with a young French pastor in A. We had put before us quite simply the question what we really wanted from our lives. He said that he wanted to become a saint (and I think it possible that he did become one); at the time I was very impressed. In spite of this I argued with him and said something to the effect that I wanted to learn to believe. For a long time I didn't know how far apart we were. I thought I could learn to believe insofar as I myself tried to lead such a holy life. At the end of this path I wrote the Cost of Discipleship. Today I can see the dangers of this book, although I stand by what I wrote as before.

Later I discovered and am still discovering up to this hour that it is only in the full this-sidedness of life that one learns to believe. When one has completely abandoned every attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, a converted sinner, a churchman (the priestly type, so-called!) a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one — and this is what I mean by worldliness — living to the full the duties and problems, successes and helplessness. Then one forgets about one's own sufferings and takes seriously the sufferings of God in the world; then one throws oneself utterly into the arms of God and watches with Christ in Gethsemane. I think that is faith, metanoia, and that is what makes a man and a Christian (cf. Jer.45!) How can success make us arrogant or failure lead us astray, when we participate in the sufferings of God in a this-sided life? 162

We have already had occasion to remark that by speaking of suffering, Bonhoeffer is stressing the forbearance and submission of the Christian, not a melancholy refusal to participate in the joy of life or undue fascination with the morbid.¹⁶³ To suffer means to place one's cause, whether for blessing or for a cross, unreservedly in the hands of God.¹⁶⁴ Bonhoeffer would have liked Ellul's description of the Christian life as "agonistic",¹⁶⁵ with that word's original meaning of "contestant" or "combative".

But unlike Ellul, he would have linked this to the Incarnation of God in Christ, pointing to Christ's own existence in the world as "agonistic". It is the suffering of God in Christ that one participates, Christ's "affliction". At its lowest estimate, Bonhoeffer's phrase may be coupled with the words of H. Richard Niebuhr: "The story of Jesus, and particularly of his passion, is the great illustration that enables us to say, 'What we are now doing and suffering is like this.'"¹⁶⁶ Bonhoeffer himself wrote, in August, that...

...if the world was worthy of bearing the man Jesus Christ, if a man like Jesus lived, then and only then has our own life meaning. Had Jesus not lived, then in spite of all the other men whom we know, honor and love, our lives would be meaningless. 167

Is it sufficient to speak of Bonhoeffer's final comments on Jesus as indicative of the "illustrative" meaning of Jesus for the Christian life? By referring to the relationship of the disciple to his Lord as a participation in the sufferings of God in Christ, Bonhoeffer may well have begun to describe an imitatio Christi, such as Barth found in the prison letters. That Bonhoeffer was moving in this direction, perhaps deliberately, cannot be doubted when one considers the projected second chapter of the "Outline for a Book," which appeared in August and which we have cited previously.¹⁶⁸ Encounter with Jesus' "being for others" as "the reversal of all human being" is the experience of transcendence. "Faith is the participation in this being of Jesus," "man living out of the transcendent."

Bonhoeffer wished in 1930 to overcome the problem of act versus being in revelation "in Christ", but in Christ who exists as the church. We saw how his Christology and the tropological formula of The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together produced a dynamic process rooted in meditation upon the scriptures, where Christ meets the believer and empowers him to fulfil His commands. But now one participates in Christ's being for others in the setting of worldly life. The "space" of the church has given way to the archimedian point of the secret discipline which remains hidden and secret, while Christ is met and revelation is concrete in "this-sidedness", the life of the world. 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."

What form will this identification with Christ in the world come of age actually assume? First and foremost, it will take the form of a kind of identification with the world. A secret discipline may enable one to retrace one's steps when they have proved errant in order to begin afresh, but it cannot in and of itself recover the meaning of Christ in a world come of age. What is needed is an entry into the life of the world so complete that one's Christian presuppositions and answers, when they must be present, are silent and tentative. "Christ for us today" can only be found in the world, and the "religious" barriers which keep one from one's neighbors must be broken down. This identification with the godless world must be a real one. Following Bonhoeffer, Daniel Jenkins writes:

The guiding principle for Christians in this realm is that of identification. They will recognize that they are part of the world Christ came to save and that they cannot participate in his saving act unless they do so at those places in the world where they live alongside their fellows, whether their fellows bear a Christian name or not, and where they have to take those decisions which are most significant for their own lives and for the lives of others who depend upon them. 169

God must be obeyed not merely in what men call the Church but also in what they call the world -- in men's politics, business, industry and all the other spheres of human activity and association in which their lives are lived. And he must be obeyed not by considering how life in these spheres must be related to life in the institutions of the Church, nor by turning the questions which confront men in their living experience into 'religious' questions, nor even by raising the 'Christian' issue in relation to them in a self-conscious way. 170

"God must be obeyed" may and must read: "Christ is to be found." Finding Christ through this identification can only be accomplished through the cultivation of a this-worldly life which accepts full responsibility for the world's history, structures, laws, and influences; recognizing their power to destroy men but seeing in them a capacity to create as well. The Christian's first duty, Ellul reminds us, is to

...regard himself on the level of other men, with them subject to the same laws, to the same influences, to the same despair... He ought to consider himself in this world, whose inner structure he perceives as involved in this civilization, moved by it, dependent on it, but also, perhaps, capable of altering it. 171

Here there can be no escape into the transcendent, no flight to the deus ex machina as the only solution to insoluble problems. It was the experience of this truth in his own involvement in the history of his country which led Bonhoeffer to make this responsibility axiomatic for any understanding of Christian faith and life:

It is only by refusing to allow any event to deprive us of our responsibility for history, because we know that is a responsibility laid upon us by God, that we shall achieve a relation to the events of history far more fruitful than criticism or opportunism. To talk about going down fighting like heroes in face of certain defeat is not really heroic at all, but a failure to face up to the future. The ultimate question the man of responsibility asks is not, How can I extricate myself from the affair? but, How is the coming generation to live? 172

By speaking of "identification with" and "being responsible for" the world, it might be thought that what is required is more active Christian participation in secular political, social, and economic life. No doubt this will have to occur. But it is only a part of the problem, and by no means the major part. Bonhoeffer hinted several times in the prison letters and throughout the Ethics that true identification and responsibility

is the shaping of one's life in the tension between being fully in the world and deriving one's ways of thinking, judging, and feeling from another kingdom which claims one's ultimate allegiance. He would have applauded Ellul's remark that "in a civilization which has lost the meaning of life, the most useful thing a Christian can do is to live, and life, understood from this point of view of faith, has an extraordinary force."¹⁷³ Both Bonhoeffer and Ellul stress the "apologetical" nature of the Christian life; the former of "the importance of human example" which gives the Word emphasis and power, the latter of living as a sign of the new covenant in Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁴ What is meant is not piety nor ethics, but a "style" of life of such quality that it leads men to God:

Christians ought to try to create a style of life which does not differentiate them from others, but yet permits them to escape from the stifling pressure of our present form of civilization... The only successful way to attack these features of our modern civilization is to 'give them the slip', to learn how to live on the edge of this totalitarian society, not simply rejecting it, but passing it through the sieve of God's judgement.¹⁷⁵

In learning to live and in actually living such a life one allows for a confrontation between the secret discipline, which makes possible and obligatory an existence in the world, and the godless world come of age itself. This confrontation, this dialectical tension gives the Christian life its distinctiveness by molding it into a particular shape and guiding it in a particular direction. The truth of the Incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ, the Lordship of Christ, is proclaimed by the living of such a life.

What this being in Christ entails, what the content of this "holy worldliness"¹⁷⁶ will be necessitates a

great amount of involvement, reflection, and confession. Certainly it will mean different things to different people, and the comparing of "notes" will be of the utmost importance as each Christian attempts to determine the degree to which his own life must be aesthetic or intellectual, simple or complex, meditative or occupied. Although there were times when Bonhoeffer thought that the Christian life in this generation would have to remain fragmentary and strive simply to endure rather than to shape itself¹⁷⁷, he found it possible to suggest certain marks of such a life upon which one could focus. Speaking to a circle of friends who shared his tradition and interests, he expressed his hope that a new, liberalized "aristocracy" might emerge, one which would re-discover a sense of "quality", of "reserve between man and man":

Socially it implies the cessation of all place-hunting, of the cult of the "star"; an open eye both upwards and downwards, especially in the choice of one's more intimate friends, and pleasure in private life as well as the courage of a public life. Culturally it means a return from the newspaper and the radio to the book, from feverish activity to unhurried leisure, from dissipation to recollection, from sensationalism to reflection, from virtuosity to art, from snobbery to modesty, from extravagance to moderation. 178

Whatever the marks of such a Christian life, they will be determined by an encounter with Christ as "the reversal of all human value." One lives and learns to live by participating in the revelation which one has both received and has yet to receive, to find Christ in the world while one rejoices in the certainty that he already has been found there, to confess to and to identify with those who have not received because Christ identifies with them as he does with us who have received.

6)

From living and describing such lives lived in imitation of Christ, "lives based on the transcendent", Bonhoeffer foresaw the renewal of theology and the church. "Our traditional language," he wrote, "must perforce become powerless and remain silent, and our being Christian today will be confined to two things: praying for and doing right by our fellow men. All speaking, thinking, and organization of the things of Christendom must be reborn out of this praying and this action."¹⁷⁹ A chapter in the book Bonhoeffer did not live to write was to deal with the nature of a life based upon the transcendent, a life for others. It was to be followed by:

(c) This as the starting point for the reinterpretation of biblical terminology. (Creation, fall, atone-¹⁸⁰ment, repentance, faith, the new life, the last things.)

Upon the ability of Christian theology to rediscover what she can and may say about revelation in terms of the life Christ lives and to which he calls men, upon the ability of Christians really to live redeemed lives before men in this world, will depend the shape of Christianity and its hope for the world. Here, in worldly life and in worldly lives in Christ, there occurs the revelation which shatters and remakes human history.

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We have followed the path of Bonhoeffer's theology from his early "Christ existing as the church" to the breaking down of the limitations of an ecclesiological doctrine of revelation and of Christ in the Ethics, and to the final affirmation of the this-sidedness of Christ and the Christian life in a world come of age.

A systematization of his theological ideas would be the last thing Bonhoeffer would have wanted. His work is and must remain fragmentary -- that is how he

speaks and must speak to us, in "fragments which must be fragments"¹⁸¹, which afford us but a glimpse of "the way in which the whole was planned and conceived, and of what material he was building with or should have used had he lived."¹⁸² To have known that his work provided us with such a glimpse and had thus provided a lasting contribution to the renewal of theology and the disclosure of "Christ for us today" would have gratified him deeply. Our task is to strike our tents and to go forth into the region which he sketched crudely but did not live to enter. That we have the courage to do so is due in great measure to the life and work of this astonishing, disturbing, and comforting man.

Part III (B): "This-Worldly Transcendence"

1. Cf. above, pp. 195 ff.
2. November 21, 1943. Letters, p. 44.
3. January 29-30, 1944. Ibid., p. 67
4. Advent II, 1943; November 21, 1943. Ibid., pp. 50, 44.
5. Advent II, 1943. Ibid., p. 50.
6. Hamilton, p. 447. Cf. above, reference 17 in notes for Part II (B).
7. December 18, 1943. Letters, pp. 56-7.
8. May 20, 1944. Ibid., pp. 99-100.
9. January 23, 1944. Ibid., p. 63.
10. January 23, 1944. Ibid., p. 64.
11. April 30, 1944. Ibid., p. 93.
12. Paul van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, New York, 1963, pp. 1-2.
13. R.G. Smith, "A Theological Perspective of the Secular," The Christian Scholar, March, 1960, p. 21. Elsewhere, Smith has written:
 "God is not to be met primarily in some assertion about him. God is not to be found in an abstract belief about his omnipotence, or omniscience, or even in the idea of love. God is not any idea we have of him. He is not any idea. To attempt to elevate some idea to the place of God is to make an idol and worship that instead of God. When we set up some abstraction in place of God we are worshipping nothing more than an extension of the world." (The New Man, London, 1956, p. 98). Cp. J.A.T. Robinson, Honest to God, London, 1963, pp. 125-6.
14. "Outline for a Book," Letters, p. 165.
15. Smith, The New Man, op. cit., pp. 98-9.
16. July 16, 1944. Letters, pp. 121-2.
17. August 21, 1944. Ibid., pp. 130. Cp. Hammelsbeck:
 "Nietzsche's saying is valid in a special way: 'God is dead'; but in the Christian church the faith is nevertheless valid: Christ lives." (MW I, p. 47).
18. August 21, 1944. Letters, p. 130.
19. Cf. Appendix. Prenter defends Luther against the charge that the latter's theology is "negative" in MW IV, pp. 33-51.

20. June 8, 1944. Letters, p. 130.
21. May 5, 1944. Ibid., pp. 94-5.
22. Hamilton, pp. 444ff.
23. June 27, 1944; June 30, 1944. Letters, pp. 112, 115.
24. Cf. above, pp. 147-150.
25. April 30, 1944. Letters, p. 92.
26. June 27, 1944. Ibid., p. 112.
27. May 25, 1944. Ibid., p. 104.
28. July 21, 1944. Ibid., p. 124.
29. July 18, 1944. Ibid., p. 123.
30. August 21, 1944. Ibid., p. 130.
31. July 16, 1944; "Christians and Unbelievers". Ibid., pp. 122, 174.
32. July 21, 1944. Ibid., p. 125
33. GS III, p. 233.
34. Müller, p. 375.
35. "Challenge", p. 34.
36. Cf. below, pp. 283ff.
37. July 21, 1944. Letters, p. 125.
39. Cf. his letter to P.W. Herrenbrück, Appendix.
40. July 28, 1944. Letters, p. 127. Cf. Müller, pp. 384-7.
41. Müller, pp. 386-7.
42. "Outline for a Book". Letters, pp. 164-5.
43. Cf. above, pp. 73.
44. Cf. below, pp. 98ff.
45. Cf. below, pp. 287ff.
46. Smith, The New Man, op. cit., p. 103.
47. August 21, 1944. Letters, p. 130.
48. "Christians and Unbelievers," Letters, p. 174.
49. "Like most catch-phrases, it is used more to indicate an awareness that an interesting set of notions exists which bear further examination than to define something which is clearly formulated and easily recognizable." Daniel Jenkins, Beyond Religion, London, 1962, p. 9.

50. Cf. above, pp. 190-195.
51. Cf. above, p. 163.
52. April 30, 1944. Letters, pp. 91-2.
53. Cf. above, pp. 54ff; 60ff; 71ff.
54. Cf. above, pp. 49ff; 71ff.
55. Cf. above, pp. 62-71.
56. Cf. above, pp. 62ff.
57. Seeberg, Chr. Dogmatik, I, p. 104. quoted in AB, p. 46.
58. GS III, p. 96; cf. pp. 91-2.
59. GS III, p. 76.
60. So Paul van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, New York, 1963, p. 2. Van Buren's work, though it is in no way a study of Bonhoeffer, is a response to Bonhoeffer's challenge that theology "make sense" to man in a world come of age. Van Buren sees the problem mainly as a linguistic one: secularism is a word which can be understood by examining the developments of british philosophy in linguistic analysis. His choice of conversational partners unfortunately places his interesting book outside of the considerations of this study.
61. London, 1962, pp. 26-33.
62. Ibid., p. 29.
63. Ibid., p. 29.
64. Ibid., p. 33.
65. "Challenge", pp. 33-4.
66. Jenkins, op. cit., p. 35.
67. Ibid., p. 33.
68. Ibid., p. 33.
69. April 30, 1944. Letters, p. 91.
70. MW I, p. 77.
71. Of the five theologians Bonhoeffer mentioned in connection with his new thoughts in the prison letters, we have already dealt or will yet examine at length his relationship to Barth, Bultmann, and Tillich. We have not the space to develop a by no means passing conversation between Bonhoeffer and Paul Althaus, and

and have restricted our comments to a footnote (16) in the appendix to this study. Althaus, too, sided with the German Christians during the Kirchenkampf. His notion of the universality of the human religious situation as "inescapable godlessness in inescapable relationship to God" is the kind of eschatological-apologetical statement Bonhoeffer opposed as a "last question", an improper one in the face of the coming of age of the world. Concerning Karl Heim, see the note immediately following.

72. Karl Heim's Glauben und Denken, which Bonhoeffer reviewed in 1932 (cf. GS III, pp. 138-159), attempted to mediate between theology and philosophy by means of a special understanding of the category of "dimension" and a strong eschatology in the form of "ultimate questions." Bonhoeffer, following the arguments of Barth and Grisebach, termed Heim's theology "religious titanism", believing that few men encounter such questions and that the Bible has more to say to those men who do not (GS III, pp. 158-9). Heim responded on other points of Bonhoeffer's argument in the third volume of his work (cf. God Transcendent, eng. tr. of the above, London, 1935, pp. 255-9).

As with all of the theologians mentioned in his prison letters, Bonhoeffer learned much from Heim. In particular, a study of the relationship between "this-worldly transcendence" and Heim's anti-metaphysical attempt to establish what he called a "world-space" as the space of revelation, defined largely in terms of "encounter" theology and heavily indebted to Buber's thinking, would prove interesting. But Heim lent his support to the German Christians (so much so that he deleted all references to Buber, the Jewish philosopher, in the second and subsequent editions of Glauben und Denken), and Bonhoeffer turned away from yet another conversation which might have proved fruitful.

73. D. Jenkins uses Tillich's notion of the "God above God" to explain Bonhoeffer's attack upon religion, describing both as attempts to recover the principle of self-protest which must underly all protestant theology. J.A.T. Robinson has learned much from Tillich's use of phrases such as "Ground of Being" and "Depth of Existence" as substitutes for a concept of God. But cf. below, note 86.
74. AB, p. 73.
75. Ibid., p. 75

76. Cf. Ibid., notes on pp. 87, 161.
77. GS III, pp. 71-2.
78. June 8, 1944. Letters, pp. 108-9.
79. April 30, 1944. Ibid., p. 93
80. May 25, 1944. Ibid., p. 104.
81. June 27, 1944. Ibid., p. 112.
82. June 8, 1944. Ibid., p. 107.
83. June 30, 1944. Ibid., pp. 114-5.
84. June 8, 1944. Ibid., p. 108.
85. Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, Chicago, 1957, p. 9.
86. Ibid., p. 10. Compare Tillich's statement in his Courage to Be (Yale, 1952, p. 40): "Man as man in every civilization is anxiously aware of the threat of non-being and needs the courage to affirm himself in spite of it." Only recently has there been a reaction against the use of Tillich's theology in order to fill the gaps in Bonhoeffer's prison meditations. F.G. Downing questions J.A.T. Robinson's interest in Tillich as the answer to Bonhoeffer's questions, believing that Tillich's apologetic is based upon the kind of religious a priori Bonhoeffer deplored (cf. The Honest to God Debate, London and Philadelphia, 1963, pp. 126-133). Another expression of skepticism has come from Grover Foley, a student of Barth, who asks whether an interpretation of God as "the Ground of our Being" can possibly be at the same time a denial of "religion" in Bonhoeffer's sense. He concludes: "The fact is, Tillich is at heart a confessed religious Philosopher, a philosopher of religion par excellence, the very antithesis of one supporting Bonhoeffer's attack on religion." ("Religionless Religion," in The Christian Century, p. 1097).

This discussion is related closely to the argument of the present study which begins at this point. Perhaps the most useful bridge is a recent article which questions seriously the conviction of existentialist theologians that the experience of anxiety suggests, however distorted, a "desire for God". Kenneth Hamilton views the Christian doctrine of sin as more radical than the concept of anxiety which has sought to replace it; the latter seems to assume that "man the sinner genuinely longs for God and actively struggles to attain to righteousness." ("Man: Anxious or Guilty? A Second Look at Kierkegaard's Concept of Dread," The Christian Scholar, January, 1964. Fur-

therefore, Hamilton questions the widespread assumption that Paul, at least in the Letter to the Romans, is attempting to show that "we all seek after God, desiring to be with him." The universal fact of religion proclaims as much, showing that none of us is without the intuition of the divine that reaches out in love toward the Source of all the good." (Ibid., p. 294) Hamilton directs his counter-arguments against Tillich, but with the touchstone in Paul's doctrine of the Law, this same argument is useful for our analysis of Bonhoeffer's relationship to Bultmann's later theology. Cf. below, pp. 276ff.

87. H. Hamilton, "A Theology for a World Come of Age," op. cit., p. 458.
88. William Hamilton mentions the strangely attractive "uncertainty" of Bonhoeffer's approach. R.G. Smith, accepting this posture vis-a-vis the secularist as a proper one, speaks of a "defenselessness" which cannot but seem "rather naive and primitive and unsystematic to the theologians and rather arbitrary, and naive as well, to the secularists." ("A Theological Perspective of the Secular," op. cit., p. 11)
89. April 30, 1944. Letters, p. 91.
90. June 8, 1944. Ibid., p. 10.
91. Theology of the New Testament, I, New York, 1951, p. 269. Bultmann states that "the ultimate purpose of the Law is to lead men to death and thereby to let God appear as God..." (Ibid., p. 267). Bultmann has recently reviewed and rejected contemporary theological interest in "the death of God" and the disappearance of the religious a priori which began with taking seriously Bonhoeffer's questions in the prison letters. Cf. "Der Gottesgedanke und der moderne Mensch," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, Dezember, 1963, pp. 335-343.
92. "Die 'nicht-religiöse Interpretation biblischer Begriffe'", MM II, pp. 12-73. An english translation is now available in Word and Faith, London, 1962 (a collection of Ebeling's essays).
93. Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," Harvard Theological Review, July, 1963, pp. 199-215.

94. Stendahl's argument, however, depends upon an understanding of the Law which differs somewhat from that of Ebeling and Bultmann. Stendahl claims that the Law became a theological problem for Paul simply because the Messiah had come, making the Law (which he understood always as the Jewish law) invalid. Any suggestion in Paul's writings that the Law is universally apprehended and has the position of a "schoolmaster" (a mistranslation, Stendahl points out) is incidental and secondary to the real problem. Paul is simply wrestling with the question of what possible meaning the Law can have for Jew and Gentile following the appearance of the One who supercedes and invalidates it.
95. Ebeling, op. cit., p. 54.
96. Ibid., p. 59.
97. Ibid., pp. 59-60.
98. Ibid., pp. 59-60.
99. op. cit.
100. Ibid., p. 199
101. Cf. above, note 94.
102. Ibid., pp. 200-201. On the contrary, Paul's conscience was "robust" and he gloried in his achievements as a righteous Jew (cf. Philip. 3)
103. Ibid., p. 200.
104. Ibid., p. 206.
105. Ibid., p. 207.
106. Ibid., p. 215.
107. Ibid., pp. 208-9. Cf. Bultmann, "The Problem of Hermeneutics," in Essays Philosophical and Theological, London, 1955, pp. 234-61.
108. Theology of the New Testament, op. cit., p. 269.
109. Cf. especially G. Harbsmeier, "Die 'nicht-religiöse Interpretation biblischer Begriffe' bei Bonhoeffer und die Entmythologisierung," MZ II, pp. 74-91. In support of our argument, Harbsmeier states:
 "It can very well be that (Bonhoeffer's) intention is indeed at one with Bultmann's. Some utterances seem to me to strengthen this impression. But intention is one thing and carrying it through to a success.

ful outcome is another. In any event, I understand Bonhoeffer's criticism of Bultmann in terms of the question of success. Bultmann doesn't want reduction and subtraction, but interpretation. He wants to conquer Liberal theology at this point. Is he successful in this? Bonhoeffer thinks: No. For Bultmann, as I think Bonhoeffer sees it, fundamentally misunderstands the use of mythological diction in the Bible." (Ibid., p. 82). Cf. also R. Prenter, NY III, p. 17 and our treatment of Bonhoeffer's relationship to the problem of hermeneutics (below, pp. 295ff.).

110. June 8, 1944. Letters, p. 110.
111. "Ethische und mystische Religion in Urchristentum," Die christliche Welt, 1920, p. 740. Barth attempted to answer the charge in his preface to the second edition of the Römerbrief (Epistle to the Romans, op. cit., pp. 16-18.)
112. "Karl Barths Römerbrief in zweiter Auflage," Die christliche Welt, 1922, p. 320.
113. Kerygma und Mythos I, p. 26, cited in Ebeling, NY II, p. 52.
114. Cf. the appendix to this study, where two letters from Bonhoeffer's hand give an indication of how he received and responded to Bultmann's essay.
115. May 5, 1944. Letters, p. 94.
116. June 8, 1944. Letters, p. 110.
117. Honest to God, op. cit., pp. 266, 7. Cf. R. Prenter, NY III, p. 17.
118. Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism, New York, 1958, p. 154.
119. Cf. especially his Protestantism and Progress, op. cit.
120. Weber, op. cit., p. 181. Weber describes this revolution as follows:
 "Christian asceticism, at first fleeing from the world into solitude, had already ruled the world which it had renounced from the monastery and through the Church. But it had, on the whole, left the naturally spontaneous character of daily life in the world untouched. Now it strode into the market-place of life, slammed the door of the monastery behind it, and undertook to penetrate just that daily routine of life with its methodicalness, to fashion it into

a life in the world, but neither of nor for this world." (Ibid., p. 154)

121. Cf. above, pp. 115 ff.
122. Smith, The New Man, op. cit., p. 104.
123. April 30, 1944. Letters, p. 92.
124. May 5, 1944. Letters, p. 95.
125. MW I, pp. 55-7.
126. MW III, pp. 18-19.
127. "Challenge", p. 35.
128. "Thoughts on Baptism". Letters, pp. 159-60.
129. Cf. CD, p. 45. On the historical foundation of Bonhoeffer's notion, cf. G. Heuss, MW III, pp. 70-71; Müller, p. 393; Hammelsbeck, MW I, p. 55; Bethge, MW I, p. 23.
130. Bonhoeffer's judgement of monasticism as a justification, in the last analysis, for the increased secularization of the church (CD, pp. 38-9) and his description of Luther's decision to leave the monastery as "the worst blow the world had suffered since the days of early Christianity" (CD, p. 40; cp. Ethics, pp. 223-224) warn us against equating the "secret discipline" with some sort of "return to the cloister". In this respect, Hammelsbeck's remark that "the secret discipline" could serve as a subtitle for the work Life Together (cf. MW I, p. 56) is dangerously misleading, although not simply incorrect.
131. Cf. GS I, pp. 38-40.
132. "Challenge", p. 24.
133. MW I, pp. 56-7.
134. R. Fuller, "Liturgy and Devotion," in Marty, p. 179.
135. GS I, pp. 115; 133-9; 142, 3, 7.
136. Cf. letters of April 30, 1944 (Letters, p. 92); June 8, 1944 (pp. 109-110); August 3, 1944 (p. 123).
137. "Outline for a Book". Letters, p. 166.
138. July 18, 1944. Ibid., p. 125.
139. Word and Faith, London, 1962, p. 126. Hermeneutics embraces the whole theological enterprise as a movement of language: the confrontation, apprehension, preaching, hearing, and serving of the word.

140. GS I, pp. 174, 178, 116f.
141. Ethics, p. 204.
142. Ethics, pp. 204ff; 271; 283ff.
143. Ethics, p. 232.
144. Ethics, p. 233. Bonhoeffer criticized Brunner for overlooking the question of whether and when ethics becomes a topic of conversation at all. Cf. GS I, pp. 31, 33-5, 40.
145. Ethics, p. 234.
146. Ethics, p. 84.
147. April 30, 1944. Letters, p. 92.
148. op. cit., pp. 112ff.
149. Soundings, Cambridge, 1962, p. 247.
150. "Retrospect upon the Effect of the Book in Post-War Theology", in Christus und die Zeit, Zurich, 1962, pp. 25f. Bultmann, at least, is not unaware of these dangers, and has from time to time called for "openness" rather than presuppositions (cf. Theology of the New Testament, II, New York, 1955, p. 241).
151. "Zum Thema der urchristlichen Apokalyptik," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, February, 1963, pp. 259n.
152. Ellul, The Presence of the Kingdom, ET London, 1951, p. 45.
153. May 20, 1944. Letters, p. 129.
154. Smith, The New Man, op. cit., pp. 104-5.
155. Ibid., p. 106.
156. Ibid., p. 107.
157. CD, p. 166.
158. Müller, pp. 395-6.
159. "Vivendo, immo moriendo et damnando fit theologus, non intelligendo, legendo aut speculando." (WA 5. 163.23).
160. Hamilton, p. 435.
161. Cf. above, p. 246.
162. Letters, pp. 122-5.
163. Cf. above, pp. 251ff.

164. July 28, 1944. Letters, p. 127. Cf. above, note 35, Part II(B), p.
165. Ellul, op. cit., p. 19.
166. The Meaning of Revelation, Macmillan Paperbacks ed., New York, 1960, p. 122.
167. August 21, 1944. Letters, p. 130.
168. Cf. above, pp. ²⁵², annotated 42. It is important to recall that the Cost of Discipleship closed by referring to discipleship as an imitation of Christ (cf. CD, pp. 269-275) and the Ethics sketched such a development (especially Ethics, p. 99).
169. Jenkins, op. cit., p. 81.
170. Ibid., p. 22.
171. Ellul, op. cit., p. 122; "Thoughts on the Baptism of D.W.R.," Letters, pp. 138, 136.
172. Letters, pp. 138-9.
173. Ellul, op. cit., p. 94.
174. Ibid., pp. 12-13.
175. Ibid., p. 60.
176. Alec Vidler's title for his excellent essay which owes its inspiration to Bonhoeffer. Cf. Essays in Liberality, London, 1957, pp. 95-112.
177. Letters, p. 157.
178. "After Ten Years," Letters, p. 144.
179. Ibid., p. 160.
180. "Outline for a Book," Ibid., p. 165.

Appendix I

"Scientific" Theology: Bonhoeffer and
the Barth-Harnack Letters

In 1923, the year in which Bonhoeffer began his theological study, a series of open letters were exchanged between Adolf von Harnack and Karl Barth — the two men who were to have the greatest influence upon Bonhoeffer's theological development.¹ Harnack wrote as the eminent spokesman for Liberal "scientific" methodology, Barth as the brash, intense, often careless exponent of the radical "theology of revelation". Barth called for Christianity to turn its back upon the interests of two hundred years of Protestant thought; Harnack, bewildered and angry, wrote an open challenge to those he called "the despisers of scientific theology". The challenge was accepted by Barth, and the ensuing debate comprised four letters and Harnack's epilogue.

These letters, which seemed to close the discussion as abruptly as it had been opened with little accomplished passed quickly into obscurity. But in 1957 they were republished in a volume of collected essays under Barth's authorship. From the perspective of the several years of theological development which have passed since these words first appeared, it is clear that the argument has assumed new importance for contemporary theological debate. If we cannot accept Harnack's answers, his questions still trouble us. We cannot afford not to take up this discussion once more, in one form or another, and for this rea-

1. "Ein Briefwechsel mit Adolf von Harnack," in Karl Barth, Theologische Fragen und Antworten, Zürich, 1957, pp. 7-31.

son as well as for our interest in clarifying Bonhoeffer's relationship to his teachers, we introduce them here.

1. The Letters.

Harnack began the discussion with "Fifteen Questions to the Despisers of Scientific (wissenschaftliche) Theology among the Theologians". His questions emphasized the relativity of the contents of the Bible, the reality of the experience in man of the awakening of faith, the validity for faith of moral and cultural experiences not directly related to the content of the Christian proclamation, the necessity for preaching "God's holy majesty and love," and the absolute dependence of one's knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ upon historical-critical study. He was arguing, against the "theology of revelation", that theology as a discipline is enclosed in cultural history and cannot present itself other than as an element within that history, subject to its relativities, insights, and difficulties. In order to be so related to culture, theology must be "at one with the secular sciences," or wissenschaftlich. "Indolence, shortsightedness, and numerous other illnesses notwithstanding," Harnack asked, "is there a theology other than that which is at one and in blood relationship with science? If so, what persuasive power and value may be ascribed to it?"²

Barth recognized immediately that the challenge was meant for him, and he responded with "Fifteen Answers to Professor von Harnack". His letter began with the accusation that "the form of Protestant-scientific theology which, since the days of Pietism and the Enlightenment and especially in the last fifty years of German history has

2. Ibid., p. 9.

served as the measure," has "alienated itself more than is good for itself from its theme," which is "the one revelation of God."³ Theology is not related to either culture or science, but to preaching and faith. "Faith arises, in point of fact, out of preaching; but preaching...through the Word of Christ. The task of theology is one with the task of preaching. It consists thus of taking up and passing on the Word of Christ."⁴

Much of Barth's "Fifteen Answers" struck Barnack as "totally incomprehensible." In a subsequent letter he located what he thought was the center of the disagreement and his inability to understand what Barth was aiming at, remarking that "the central matter remains under a thick fog: namely, your conception of revelation."⁵ He could not see what Barth meant by identifying theology with "preaching":

You see in the scientific theology of the present a weak and transitory product which has been constructed since the days of pietism and the enlightenment, and which has only the value of a communis opinio. I see in scientific theology the only way of encountering the object epistemologically, a way which is new and old at the same time: new, because it has reached its clearest expression since the 18th century; old, because it has existed as long as there have been thinking men. You say, "the task of theology is one with preaching," I counter: "The task of theology is one with the task of science in general, but the task of preaching is the pure presentation of the task of the Christian as a witness to Christ. You exchange the theological lectern for the pulpit (and want to disseminate theology proper among the secular faculties). I tell you from the standpoint of the general course of church history that this undertaking will not edify, but rather lead to disintegration. 6

3. Ibid., p. 9.

4. Ibid., p. 10.

5. Ibid., p. 14.

6. Ibid., p. 14.

Harnack thus regretted that Barth's answers showed only the "cleft" which separated the two conceptions of revelation and the task of the theologian. He expressed the conviction (which he carried to his deathbed) that if Barth's conception should become the accepted one, the gospel would be "given over exclusively into the hands of the revival preacher."⁷

Barth acknowledged that the central issue was the relationship between theology and preaching, and he developed his identification between the two in a long and more careful answer. He again expressed his concern that contemporary (that is, Liberal) theology had emptied its task of real meaning by representing theology as a self-evident "fact" of cultural history and replacing the Evangelical correlation between Spirit and Scripture (= "the Word") with the "simple gospel" (which "can only metaphorically be called the Word of God, because it is in the best analysis only a human utterance"). Barth continues:

The sentence which you and others find so strange and repelling, that the task of theology is one with the task of preaching, is unavoidable and programmatic for me (although, of course, to carry it out there is a great deal which has still to be considered). Thus, I set forth as axiomatic that the preacher, too, has properly to proclaim the Word and not his own discoveries, maxims, and reflections. That the truth of preaching and faith comes through this Word of Christ (that 'of' is to me of very little note!) you have indeed admitted. But if this Word is to be passed on through preaching, so it is as well (and may be considered to be identical with) the task of theologians. The tactical-practical differentiation in execution goes without saying, and it is just as well that one hears from the lectern what was left unsaid in the pulpit and vice-versa.

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7. Shortly before he died, Harnack wrote the following to Bonhoeffer: "...Materialism, Commerce, and Sport threaten our spiritual and mental well-being; along with this our theological well-being is threatened by the despising of scientific theology and from unscientific theologians.

But Harnack would not surrender his position that theology and preaching are to be differentiated. Because of this very basic disagreement, and because neither felt that he was making himself understood to the other, the discussion ended at this point. And yet, Harnack's epilogue which signalled the close of the conversation remains the most disquieting document of all past discussions between Liberal and post-Liberal theologians. Harnack never received an answer. He wrote:

In life, theology and witness are indeed bound up together; nevertheless, neither the one nor the other can remain sound if one turns one's back on the necessity of keeping them separate. Both are 'real' — not simply 'witness', as Professor Barth puts it. But the manner of their 'reality' is here and there a very different thing. Scientific theology can, thanks to her object, inspire and edify; but scientific theology which proceeds from inspiration and edification brings strange fire to her altar. There is only one scientific method; there is only one scientific task: the pure knowledge of the object. Whatever science happens upon apart from this is an incalculable gift. The concept of revelation is not a scientific concept; science is incapable of explaining the God-consciousness and paradoxical preaching or religious founders and prophets (or religious experiences in general) under one generic heading, or as "revelation". It is pointless to fasten upon a "Word" of this kind as something so purely 'objective' that it can be allowed to be shut out of the influence of human speech, hearing, and reception and understanding. I have the impression that Professor Barth is attempting to do something like this and calls dialectics to his aid — leading us to an invisible edge between absolute religious skepticism and naive biblicism — a most distressing interpretation of the Christian experience and the Christian faith!9

Therefore, those who stand by the banner of scientific theology must all the more hold it high, and they must build as kings, but at the same time fear no yeoman duties. I am certain that you, dear Bonhoeffer, will always take this to heart, and I have a firm trust that your work and research is on the right track." (GS III, p. 20).

8. Barth, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

9. Ibid., pp. 30-31.

2. Theology, Faith, and the Church.

If one is tempted to dismiss the debate which Harnack initiated as narrowly academic, revealing in him a misunderstanding of Barth's position so basic that one can only marvel that so open and receptive a mind as Harnack's could have seen these as the issues on which clarity should be demanded, this may be because Barth's abilities as a polemicist are always impressive (Barth, as usual, "won" this debate), and because the phrases and concerns of Liberalism, once taken for granted, can today only with difficulty be understood. Behind the odd phraseology of Liberalism and an academic argument concerning the appropriate German verb "to know" is the question of the task of theology itself. What is it that disturbs Harnack? Holding the light of Wissenschaft against Barth's position, Harnack sees that his adversary is attempting to remove theology from its legitimate place as an area of human knowledge and investigation, stripping it of any claims to intellectual integrity by calling upon "revelation", and shutting it out from that discussion with secular, "scientific" disciplines which Harnack had so carefully cultivated for the preceding fifty years. In question was the relationship between theology and the world of human thought and knowledge (Wissen), the obedience of the theologian to the accepted rules which governed the human search for truth. At issue, then, was no less than the nature of theology itself.

Can theology be distinguished from "witness" as an area open to "scientific" historical investigation, or are theology and witness (or "faith") but two sides of the same coin, synonyms for the response to an "event" of revelation inapprehensible to human knowledge? Harnack was certain that theology could and must be distinguished from faith, and that

the former must commend itself as an area of human thought which required no special rules which distinguished it from other spheres of knowledge. He began his History of Dogma by describing his work as "an historical investigation of the doctrines of the Christian faith logically formulated and expressed for scientific and apologetical purposes, the contents of which are a knowledge (Wissen) of God, of the world, and of the provisions made by God for man's salvation."¹⁰ The conclusion of his survey saw Luther as the liberator of faith from this series of dogmatic propositions, so that the "simple gospel" could be rediscovered, encountered, and personally adhered to. A "history of dogma" thus became possible: dogma as "the historical exposition of the gospel" separated from any supernatural aspects could be measured and shaped by "the general state of knowledge of the time".¹¹ Barth, in Harnack's view, was undoing Luther's revolution, turning theology into a concern of "faith", with its own language, demands, and concerns apart from this world.

Barth's rejection of this definition of theology -- so clumsily expressed in these letters -- was unequivocal.¹²

10. Harnack, History of Dogma, op. cit., v.1, p.1.

11. Ibid., p. 21n.

12. The claim need hardly be made that despite tactical or methodological changes through the years, Barth's battle against "natural theology" (the phrase with which he has always characterized, among other things, Liberal theology) has remained his primary concern. The first development in Barth's thinking came with the rewriting of the Christliche Dogmatik as Kirchliche Dogmatik in 1932, following his study of Anselm and his replacement of the dialectical method with Anselm's methodology (cf. Barth, Fides Quaerens Intellectum, ET London, 1960). Godsey rightly reminds us (in op. cit., p. 64n.) that much of Bonhoeffer's

If the picture of the world as a place where all worldly enterprises, however "scientific", have an unquestioned religious basis were no longer true, then Harnack's definition of theology as another secular discipline would have the effect of banishing God altogether at the same time it banished revelation. The methodology which Barth demanded restored to dogmatic theology exactly that which Harnack wished to disclaim: the presence of the Holy Spirit as an "impossibility", an "inconceivability." Theology could not be compared with "scientific" disciplines. There was no unity between theology and the cultural world; on the contrary, the theologian could only bear witness to the discontinuity between God and the world, revelation and religion, the Word of God and the word of man. Theology can only be described as confession, proclamation, *fides quaerens intellectum*. Both faith and theology are directly involved as inseparable elements of the actus purus, the epistemological cognitive act. God is thereby free, non-objective, eternally subject. He cannot be contained within words or institutions; men cannot really speak of Him. But He can, if He so chooses, make use of a theology to attest Himself therein.¹³

Hence Barth's utter rejection of the description of theological thought as wissenschaftlich. Wissen denotes a compendium of knowledge, positive and entitative knowledge which can be catalogued, stored, and analyzed in the manner of secular disciplines. God, Barth claimed, cannot be "stored". He made exclusive use of the other german

protest is directed at the rejected Christliche Dogmatik. At the same time, as Reuten writes, "the continuity of Barth's thought is, for the rest, astonishing and admirable. But in his early work the train of his thinking on revelation...is fresher and clearer. ...It has full validity for the theology of the Church Dogmatics." (MW III, pp. 34-5).

verb "to know": kennen. Erkenntnis is defined as the instantaneous "epistemological" acquisition of knowledge; "recognition" or "perception".¹⁴

Harnack and Barth were arguing over a problem which, in one form or another, was to disturb Bonhoeffer throughout the whole of his life. No one can doubt that Bonhoeffer understood and accepted Barth's protest and made it his own — in the last year of his life he acknowledged the Commentary on Romans to be one of the important books in his development and the development of twentieth century theology.¹⁵ But he was aware that Barth's methodology created difficulties which could not be glossed over, and that these were the same that had made his position so unintelligible to Harnack. In 1931, Bonhoeffer described the situation to a seminar in New York:

The category which Barth tries to introduce into theology in its strict sense and which is so refractory to all general thinking is the category of the Word of God, of revelation straight from above, from outside of man, according to the justification of the sinner by grace. Theology is the scientific consideration of this category. But exactly here the difficulty comes in. Scientific consideration is based upon general, formal presuppositions of thinking. Since these presuppositions cannot be taken from the object of theological thinking — just because it never actually becomes an object, but always remains subject — and since, on the other hand, they must be taken from this subject-object, if they are to be at all adequate, the deepest contradiction in the task of theology becomes obvious. It is, in the final analysis, the great antithesis of the Word of God and the word of man, of grace and religion, of a pure Christian category and a general religious category, of reality and interpretation.¹⁶

13. Cf. Bonhoeffer's presentation of Barth's position, AB, pp. 80-86.

14. Cf. the translator's remarks concerning wissen and er-kennen in AB, pp. 138n, 149n.

15. Letters, June 8, 1944 (p. 109).

16. GS III, pp. 116-7. Among Barth's early associates, Paul Althaus found the problems raised by the rejection of the notion that theology is a "science" insurmountable, and sought instead to retain both a "scientific" and

Bonhoeffer did not think that Barth's category of revelation necessitated a rejection of the term "scientific" as an adjective describing theology. He chose instead, in Act and Being, to redefine this term in support of his ecclesiological solution to the problem of revelation, and to insist upon the "scientific" character of theological work as the means whereby the difficulties of Barth's presentation might be overcome. Interestingly, he singled out as the most important of these difficulties one which had greatly troubled Harnack: Barth's understanding of the relationship between faith and theology.

Bonhoeffer described the situation: Faith must remain the direct, intentional act of belief in Christ which is characterized at every point by its refusal to reflect upon itself, to consider "What would happen if...?" Dialectical theology, and especially Barth, "allows faith to grow doubtful of itself in reflection, which brings it into temptation, the penalty of not having distinguished adequately between knowing (wissen) in faith and theological cognition (Erkenntnis)."¹⁷ Faith is thereby dissolved into "faith-wishfulness",

"revelational" theology (cf. his "Vom Sinn der Theologie," Evangelium und Leben, Gütersloh, 1927, pp. 15-30, and the description of the issues involved in his Grundriss der Dogmatik, 1929; 3rd. ed. Berlin, 1951, para. 1). Althaus was in many ways near to Bonhoeffer's ecclesiological solution of the problems facing theology, and it is interesting that he alone of the major theologians who were involved in the dialectical rebellion against Liberalism saw the doctrine of the Church, from the outset, as the central problem. Bonhoeffer was forced to reverse the order of the words in the title of his dissertation to avoid confusion with Althaus' Communie Sanctorum, which appeared in 1929.

17. AB, p. 176. "In the knowing of the believer there is absolutely no reflection. The question whether faith is possible can be answered only by faith's reality. But, since this reality retires from demonstration as an entity, any reflexion must obliterate it. Faith looks not on itself, but on Christ alone. Whether faith is faith can be neither ascertained nor even believed.

the desire for faith. The confusion of faith with theology can only result in the theologian falling into the trap he wishes to avoid: belief in a theology, rather than belief in God. For theology, by its very nature, involves reflexion upon itself, detachment, observation, and analysis.

"In theological knowledge, I am detached from the intentionality of the faith which vanquishes temptation."¹⁸

Needless to say, theology can never conquer the real temptation (Anfechtung) of faith with its propositions. It is a matter of the concrete struggle, taking place in the direct consciousness of man, between Christ and Satan, of which the issue must first be won or lost. We may keep before our eyes, as much as we like, theological propositions of forgiveness and redemption; unless Christ in person speaks to us his Word of new creation to transform our existence, unless the general proposition becomes a living occurrence, they themselves are a collective temptation.¹⁹

To speak of theology as "Erkenntnis" stresses the existential nature of theological propositions; their basis in faith. But "humility in theology is impossible so long as it gives out its propositions as faith-inspired or as "existential" (which is in the end the same thing...)"²⁰ Theology "turns revelation into entity"²¹ and, therefore, theology must be an ecclesiastical Wissenschaft:

It is positive science (Wissenschaft), for it has its own given object, the spoken Word of Christ in the Church, from which fact it has authority to make general pronouncements; it aims at the system, at dogma. But it is only within the Christian communion that all this acquires its particular meaning. Only the communion knows that the Word it hears is ever and again repeated in a sphere beyond theology, that theology is no more than the custodian, catalogue, and memorial of this Word; it knows that the general pronouncements are meaningless without their confirmation by Christ, knows that the very dogma on which preaching builds is the result of 'direction' by preaching. It knows that when theology says 'God forgives sins' neither God himself nor sin is implicated, but that both have been used to form a general proposition, for there is real talk of God and sin only when

18. AB, p. 143.

20. AB, p. 144.

19. AB, pp. 145-6.

21. AB, p. 145.

Christ speaks of them here and now, speaks of my sin specifically in the existential 'now'.²²

Here are the bounds of theology. This is known by the communion in which it is practiced, and indeed it would appear, not only in the knowledge of its limitations, but also of its justice and necessity, that theology's tendency to 'self justification by intellectual works' (Herrmann) can be overcome... In reality the position is such that I, speaking as a theologian, can counter the urge to justify myself with intellectual works in no other way than by inserting my theology into the community of persons (which is the theologian's humility), and allowing the communion to allocate its place, bestow its meaning upon it.²³

Barth followed Bonhoeffer's lead within a few years — although he could not settle for even a redefinition of the term Wissenschaft as a description of theology, he did agree that theological methodology must be grounded in ecclesiology. But Bonhoeffer, and later Barth, succeeded only in setting ecclesiology between themselves and the question Harnack had asked. Both post-Liberal theologians accepted the (fundamentally Ritschlian) isolation of the church, and the theological methodology used by the church, from the world and worldly thought and knowledge.

Barth's theology has consistently been characterized by its witness to a fundamental principle: Revelation comes to man, when and if it comes, from outside of human thought and action. God speaks to the world from a position inaccessible to the world; creating both his manner of speaking and the means by which his Word is heard. Theology begins with the recognition that God is not man, and the question of the relationship between worldly thought and theology cannot be discussed beyond this point. The involvement of Bonhoeffer's theology in the Kirchenkampf obscured (certainly for his friend Barth) the fact that Bonhoeffer's theological development issued from his certainty that Barth's principle was the first word, not the last word, of theological discourse. Sancto-
rum

run Communio and Act and Being failed to show clearly that Bonhoeffer's main wish was to move theology and the church into the center of sociological and philosophical discussion. But he attempted to explore the implications of his ecclesiological-revelational theory for the world outside of the church in numerous essays and studies written within the traditional Lutheran framework of the doctrine of the two kingdoms, between 1931 and 1933.²⁴ These were the attempts to describe the relationship between Christianity and the world which were taken up in another form in the Ethics in 1940. And finally, Bonhoeffer asked the question of God's existence in the world, of the "worldliness" of Christianity, in still another, startling, unforgettable way in the prison letters.

Prophetically, Harnack asked in 1923 the questions that would arise to plague us forty years later, as theology attempts to move with Bonhoeffer's help beyond the halting places of its great teachers: Bultmann, Barth, Tillich. Perhaps R. Gregor Smith has put the continuing problem most concisely:

If I may put the matter at its lowest estimate, we may say that theology begins with the recognition of God as being not-man, as being over against man. ... This recognition of a given otherness, which is at the same time a disturbance, a question, addressed to man's being, is from the Christian point of view by no means something that takes place in isolation or abstraction. It takes place in this world which is also in a special sense man's world. The God that Christian theology speaks about here is not God in isolation but God in the world. Theology here faces intellectually its one and only problem. 25

22. AB, p. 145.

25. Smith, TPS, p. 15.

23. AB, p. 146.

24.

Appendix II

Translated MaterialI. Letters from the Gesammelte Schriften.

A. Reform of the church and the problem of speech.

The identity of the receiver, a woman, has not been determined. From Berlin, written probably in early 1940. Cf. GS III, pp. 37-43.

...I am afraid that you will be disappointed by my letter. For what you are really asking is a reformation of the church root and branch, and I can't manage that just now. But on the basis of the questions of your letter I would like to consider what we pastors, and you as a church member, can in fact do about it -- not to reform the church, but at least to keep from hindering and disturbing what renewal will perhaps occur. I think that from the outset our mission should thus be limited. We don't reform the church, but we can certainly stand in the way when God has determined to reform his church. To give way, to make room -- these things alone should concern us. Reforming impulses can do just as much damage to the church as letting things slide, with the comfortable excuse that God alone must do it...

...There is no place in the church for Christ and the creative in man but, strictly considered, for Christ alone; and in him -- but really only in him! -- for everything that is lovely on the face of the earth, insofar as it is able to serve him alone. Only where, for the sake of Christ, we deny that which we of ourselves and out of our creative possibilities hold to be beautiful -- that is, where we have set aside all of our measurements for the sake of Christ, who is the measurement of all

measurements, can Christian beauty and Christian genuineness arise. And it will only arise when Jesus Christ alone is the driving force behind all of our creations...

Everyone knows today that the protestant church — and not only the protestant — has brought upon itself the devastating judgement of many of the educated, due to the frightfully misguided taste of the last century. Nothing can be said against your roll call of evils; every bit is appropriate and the list could be extended. Why is it, then, that today we are nevertheless disposed to judge these things more gently and with less self-consciousness? Since its earliest beginnings, the church has been a matter of small, insignificant people. But haven't these been up to the present the same people who have "Bless this House O Lord We Pray" in burnt wood, hanging in their room, and who, in spite of countless setbacks, give their pennies for the things of Jesus Christ with a loyalty which moves one, who bear the burden of home missions, indeed, who set the whole of their existence on the line for the sake of the church of Jesus Christ? Is it not on the contrary those educated, who understand taste and nothing more, who enter into an emptiness so astonishing that only exceptionally are they capable of the simplest acts of love and prayer? No one is above reproach at this point. We all sit in the same boat. But that is the fact of the matter. In the face of these peculiar and surprising circumstances are we not necessarily forced to distinguish between the essential and the nonessential? Isn't it more essential to be a true and responsible Christian with a somewhat philistine burnt wood motto than, with the best taste, never to reach a decision? Isn't it more essential to live, act, and die with the verses of a somewhat sentimental hymn book than to pass by the necessary decisions of our present day Christian existence with well-chosen hymns from the sixteenth century? And finally: the "pathos" of pastors. This is really something very bad — but very much worse is the educated pastor who would never ever

slip in this way, who comforts his congregation with his education instead of with the Gospel. You speak for the educated. But isn't it to be expected of just these educated that they see beyond the nonessential to the essential? But in fact the situation now is that it is not the educated, but rather the simple people who carry the church; and on the basis of the Gospel, we truly have not the slightest reason for being dissatisfied with this nor for wishing ourselves any better. Of course we wish that the educated wouldn't stand aside and let themselves be dismissed by this kind of thing, but that they would join for that reason, work along and try to shape things. The sacrifice of certain forms and traditions must occur, to be sure, but perhaps at this point only in order to come upon more felicitous, freer, newer forms.

...You set out the whole problem on the basis of "speech" and, I think, you are certainly right in doing so. At no place will you find my perplexity in answering you greater than at this point. In the protestant church, which is the church of the preaching of the Word of God, speech is no superficial matter. I can understand very well your continual irritation over our expressing in such a matter-of-fact and banal fashion such great and ultimate matters which otherwise a man can scarcely utter. You are also right when you say that a word such as sin, grace, forgiveness or whatever has a completely different sound, bears a completely different weight, when it is uttered by a man who never speaks these words otherwise. The word which sees the light of day as the result of a long silence is more heavily weighted than the same word in the mouth of a chatterer. I agree with you: we shouldn't use certain words at all, because they are worn out. It has often been said that there should be fewer sermons, that the Word might be given stronger emphasis.

But surely, that too is tendentious and spurious. We pastors experience countless times in counselling that a Bible word in the mouth of a sick or poor or lonely person is something entirely different from when we say it ourselves. We keep our silence often enough in order to keep our office away from a spiritual routine. But we know that we must speak and often may not keep silent when we would like to. And now put yourself in our position, having to go around from morning to evening "professionally" with the greatest words in the world; reading, studying, praying, lecturing, baptizing, marrying, burying, preaching. We couldn't be thankful enough were someone to tell us where we do it improperly: where, perhaps by all objective accounts, we simply fall into the heaping up of empty phrases. But above all, we would like to know how to do it better. Nothing is helped by a radical cure, such as the striking of the words Cross, Sin, Grace etc. from our vocabulary. In the first place, "cross" can't be replaced by "guillotine" because Jesus did in fact die on the cross. Second, the word "feeding trough" instead of "manger" would perhaps be good for the moment, but after the second and third time just as worn out. Of course there are words, especially those favorites sought out and given an interpretation by oneself, which can and should be struck out completely; still, we have to speak with words. Whether the "everyday speech of the average educated man" is the right one, I don't know. In any case, that is not what Luther's speech was. I believe that one should not seek out a particular style of speech. One falls too easily into complacency. It doesn't help matters that Christianity is 2000 years old and has her own speech. This speech of the Bible should, I think, remain as it is (at least because for daily use one wants water and not nectar, if one is to fasten on to its word). But what is essential is the depth out of which it

comes and the circumstances in which it is used. And, in conclusion, I must say something "spiritual". You know of course the book by Bernanos?¹ When the priest there speaks, the word bears weight. That is because it comes not out of some speech consideration or observation, but simply out of the daily, personal correspondence with the crucified Jesus Christ. This is the depth out of which a word must come, if it is to bear weight. One might say it has to do with whether or not we judge ourselves daily with the picture of the crucified Jesus Christ himself, and allow ourselves to be called to repentance. Where the word comes, so to speak, immediately from the cross of Jesus itself, where Christ is so contemporary that he speaks our words himself, only there can the terrible danger of spiritual chatter be avoided. But who among us lives with this composure?...

B. The "demythologizing" controversy.

1. To Ernst Wolf, March 24, 1942. GS III, pp. 45-6.

...I am very happy about the new Bultmann volume.² The intellectual honesty of his work always impresses me. I hear that a short time ago, D. took you and Bultmann apart in the Berlin circle in a pretty stupid fashion, and that the circle, as I hear it, came within a hair of protesting to you about Bultmann's theology! And that from the Berliners, of all people! I'd like to know whether any of them has worked through the Commentary on John. The arrogant self conceit that flourishes here — I think under the influence of some pompous asses — is a real shame for the Confessing Church...

2. To a friend, March 25, 1942. Unpublished.³

...Now about Bultmann: I am among those who greeted his writing — not because I agree with it, I regret his double

1. Diary of a Country Priest.

2. "The New Testament and Mythology" in R. Bultmann,

point of departure (the argument from John 1:14 and from the radio ought not be confused; I too think the second is an argument, it's just that the separation must be clearer). In this much, I have perhaps remained a student of Harnack's. Putting it crudely: Bultmann has let the cat out of the bag, not only for himself, but for very many (i.e. the Liberal cat out of the Confessing Church bag), and I am happy about it. He has dared to say what many repress in themselves (I include myself), without having faced the issues. In this way he has done intellectual integrity and purity a service. The pharisaism of faith which, on the other hand, many of the brothers are calling upon, seems to me unfortunate. Speaking and answering are in order. I would gladly speak to Bultmann about it and set myself in the draught which blows from his direction. But then the window will have to be shut once more. Otherwise the susceptible will catch cold too easily.

If you see Bultmann, please give him my greetings.... Tell him that I would be glad to see him, and how I see things...

II. From a letter from Karl Barth to Superintendent R.W. Herrenbrück, December 21, 1952.

...The letters, from what one can make out of their single sentences (and I have let them work on me once again in toto, since the beginning of your correspondence), are a particular thorn; to allow them to affect us all can only be a good thing (because, unlike 'demythologizing', this is a spiritual unrest).

3. ...Nun zu Bultmann: ich gehöre zu denen, die seine Schrift begrüßt haben; nicht weil ich ihr zustimme, ich bedaure den doppelten Ansatz in ihr (das Argument von Joh. 1,14 und vom Radio her sollte nicht vermischet werden, dabei halte ich auch das zweite für ein Argument, nur müsste die Trennung klarer sein), soweit bin ich also vielleicht noch ein Schüler Harnack's geblieben. Grob gesagt: Bultmann hat die Katze aus dem Sack gelassen, nicht nur für sich, sondern für sehr viele (die liberale Katze aus dem Bekenntnissack) und darüber freue ich mich. Er hat gewagt zu sagen, was viele in sich verdrängen (ich schliesse mich ein), ohne es überwunden zu haben. Er hat

What an open and rich and, at the same time, deep and astonishing man stands before one -- somehow shaming and comforting at the same time. That is also how I personally remember him. An aristocratic Christian, one might say, who seemed to hurry on before one in the most varied dimensions. This is why I always read his earlier offerings, especially those which seemed to or really did say things which I didn't at first understand, deliberating whether, seen from certain angles, he might not be right. So also these letters, with their expressions, some of which I of course find bewildering as well. One can't read them without having the impression that there must be "something there". You are therefore surely right to impress them upon your pastors and, at the same time, to make some suggestions concerning their significance. But then, and still today, one meets with a particular difficulty in Bonhoeffer. He was a -- how should I put it? -- impulsive, visionary thinker, who was suddenly siezed by an idea and then proceeded to give it lively form, only after a time to -- one never knew -- stop temporarily or finally by some penultimate point. Wasn't this already the case with The Cost of Discipleship? Didn't he also have, for some time, liturgical impulses? And how was it with the "Mandates" of his Ethics with which I tussled, as you know, in III/4? Musn't one always forgive him what he would certainly have made clearer and more concise in another connection and at another time, perhaps withdrawn, perhaps pressed further? Now he has left us alone with the enigmatic

damit der intellektuellen Sauberkeit und Redlichkeit einen Dienst geleistet. Der Glaubenspharismus der nun dagegen von vielen Brüdern aufgewoten wird, ist mir fatal. Nun muss Rede und Antwort gestanden werden. Ich spräche gern mit Bultmann darüber und mochte mich der Zugluft, die von ihm kommt, gern aussetzen. Aber das Fenster muss dann auch wieder geschlossen werden. Sonst erkälten sich die Anfälligen zu leicht.

Wenn Du Bultmann siehst, grüsse ihn doch bitte von mir...

utterances of his letters — in more than one place of which he showed perfectly well that he indeed suspected, but in no way knew, how the story should go on (for example, what exactly he meant by the "positivism of revelation" he found in me and, much more so, how the program of a non-religious speech should be realized).

As far as the first is concerned, I have neither considered the question of when I have asked somebody to "take" or "leave" the Virgin Birth¹, nor the question of what my neo-Calvinist well-wishers in Holland would think of me portrayed as a "positivist of revelation"; but I am a bit embarrassed by imagining, as it could indeed have been, how so sensible and well-meaning a man as Bonhoeffer could have remembered my books (which he certainly did not have with him in his prison cell) in this way, as it appears in this enigmatic expression. The hope remains that at least in heaven he has not reported about me to the angels (the Church Fathers, etc.) with just this expression. But perhaps I have indeed on occasion behaved and expressed myself "positivistically" and, if that is so, then Bonhoeffer's remembrance has brought it to light. Without being able to ask him personally, we shall have to content ourselves with remaining confused.

Similarly so with the postulate of non-religious speech. I rather think that you have dealt with him with too heavy a hand when you point (on page 9) in the direction of existentialism, pre-understanding, etc. On the other side you rightly indicate that he did not have in mind the putting of the kerygma into "other words", thus to do that which follows practically upon Bultmann. Can he really have meant anything other than a warning against all Christian chit-chat, against all unmediated recitation of biblical-traditional pictures, phrases, word associations, in which the world cannot see anything at all because the religious writer or speaker himself does not in fact think or think in an orderly fashion about what he is saying. In the opinion that the stuff will somehow be God's

Word he starts in -- just as it might now be happening (oh, it isn't meant in a bad sense, and how many of us really have the time and capability to meditate in an orderly fashion?) under thousands of Christmas trees?

Certainly Bonhoeffer hasn't left us anything tangible in this respect, and I almost think it wasn't tangible in his own mind either. What more remains for us than to let him tell us something "best" -- in the direction previously indicated or some other way -- without searching for a deeper sense which he himself did not display to us, perhaps didn't even think through himself? And about this matter of the participation in the suffering of God, etc. it seems clear to me that this is a variation of the Imitatio notion which he so rightly stressed. Why should one not allow oneself simply to be addressed in this way: by a man of whom it was asked and to whom it was also given that he not only think it and say it, but also live it? To me it is long since clear that I will have to give wide space to this matter in the CD, in its place. Was Bonhoeffer of the opinion that the whole of theology was to be put on this particular basis? It could be that in his cell he was at times of just this opinion. Again, he has left us no clues in this regard, how he thought about this in detail and how he thought the questions deriving from his theme should be worked out. Well, you understand that I don't want to be rid of him when I reckon him "more or less", as one so nicely puts it, along with what I used to call "the melancholy theology of the north German plains." I am thankful enough that I have myself lived there for fifteen years and that I have absorbed a good bit of this Lutheran melancholy. This is how I also understand this Bultmann. Again, it hasn't yet been shown, and neither has Bultmann nor Bonhoeffer stated it triumphantly, that we have to look for the one and final word in this direction.

None of this is meant to be a criticism of your concerns relating to Bonhoeffer. Everything you have said about him remains to be considered. A softening of the offense he has given us would be the last thing I would want...

1. Letters, May 5, 1944 (p. 95).