

SPEAKING UP:
DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S IDENTIFICATION
WITH THE JEWS

by

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SUMMARY

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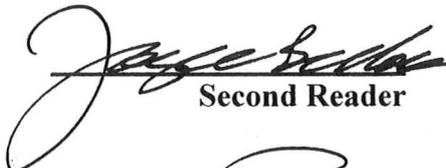
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ABSTRACT

M.A. in Church History (2006)

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer baffles Christian pacifists and Jewish writers, who cannot conceive that a German Lutheran pastor would risk his life siding with Jews by joining the conspiracy against Hitler. Christian theologians like Lacey Smith, Walter Harrelson, James Beck or Stephen Haynes, and Jewish critics like Emil Fackenheim, Stanley Rosenbaum, Ruth Zerner and Mordecai Paldiel, read political or purely humanitarian motives into Bonhoeffer's actions. However, a comprehensive examination of Bonhoeffer reveals a profound solidarity with Jews in his messages of freedom for all and of peace for the universal community of God.

Bonhoeffer did not stop speaking up for marginalized Jews in Nazi society. From his university years, when he learned Jewish teachings and equated their "cause of peace" with restored sociality in Christ, until his conspiratorial involvement as a dissident fact-finder and smuggler of Jews out of Germany, Bonhoeffer unconditionally identified himself with his Jewish "brothers."

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INTRODUCTION

The Holocaust's effect in world history marks it as one of the most tragic events of systematic genocide of the Jewish people since antiquity.¹ From the inception of the German Nazi state in 1933, "Jews were deprived of civil rights, persecuted, physically attacked, imprisoned, pressurized to emigrate, and murdered."² Then, at a conference in Wannsee (20 January 1942), plans were made with orders by Adolf Hitler for the Nazis' Final Solution: Jews were to be exterminated at concentration camps.³ This act of "major genocide was against the Jewish people," and, "by the end of World War II in 1945, more than 6 million Jews had been murdered out of a total Jewish population of 8 million in those countries occupied by the Nazis."⁴

It has been noted that, until too late, the world powers did alarmingly little to prevent the mass-extirpation of Jews in Europe during the Second World War. The reasons and excuses for this passivity can all be reduced to two: "genuine indifference, and fear lest the Western powers be suspected for waging a 'Jewish war'."⁵ Hitler invaded Austria (March 1938) and Bohemia-Moravia (March 1939), but it was not until

¹ There are at least a few reasons the Nazis' plan of extermination looms large in historical memory. Germany at the time of the Holocaust contained the largest population of European-born Jews yet, unlike the mass pogroms during the Dreyfus Affair in France—wherein the responsible mob and "entire minority [supposedly fighting for French democracy] had to work along extraparliamentary lines" for terrorizing Jews—Hitler capitalized on both an omnipotent police and a pseudomystical absoluteness that empowered his totalitarian bureaucracy in order to initially overrule individual objections, then deprived Jews of legal status (from second-class citizenship), then deprived them of life. "Not until Germany forced German Jewry into emigration and statelessness did they form a very considerable portion of the stateless people. But in the years following Hitler's successful persecution of German Jews all the minority countries began to think in terms of expatriating their minorities...." Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), 115, 249, 289 passim.

² "Holocaust," *Chambers Dictionary of World History*, ed. Katharine Boyd, Updated Version (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1994), 425.

³ Paul Johnson, *A History of the Modern World From 1917 to the 1990s*, Revised Edition (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991), 382, 414.

⁴ "Holocaust," *Chambers Dictionary of World History*, 425.

⁵ "Jewish Resistance," in *Contemporary Jewish Ethics*, ed. Menachem Marc Kellner (New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1978), 423.

Poland was taken (1 September 1939) that Britain and France declared war on Germany.⁶ The Nazis deported to the death camps Jews from these occupied territories and also from Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, France, Greece and Yugoslavia before December 1941, when the Americans entered the war against Germany's Führer ("Leader"). A joint declaration by the leaders of the Allies, whose considerations were military and political, "begged Pope Pius XII to make a statement condemning Nazi Germany's actions."⁷ However, Pope Pius did not intervene in March 1942 to thwart the deportation of Jews to Auschwitz; neither did he condemn Hitler. The Allies' great offensives from the East and the West eventually led to the occupation of Berlin, to Hitler's suicide, and to the final defeat of the remaining areas under Nazi control in 1945.

Regarding anti-Nazi resistance and the lack of organization for a timely response, Alexander Donat remarks that the two means that might have significantly aided Jews against the strategies of the Reich Führer were political resistance and the pulpit.⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was one German who dangerously engaged both of these avenues of resistance. As a distinguished figure in ecclesiastical circles, he denounced Nazi strategies against Jews before enlisting as a civilian in the counter-intelligence agency of the Abwehr (Military Intelligence Office) and the resistance therein, which joined together members of armed forces and of political bureaus in an attempt to overthrow Hitler. Reflecting on Bonhoeffer's remarkable sacrifice, Richard John Neuhaus, Editor-in-Chief of *First Things* (Journal of Religion, Culture, and Public Life), writes: "Among those who resisted Hitler, there is no more morally luminous a

⁶ "World War II," *Chambers Dictionary of World History*, 987.

⁷ "The Silence of the Vatican," in *To Bear Witness: Holocaust Remembrance at Yad Vashem*, ed. Bella Gutterman and Avner Shalev (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005), 206.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 422. Re. the final mean mentioned, consider the positive role that the church played in saving Jews from deportation particularly in Denmark and Bulgaria.

figure than Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor who rescued Jews and was executed on the direct orders of the Fuehrer (*sic*) in April 1945.”⁹

Despite the atrocities committed by Nazis during the Holocaust, one cannot help but question: Why did this highly reserved pastor and studious theologian come to throw in his lot with a group of ‘traitors’, whose primary goal was the death of the Führer? Moreover, why would a blond German of privileged upbringing, a picture of the quintessential “Aryan,” choose to associate himself with Jews wherever he went—especially at so inopportune a time?¹⁰

Jewish as well as Christian writers have sought to present Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a unique German Lutheran, who ultimately sacrificed his life for the Confessing Church and for Jews on political principles or purely humanist grounds.¹¹ The debate warrants attention and will be discussed in the chapters that follow. This thesis will disprove the notion that, in attempting to save the Jews in Germany, Bonhoeffer assumed personal risk strictly for humanitarian reasons.¹² Instead, this thesis argues that Bonhoeffer was motivated on Christian grounds to speak and to act on behalf of Jews; he saw this as his commitment to Christ, whose own sacrifice demonstrated the exercise of freedom *for* others out of identification with creation. Bonhoeffer also increasingly identified with and spent his freedom on behalf of the Jews through the course of his abbreviated life.

⁹ Richard J. Neuhaus, “Daniel Goldhagen’s Holocaust,” in *First Things*, no. 65 (Aug./Sept. 1996), 36-41. <http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9608/articles/review_essay.html>

¹⁰ Reich Citizenship Law (15 September 1935) said: “A citizen of the Reich is a subject of the State who has German blood...” Hitler’s propaganda erected the ideal of an “Aryan” race of fair-haired men and maidens, while associations set up by the Nazis (usually with requirements of mandatory membership) instructed children in “racial matters,” depicting Jews as visually suspect and dark-haired. Bella Gutterman and Avner Shalev, 49.

¹¹ Lecture by James Beck, delivered at Toronto School of Theology (11 November 2004). Cf. James Beck, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Jews and Judaism” (Toronto: Wycliffe College, 2003), 81. See also pp. 7 n. and 10 of thesis for a list of other writers.

¹² Miriam Webster’s definition of *humanitarian*: “committed to improving the lives of other people.”

Although he never lived as a Jew in accordance with the particular customs and traditions, Bonhoeffer understood and protested their plight; he appreciated Judaism and learned the Hebrew language; he did not distinguish himself spiritually, morally, or socially from his Jewish ‘brothers’. This solidarity with the Jews is relatively unrecognized as a topic of the current literature on Bonhoeffer.¹³ Ultimately, however, Bonhoeffer’s actions were not simply motivated by a commitment to improve the lives of Jews. He was able to relate unconditionally to a people unlike his own by an undying commitment to Christ, who willingly sacrificed his life for Jews. Despite the risks incurred by speaking up for the Jews at the time of the Holocaust, Bonhoeffer’s relevant Christology and his dedication to living out a “real” theology were passions that profoundly compelled him to unite with them throughout the course of his adult life.

In accounts of his experience and in his personal thought, one reads a Christian sense of freedom, which also entailed Bonhoeffer’s multifaceted identification with the Jews. Bonhoeffer’s life, actions, and writings all pointed to a faith-driven solidarity with the Jews. Therefore, in order to understand the man and the motivation for his actions, a study of Bonhoeffer should not neglect the relationships and life events that were formative or impacted his mind and soul. Bonhoeffer also wrote later from a Gestapo-run prison that writing itself is “an event.” Just as an appreciation of Karl Marx should entail a basic understanding of his thought (i.e., as expressed in his *Communist Manifesto*), a fair inquiry into Dietrich Bonhoeffer should not neglect his *Costly*

¹³ Stephen Haynes recognizes the need for a study on Bonhoeffer and the Jews. He also ends his book with this concluding thought: “Impressed by Bonhoeffer’s sacrificial actions on behalf of Jews, the remarkable integrity between his thought and behavior creates the presumption that Bonhoeffer must have thought in ways that were radically pro-Jewish as well....actions were an outgrowth of his theology.” Stephen Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 176. Another writer claims that “it remains to be proved convincingly that Bonhoeffer died as a martyr primarily for, and in solidarity with, the Jews.” James Beck, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Jews and Judaism,” 35 n.

Discipleship of Christ—or any of the other writings that Bonhoeffer penned during his battle against the oppressive system that eventually overtook his physical life.

Bonhoeffer's conciliatory activism for the Jews and his anti-Nazi resistance (which, in the wartime German context, was most often synonymous) reveal values and ideals that Bonhoeffer shared in common with the Jews. Consequently, one can see in both his thought and his actions, Bonhoeffer sided with this persecuted people over his own German people (*Volk*). Since his relationships as well as his interpretation of the Bible were simultaneously responsible for Bonhoeffer's perspective of the Jewish plight, an examination of Bonhoeffer's written works, his diaries, and various letters¹⁴ must be considered in combination with secondary sources about Bonhoeffer's social dealings, which provide further support for the theological motivation behind Bonhoeffer's aid to the Jews.

A contextual examination of Bonhoeffer's corpus of writings is necessary, not only because of the censor that apprehended his activity and speech but also due to "the deception required to aid the work of the conspiracy."¹⁵ Bonhoeffer's earlier outspokenness against Nazi leadership and anti-Semitism might appear to assume a subtler tone later in his life, but his actions spoke louder and counter-cultural ideas were evident throughout all his writings. Unfortunately, a good portion of Bonhoeffer's notes and letters from the period of his involvement in the conspiracy were destroyed, either by the Gestapo or by his own hand due to incriminating evidence. The letters to his fiancée

¹⁴ English translations of Bonhoeffer's works, most of which were published first in German, provide an authoritative as well as generally accepted rendering of the intended meaning of his writings. The New International Version of biblical passages is used where applicable.

¹⁵ Enforcement of the censorship by Hitler's Gestapo and the interest of protecting other conspirators, who had put themselves at risk in attempting to topple the Nazi regime, were continuing concerns of Bonhoeffer—as mentioned in the Editors' Introduction. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Testament to Freedom*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson, Revised Edition (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995), 36-37.

that were later smuggled out of prison by a friendly guard in Tegel are also limited for evaluation, since Maria von Wedemeyer entrusted the remaining collection of Bonhoeffer's unpublished private correspondence to her niece to guard with secrecy after Maria von Wedemeyer's death. All of the conspirators that Bonhoeffer befriended died in prison before the end of the war, and since then, most if not all of the surviving eye-witnesses who knew Bonhoeffer have perished. Therefore, what would otherwise have been valuable sources of primary documentation, representing the final years of Bonhoeffer's life, are limited in scope and in analysis.

Much reflection on Bonhoeffer's life remains cursory or misunderstood. Because in part, substantiation has seemed elusive, one must consider the range of opinions on the reasons for Bonhoeffer's fateful decision to join the conspiracy and the anti-Semitic context in which this took place. The introductory analysis will begin to address whether Bonhoeffer's death should indeed be regarded as a religious or Christian martyrdom in propitiation for the Jews, rather than solely a result of political conscience, and how in his writings Bonhoeffer opposed the anti-Semitism inherent in Nazism. (Detailed treatment of what compelled Bonhoeffer appears in the second and third chapters.) One can assess Bonhoeffer's view of the Jews through an analysis of his writings from various phases of his life: school years, the 1930's period dubbed Church Struggle,¹⁶ and finally, conspiracy. Each phase builds on what precedes it, and Bonhoeffer's school years are central to understanding a social or religious paradigm that evolved until the end of his life in prison. Unfortunately, Jewish scholars who have attempted to examine Bonhoeffer

¹⁶ Church Struggle (*Kirchenkampf*)—"This refers to the conflict within the German Evangelical Church between the Confessing Church and the official Reichskirche, which accepted the ecclesiastical policies of the National Socialist Party (Nazis). Hitler used these policies in his attempt to dominate and control the Evangelical Church by integrating it into the Nazi bureaucratic structure." *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Cambridge University Press, 1999), Glossary xxi.

in his relationship to the Jews tend to neglect Bonhoeffer's early writings from the first phase (i.e., prior to 1933), and rather, focus on his works and actions nearer the so-called "secular" phase of activism or Bonhoeffer's time in the conspiracy.¹⁷ For example, Emil Fackenheim accuses Bonhoeffer of neglecting the Jewish plight and of seeking to absolve German contemporaries of guilt. However, Fackenheim bases his argument only on a letter from prison and overlooks Bonhoeffer's criticisms of German Christians in the period of the Church Struggle.¹⁸ In the end, after assessing the corpus of his work, one will rightly conclude that Bonhoeffer's relationship to the Jews was unique for a German during this period; he was a man beyond his own time in perceiving the dreadful combination of corporate identity and of self-interest within Nazi culture and fully appreciated the active response that Christians should take on behalf of a suffering Jew as one's "weaker brother." Bonhoeffer's view of Jews or of Judaism grew beyond the pejorative sense of his western contemporaries.

The analysis of Bonhoeffer's school years will encompass a brief background from his early years in Germany until his completion of post-doctoral studies in New York. Rather than providing a simple survey of the works that have been written about Bonhoeffer to this point, this thesis will incorporate key moments in Bonhoeffer's life that helped him to identify fully with the Jews—even to the point of dying like them in a concentration camp. These experiences will be compared with his writing or his diary

¹⁷ Consider Walter Harrelson, "Bonhoeffer and the Bible," in *The Place of Bonhoeffer*, ed. Martin Marty (NY: Associated Press, 1962); Emil L. Fackenheim, "On the Self-Exposure of Faith to the Modern-Secular World: Philosophical Reflections in the Light of Jewish Experience," in *Daedalus* 96 (1967); Ruth Zerner, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Jews: Thoughts and Actions, 1933-1945," in *Jewish Social Studies* 37 (1975); Stanley N. Rosenbaum, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Jewish View," in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 18 (1981); Stephen R. Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses: Jews and the Christian Imagination*; James Beck, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Jews and Judaism" (Toronto: Wycliffe College, 2003), 80 n.

¹⁸ Fackenheim, 198. Bonhoeffer does not fail to mention the burden of guilt that he and the Church bear. *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge and trans. Neville H. Smith (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 113-114.

entries (dated within a year of an event), so that one might be able to understand the shaping of this prolific mind toward theological and socio-psychological identification, not overlooking insight gained into significant events surrounding the Holocaust. Along with biblical study, Bonhoeffer's ongoing relationships with his doctoral supervisor, Reinhold Seeberg, with Jewish friends, such as Franz Hildebrandt and Rabbi Wise, and with other minorities, like African-American Franklin Fisher, furbished Bonhoeffer's theology with a value of the sanctity of life that is evident in the Hebrew Scriptures—in complete contrast to the egoism that he recognized in Nazism. Bonhoeffer's grandmother, Professor Seeberg, and Jean Lasserre may have germinated ideas of peace in his theology, but these ideas took mature shape through Bonhoeffer's interactions with Jewish and African-American compatriots. This becomes most evident in an examination of Bonhoeffer's writings (in letters and works penned usually for the purpose of publication) around or reflective of his encounters and experiences. Furthermore, Bonhoeffer's description of emotions and reminisces of experience in his *Fiction from Tegel Prison*, though penned during his final years spent in prison, can be treated here as a semi-autobiographical expression of his ideas in light of the censor (not unlike the tsarist regime that impeded free flow of thought in nineteenth century Russian literature) and are explanatory of personal development in Bonhoeffer's earlier life.¹⁹

With recognition of Bonhoeffer's move toward acting on behalf of all Jews (or gradually away from solely baptized Jews from among German Lutherans), Bonhoeffer's works will be examined for any traces of progressive thought from a concern strictly for

¹⁹ Edwin Robertson, *My Soul Finds Rest: Reflections on the Psalms by Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 137. Editor's comments outline the autobiographical content in detail. *Fiction from Tegel Prison*, vol. 7 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Renate Bethge and Ilse Tödt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

the church toward a more universal concern.²⁰ In order to establish its veracity, this thesis will mostly concentrate on formative experiences that culminated in Bonhoeffer's role in the underground seminary and on his general corpus of writings (not neglecting those that were written from 1939, after which both Jews and Germans became generally aware of Hitler's deadly campaign against the Jews.)²¹ Bonhoeffer's personal sacrifice for the Jews can be understood in light of the records that he left behind as friend and biographer Eberhard Bethge highlights: "With Bonhoeffer, actions and life comment on his sayings, and the words on his actions, in an extraordinary degree."²² In contextually understanding his unique theology and the breadth of his personal life experiences, one is compelled to consider both in combination as the impetus for Bonhoeffer's growing identification with all Jews.

The Jewish Question, or the debate about God's judgment of the Jews after their supposed crucifixion of his Son, was not new fodder for debate in Bonhoeffer's day. Catholic rulers had used this to legitimize the exploitation of landless and vulnerable Jews in their domains since at least the thirteenth century—and arguably, as early as Constantine's reign.²³ Comprising the Roman diaspora, the people of Israel had experienced a Christian form of anti-Semitism that spanned a continent and centuries, and the majority who hoped for greater security by taking residence within Germany's

²⁰ Larry Rasmussen also notes the progression toward universalism in Bonhoeffer. Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*, 2d Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 33.

²¹ Joseph Klinger (family of survivors), interview by author (Toronto: 2 December 2004). Also, see Menachem Kellner, *Jewish Contemporary Ethics*, 420.

²² Eberhard Bethge, "The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life and Theology," *The Chicago Theological Seminary Register*, LI:2 (Feb., 1961). Quoted in Clyde E. Fant, *Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1975), 6.

²³ "The image of the Jew as the murderer of Jesus and the fact that Jews had rejected Christianity's embrace led to widespread hatred and suspicion. Jews in Christendom were humiliated, banished from their places of residence, wear identifying marks, and confined to separate residential quarters. They were portrayed as offspring of the Devil and accused of the ritual murder of Christian children." Gutterman and Shalev, 38.

borders discovered that the followers of Luther had inherited the same theologically based papal mandate of contempt for Jews who refused to convert to Christianity.²⁴

Hitler himself was Catholic and re-introduced the Jewish Question in a manner that was initially not completely out of keeping with norms in Christian societies past.²⁵

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, any conversation about Bonhoeffer ought to consider the way in which he has been viewed by Jews as well as Christians. Debate and confusion abound regarding Bonhoeffer's motive for the conspiratorial involvement that precipitated his death. While explaining the criticism that Bonhoeffer has received from certain pacifist or Christian writers—including Lacey Baldwin Smith, who calls Bonhoeffer a “political martyr” in his book,²⁶ Craig J. Slane defends the authenticity of Bonhoeffer's religious martyrdom. He also raises the crusade led by Stephen A. Wise (grandson of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise) in support of Bonhoeffer's recognition as one of the “Righteous among the Nations” (*Hassidei Umot Haolam*). In early 1998, Mordecai Paldiel, director of Yad Vashem's Department for Righteous among the Nations in Jerusalem, responded to Stephen Wise by saying that the official program “is geared to

²⁴ Eleanor H. Ayer, *The Importance of Adolf Hitler* (San Diego: Lucent Books, 1996), 25. Cf. James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and The Jews* (Houghton Mifflin, 2001). In addition to the estimated million or more European women who were killed by the Catholic Church during the Inquisition, one Jewish writer provides another example of the psychotheological phenomenon and profitability of scapegoating: “In Spain and Portugal, the Inquisition was carried out not against women but against Jews. (They needed someone, and either group would do.) Women and Jews shared a vulnerability. Their persecutors knew they could get away with confiscating their earthly goods, and with torturing and killing them....Nothing unites people who are otherwise and at all times divided as well as having a common enemy to scapegoat.... this, as we know, is what they did: branded Jews as the killers of God's Son, the ‘Christ Killers,’ and condemned Jews to universal discrimination, persecution, exile, death, and damnation.” Phyllis Chesler, *The New Anti-Semitism* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 27-28.

²⁵ Popes since medieval times had instigated Jewish ghettos with curfews and visible marks, such as the ‘star of David’ or peculiar hats, to be worn only by Jews. It has been noted that Catholics in Germany, though comprising only one third of the total population, likely caused the ‘swing votes’ (e.g., Thuringia), which helped Hitler to gain just over half of the seats in the Reichstag, and thereby, to achieve chancellorship in Germany. Cf. Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 101. Also, Figure 4 of Derek Heater, *Our World this Century*, 2d Edition (Oxford University Press, 1987), 50.

²⁶ Lacey Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, and Traitors* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 336.

persons who specifically helped Jews, and this aspect has not been established in regard to Dietrich Bonhoeffer.”²⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s brother-in-law and co-conspirator, Hans von Dohnanyi, was eventually listed as one of Yad Vashem’s “Righteous Gentiles,” but Bonhoeffer’s case was rejected on unclear conditions that have been contested.²⁸ The following pages will demonstrate that Bonhoeffer sought to do what was right for the sake of all endangered Jews before and during the Holocaust. In developing his Christian faith, Bonhoeffer learned to identify with Jews. In fact, Bonhoeffer “specifically helped Jews” as he acted in solidarity with them to the point of his own death.

Throughout his life, Bonhoeffer upheld the supreme authority of Scripture and biblically instructed the Church in an inclusive manner with regard to the Jews. He himself associated with Jews of every background and spoke for them as well as for their distinct faith-expression. He increasingly drew on commonalities between Judaism and Christianity in the Scriptures, thereby trying to validate the Jewish community and affirm the rights of all Jews (for whose physical lives, Bonhoeffer warned, Christians would be held responsible unless they act on Jews’ behalf). In both Christian and Jewish communities he recognized the Spirit’s presence by the promises of God in Scripture and by their common righteousness—as understood through a shared ethical ideal of loving self-sacrifice for the realization of God’s dominion (which the Church fulfills by purposefully ranging with Christ in the world of “reality”). Bonhoeffer’s school years demonstrate his growing appreciation of both non-egotistical humility and the “real” (or sociality) as seen in Hebrew Scripture and in Christ’s incarnation over the “metaphysical”

²⁷ Craig J. Slane, *Bonhoeffer as Martyr: Social Responsibility and Modern Christian Commitment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 33.

²⁸ Slane writes: “See Marilyn Henry, ‘Who, exactly, is a Righteous Gentile?’ *Jerusalem Post*, 22 April 1998, 12f.” *Ibid.*, 33 n. Also see Beck, 65.

in western thought and piety. On this biblical basis, Bonhoeffer challenged racism and Christians' passivity to anti-Semitic measures of the German state. By the end of the Church Struggle, he combined perspectives of both Old and New Testaments in recognizing church and synagogue as similar spiritual entities, based on mutual ethical relationships as well as the continuing work of the Spirit of God. Bonhoeffer continuously valued relationships and dialogue with Jews. By the next phase in his life, he prioritized the preservation of an order and a peace that sustains life and community in accordance with God's original design, which Christ calls to be restored. This creation theme in the Old Testament became an increasing element in Bonhoeffer's evolving Christology, which led him with a sense of Christian calling toward political conspiracy. Bonhoeffer's thought and his actions demonstrated that respect and justice must be shown to all in obedience to the Jewish pattern and to Christ, whose temporal life was lived not simply for self but for the sake of others. In these inclusive ways, Bonhoeffer harmonized Christian and Jewish paradigms. He theologically and socially identified with Jews, the "brothers" with whom Bonhoeffer sided in suffering to resist his own German nation.

CHAPTER ONE

SCHOOL YEARS

1. Early Childhood and Youth

In order to better appreciate the progression in Bonhoeffer's life and thinking toward increasing identification with the Jews, one ought to begin at Bonhoeffer's initial starting point—that of a thoroughgoing, pious German. Born to Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer on 4 February 1906 were Dietrich, and younger twin sister, Sabine (whose married name, Leibholz, was taken from her Jewish husband, Gerhard).²⁹ Dietrich was sixth of a family of eight children, whose peaceful, sheltered existence was afforded by their father's professional practice in psychiatry both in Breslau, a German city of Silesia that is now Poland, and from 1912, in Berlin. Even following the painful repercussions from the Treaty of Versailles, Bonhoeffer never really experienced the economic difficulties that were incumbent for war-torn Germany. Partly as a result of the foreign currency collected from his father's clients, Bonhoeffer's home environment was comfortable during his early years. Having spent so much time within the conservative boundaries of his family, he later told his youngest sister, Susanne: "I should like to live

²⁹ Mary Bosanquet, who was acquainted with Dietrich's twin sister (Sabine Liebholz-Bonhoeffer provided the Introduction to Bosanquet's biography), writes: "Dietrich received the news of his twin sister's engagement with unaffected delight, warmly welcoming her husband-to-be into the family circle. But this regrouping of relationships, happy and natural as it was, cannot have come to him entirely without a sense of loss. The devotion between the twins, so deep as seldom to need any expression, was for both an element in life almost as inevitable as the air they breathed. During the early years of childhood neither had needed any other intimacy, and to that day Dietrich had found no other....still at heart Dietrich remained alone, never truly intimate with his family or with his teachers at the university, though they were to serve him well." Mary Bosanquet, *The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), 55.

an unsheltered life for once. We cannot understand the others. We always have our parents to help us...that gives us such a shameless sense of security.”³⁰

Later, Bonhoeffer’s unwavering decision to pursue theology and a pastoral vocation was, no doubt, evidence of influences from his governess, who had come from the pious world of the Moravian community at Herrnhut, and, less advertently, from the private faith of his mother, Paula. Though she preferred to provide biblical teaching at home to Dietrich and his siblings rather than raise them in church, Paula’s father, Karl Alfred von Hase (1842-1914), had been preacher to Kaiser Wilhelm II as a member of Prussia’s Supreme Church Council, and her grandfather, Karl August von Hase (1800-90), was the eminent church historian at Jena.³¹ Bonhoeffer hinted that this elite upbringing was the “foundation” for the obligatory sense of leadership by which he impacted many others; for, “that was the real advantage which Dietrich had over others: he knew where he came from and who he was. He had parents who had already become something, and a family history of which he could be proud...From the start he has a different awareness of himself.”³²

Despite Bonhoeffer’s aristocratic background, during his teen years, he slowly grew to identify with those who were different from him. (In later writings, Bonhoeffer refers to them as the “other.”) At the Friedrichswerder Gymnasium in Berlin, where Dietrich was a secondary student from the autumn of 1913 until the spring of 1919, he developed a meaningful friendship with Ernst Abrahamsohn, a Jewish classmate and

³⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 22.

³¹ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian, Christian, Contemporary* (London: Collins, 1970), 3.

³² Renate Wind, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Spoke in the Wheel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 26, 11.

eventual professor of classical philology until his death in U.S.A. (beside whom Dietrich Bonhoeffer is seated in a class photograph in 1917). Up to half of Bonhoeffer's classmates were of Jewish origin, and he fiercely competed for supremacy among his peers. About this period of Dietrich's school years, his father's annual entry for 1915 in the family's New Year's Eve log reads: "He (Dietrich) likes fighting, and does a great deal of it."³³

Bonhoeffer did not leave the kind of personal reflections from this period like his later writings that were published after his execution, but he wrote an account of his rivalry and friendship with Abrahamsohn in *Fiction From Tegel Prison*. The novel was noted as pseudo-autobiographical both by its editor and by another Jewish classmate at the gymnasium, Dr. Hans Krause, whose letter from Jerusalem to Dietrich's relations in 1978 (after publication of the first edition of Bonhoeffer's novel in Germany) reveals: "He (Abrahamsohn) had been an extraordinarily gifted student and a rival to Bonhoeffer, who had been the unquestioned leader of the class."³⁴ Like the Major in the novel who reminisces about his childhood rival, Hans, Abrahamsohn recognized a confident opponent in Bonhoeffer, whose family upbringing did not allow him to discriminate on the grounds of class (or race) as did both his counterparts and even the school's principal. Similar to the chapter's heroes in the portrayal of their contest of strength, Bonhoeffer commented on a lesson that he (and Abrahamsohn) learned together:

Each of us was living in a dream, thinking that we were each quite alone in the world and that everyone else existed only for our sakes. This illusion had made us blind to one another. To be sure, we had nothing to reproach each other about. Our views and the concepts of honor and

³³ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, Revised Edition (Fortress Press, 1999), 24. Also, *Fiction From Tegel Prison*, vol. 7 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Clifford J. Green (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 151.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 151 and 155 n.

decency that we had learned from our parents were the same. In fact, we even felt a certain attraction, and certainly we respected each other. And yet neither of us could stand the other's presence. Each of us thought the other was getting in his way and should submit to his will. To put it in fancy words, you would say it was a pure power struggle. Of course neither of us was conscious of it at the time, but, given the way we were, the clash was simply inevitable. When we woke up from our dream, we understood that no one is alone in the world, but that people must live side by side with others and get along with them—and that human beings are fortunate that this is so. Certainly you must give up some things; you must learn to yield without sacrificing your character. Indeed, character is only formed in the process of living with one another.³⁵

Bonhoeffer's idea of sociality, "of living with one another," went contrary to the old German saying that he disdainfully quoted: "Many foes, much honor." The Major in Bonhoeffer's novel continued to develop this idea, noting that it is only in putting limits on one's power and not in using "force to suppress any resistance, any contradiction, any difference" that true character is demonstrated. In a formative friendship with his Jewish schoolmate, Bonhoeffer learned about and continued to reflect upon issues of power (and its abuses). Bonhoeffer's character, which was shaped in the relatively safe context of the schoolyard, helped prepare him for the unprecedented period of testing that awaited unseen heroes like himself, who never imagined the insidious lies of hatred that would permeate Nazi society.

2. Post-Secondary Years

Throughout his early years, most of Bonhoeffer's childhood was spent within the safe social sphere of his family. However, during his post-secondary years, Bonhoeffer underwent his most significant experiences that impacted his worldview. Aside from friendships, Bonhoeffer's first influential relationship was with his professor, Reinhold

³⁵ Ibid., 159.

Seeberg, under whom Bonhoeffer completed his doctoral dissertation at the age of twenty-one. Not only did Bonhoeffer owe his supervisor “the hostility toward metaphysics;” it was from Seeberg that Bonhoeffer learned “to ‘take the category of the social seriously’...Bonhoeffer sharpened this in his view that the social must be ‘the essential characteristic of all theological concepts’.”³⁶ After the completion of Dietrich’s studies at Berlin University, he wrote a letter to his agnostic brother, Karl Friedrich, and the letter “identifies the cause of peace with that of social justice and Jesus Christ.” Dietrich wrote, “there were realities for which one had to take an uncompromising stand,” and “it appears to me that peace and social justice, really Christ himself, are these.”³⁷ It will be shown, in subsequent chapters, that the influences of both “the hostility toward the metaphysics” and “the category of the social” in Bonhoeffer’s thought were instrumental for his increasing sense of identification with the Jews.

Seeberg’s influence can be seen in Bonhoeffer’s doctoral thesis, *Sanctorum Communio* (Latin for “community of the saints”), which he began in 1925. This thesis deals expressly with the social nature of the church. Bonhoeffer’s travels to the bastions of Catholicism (Rome and Spain) led him to conclude, even though he did not concur with his older brother’s Communist ideas: “I believe there really is some justification for the foolish saying that religion is the opium of the people.”³⁸ However, Bonhoeffer was also inspired by what he witnessed at St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. In his criticism of Catholic theology, he recognized that the church universal “is founded by God and yet is

³⁶ Quotation: Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1967), 99, in Benjamin A. Reist, *The Promise of Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1969), 45.

³⁷ Editors’ Introduction, *Discipleship*, 15.

³⁸ Wind, 42.

an empirical community like any other.”³⁹ The Christian religion should not be simply identified with a particular form of the church as though this were the embodiment of divine revelation. Bonhoeffer aimed in his thesis “to understand the structure, from the standpoint of social philosophy and sociology, of the reality of the church of Christ which is given in the revelation of Christ.”⁴⁰ Toward that end, Bonhoeffer was able to explore the sociality and spiritual basis of Christianity. Just as all communities of distinctive cultures have a personal character, such that they might be regarded as a “collective person,” so the church makes up an ethically accountable body, in which individual persons are responsible for their corporate communities and are intrinsically social-ethical-historical beings.⁴¹ Also, in the church, Bonhoeffer saw the meaning of mutual ethical relationships achieved not purely by moral effort but also by the Holy Spirit (subsisting in faith); it ought not to be reduced to a religiously moral society (contradictory to his “reality of revelation” as the basis of church) nor should it be equated with the Kingdom of God.⁴² Bonhoeffer commented that one must be mindful of the human or historical reality of the empirical church. In his mind, with the influences of Seeberg and partly of the Hegelian tradition, social justice and sociality were “inseparable” from Christ.⁴³ (It is no wonder, then, that among the list of reading materials that were smuggled to Bonhoeffer’s prison cell near the end of his life, no less than a few of Seeberg’s books were requested.)⁴⁴

³⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Dogmatic Investigation of the Sociology of the Church* (London: Collins and Harper and Row, 1963), 32.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴¹ *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Witness to Jesus Christ*, ed. John de Gruchy (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 6.

⁴² Such an idea led to the Church’s mistakes in history, such as the Crusades. For support, see Bonhoeffer’s descriptive commentary in “Christoph Argues with the Major.” *Fiction from Tegel Prison*, 172-177.

⁴³ *Witness to Jesus Christ*, 4.

⁴⁴ Eberhard Bethge, “Über die Restbibliothek Dietrich Bonhoeffers.”

The greatest impact on Bonhoeffer's identification with the Jews, however, was his love of Scripture. Bonhoeffer's growing appreciation for the Hebrew Bible in particular began no later than his university years. Although he had attended the seminar of the eminent Adolf von Harnack, a liberal theologian who questioned retention of the Old Testament in the Bible due to its archaic characterization, Bonhoeffer was neither swayed into becoming a neo-Marcionite (rejecter of Jewish elements in the Bible) nor a Liberal Protestant of any kind;⁴⁵ he disagreed that "Jesus was to be identified precisely in contrast with his Jewish environment."⁴⁶ Rather, Bonhoeffer plunged himself into Hebrew studies, and along with acquaintance Gerhard von Rad (who eventually became renown in the field of Old Testament studies), attended lectures on the psalms and on the prophets at Tübingen University before transferring to the Divinity School at Berlin University. Another classmate, Fritz Figur, recalls of Bonhoeffer's student days:

As students we only met in one lecture, about organ theory and campanology, where our study books had to be signed, as attendance was compulsory for the examination. Most of us wasted our time on trivialities during these lectures, or wrote letters; Bonhoeffer learnt Hebrew. Such zeal impressed me enormously.⁴⁷

Bonhoeffer's consequential familiarity with the exposition of Jewish law in the *Mishnah*, with Hebrew as well as with Septuagint readings of Scripture, are evident in his seminar paper on First Clement (1924-25 winter semester).

Bonhoeffer's dependence on the Hebrew Bible became most evident in his prison writings. He differed from his contemporaries, who either subjected the Hebrew Bible to

⁴⁵ Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 273 (n. 3).

⁴⁶ Keith W. Clements, *What Freedom? The Persistent Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Birmingham: Church Enterprise Print, 1990), 140.

⁴⁷ Fritz Figur, "At Zion Church," in *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Wolf-Dieter Zimmerman and Ronald G. Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 56.

the New Testament by prophetic-proof use of the Old Testament or rejected the Hebrew Bible altogether. In contrast to Bonhoeffer's biblical defence, Fritz Veigel wrote a poem titled "The People's Atonement 1933" that presented the Jew as the agent of Germany's destruction and rather cast Germany itself in the role of the Children of Israel:

Us! We are the ones! We strayed from your path!
 We circled around the golden calf!
 We made our bellies, our lust, our money into idols;
 We bartered away our land, our blood, our hearts
 to the eternal Jew, whom you made into a curse!⁴⁸

Here, the cultural symbols of the Old Testament were tools that Germans used to construct their own self-image as figures in a spiritualized drama of this period in their nation's history. Later, Georg Schneider, editor of a German book of devotions, wrote, "Into the oven with the part of the Bible that glorifies the Jews," and Thuringian German Christian Julius Leutheuser declared the Old Testament and the religiosity of the past to be "foes of German Christianity and Germanness."⁴⁹ Mere references to the Old Testament for purposes of anti-Jewish manipulation came to be regarded with suspicion. Walter Grundmann, who actively strove to abolish the Old Testament while directing the Institute for Research into and Elimination of Jewish Influence in German Church Life in Eisenach, was placed under police surveillance for not doing enough to further the religious aims of National Socialism, while a Ph.D. candidate in Kiel was disciplined by his university rector for propounding the Nazi themes of "Blood and Soil" using the Old Testament as a source.⁵⁰ Against this culture, Bonhoeffer continuously provoked Germans to seriously value the Old Testament:

⁴⁸ Bergen, 147.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 152.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 152-153.

He points to the possibility of liberating the Old Testament from the polemical straight-jacket of the past—or perhaps we should say the possibility of our being liberated from the need always to devalue the Old Testament subtly to our own impoverishment—while in no way detracting from the uniqueness and finality of Christ. He does all this while simultaneously, through the witness of his own life and death, facing us inescapably with that question which always accompanies our approach to the Jewish scriptures, of how we relate to the Jewish people.⁵¹

Contrary to criticisms of Bonhoeffer's use of the Old Testament, his reliance of the Hebrew Bible was considerable and varied. It has been noted that despite Bonhoeffer's Christocentric interpretation of the Bible, in his prison letters and papers Old Testament citations significantly outnumber New Testament ones (93 to 68).⁵² This intrinsic appeal to the Hebrew Bible bespeaks Bonhoeffer's continuing, profound appreciation of it and counters the criticisms of one Old Testament scholar.⁵³ Bonhoeffer's continuous defence of the integrity of the Jewish Scriptures should be considered in the German Christian context in order to understand his pro-Jewish approach to the Bible.

3. Turning Point Toward Identifying with Jews

On 18 December 1927, Bonhoeffer's life took a definite turn. It was on that day that Bonhoeffer met his first close friend, Franz Hildebrand. Bonhoeffer befriended Hildebrandt, a fellow theologian of half-Jewish descent at the University of Berlin, in Seeberg's seminar the day before Bonhoeffer's defence of his doctoral thesis, *Sanctorum Communio*. This was an era when most Germans like Bonhoeffer (whose family lineage

⁵¹ Figur, 143.

⁵² Ibid., 143.

⁵³ An article published on Bonhoeffer's approach to the Bible uses his sermon on Psalm 58, a prayer that Bonhoeffer links to Christ as the perfect model, to substantiate the claims that "Bonhoeffer simply removes the Bible of the Jews from their hands" and "no writing" of his "seeks to lay out the relation between Judaism and Christianity." Harrelson, 129-130. (Other contrary evidence shall follow, such as Bonhoeffer's Jewish understanding of creation and of the Ten Commandments. Also, see p. 69 of thesis.)

was based upon prestigious contacts, including the “Hedgehog” fraternity) would not be prone to mingle with anyone of Jewish descent, though millions of them lived in Berlin. Anti-Semitism was still a reality, since Jewish emancipation had only occurred a half-century prior. The first admission of a Jew into the University of Berlin occurred merely decades before Bonhoeffer met Franz Hildebrandt at Berlin University, where pan-Germanic fever and subsequent anti-Semitism reached a pitch around this time.⁵⁴ Prior to 1933 students or professors showed their Nazi sympathies by appearing in their S.A. (*Sturmabteilung* or “Brown Shirts”) paramilitary uniforms within walking distance from the Bonhoeffer home at Berlin Technical University (known before the war for its place-name, “Charlottenburger Hochschule,” where Dietrich served as Protestant Campus Minister while also leading a confirmation class in 1931 for boys in Prenzlauer Berg).⁵⁵ “Students were more anti-Semitic than either the working class or the bourgeoisie. Most German student societies had excluded Jews even before 1914,” and in 1919, fraternities on campus declared “the racial objection to Jews was insuperable and could not be removed by baptism.”⁵⁶

Therefore, Bonhoeffer was going against the culture of his day when he chose to associate himself with a non-Aryan, although he himself was known as a fraternity fellow and a “pure-blooded” German. One can speculate that, from his continued friendship with Hildebrandt,⁵⁷ followed by his ongoing friendship from 1930 (in violation of the

⁵⁴ Johnson, *A History of The Jews*, 264.

⁵⁵ Protestant Student Parish of Berlin Technical University, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Berlin-CityTour*, ed. the Board of the Bonhoeffer-House Memorial, trans. Dana Hauser and Jennifer Mand (Berlin: Kästner-Druck, 2000), 23.

⁵⁶ Johnson, *A History of the Modern World*, Revised Edition (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), 127.

⁵⁷ “Dietrich and Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer were going back to Europe to face war. Bonhoeffer stayed ten days with his sister in London and met Hildebrandt.” Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 565.

“law against High Treason”)⁵⁸ with Rabbi Stephen S. Wise (1874-1949), Chairperson initially of the United Eretz-Israel (Land of Israel) Appeal then of the American Zionist Emergency Council in New York,⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer shared commonalities that spurred his ongoing interests in the Hebrew Torah (“Law” or Pentateuch), in related Rabbinic literature as well as in the Hebrew language. It was his support for Hildebrand during Nazi persecution, as shall be explained in the next chapter, that Bonhoeffer explained his main reason for self-imposed exile together with him in London.

Evidence of the impact of burgeoning friendships with Jews appears in Bonhoeffer’s meditations for *Act and Being*, a philosophical masterpiece that he developed in relation to his best friend, Hildebrandt, and completed in February 1930. Bonhoeffer grappled with a contemporary issue in Germany when he used theology to critique a core root that underlies anti-Semitism: power, and its abuses for the domination of the ‘other’.⁶⁰ The Jew had always been treated as the ‘other’ throughout history, and as a result, had experienced ongoing and deep-seated prejudice.⁶¹ Bonhoeffer was compelled to focus his theology of sociality on the freeing of oneself and

⁵⁸ Bethge, *A Biography*, 267.

⁵⁹ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 201.

⁶⁰ By deviously using religious imagery or icons while appealing to people’s desire to recapture national greatness, Hitler’s “political theology” (as seen in his book, *Mein Kampf*, with which Bonhoeffer was familiar) successfully waged an ideological war to captivate the minds of nominal back-sliders and liberal Christians in Germany—even one as notable as Emmanuel Hirsch. Richard J. Neuhaus writes: “while the Nazis exploited for propaganda purposes whatever they could find of anti-Semitism in the Christian tradition, National Socialism itself was stridently anti-Christian, appealing to the pagan myths of Aryan superiority against a Christianity fatally corrupted by its Jewish origins.” *First Things* 65 (Aug./Sept. 1996): 36-41. <http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9608/articles/review_essay.html>

⁶¹ “Ethnic national movements reinforced the tendency to isolate ‘the Jew’ and brand him as the ‘other’. This attitude spawned two special indicators of modern anti-Semitism: the myth of the ‘Jewish conspiracy’, in which Jews are accused of a devising secret plot to take over the world; and an ostensibly scientific racial theory that attributes to Jews immutable and objectionable biological traits.” Jews’ social integration was impeded, and discrimination resulted. For example, “The Eternal Jew” was the title of an anti-Semitic exhibition at the German Museum of Munich, inaugurated on 8 November 1937. A Nazi broadsheet portrayed large-nosed dark men leering at a fair or Aryan woman, so that Jews were depicted as schemers against the supposed purity of the German-blooded nation. Gutterman and Shalev, 38, 50.

of others from the power of the dominating *ego*, which Clifford Green (director of the English translation of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* series) identifies as “the heart of the soteriological problem in Bonhoeffer’s thought:”

For him neither instinctual drives nor the guilty conscience with its repressed anger and compulsive works occupy the center of the stage. The issue for Bonhoeffer is whether the powers of the ego will be used for the service of others, or whether they will function in a dominating and egocentric way.⁶²

The call to follow Christ, who spiritually represented the ‘other’, involves breaking from identification with sin (i.e., the will that “affirms as valuable only itself...and that acknowledges the other only on its own terms”) in self-alignment with the “extremely egocentric” Fallen Adam.⁶³ In *Act and Being*, God-given sociality and boundaries are violated by the person with a powerful ego, who is self-interpreting “creator and lord” of one’s world. Bonhoeffer derided this person, whose “demanding replaces giving and competition excludes mutuality” and whose credo is “God is man himself” in unnecessarily subordinating neighbour as well as God into “things to be used” for the self.⁶⁴ Regarding Bonhoeffer’s concept, Green comments that the conscience of this egocentric person is co-opted toward self-justification “without echo” unless the tragic circle of this self-enclosed world is broken: “Only when Christ breaks a person’s solitude does he know himself placed in the truth.”⁶⁵ The fellowship of genuine community with Christ and with others can counteract this overweening pride, and throughout his life Bonhoeffer taught on overcoming self or ego by focusing on selfless God-centredness.

⁶² Clifford J. Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 111.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 91, 248.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

Unlike many of his counterparts, Bonhoeffer proved to be grounded in the Truth that gives, that creates mutuality, and that values both life and openness.

Less than a year after Bonhoeffer began his friendship with Hildebrandt while writing *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer began a licentiate post with a German congregation in Barcelona. At this time he discussed with Professor Seeberg the idea of writing a book on Christian ethics.⁶⁶ It was his interest to focus less on the religious aspect, but rather, to explore the love that Christ commanded for one's neighbour. Although his book was never completed (with only surviving fragments published posthumously as *Ethics*), one of Bonhoeffer's presuppositions about the inclusiveness of divine grace is evident in his Christocentric lecture called "Jesus Christ and the Nature of Christianity:"

The Christian religion as a religion is not of God...Christ is not the bringer of a new religion, but the bringer of God, therefore as an impossible road from man to God the Christian religion stands as other religions; the Christian can do himself no good with his Christianity, for it remains human, all too human, but he lives by the grace of God, which comes to man, and comes to every man, who opens his heart to it and learns to understand it in the Cross of Christ; so the gift of Christ is not the Christian religion, but the mercy and love of God which culminate in the cross.⁶⁷

Bonhoeffer believed the cross, stripped of overly religious connotations, to be the basis of an inclusive society. Here, Bonhoeffer was beginning to move toward a wider Christian worldview that culminated in his eventual idea of "religionless Christianity."

Bonhoeffer's biographer, Renate Wind, states that the church in a religionless Christianity "was not identical with a particular religious form but was wherever people lived together in solidarity."⁶⁸ (This theme shall re-emerge in later chapters of Bonhoeffer's life.) Based on his deliberations for what would develop into *Ethics*,

⁶⁶ Letter dated 19 October 1928. *No Rusty Swords*, 32.

⁶⁷ Fant, 10.

⁶⁸ Wind, 58.

Bonhoeffer wrote a lecture entitled “What Is A Christian Ethic?” which also depicts the inclusiveness of Christ’s commands. Barcelona’s German-speaking congregation heard this address that Bonhoeffer delivered on 8 February 1929. From the outset, he placed Christian teaching within a wider or Jewish context:

The commandment of love is not specifically Christian, but was already generally recognized and widespread at the time of Jesus... This also emerges from a comparison of sayings of Jesus with the sayings of Jewish Rabbis and pagan philosophers, which are often similar, right down to their formulation. The Rabbi Hillel is asked what is the greatest commandment and he replies, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself. That is the greatest commandment.’ Another says, ‘Do not do to another what you would not have done to yourself.’⁶⁹

Near the end of Bonhoeffer’s address, the reader can detect a sign of his impetus for activism toward an inclusive peace. After speaking about Christian freedom and its requisite ethic regarding loving one’s neighbour, he concluded:

The man who would leave the earth, who would depart from the present distress, loses the power which still holds him by eternal, mysterious forces. The earth remains our mother, just as God remains our Father, and our mother will only lay in the Father’s arms him who remains true to her. That is the Christian’s song of earth and her distress.⁷⁰

Bonhoeffer’s interpretation of Christian faithfulness recognized neither particular religious forms nor a private and heaven-focused piety. Rather, he taught that Christians are responsible for “the present distress” or for contributing to the earth, which must be shared by all of created humanity. Instead of adhering to a political view of Christians’ calling and unlike Hitler’s exclusive vision, Bonhoeffer advocated a biblical call to the Church to be bearers of peace in the world.

Bonhoeffer’s message of peace in 1929 was poignant as the world saw the dawn of totalitarian rule and terror. It was not only the year that marked the start of the Great

⁶⁹ Letter dated 19 October 1928. *No Rusty Swords*, 38.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

Depression, but also of Stalin's rise and commencement of the first Five-Year Plan, which led to the banishment of millions of Russians to labour camps or to Siberia; Arab attacks on Jews escalated to a pitch over their use of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem; Benito Mussolini ("Duce" or Leader of Italy), who wrote that "outside the state no human or spiritual values can exist," signed the Lateran Treaty with Pope Pius XI that gave necessary recognition from the Vatican for Italy's Fascists to catapult to an uncontested, oppressive level of influence.⁷¹ In 1929 Hitler also used Mussolini's political model and grew in popularity such that, by the next election, his Nazi party captured a vast number of the votes that had been lost to the Centre parties in the year prior. Both up to and following the time that espousal of pacifism was declared tantamount to treason in the Third Reich, Bonhoeffer, while perhaps never converting to strict pacifism, became a supporter of conscientious objection to military service—much to the embarrassment of other leaders in the Confessing Church and even certain close friends.

Bonhoeffer's motive was the realization of Christ-like love for one's neighbour or "brother," which continues to reappear as both a theme in his writings and an underlying basis of Bonhoeffer's activity. Bonhoeffer first delivered his lecture on Christian ethics in 1929 at Barcelona to a German audience that would someday face the mandatory draft to Hitler's army. He preached that the one whom people call "enemy" is none other than one's neighbour, "whom I am sworn to love in death or life...just as my own brother."⁷² Notwithstanding "love and gratitude to my *Volk* ('people')," all who with "utterly

⁷¹ Derek Heater, *Our World this Century*, 2d Edition (Oxford University Press, 1987), 47. Figure 4 on page 50 shows that the Nazis, having held 12 seats in the Reichstag (the German parliament) in the May 1928 elections, grew to majority status with 196 seats in the November 1932 elections. As a comparison, the Centre parties shrunk from 364 seats to 166, respectively; the remaining seats were taken by the Communists, whose leaders were soon assassinated by Hitler's police agents.

⁷² Bonhoeffer, "Grundfragen einer christlichen Ethik," in Rasmussen, 97.

serious responsibility” enter battle should do so as though it were a crime and without hatred for the so-called enemy, but rather “in the sacrifice of the will of the self to the divine will which directs world history” in a personal way:

I will finally acknowledge that only in the continuing relation to God, in which Christian decisions are made in ever-renewed submission to the divine will, can it remain certain that, even when the world violates my conscience, my decision can only be that to which God has led me in the holy hour of the encounter of my will with his....If we look again at the argument of the other side, then we recognize as decisive the fact that its advocates make the commands of the New Testament into laws. They make themselves slaves of these laws when they should be making their decisions in freedom. They judge according to the literal meaning but not according to the spirit of the Christian. They act according to principles, not out of the extreme situation given me by God. Sparks do not spring out of empty space, but as hard stones strike one another. So, too, the Holy Spirit does not flash forth in ideas and principles but in the urgent decision of the moment.⁷³

Bonhoeffer taught that ethical questions are solved neither by the *Voelker* nor by a Christian perversion of biblical “laws,” but by obedience to God in the moment of crisis, even when one’s own will collides with the Holy Spirit. God grants freedom to each individual, and ethical choices are to be made in accountability to God—not to others or to religious principles irrespective of the extreme context. The idea of a spiritual brotherhood that transcends nationality is evident in Bonhoeffer’s stance against war on the “enemy,” and this becomes important later as his theological basis for actively identifying with the Jews. Bonhoeffer and Franz Hildebrandt collaborated in 1930 to compose the first German Lutheran catechism against sanction for war, and when the opportunity arose for Germans to participate in the emerging world-wide ecumenical movement, Bonhoeffer threw himself wholeheartedly into the cause.⁷⁴ He already saw,

⁷³ Ibid., 97-98.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 100. Larry Rasmussen also notes Bonhoeffer’s “robust” passion for peace the year after Barcelona both in his address, “Ansprache in New York,” and “through all his ecumenical work.”

however, that both truth and unity, understood Christologically, requires concrete expression not least with regard to the social responsibility of the church. Though an ardent patriot in his youth, Bonhoeffer could not reconcile himself to the position of German churches that had supported the nation's expansionary war effort in 1914 with the belief that "God was on their side."⁷⁵ Amid growing nationalism and rearmament in Europe, Bonhoeffer went against the stream of German Lutheranism and of other national churches by boldly calling upon the ecumenical movement and its member churches to outlaw war in the name of Jesus Christ.⁷⁶

Bonhoeffer's struggle against violence and war may have started in New York under the influence of Jean Lasserre, who derived his brand of pacifism from Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. However, Bonhoeffer also drew from a "real" approach to Christology and spoke with "additional urgency" at an ecumenical gathering in Fanø, Denmark. The German mystique of militant, manly glory was debunked by his riveting speech, which centred on the order of peace that must characterize Christians:

Christ is the prime reality; hence, attacks on people are, for Bonhoeffer, attacks on none other than Jesus Christ...Bonhoeffer proclaims again the simple logic of obeying the peace commands of Jesus Christ: "The brothers and sisters in Christ obey his word; they do not doubt or question, but keep his commandment of peace. They are not ashamed, in defiance of the world, even to speak of eternal peace. They cannot take up arms against Christ himself—yet this is what they do if they take up arms against one another!"⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Church historian John Conway, interview in Martin Doblmeier, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Pacifist, Nazi Resister* (First Run Features).

⁷⁶ John De Gruchy, *Bonhoeffer and South Africa: Theology in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 14.

⁷⁷ Quotation from Bonhoeffer's speech in editors' Introduction. *Discipleship*, vol. 4 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 15.

This defiance against the Church's passive complacency appears again in *Costly Discipleship*, wherein purposeful action and not private religiosity is merited. In the book he admonished:

The followers of Jesus have been called to peace. When he called them they found their peace, for he is their peace. BUT now they are told that they must not only have peace but make it. And to that end they renounce all violence and tumult.⁷⁸

Bonhoeffer claimed that the lasting role of the Church is to be makers of peace.

4. First American Trip

For Bonhoeffer, the entire earth with all its inhabitants comprised the realm of possibility for God's kingdom and for action on its part. This was a lesson he learned in the United States, where Bonhoeffer headed to pursue post-doctoral studies upon receiving his doctoral degree in Germany. After he was accepted for a teaching position at Berlin University at the age of twenty-four, in September 1930 Bonhoeffer assumed a Sloane Fellow teaching scholarship at Union Theological Seminary in New York. There, he befriended African-American Franklin Fisher, who became (along with Lasserre and Paul Lehman) one of Bonhoeffer's closest comrades in the U.S. Throughout the academic year, Bonhoeffer's theology was pushed further toward a social bent as he quickly identified with blacks in America. By his next journey to the U.S., Bonhoeffer could comment in reflecting about his evolving theology at the time: "I don't think I've ever changed very much, except perhaps at the time of my first impressions abroad and under the first conscious influence of father's personality. It was then that I turned from

⁷⁸ *Costly Discipleship* (London: SCM Press, 1959), 102.

phraseology to reality.”⁷⁹ Bonhoeffer stood in solidarity with members of an oppressed race represented by Fisher, whose “segregation pained him just as it had his brother;” this was most evidenced when Fisher was refused service in a white-owned restaurant: “(Bonhoeffer) ostentatiously left the restaurant, leading the whole party out into the street, demonstrating his displeasure! Racism was not in his character and he could not tolerate it.”⁸⁰

In America, Bonhoeffer allied himself with and recognized Christ most clearly amongst the powerless black members of society. He praised highly the work of black Christianity and commended their “practical work in the community and their public effectiveness.”⁸¹ Much more than the work of churches with white-majority congregations, Bonhoeffer valued the expression of the Social Gospel (feeding the hungry and “setting the captives free” as Christ proclaimed) among black churches.⁸² Bonhoeffer recognized only that which was the truest application of Scripture for the common or social good. Thus, in retrospect, a modern Lutheran scholar has commented that the Social Gospel movement left Lutheranism “largely untouched”—with “the exception” of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.⁸³ Bonhoeffer had written about a year prior on a lesson he had learned in Barcelona: “men are not the same even at the deepest level, but

⁷⁹ Bonhoeffer added: “Self-development is, of course, a different matter.” Letter from Tegel Prison dated 22 April 1944. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Enlarged Edition (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 275.

⁸⁰ Edwin Robertson, *The Shame and the Sacrifice* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), 56.

⁸¹ *Witness to Jesus Christ*, 213.

⁸² “The most conspicuous movement representing the social aspects of Christianity in American and Canadian Protestantism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries...the movement had a high view of human nature and its potentiality, stressed the idea of progress, was reformist in tone, and had a somewhat utopian caste.” *Oxford Concise Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. E. A. Livingstone, New Edition (Oxford University Press, 2000), 537.

⁸³ Franklin Sherman, “Secular Calling and Social Ethical Thinking,” in *The Lutheran Church: Past and Present*, ed. Vilmos Vajta (Minnesota: Augsburg Publications, 1977), 185, 205.

they are individuals, totally different and only ‘united’ by the Word in the church.”⁸⁴ Not disrespecting cultural and psychological differences that distinguish individuals and peoples, Bonhoeffer overcame interracial barriers in acknowledging the spiritual and the social needs that are common to humanity. Not surprisingly, Bonhoeffer was able to identify closely with the work of black Christians—more so, one may arguably say, than he identified himself with white Americans, though they were nearer his background and cultural sense of reserve. During his stay in New York, Bonhoeffer chose to attend and to teach children’s Sunday school at Abyssinian Baptist Church in an African-American area of Harlem, rather than attend the all-white Riverside Church closer by his residence at Union seminary. This kind of behaviour was atypical of even American Anglo-Saxons, since racial segregation existed in North America. As late as 1933, acts of race-hatred were also widely perpetrated. For instance, it was not uncommon to see reported in the headlines: “Lynchings spread across the South, and forty-two blacks are killed by lynch mobs.”⁸⁵ However, Bonhoeffer was unaffected by the prevalent racial stereotyping, partly because he appreciated differing faith-expressions. Like the Frenchman’s pacifism, he embraced the Social Gospel of African-Americans at Abyssinian Church. This period at Union Seminary clearly marks Bonhoeffer’s openness to theologies that were foreign to his own realm of religious experience.

Most particularly in the music of African-Americans, Bonhoeffer was moved and unified together with the black spirit (in contrast with the spiritual imperviousness that he

⁸⁴ *No Rusty Swords*, 12.

⁸⁵ Trager, 818. Bonhoeffer deals with the marginal experience of black Americans in a report about his time at Union Seminary entitled “Christianity Without Reformation.” His diary entries, from disembarking after sea voyage on his second trip to Union Seminary in NY (see chapter two of this paper) and compiled in *Way to Freedom*, also document Bonhoeffer’s interest and discussions on the subject of black-white race relations in America.

perceived from white Americans). Bonhoeffer considered African-Americans' emotional spirituals to be "the most influential contribution made by the Negro to American Christianity."⁸⁶ He noted:

It is barely understandable that great Negro singers can sing these songs before packed concert audiences of whites, to tumultuous applause, while at the same time these same men and women are still denied access to the white community through social discrimination. One may also say that nowhere is revival preaching still so vigorous and so widespread as among the Negroes (*sic*), that here the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the saviour of the sinner, is really preached and accepted with great welcome and visible emotion.⁸⁷

Beyond just relating to African-Americans, Bonhoeffer studied in blacks' stories and music the soul of a persecuted minority group (though hitherto he had shared nothing in common with them). Comparing Bonhoeffer's love of the Old Testament for the way it captures the story of the nation of Israel, one African-American scholar has noted that Bonhoeffer loved blacks' spirituals for the way these capture their "tragic soul life" and "chronicle the history of black suffering and faith."⁸⁸ Although those who knew Bonhoeffer remembered his exceptional ability to play classical piano, Bonhoeffer appreciated the very different music that he heard for the first time in Harlem. For a person who was privileged and who could enjoy every aspect of the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture, it was unusual that Bonhoeffer valued the people's spirit expressed in black music and in black American literature, which he read and about which he wrote.⁸⁹

While other European students toured New York's sights, Bonhoeffer secretly slipped

⁸⁶ "Negro" can be interchanged with "African-American" (not yet a recognized term in Bonhoeffer's day). In his writings, no negative implication was attached to the commonly used terms, "negro" and "negroes."

⁸⁷ Robertson, *The Shame and the Sacrifice*, 68, 57.

⁸⁸ J. Deotis Roberts, *Bonhoeffer & King: Speaking Truth to Power* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2005), 48.

⁸⁹ Bonhoeffer wrote to Reinhold Niebuhr on 6 Feb. 1933 with greetings to friends at Union Seminary and particularly one named person, Jim Dobrowski, to whom Bonhoeffer requested: "I ask to return my essay on Negro literature that he must still have." Rasmussen, 219 Appendix.

away from their mid-week trips to attend prayer meetings and hymn-singing at black churches in Harlem.⁹⁰ Upon returning to Germany (despite a somewhat mixed response from his hearers), Bonhoeffer ceaselessly shared about blacks' experience and gave their precious gift of spirituals on his record player to classes of Confessing pastors at the underground seminary in Finkenwalde.⁹¹ Unlike contemporary ethnographers in their discussions about the categorization of Otherness, Bonhoeffer neither judged black Americans' art to be "uncivilized expressions not high culture" nor imposed "specific interests and concerns of the disciplinary specialist;" he preferred to recognize the Other's voice, demands, and teachings that are usually absent from dominant rhetoric.⁹²

5. Joining a 'Jewish' Fight

During Bonhoeffer's time at Union Seminary, fellow colleague Paul Lehman introduced Bonhoeffer to Rabbi Stephen Wise, notably "the most influential and well-respected American Jew of his generation."⁹³ This relationship with Rabbi Wise, whose lifelong friendship he cultivated from 1930, was significant both for Bonhoeffer as well as for the fight against Hitler waged by American Jews under the leadership of this rabbi. While Jewish writers have at times criticized Bonhoeffer for failing to speak out for the Zionist cause, one cannot overlook the importance of this Zionist leader's ongoing friendship with Bonhoeffer, who was unique among Germans in relating to a rabbi of such political influence. Additionally, like the Rabbi, Bonhoeffer recognized the

⁹⁰ Wind, 50, 52.

⁹¹ Doblmeier, "Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Pacifist, Nazi Resister."

⁹² J. Fabian, "Presence and Representation The Other and Anthropological Writing," in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 16 (Summer): 771. Quoted in David Goldberg, *Racist Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), 151 n.

⁹³ In the "American Experience" film, PBS pays tribute to Rabbi Stephen Wise for his role in Zionist circles since 1898 when the rabbi first met Theodor Herzl, founder of modern Zionism. Public Broadcasting Service (2006). <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/holocaust/peopleevents/pandeAMEX101.html>>

“promised land” as belonging to the people of the Book (or Bible) in his later writings.⁹⁴ Bonhoeffer first attended Rabbi Wise’s sermons in New York and then met with him in person. He also delivered the message that first conveyed to Rabbi Wise the plight of German Jews in 1933 after Hitler’s ascension to power.⁹⁵ Consequently, in March of that year, Rabbi Wise (through the auspices of his American Jewish Congress) organized a mass meeting in New York’s Madison Square Garden, where “Wise called for an immediate end to the anti-Semitism of the Third Reich.”⁹⁶ It is also possible that, with Bonhoeffer’s aid, the original message of Hitler’s Final Solution against the Jews was mysteriously delivered to Rabbi Wise via London on 28 August 1942 from the original source: Gerhart Riegner, World Jewish Congress representative in Switzerland, who became yet another Jewish person of influence among Bonhoeffer’s contacts.⁹⁷

Bonhoeffer would eventually become increasingly aware of a relationship between the oppressed plights of blacks and of Jews.⁹⁸ At the same time that the Nazis were preparing to open Germany’s first concentration camp for Jews and for political prisoners at Dachau, on 6 February 1933, Bonhoeffer wrote a concise letter (of two paragraphs with greetings) to Professor Reinhold Niebuhr at Union Theological Seminary

⁹⁴ Example: *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 53.

⁹⁵ © Holocaust Heroes (2006). <<http://www.holocaust-heroes.com/bonhoeffer.html>>

⁹⁶ PBS America and the Holocaust “People and Events” from “American Experience” film. <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/holocaust/peopleevents/pandeAMEX101.html>>

⁹⁷ Walter Laqueur, “The Mysterious Messenger and The Final Solution,” in *Commentary Magazine*, vol. 69, No. 3 (March 1980). <<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/archive/digitalarchive>>

⁹⁸ On reasons for Bonhoeffer’s activism in protest of Hitler’s Aryan Clause, which disempowered German Jews, Mary Bosanquet writes: “A number of factors combined to make him (Bonhoeffer) quickly sensitive to the central importance of the situation...One was the presence of a non-Aryan in his own family, his twin sister’s husband, Gerhard Leibholz; another was his friendship with Franz Hildebrandt, whose future would now be in jeopardy, and a third was his intimate knowledge of another suffering minority, the coloured people of America. Thus it was on behalf of the Jewish Christians that his first serious protest was made. It took the form of an address given somewhere in Berlin before the end of April (1933).” Bosanquet, 119-120.

in New York.⁹⁹ Here, his deliberation on blacks (about which he wrote an “essay on Negro literature”) is coupled with his concern for the current situation of the breach of human rights in Germany. Though he must be cautious in order not to attract the attention of the official censor, Bonhoeffer’s letter briefly touches on a number of issues:

That neither economic nor political nor social matters will change drastically is rather unlikely; but a horrible cultural barbarization threatens even more, so that we’ll also have to open a Civil Liberties Union here very soon. As you yourself can imagine, the specter of communism cannot be exorcized with national incantations and casting of spells....The course of the Church is as obscure as seldom before.¹⁰⁰

First of all, Bonhoeffer acknowledged in his letter that economic and political and social matters are pressing, though not so much as a “cultural barbarization” (for which, it can be assumed, only the Nazis were at fault). This leads to a second issue of the need for addressing civil liberties. Third, the “specter of Communism” is being attacked, but the Church is not doing enough to intervene in the wake of these issues. One can only guess, since the general populace associated Jews with Communism, which got financial backing in Germany from Jewish sources,¹⁰¹ that Bonhoeffer was covertly referring at least in part to the treatment of Jews throughout this paragraph. Such an interpretation makes sense, considering that the Lutheran theology of the Church in Germany precluded the possibility of its involvement in politics,¹⁰² much less in socialist endeavours

⁹⁹ Ibid., 818.

¹⁰⁰ Rasmussen, 218 (Appendix B).

¹⁰¹ Many Zionists were Communist, and “with the overall collapse of the parties of the Middle in 1932 that the SPD (Social Democratic Party) succeeded in securing a majority of Jewish voters. It is clear, then, that the stereotype of Jews as socialists and communists was an exaggerated yet nevertheless important one, because it led many Germans to distrust the Jewish minority as a whole and to brand Jews as enemies of the German nation.” Sarah Gordon, *Hitler, Germans, and the ‘Jewish Question’* (Princeton University Press, 1984), 22, 24.

¹⁰² Consider the traditional concept of *Zwei Reich/ Zwei Regimente* (two rules/ two governments), whereby within a person one is subject to Christ, but by ones office one is subject to the worldly kingdom. This led to a belief in absolute outward “obedience to (secular) authority,” with internalized “emphasis solely on sin and guilt” with respect to biblical interpretations of deliverance, redemption, etc. Sherman, 193-195.

(Bonhoeffer meant to implicate the Church, however, with relevancy to the first and third political issues he raised).

The next year, Bonhoeffer followed suit with a letter to his former supervisor at Union from the safety of London, where he could lengthily and freely express how he had thrown himself completely into his volunteer work among Jewish refugees. After “such a long interval,” Bonhoeffer wrote Niebuhr for his “help in a few matters involving emigrants:”

It’s only natural I’ve come to have a great deal to do with these things since my stay in London. What I’d like to find out now is whether and what kind of arrangements exist there for students (Jewish students, or those expelled from the university for political reasons)...Here in London I’m particularly concerned about a man, 23 years old, formerly president of the Republican Student Society, a lawyer who is in a bad way and whom I can’t place anywhere. I doubt he has any special talents but he simply must be helped. Now what I should like to know is whether the possibility might exist in the States for him to continue his studies or begin something new — perhaps with a scholarship or something similar. That’s the one case. The other is the author Arnim T. Wegner—Tillich will surely know of him—very left politically, suffered a terrible period in a concentration camp and is a total wreck. He’s been unable to find anything here and is despondent over it. Pardon me for bothering you with these matters, but it’s only a small slice of what we see daily and which finally leaves one simply standing there, unable to help any further. My congregations are very understanding in supporting my work. That’s a substantial help.¹⁰³

His letter takes for granted (possibly from prior experience in New York) Professor Niebuhr’s “natural” understanding of Bonhoeffer’s “great deal” of care for the plight of German Jews, even for Communist Wegner (of whom leftist theologian Paul Tillich was aware). Bonhoeffer also expected the church congregations to which he traveled to be “understanding” and supportive of their pastor’s work amongst these Jews. The fact that Bonhoeffer prioritized aiding the Jews over execution of his clerical duties and that he

¹⁰³ Letter dated 13 July 1934. Rasmussen, 219 (Appendix B).

saw the church in both letters as a vehicle for social change marks a progressive and significant relation of Bonhoeffer's theology to his motivation for political actions. He immediately goes on in his letter to reclaim the Sermon on the Mount "on the basis of a partially restored" yet totally new Reformation theology, with the hope that a bold new opposition church ("very different from the present opposition church") might emerge that will no longer "secure guarantee for the Nazi State"—with a condemnation of the tyranny that underlay events of aborted justice, including the Röehm affair.¹⁰⁴ For the purpose of "preparation" for this kind of resistance, Bonhoeffer ends his letter with mention of his "plan to go to India very soon to see what Gandhi knows about these things and to see what is to be learned there."¹⁰⁵ Bonhoeffer was now moving his theology from the ivory towers of academic or pastoral seclusion to the arena of the "real world" of resistance and action. He allied himself with Jews against a tyrannical state.

In considering and taking for granted both personal responsibility as well as resistance to systemic oppression, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was not unlike his grandmother, Julie Bonhoeffer, whose privileged status did not prevent her from seeing through socially created inequities. Grandmother's personal associations included Jews near the Bonhoeffer house, and whether spoken or not, her views undoubtedly influenced her grandchildren. Dietrich proudly remarked on his grandmother's antiapartheid stance when she "ostentatiously walked through the S.A. cordon in Berlin that was imposing a

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 220. "The most recent events in Germany have now shown beyond a doubt where we are headed. I am only astonished that no Protestant pastors were among those shot on the 30th of June....the time of the *Kulturkampf* ('culture-struggle') has arrived." For details on the Röehm affair, see next chapter, page 63 n.

¹⁰⁵ "Mahatma Gandhi in India defied the British raj with 'passive resistance' that would culminate in independence." On 12 March 1930, Gandhi began a civil disobedience campaign to defy the British monopoly in salt production. Gandhi's persistence from 1932 to demand social reform by more campaigns, a "fast unto death" and a boycott of British goods, led to the outlawing in 1947 of discriminating against the "untouchability" of the lowest caste, whom Gandhi called *harijans*—"God's children." Trager, 812.

boycott of Jewish shops” (1 April 1933).¹⁰⁶ She helped to cover the extra cost of Dietrich’s travels and had introduced the idea of his going to India to study passive resistance under Gandhi’s tutelage—a dream that never came into reality during their lifetime.¹⁰⁷ One can safely assume that, while living in Dietrich’s family home, Julie Bonhoeffer recognized his desire to impact social change through resistance. Although he may never have become a pacifist,¹⁰⁸ from an early age he learned not to draw lines on the basis of race and developed values or actions that were distinct from the status quo.

Hence, not inconsistent with his character, Bonhoeffer’s activism extended to a people most foreign to his own background. While doing his post-doctoral work in U.S.A., Bonhoeffer traveled as far as Mexico to speak, “even stronger” than French pacifist Lasserre and Mexican Quaker Herberto on “the Christian’s responsibility to work for peace.”¹⁰⁹ During that time, too, Bonhoeffer lectured in English to an American audience on the common humanity of all:

I am overwhelmed, considering the idea of God, the Father, who dwells beyond the stars and looks down upon his children in the whole world—in America and Germany, in India and in Africa. There is not any difference before God, as Paul says: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.’¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Wind, 96.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 9, 48.

¹⁰⁸ Bonhoeffer has long been a puzzling figure or simply overlooked particularly in Anabaptist circles, which perceived a contradiction in Bonhoeffer’s previous outspokenness against war and his later decision to join the *Abwehr*-led conspiracy. While acknowledging the complexity of Bonhoeffer and his actions, as the backdrop for his recent theological work, Stanley Hauerwas defends Bonhoeffer’s activist reasons for supporting pacifism in *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁹ Robertson, *The Shame and the Sacrifice*, 66.

¹¹⁰ *No Rusty Swords*, 73.

In the same breath, regarding the unity of humankind, Bonhoeffer captured here the essence of conciliatory, vicarious suffering in God's work through Christ, which overcomes every natural boundary:

God has erected a strange, marvelous and wonderful sign in the world, where we all could find him—I mean the cross of Jesus Christ, the cross of the suffering love of God. Under the cross of Christ we know that we all belong to one another, that we all are brethren and sisters in the same need and in the same hope, that we are bound together by the same destiny, human beings with all our suffering and all our joys, with sorrows and with desires...Before the cross of Christ and his inconceivable suffering all our external differences disappear, we are no longer rich or poor, wise or simple, good or bad; we are no longer Americans or German, we are one large congregation of brethren; we recognise that nobody is good before God...Christendom is the community in which men stand for each other, as a brother stands for his brother. Christendom is one great people composed of persons of every country in concord in their faith and their love because there is One God, One Lord, One Spirit, One Hope.

The Name of God goes beyond all social and racial distinctions. Based on the spiritual nature of Christ's Church, Bonhoeffer hoped in a universal brotherhood. In praise of the "God who is a God of love and not of hate," Bonhoeffer continued by exhorting, "in America and Germany, in Russia and in India...if we are in accord, no nationalism, no hate of races or classes can execute its designs, and then the world will have its peace for ever and ever...it is not enough only to talk and to feel the necessity of peace." With these concluding words before returning to Germany on the eve of Hitler's rise to power, Bonhoeffer realized the dawn of his freedom of speech under threat of Nazi designs.

6. Embattled in Germany

From his return to Europe at the completion of the Sloane Fellowship until his death, Bonhoeffer had to be mindful of the ever-watchful, limiting influence of the

German censor.¹¹¹ Later, in 1936, on charges of “pacifist,” “enemy of the state,” and having an influence “not conducive to German interests” after his outspokenness abroad, Bonhoeffer was banned from all German universities and was no longer permitted to speak publicly.¹¹² However, by then, Bonhoeffer had already left an impression on theological students at the university in Berlin and abroad. Upon loss of official lecturer status in Germany, he had the opportunity to consider a request by leaders of the Confessing qua Evangelical Church to run a secret seminary that was eventually set up at Finkenwalde in the German province of Pomerania.

Despite his illegal activity and the growing limitations on his freedoms, Bonhoeffer continued to stand for the truth, which he distinguished from mere appearances of peace and of fairness. He had witnessed the suppression of the church and of Jews in Germany, where Nazis perpetrated lies while promising peace and order. In America, where the struggle over creed that had torn apart post-Reformation Europe was bypassed for the sustenance of community-tolerance, Bonhoeffer also observed that disintegration of the church prevailed. Perhaps partly as a result of lecturing on the theology of Karl Barth (his acquaintance from late 1931) to liberal seminarians in America, Bonhoeffer disdained their concentration on social or political ethics. Unlike the Americans, he was imbued with a zeal for a theologically rooted Christian life (as

¹¹¹ Bonhoeffer lost his freedom of speech in 1936 when the Gestapo disallowed him to teach, preach or write anything for publication. Furthermore, from Tegel Prison he was aware of the censor: “My dearest Maria, so you waited a month for a letter from me? I’ve written to you and my parents alternately, every four days without fail, except on 5 September, when I wrote to my parents after the alert. But it’s been the same at this end. The letter you told me to expect during your visit still hasn’t turned up...” Letter dated 9 September 1943. Bonhoeffer and von Wedemeyer, *Love Letters from Cell 92* (London: Harper & Collins, 1994), 63.

¹¹² Wind, 114. “Combined with the Emergency Decree of 28 February, the Treachery Law imposed dangerous restrictions on anyone like Bonhoeffer who was unwilling to identify his loyalty to Germany with acceptance of Hitler’s administration.” Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 201.

partially glimpsed in Barthian conservatism).¹¹³ This is evidence of the beginning of a spiritual conversion for Bonhoeffer, who cultivated a profound relationship with Christ through studying the truth in God's Word.¹¹⁴ In preparing a report on his time until 1931 at Union Theological Seminary, Bonhoeffer wrote critically on "Protestantism without Reformation" in America, where "the concept of *tolerance* becomes the basic principle of everything Christian;" this was an ethical ideal for society that even contemporary proponents of peace like Stanley Hauerwas confessed warrants challenge.

Because Christians in America have no place for the conflict truthfulness requires, they contribute to the secularization of society; a society, moreover, which finds itself unable to subject politics to truth and the conflict truthfulness requires. Tolerance becomes indifference and indifference leads to cynicism. Bonhoeffer's criticism of American theology, education, and politics reflects his lifelong passion to speak the truth.¹¹⁵

As a pacifist interpreter of Bonhoeffer, Hauerwas would like to redeem Bonhoeffer among those in the Christian world who cannot accept the slightest taint of war (even self-sacrifices for the common good). However, he recognizes that Bonhoeffer would not choose any unifying efforts without a correct basis. Bonhoeffer's main criticism of white students at Union Seminary was the ineffectiveness of their preaching, which lacked the component for effecting genuine peace that results only from the unifying power of the Word. He wrote, "Because the American student sees the question of truth essentially in the light of practical community, his preaching becomes an edifying narration of examples, a ready recital of his own religious experiences, which are not of course

¹¹³ Bonhoeffer was appalled that American seminarians' knowledge of Barth was "so inadequate that it is almost impossible for them to understand what he is talking about." *No Rusty Swords*, 88.

¹¹⁴ Fant, 15.

¹¹⁵ Hauerwas, 59.

assigned any positively binding character.”¹¹⁶ To the contrary, Eberhard Bethge believed that “preaching is the focal point in the picture of Bonhoeffer” throughout his stages of (1) academia, (2) ministry years, and (3) imprisonment, and Bethge supported Clyde Fant’s assessment of his *Worldly Preaching*: “Word, church, world—these, in many variations of expression, are Bonhoeffer’s chief concerns. No one may dominate over another without damage being done to the wholeness of Bonhoeffer’s thought.”¹¹⁷

Bonhoeffer valued the truth in God’s Word over a ‘feel good’ sense of peace. His peace efforts did not simply promote a general ideal of community or of toleration; rather, Bonhoeffer struggled for a peace centered on godly mandates and on careful preaching. In that sense, Bonhoeffer shared a common view with his friend, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, who founded the American Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress and saw unity in terms of the fulfillment of calling for people of ‘the Book’ (the Bible).

Hitler had a different basis for unification. He revived German race-doctrine, reminiscent of nineteenth century romanticism, in which the people (*Volk*) had become a romanticized object. He used this as a weapon of internal national unity among various German states; from the former paradigm sprang the idea of a “superman whose natural destiny it is to rule the world...they were but temporary means of escape from political realities.”¹¹⁸ As a result, race (or racism) developed into a full-fledged ideology.

Before the tide of anti-Semitism rose, Bonhoeffer’s confidant Bethge recalls that Bonhoeffer preached openly against the misuse of the divine name, by which Germans were in fact glorifying themselves while legitimizing corrupt political realities. Bethge recorded, “Bonhoeffer well understood the emotions of those years, but saw through

¹¹⁶ *No Rusty Swords*, 13.

¹¹⁷ Fant, 5-6.

¹¹⁸ Arendt, 168-170.

them...On 31 July nearly 38 per cent of the German electorate voted for Hitler's party."¹¹⁹ Later that year, on 6 November 1932, Bonhoeffer delivered a sermon in packed church buildings during the Reformation Festival. He pointed to the Bible in decrying the revival of triumphalist nationalism that honoured the Teutonic gods of blood, soil, and conquest, even under the banner of Martin Luther in the "mighty fortress" of Nazi Germany, and called Lutherans to "do the first work" of "letting God be God—since it is highly important to say this today...to love God and one's brothers and sisters."¹²⁰ Bonhoeffer was dismayed to see his homeland imbued with 'pagan' National Socialist fervour and wrote, "The trend towards nordic heathenism is growing tremendously particularly among very influential circles;" he was "afraid the opposition is not united in their aims."¹²¹ In 1936-1937 Bonhoeffer spoke more pointedly in *Costly Discipleship* against German Christians, who misrepresented Luther's thought about Christian "works" for the present "work" of Nazis in building a new earthly kingdom.

Within this politically charged atmosphere, Bonhoeffer and a group of students that had formed around him when he was assistant lecturer at Berlin University joined the Charlottenburg youth club, which was a gathering place for unemployed young people from the streets. Anneliese Schnurmann, a Jewish friend of Bonhoeffer's youngest sister, Susanne, had virtually financed the project that began in the autumn of 1932. This club lasted for six months until it had to close due to the roving commandos of the S.A. In Charlottenburg "Christians, Jews, and Socialists worked, discussed, and celebrated together," and after its closure Dietrich Bonhoeffer attempted to help persecuted Communists or Jews from the club who "disappeared into a place on the edge of the city

¹¹⁹ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 176-177.

¹²⁰ *Discipleship*, 9-10.

¹²¹ Letter from Bonhoeffer to Bishop Bell, dated 27 December 1933. *No Rusty Swords*, 262.

which Dietrich's parents had 'given' for youth work."¹²² This began Dietrich's move toward political action, which concurrently incorporated Jews into his social sphere.

Bonhoeffer was known throughout his student days for disliking politics, and he cautiously regarded the Nazis' hostility toward Judaism along with their anti-Marcionite reading of the Lutheran Bible, which was quickly becoming purged of all Jewish references. Bonhoeffer had already concentrated his life's work largely on the Jewish Scriptures and now took the staid course of a conciliatory Christology reminiscent of themes of the Social Gospel in America with an added conservative bent toward the Hebrew Torah. One response to the sweeping changes overtaking Germany at that time took the form of a published work, *Creation and Fall*, based on a series of Bonhoeffer's lectures at Berlin University from winter of 1932 until the early part of 1933. On Christians' commonalities with Jacob, Bonhoeffer wrote in *Creation*: "Whoever loves God, on the other hand, loves him as Lord of the earth....God wants us to honor him on earth; he wants us to honor him in our fellow man—and nowhere else."¹²³ In relating the Genesis account of creation to Christ's work on the cross, Bonhoeffer's writing again reflected a worldly or earth-loving faith that recognizes the freedom and image of God as reflected in and through all of human creation. The basis of Bonhoeffer's creation faith, not unlike the Jews (whose views were ostracized in his day), was evident in his works since the early 1920s (e.g., "First Clement"). In this early theological work, Bonhoeffer wrote about the Holy Spirit as the Animator of life, who "speaks from the Old Testament," and about how early Christianity foundationally "needs these Jewish ideas" [old religious and ethical concepts, including *ekklesia* ("church-community"), *adelphos*

¹²² Wind, 60.

¹²³ John D. Godsey, *Preface to Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 32, 45.

(“brothers”), *tapeinophrosune* (“humility”)] against insidious Greco-Roman elements of the later religious-heroic model.¹²⁴ Over and against the Reich Church’s extreme redemption-driven view that invalidated Hebrew parts of the Bible, Bonhoeffer pointed to an ancient Judeo-Christian creation theology and consciously or unconsciously validated a Jewish worldview. In “The First Table of the Ten Commandments” that was later smuggled out of Bonhoeffer’s prison cell in 1944, “the Christian rejoices that he holds so many important things in common with other men,” all of whom find origination in the “Creator and Preserver of life.” Harkening to Jewish imagery, Bonhoeffer wrote that the Ten Commandments “belong” and “must be sought” in the *sanctuary*, at the place of God’s gracious presence in the world, from there whence they go forth again and again into the world (Isa. 2:3)...for “obedience to God alone is the foundation of our freedom.”¹²⁵ Bonhoeffer was not only working out an ethics and theology of life that would prepare himself as well as future students for the type of political rhetoric that paved the way for the Holocaust; Bonhoeffer was also reminding Christians that their sole allegiance is to heaven above.

Bonhoeffer subversively declared that any other power that fails to uphold “authority and dignity in God’s sovereignty” is “usurpation and has no claim to obedience,” based on Christ’s gracious demonstration of God’s freedom exercised *for* humankind. From thence comes freedom for all (“that however means nothing else than that the Creator’s image is created on earth”), and Christian freedom according to the prototype is never meant to exclude “being free for” others.¹²⁶ In his book, *Creation*,

¹²⁴ *The Young Bonhoeffer 1918-1927*, vol. 9 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 235, 253.

¹²⁵ Godsey, 50-51, 54.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

Bonhoeffer affirmed that God gave the Word in the beginning in order to create and to maintain his image in human beings through the Agent of Freedom, who is the life-preserving Holy Spirit. Since God is “at one and the same time, my boundary and my rediscovered centre,” the concept of limit or boundary enables and preserves freedom:

Because freedom is not isolated autonomy but relationship, because it is not only gift but also claim, humanity is both free and responsible, called to freedom but answerable in his freedom. If human freedom is derivative of and in the image of divine freedom, then true human freedom involves the free and willing limitation of the self by the other. It is precisely in his dependence on God, in recognizing God as his limit, that humanity is free in relation to God. In other words, limitation or constraint is actually constitutive of Christian freedom...the divine commandments operate as limits which set free. Like the boundary in *Creation and Fall*, and the *Christology* lectures, they stand at the centre.¹²⁷

Bonhoeffer’s theology is completely in keeping with what Jews, too, had gleaned from Scripture. Although Bonhoeffer addressed his works to Christians in the German context, his faith-based ethic, *analogia relationis*, as well as his ultimate respect for life were not strictly Christian. A Jewish writer relates to these elements:

To Jewish ethics, as it seeks to guide the individual in his relationships with his fellow man, one may apply the words of the scripture: ‘It is not in heaven that you should say, who will go up for us to heaven and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it... But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.’ Its constitutive principal is the axiom, permanent and universal, that man bears the ineffaceable imprint of his Maker. Its rule of action is that natural self love which left unchecked yields the rankest egotism but directed outward produces the highest moral good.¹²⁸

Similarly, Bonhoeffer was neither driven to action for humanitarian reasons nor driven solely by an ethical command to love. Rather, as Clifford Green explicates, Bonhoeffer’s life and theology drew people to a personal Lord, who gives freedom from the power of

¹²⁷ Ibid., 66-68.

¹²⁸ Kellner, 172.

sin and gives life in the context of humble relationships with God and with fellow humans. Bonhoeffer was critical of the ‘heresy’ of the ‘confession’ of German Christians, pertaining to man’s need for redemption, which was extended into a political messianism in their hailing of Hitler as the nation’s Saviour. From Bonhoeffer’s seminar on First Clement in 1924, one sees that he preferred the “realistic” kind of Jewish thought that focused on what is actual (with “the intersection of the divine and human planes” in the worldview of Apostle Paul) over abstract, Greek philosophical thought, which did not preclude reducing Christ to “a religious-heroic model,” so that “as such he became one paradigm among many others of lesser significance.”¹²⁹ As John Godsey believes of Bonhoeffer’s critique of supposedly ‘redeemed’ churchgoers in Germany:

Even a ‘theology of revelation’ becomes perverse if it allows us to stand over against the world rather than leading us to responsible sharing in the problems and burdens of the world. The church has absolutely no cause for pride, because the message it proclaims is meant for all mankind.¹³⁰

Bonhoeffer opposed the importance that Germans placed on their “pure” blood, which led to their wrong usurping of control. He was cautionary of the proud German Christians and of their world ‘left to its own devices’, which leads not to the freedom to be responsible and truly ‘worldly’ but to a destructive pursuit of self-deification. As a challenge, Bonhoeffer in his 1924 seminar paper on “First Clement” saw the gospel, the Christian church-community and its worship being historically derived from the Old Testament—“not one of causal connection” but “a paradigmatic usage of a given divine revelation.”¹³¹ Bonhoeffer refused the air of religious supercessionism that neglected the Jewish element; he noted that “the specifically Christological element does not, in

¹²⁹ “The Jewish Element in First Clement.” *Young Bonhoeffer*, 235, 253.

¹³⁰ Godsey, 18.

¹³¹ “The Jewish Element in First Clement.” *Young Bonhoeffer*, 222.

principle, refine the Jewish concept of divine revelation in the Old Testament....The notion that the Old Testament is a Christian document is also not in principle a refinement.”¹³² Unlike his German people, Bonhoeffer did not believe that all things Jewish should be dismissed.

On the other hand, Bonhoeffer’s theology differed from conservative Jewish thinking that believed humankind can bring “perfection out of ourselves.”¹³³ This optimistic view of human nature did not stand under the weight of the “disaster of humanity” that marked the Holocaust. Disillusionment resulted, as one Jew describes:

In the end it was ruse, deception and cunning beyond anything the world has ever seen, which accomplished what hunger and disease could not achieve. What defeated us, ultimately, was Jewry’s indestructible optimism, our eternal faith in the goodness of man—or rather, in the limits of his degradation. For generations, the Jews of Eastern Europe had looked to Berlin as to the very symbol of lawfulness, enlightenment and culture. We just could not believe that a German, even disguised as a Nazi, would so far renounce his own humanity as to murder women and children—coldly and systematically. We paid a terrible price for our hope, which turned out to be a delusion: the delusion that the nation of Kant, Goethe, Mozart and Beethoven cannot be a nation of murderers.¹³⁴

Jews in their optimism and churchmen in their theological abeyance had missed at the early stage of Hitler’s movement a proclivity toward evil that later became overtly apparent—with severe consequences particularly for the Jews. However, Bonhoeffer was jaded more than some Jews and Christians due to his theological understanding of people’s sinfulness, a concealed nature that he warned (if unchecked) leads to self-interest and to grasping for power. He first wrote about this theme in *Act and Being* and then extrapolated further in *Ethics*. Inherent in his distinct worldview was the notion of a

¹³² Ibid., 253.

¹³³ Kellner, 157. Kellner includes this line on page 156: “The Jewish teaching is founded on the fact that we are destined to be like Him [God].”

¹³⁴ Ibid., 426-427.

spiritual battle that is enacted in the earthly realm, which needs to be restored or reclaimed. He wrote:

We know that God and the devil are locked together in combat over the world and that the devil has a word to say even at death. In the face of death we cannot say in a fatalistic way, 'It is God's will'; we must add the opposite: 'It is not God's will'. Death shows that the world is not what it should be, but that it needs redemption.¹³⁵

In this context of speaking about physical and religious embattlement, Bonhoeffer politicized the spiritual talk of redemption in order that God's will may be realized against the work of the devil. Spiritual war inevitably takes form in society and its toll will be recognized in death; thus, redemption and not fatalistic ways should be established in the physical realm. Bonhoeffer identified in Hitler a power contrary to God's will and challenged the Church that tolerated this evil. Bonhoeffer knew that imminent danger lay ahead for Jews and for the Church when Hitler came to power on 30 January 1933 and effected from one cabinet meeting both his Concordat with the Vatican and a newly instituted Protestant Church under his appointee, Bishop Ludwig Müller.¹³⁶

As a result of the crucial soteriological issue of power in his theology, Bonhoeffer diagnosed a demonism in the political concept of the Führer. His unlimited power—in contravention of Christ the Mediator in Bonhoeffer's 1932 "Christ and Peace" address¹³⁷—is "the instrument for the wishes and (unfulfilled) ambitions of the people" beset by the "law of transference (*übertragung*)," says Clifford Green:

The powerful ego is at odds with God, self, and others. The successful achievements of the ego have been won at the cost of violating the

¹³⁵ "Circular Letters in the Church Struggle" (15 August 1941). *Testament to Freedom*, 455.

¹³⁶ "National Socialist ideology had infected, not only laymen in the synods, but also a large proportion of the clergy, even those in key positions. In this way they became either the instruments of the Party or else forfeited their freedom to negotiate and were eventually to lose every vestige of independence." Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 203.

¹³⁷ Green, *Theology of Sociality*, 151-165.

essential created sociality of human beings with each other. In making the self the center of reality, one usurps the place of God, and is isolated from others. Instead of freely loving and serving others in mutuality, they are dominated, dehumanized into ‘things’...collective and institutionalized power is as much a part of the human problematic ...destructive forms of social power are just as much manifestations of sin, and therefore to be encountered with the gospel of salvation, as the forms of sin which beset the life of any individual person.¹³⁸

Bonhoeffer foretold a violation of “essential created sociality” in society by seeing the problem of collective power in Nazism. In *Act and Being*, in this 1932 address, and later in *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer displayed lengthy personal meditation on the destructiveness of sin and of power, which he applied to his political context.

From his deliberations on the creation account in the Hebrew Bible, Bonhoeffer developed a theme of the enemy who threatens God’s peace and order. Because the biblical account of creation points to an enemy who is real in an earthly setting, Bonhoeffer believed the concrete command toward loving God or loving one’s fellow human must be contemporaneous as well. William Jay Peck wrote the first essay specifically on Bonhoeffer in relation to Judaism and noted the equal authority that Bonhoeffer attributed to both Testaments, whereby Bonhoeffer saw the Church as a framework wherein Germans could begin to relate to Jews and to the Jewish question. Furthermore, in his identifying Hitler as the enemy (not only as a threat to Jews but also to Germans and to humanity in general), Bonhoeffer’s death was construed partly in terms of an interaction with a complex idea. In “The Role of the ‘Enemy’ in Bonhoeffer’s Life and Thought,” Peck added to Bonhoeffer’s idea:

the enemy, a concept that he uses as a set, minimally including the Devil, Satan, and Antichrist in the iconic-mythic realm, and Hitler as well as the

¹³⁸ Ibid., 134, 137-138. “Bonhoeffer describes this transference of individual wishes and ambitions to the leader not as the action of strong, mature people, but as compensation for feelings of weakness and inadequacy” in the aftermath of the First World War and Treaty of Versailles. Idem., 131 n.

“German Christians” in the sphere of political interaction....The enemy is that which diminishes or destroys personhood, undermines true community, and seeks to defeat the command of God. The enemy is whatever or whoever improperly substitutes *it* for *thou*. Just such a substitution takes place in the fall of Adam...But the enemy is more than the mere converse of the person, the community, and God, because the encounter with the enemy contributes to the dynamic unfolding of these concepts.¹³⁹

Because Hitler devalued personhood, the community and the loving command of God, Bonhoeffer labeled him the true ‘enemy’. This theological and political concept co-existed in the person of Hitler. (The section on Bonhoeffer’s Motivation in the chapter on Conspiracy provides further discussion about this matter.) In a manner that differed from the mindset in the Lutheran Church, which separated theology and politics, Peck noted that Bonhoeffer moved “steadily” toward an ever-closer connection of his politics and his theology until the two became virtually indistinguishable by the time of his death.

Emerging from this background of theological contemplation, cautionary warnings were relayed in the words and the tone of Bonhoeffer’s broadcasted speech to the German public on 1 February 1933. Less than a week after Hitler’s accession to power, Bonhoeffer was ready with a covert challenge to Germans from the microphone in the Potsdamerstrasse Voxhaus (Broadcasting House). Bonhoeffer had intended to deliver his talk on “The Younger Generation’s Changed View of the Concept of Führer” as criticisms against “a form of collectivism turning into intensified individualism” and the idolized “misleader” that emerged from the youth-motivated concept of Führer, which manifested in political form.¹⁴⁰ However, when he grabbed the opportunity to vocalize his protest over the radio, Bonhoeffer’s carefully timed script was cut off before its end.

¹³⁹ William Jay Peck, “The Role of the ‘Enemy’ in Bonhoeffer’s Life and Thought,” in *A Bonhoeffer Legacy*, ed. A. J. Klassen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1981), 345, 348-9 passim.

¹⁴⁰ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 194.

He was upset that the crucial point was deliberately omitted from his speech. Therefore, Bonhoeffer had to revert to lecturing and to publishing this script in full in the conservative *Kreuzzeitung* within the month that followed.

Soon afterward, on 7 April 1933, the new Aryan Clause “For the Reconstruction of the Civil Service” provoked Bonhoeffer to write in April and circulate on 7 May 1933 a seditious essay called “The Church and the Jewish Question.”¹⁴¹ In his essay, Bonhoeffer clearly stated three ways in which the church should respond to state-instituted policies of discrimination: first, the church should remind the state about its Romans 13 task, to “punish evil;” second, the church must aid victims of state action; and third, Christians ought to do more than simply bandage victims but must put a “spoke in the wheel” as well. This last idea went contrary to the Lutheran notion of divinely “ordained authority,” which eliminated the possibility of war between parties who are not equals.¹⁴² Although “he did not as yet do so on behalf of what we now call human rights,” biographer Eberhard Bethge says Bonhoeffer had “related the humanist element in the Jewish question to the confessional question at a remarkably early date” and was unique in this response out of individual volition. In writing his essay, Bonhoeffer knowingly engaged in illicit activity, despite the appointment on 24 June 1931 of Prussian State Commissar August Jäger (later to become President of the Supreme Church Council) and an official broadcast that declared any resistance a “betrayal” of the people or of the State to be suppressed “as revolt and rebellion against the state

¹⁴¹ Jewish Question or Jewish Problem (*Judenfrage*)—“This refers to the Nazi policy towards people of Jewish descent within Germany and German-occupied countries. The propaganda of the ‘Jewish question’ led to policies of slanderous and brutal anti-Semitism and to the widespread hatred of Jews, including those who were baptized Christians.” *Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Glossary xxii.

¹⁴² Luther’s stance is unlike Calvinist thought, which allows for the possibility of revolution. See Sherman, 185-205. Also, cf. Dr. A. James Reimer’s lecture, “Setting the Social, Political & Religious Stage,” delivered at Toronto School of Theology (30 September 2004).

authority.”¹⁴³ Even so, Bonhoeffer was “the first Evangelical theologian and pastor to attack Hitler’s notorious anti-Semitic legislation,”¹⁴⁴ while what would soon be termed the “Confessing Church” concerned itself more with developing a confession of “Christ alone” than it did with matters of anti-Semitism or of peace. However, this was a new era wherein rules regarding civil disobedience were being rewritten:

Those who protested the treatment of Jews were put on no uncertain notice. For instance, already in 1934, on the eve of the announced boycott of Jewish businesses, clergy and anyone else who expressed disagreement were told by the regime: “The government of national revolution does not exist in a vacuum. It represents the creative German *volk*. Anyone who attacks it, attacks Germany! Anyone who slanders it, slanders the nation!”¹⁴⁵

Words such as Bonhoeffer’s in 1933 warranted the accusation of high treason.

Bonhoeffer’s reason for dangerously opposing Hitler’s Aryan Clause was its legal discrimination against the Jews in making them second-class citizens by prohibiting them from holding office in the state and in the church. National Socialists connected manliness, race, and the *Volk*; German Christians (such as Reich Bishop Müller and Wilhelm Stapel, a prolific theologian) extended this connection to the church as well. Furthermore, they projected the analogy of gender superiority onto race in order to justify the exclusion of non-Aryans in the German church. Based on Galatians 3:28, where Apostle Paul wrote that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek....male nor female,” Stapel argued German Protestants should “forbid the Jews to speak in our German

¹⁴³ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 221.

¹⁴⁴ *Witness to Jesus Christ*, 124.

¹⁴⁵ Richard John Neuhaus, “Daniel Goldhagen’s Holocaust,” in *First Things*, no. 65 (Aug./Sept. 1996), 31-46. <http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9608/articles/review_essay.html>

congregations.”¹⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer uniquely saw the “heart of the issue” and attacked this discriminatory gender-to-race analogy:

There was no getting around it, he argued, excluding the “Jewish Christian” from the pastoral office relegated him to an inferior position in the church. It proved nothing, he continued, to point to the biblical instruction, “Let your women keep silence in the churches” (I Corinthians 14:34). Either one read that verse as a law, in which case it said nothing about “Jewish Christians,” or one did not read it as a law, which would mean that women too could speak in the congregation. Bonhoeffer considered any subjection of the pastoral office to “arbitrariness of the congregation” unacceptable.¹⁴⁷

Bonhoeffer sought to expose arbitrariness of both Church and state. He demonstrated the understanding that, contrary to the clamor of the times, Hitler’s law was more politically than socially or religiously “necessitated.”¹⁴⁸ German Christians “lambasted the Old Testament, the Apostle Paul, and the symbol of the cross as ridiculous, debilitating remnants of Judaism, unacceptable to Nationalist Socialists.”¹⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Bonhoeffer continued to write and to preach from the Old Testament. He stood for the Jews as a solitary voice prior to the 23 July 1933 Church elections, which called for the ‘Confessing Church’ that was constituted with his help at Bethel the following month.¹⁵⁰

Yet, even Bonhoeffer’s determination to oppose the Nazis’ strategies had wavered during this period. On 11 April 1933, five days after the anti-Jewish legislation came into effect, Dietrich was asked to perform a funeral with the death of the father of his Jewish brother-in-law, Gerhard Leibholz. Gerhard’s father had died a few days after the

¹⁴⁶ Bergen, 69.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁴⁸ “It has been one of the most unfortunate facts in the history of the Jewish people that only its enemies, and almost never its friends, understood that the Jewish question was a political one.” Arendt, 56.

¹⁴⁹ Bergen, 17.

¹⁵⁰ Eberhard Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr* (London: Collins, 1975), 66, 69. ‘Confessing Church’ is based on the pledge to which every pastor had to subscribe: “In making this pledge I testify that the application of the Aryan paragraph within the Church of Christ has violated the confessional stand.” Gordon, 254

Nazis forced him to leave his post as city councilor.¹⁵¹ The deceased Leibholz was “unbaptised” (a Jew who had refused to convert to Christianity), yet Dietrich’s family wanted him to conduct the service. Anticipating the attention that a Jewish assembly would attract for such an esteemed elder in their community, Bonhoeffer sought the counsel of his superior. The general superintendent urgently dissuaded him from performing the funeral “at this particular time,” and Bonhoeffer did not bury the body of senior Leibholz but later regretted his decision at a time of “weakness.”¹⁵² He soon wrote and sought Gerhard’s forgiveness for acquiescing to fear.¹⁵³ Although Bonhoeffer’s sole voice had defended the Jews in this period of social upheaval, he was pained by the one moment when he had lacked courage. It was to be the last time Bonhoeffer would refrain from personally risking himself for any Jew.

Henceforth, Bonhoeffer entered a phase of concentrating his efforts against state interference with the Church in Germany. The Church Synods of Barmen and Dahlem decided doctrinal truth as a ‘council’ (like the ecumenical kind for which Bonhoeffer called in his 1933 essay); they defined the heretic and called upon the Church to separate away from those who reviled godly truth. This transpired as a result of Bonhoeffer’s persuasion—as seen recorded in the Minutes of an earlier meeting and substantiated by subsequent correspondence from one participant.¹⁵⁴ However, Bonhoeffer did not see that the German ecumenical effort had gone far enough; churchmen at the synods “cancelled out” any progress toward genuine resistance that he had tried to make in the formulation of the Confession, as he indicated with disappointment after Bethel: “One of

¹⁵¹ Wind, 89.

¹⁵² Letter from Dietrich to Gerhard, dated 23 November 1933. Bethge, *A Biography*, 275-276.

¹⁵³ Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. VI, ed. Eberhard Bethge (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag), 290.

¹⁵⁴ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 220.

the motives he mentioned to Barth for his departure to London was that he saw ‘...a further indication in the almost total lack of understanding shown towards the Bethel Confession’.”¹⁵⁵ The church leaders had remained ‘silent’ after Hermann Goering’s security service tried to apprehend their efforts and went so far as to tap telephone lines of church opposition members.¹⁵⁶ As a consequence, the Barmen declaration did not contain any statement on political events. Bonhoeffer’s hope that the Church would be a vehicle for social change in Germany was dashed as his efforts appeared to come to naught. He left in frustration for exile to England, from where he continued to follow and to participate in the Church Struggle in Germany.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 233-234.

¹⁵⁶ Wind, 86-87.

CHAPTER TWO

CHURCH STRUGGLE

1. Exile: Solidarity with the Jews

Bonhoeffer was able to show his support for the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime by leaving for London, where he influenced church leaders around the world to put pressure on Hitler with widespread condemnation of his policies. Bonhoeffer's work as an informant continued after his return to Germany, from whence he embarked on the task of subversively preaching the one church of the Spirit, expressed in the form of congregations of Jewish and of Christian believers in God's Word. Bonhoeffer taught the necessity of an inclusive view of the community of faith, and also pressed the dissident church to speak out on behalf of their persecuted Jewish "brothers." This phase marks Bonhoeffer's shift toward activism on behalf of the Jews.

By 24 October 1933, Bonhoeffer's self-imposed exile in London and his eventual renouncement of an "ecclesiastical reputation" for an activist one were imminent when Bonhoeffer wrote to theologian Karl Barth:

I knew that I could not accept the ministry I had wanted unless I were willing to give up my attitude of unconditional opposition to this church, unless I were willing to make my ministry unconvincing in advance, and were willing to drop my solidarity with the Jewish Christian ministers—my closest friend is one of them and is now faced with a void. So the alternative of becoming lecturer or minister, and certainly not a minister in Prussia, remained.¹

Bonhoeffer saw no other option than leaving his homeland in the effort to support Franz Hildebrand and other Jewish Christian ministers who were each deprived of their livelihood by a nascent anti-Semitic order in Nazi Germany.

¹ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 209, 173.

Bonhoeffer's reason for pursuing the unfavourable "alternative" of breaking ties with his Prussian church due to its acceptance of Hitler's Aryan stipulation was hinted in the peace objective of his address to the Youth Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia the year prior. In 1932 Bonhoeffer asserted:

There can only be a community of peace when it does not rest on lies and injustice. Where a community of peace endangers or chokes truth and justice, the community of peace must be broken and battle joined. If the battle is then on both sides really waged for truth and for justice, the community of peace, though outwardly destroyed, is made all the deeper and stronger in the battle over this same cause. But should it become clear that one of the combatants is only fighting for his own selfish ends, should even this form of the community of peace be broken, there is revealed that reality which is the ultimate and only tolerable ground of any community of peace, the forgiveness of sins....The reality of the Gospel is not the external order of peace, not even the peace of the battle for the same cause, but only the peace of God, which brings about forgiveness of sins, the reality in which truth and justice are both preserved.²

Bonhoeffer's address revealed that the eventual separation of exile, which he called "unconditional opposition" to the German church in 1933, could be a simultaneous step toward strengthening God's order of peace through the "reality of the Gospel" (inseparable from preservation of truth and of justice). Since staying would mean having to "drop (his) solidarity with the Jewish Christian ministers," Bonhoeffer broke with community rather than become embittered and incapacitated by lies. From afar, he could strive for a constructive, reconciling peace that "made all the deeper and stronger" the German battle for justice.³

² *No Rusty Swords*, 168-69.

³ By demagoguery Hitler won popularity with the masses by promising them stability, but it promised to be merely an arbitrary peace, based on lies and injustice. "In a secret speech to German newspaper editors in November 1938, after his great Munich triumph, he deplored the fact that his need to talk about peace had led the German nation to relax too much. He argued...Violence was a necessity, and the public must be prepared for it." Paul Johnson, *A History of the Modern World*, 344.

From England, Bonhoeffer exercised his freedom on behalf of German Jews and never fulfilled his longing for “a quiet parish.”⁴ He found a position around London leading two German-speaking congregations and an old vicarage that he willingly shared with Hildebrand. Bonhoeffer also began his life as an informant of Nazi activities. As self-appointed ambassador for the resistance, Bonhoeffer corresponded with Dr. G. K. A. Bell, Bishop of Chichester and leader of a worldwide ecumenical movement. On 16 November 1933 Bonhoeffer wrote him about the dissenting *Pfarrernotbund* (Pastors’ Emergency League), the first instance of organized Protestant opposition to anti-Semitism that came to represent nearly one-third of German pastors.⁵ Bonhoeffer added:

We must not leave alone those men who fight—humanly spoken—an almost hopeless struggle. I get news with every mail and also by telephone. If I may, I will forward to you the recent information.⁶

Bonhoeffer’s advocating of justice for victims of the anti-Semitic Aryan Clause through Bishop Bell and through the Pastors’ League (that Bonhoeffer helped create)⁷ may seem limited in scope to pastors of Jewish descent, a minority among those who had been denied equality and means of livelihood.⁸ The case by Yad Vashem accused Bonhoeffer of being concerned only for Jewish Christians. However, he first focused on those Jewish pastors affected by the Aryan Clause partly because of his relationship with Hildebrand and also because—as he was aware through family connections—official

⁴ *No Rusty Swords*, 192.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 253. “In Sept. 1933 sixteen Nuremberg pastors publicly rejected the application of the ‘Aryan Paragraph’. Subsequently, Niemöller established a Pastors’ Emergency League....After its foundation, nine thousand clergymen joined the Confessing church; in contrast, five thousand joined the anti-Semitic German Christians....In 1937 Niemöller was arrested, leaving the Confessing church very weak; hence there was no organization to combat the anti-Semitism of the German Christians.” Gordon, 254-255.

⁶ *No Rusty Swords*, 251.

⁷ Bonhoeffer acted in a secretarial role under the more senior Martin Niemöller, a Berlin-Dahlem pastor who led the Pastors’ Emergency League and the Confessing Church that grew out of it.

⁸ Just prior to 1930, Jews represented 0.74 percent of the labour force and between 1 and 3 percent of civil servants—ranging from lawyers and all ranks of the judiciary to pastors and military personnel. Gordon, 11, 13.

plans in Nazi Germany initially targeted largely other social or political undesirables (e.g., mentally disabled and left-wing people, whom Dietrich also helped). Widespread harassment of Jews had not yet evolved into a known problem until after 10 March 1933, when Hermann Goering, Minister of the Interior in East Prussia and founder of the Nazis' security forces, permitted S.A. (*Sturmabteilungen*) troops to begin acting as "auxiliary policemen" for the Nazis toward creating a racist society.⁹ As of yet, in 1933 "many Germans aided Jews who were boycotted or otherwise harassed," and "letters protesting dismissals of Jewish civil servants were sent to Grauert, the state secretary of the Ministry of the Interior."¹⁰ Bonhoeffer himself breached the widespread confusion that resulted from Hitler's order of a "press blackout"¹¹ by alerting ecumenical friends abroad of erupting Nazi persecution of Jews. Bonhoeffer was particularly appalled by the lack of a unified response from the church in Germany.

Bonhoeffer's initiative resulted in Bishop Bell sending letters (translated by Bonhoeffer and printed in *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*) to Reich Bishop Müller and to President Hindenburg on 17 November 1933 and on 18 January 1934. After a political German Christian rally in the Berlin Sports Palace on 13 November 1933, Bonhoeffer and five German pastors in London wrote to the Reich Bishop of the

⁹ Socialists or Communists, "militant Catholics" and Poles were the first targets of the S.A. Pierre Aycoberry, *The Social History of the Third Reich* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 22.

¹⁰ Gordon, 169.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 154. This was "deliberate obfuscation of Hitler's and the party's role in racial persecution" and of party responsibility from the boycott of April 1933 and the pogrom of November 1938 until after Hitler's blackout order to the press on 7 February 1942. Sarah Gordon writes on page 155: Hitler was a master at using Germans' primary sources of information, newspapers and radio, to disseminate Nazi racial "ideology," but he was cautious both of foreign reactions to persecution and "the dependence of Germans on their media." Hence, blackouts of major and minor information on persecution of Jews, including their deportation and extermination, were "commonplace" and "camouflaged" according to press directives in three ways: (1) "blackouts of news that would have provided information upon which individuals could have formed independent judgments; (2) blackouts of evidence of domestic opposition to Nazi racial policies; and (3) blackouts of foreign nations' reactions to persecution."

new German Christian church and sent a telegram in January 1934 (followed by a letter on 15 January) to Hitler, Hindenburg, Müller, and two others for “a recovery of the German church.” Bonhoeffer’s stance was joined by the Barmen and Dahlem Confessions of the protesting church later that same year. On 19 January 1934, Bonhoeffer thanked Bishop Bell for his support of the German cause. His letter quoted Proverbs 31:8, which says: “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.” The joint efforts had not been in vain; Hitler was soon alerted by Protestant leaders around the world of their condemnation of Nazi policy.¹² At a meeting in January 1934 between Chancellor Hitler and the church leaders, Hermann Goering “created a considerable stir with a list of foreign reports on German church affairs, charging that this seriously interfered with the general reconstruction of Germany.”¹³ The protests against Hitler’s Aryan clause and against his imposition of a state church had become a threat.

However, the future of the Jews’ fate was sealed once President Hindenburg’s health went into steep decline. Until then, Hindenburg’s position had presented the sole limiting factor to Hitler’s desire for totalitarian rule. The presidency was the only domain that Hitler had not yet usurped, and he coveted the role of commander in chief of the armed forces. On 1 August 1934, before Hindenburg’s death the next day, Hitler presented to the cabinet for immediate signature legislation that merged the offices of

¹² Contrarily, the Vatican was apparently compliant. Daniel J. Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002). “1933 March 28 the German Catholic episcopate, organized in the Fulda Bishop’s Conference, withdraws its earlier prohibition against membership in the Nazi party, and admonishes the faithful to be both loyal and obedient to the new Nazi regime....Pope Pius XI himself welcomed Hermann Goering as Nazi representative at the formalisation of the *Reichskonkordat* process” (20 July 1933) between Holy See and Germany. Pope Pius XI and the Allegation, in “The Great Scandal,” Wikipedia Encyclopedia (December 2005). <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Scandal>

¹³ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 321.

president and of chancellor—to take effect upon the old marshal’s death.¹⁴ Hitler’s move was a direct violation of article 2 of the constitutional Enabling Act, which precluded changes to the office of Reich president. Furthermore, in violation of the Oath Act, soldiers were ordered to swear unconditional obedience to the new supreme commander, Hitler, not just to the office he had misappropriated. However, Hitler had no considerable opponents to oppose these moves after what is generally termed the “Röehm affair.”¹⁵ Bonhoeffer had already been notified by his brother-in-law (who passed information from within the Ministry of Justice) about Hitler’s secret plan to wrest and centralize control “with the help of malicious propaganda and an elaborate frame-up.”¹⁶ On 2 July 1934, widespread political murder ensued on the pretext of a plot against the head of state. By Hitler’s order and with Himmler’s enforcement, the political police carried out mass shootings of about one hundred and fifty inconvenient or “dangerous” people, including Captain Ernst Röehm of the militia; this affair launched the S.S. upon its monstrous career of legalized killing.¹⁷ Autobiographies of S.A. members studied by an American sociologist as early as 1934 reveal that “they were fascinated by the personality of the Great Leader and even more so by the atmosphere of virile and

¹⁴ Joachim Fest, *Plotting Hitler’s Death: The Story of the German Resistance*, trans. Bruce Little (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1994), 55.

¹⁵ Based on an unpublished letter of 13 July 1934: “Already in 1934 (Bonhoeffer) wrote Reinhold Niebuhr that the Röehm affair and other events of that year showed beyond a doubt where Germany was headed.” Rasmussen, 133.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁷ Johnson, *A History of the Modern World*, 297-299. Ernst Röehm was one of Hitler’s colleagues in Munich, which turned into the capital of German extremism after the anti-Red risings. On page 278, Johnson writes about Hitler’s debt to Röehm’s some million-strong S.A. Brownshirts: “It was the Communist state of 1919 which first gave Hitler his base in Bavaria, bringing together in a unity of fear the ‘black’ Catholic separatists and the ‘brown’ radical-nationalists of Captain Röehm’s private army.”

resentful solidarity that reigned in the S.A. inns” where the Nazis gathered.¹⁸ These were indeed violent times, in which contrary acts of conscience were virtually unheard of.

2. Subversive Preaching

In an atmosphere of suppression, Bonhoeffer was acting in a revolutionary way when he proclaimed that one must not follow any other principle, organization, or person but God. Days after Bonhoeffer had written “The Church and The Jewish Question,” he acted on his conviction and committed “treason by alerting Rabbi Stephen S. Wise of New York to the Nazi terrors in 1933” with the aid of former American colleague, Paul Lehmann.¹⁹ Bonhoeffer was aware of the rabbi’s friendship with President Roosevelt and hoped that Rabbi Wise would inform the President. Following the letter that Bonhoeffer sent Rabbi Wise in April, “a letter from Roosevelt to the rabbi clearly indicates that Dietrich’s message was sent on to the President of the United States. It was quite probably the first word from Germany about the dangers facing German Jews.”²⁰ In September 1933 the *Deutsche Christen* (German Christians) gained control of the national church synod at Wittenberg and approved the Aryan Clause’s exclusion of Jewish pastors. Bonhoeffer subsequently “spoke completely openly about the Jewish question, the Aryan paragraph in the church...and over the question of the future of minorities” while attending the World Alliance meeting at Sofia and followed up by contacting the ecumenical organization in Switzerland with the following telegraph: “Aryan paragraph now in effect, please work out memorandum against this and inform

¹⁸ Aycoberry, 19-20.

¹⁹ © Holocaust Heroes (1998). <<http://www.holocaust-heroes.com/bonhoeffer.html>>

²⁰ Elizabeth Raum, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Called by God* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 62.

press at once.”²¹ On his own initiative, Bonhoeffer pressed for a resolution that would apply foreign pressure on the Nazis in order to counteract their anti-Semitic measures.

Bonhoeffer refused anything that gives credence to an anti-Semitic state. Using the theme of following the Messiah of the gospels in “obedience to Old Testament scripture” and against “self-selected personal righteousness,” Bonhoeffer began from 1935 to give lectures to Confessing preachers about the “Hidden Nature of the Christian Life” that arises from “the visibility of the disciples’ community” in Matthew chapter 6:

The danger is great that the disciples will completely misunderstand this as a command to start building a heavenly kingdom on earth....No, not the extraordinary, but rather the completely ordinary, everyday, regular, unobtrusive behavior is the sign of genuine obedience and genuine humility....[Jesus] says: “Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them.” The call to be extraordinary is the great, inevitable danger of discipleship. Therefore, beware of this extraordinariness, of the way that discipleship becomes visible. Jesus calls a halt to our thoughtless, unbroken, simple joy in what is visible. He gives a sting to the extraordinary. Jesus calls us to reflection.²²

Bonhoeffer’s message urged Christians to condemn the Nazi-erected ideal of a “heavenly kingdom on earth.” Consequently, contrary to youthful dreams shared with his father about “reforming” the German church from within, Bonhoeffer joined the underground Protestant movement and refused to be a part of “a church that was a syncretistic mixture of the Word of God and of pagan ideology.”

Had it not been for the events of 1933 [Bonhoeffer said] he might have become a professor at one of the theological faculties. “But the present situation permits me to do something far better, namely, to seize all the opportunities of direct expression in a persecuted church.”²³

²¹ Victoria Barnett, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website (2006). <<http://www.ushmm.org/bonhoeffer/>>

²² *Life Together*, 146-148.

²³ W. A. Visser’t Hooft, Introduction, in *The Steps of Bonhoeffer*, ed. J. Martin Bailey and Gilbert, Douglas Gilbert (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969), 8.

When Bonhoeffer allied himself with “a persecuted church,” he acted according to a countercultural assumption of what *really* comprises the church and its mission. In Bonhoeffer’s eyes, the Church’s visibility was not equivalent to admissibility to God.

Rather than accepting an institutional or categorizing view of the Church, Bonhoeffer perceived it to be a spiritual reality. He respectfully rejected the Catholic paradigm of the church after travels to Rome and proposed instead an ecclesiology that focused primarily on spirituality. In a 1934 sermon he wrote: “Suffering forms man into the image of God. The suffering man is in the likeness of God....Whenever a man in the position of weakness—physical or social or moral or *religious weakness* [author’s emphasis]—is aware of his existence with God and his likeness to God, he shares God’s life.”²⁴ Here, Bonhoeffer prioritized a universal or spiritual understanding of true religion rather than subscribing to religious forms particular to a certain time or space (e.g., Lutheranism in Germany). His words did not distinguish between people’s doctrines but focused on individuals in relation to God. This acknowledged the suffering of even fellow Jews as genuinely religious, thereby validating their experience. (Later, he hearkened to an assumption of spiritual warfare or of suffering by God’s people, the targets of human agents of evil.) As explicated in *Sanctorum Communio*, the gospels never concretized one form of the *ecclesia* (‘church’). Hence, Bonhoeffer accorded validity to the spiritual communities of both the Old and New Testaments—Jewish and Christian branches to which Bonhoeffer attributed continuity with one Holy Spirit. Bonhoeffer gradually moved beyond contested terminology or designation(s) of God and uniquely recognized the Jewish synagogue as a type of “church” or spiritual body “in

²⁴ Bonhoeffer, “Zwei Abend-Predigten in der deutschen reformierten St.-Pauls-Kirche,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. IV, 2d Edition, 182. Quoted in Rasmussen, 17.

promise” of the Spirit—not completely cut off from the Christian “church of the Spirit who has come” due to Christ’s atonement.²⁵ Notes from Bonhoeffer’s lecture on the church in the book of Acts record:

The church is the end and the fulfillment of Gods revelation in the history of his people. It has a beginning in history, just as the coming of the Spirit also has a beginning in history: Whitsuntide. It is not wrong to speak of a church of the Old Testament. The church of the Old Testament, like the church of the community of Jesus with his disciples, is a church of the promise, because the Holy Spirit was not yet given. It is really a church....There is one and the same church, one God who has called it, and one faith in the one Word. Therefore the ancient church is a church of the Spirit, but in promise, not in the fullness of the Son of God who has entered time, and the Spirit who has entered the community. The church of the New Testament is the church of the Spirit who has come.²⁶

Not understating the significance of Jesus Christ, whose ‘fullness’ of divine revelation is upheld as the perfect model (prototypical ‘man *for* others’ as the Suffering Messiah)²⁷ in Bonhoeffer’s writings, this theologian attempted to expand people’s concept of ‘church’—and in turn, their definition of ‘neighbour’ for whom love is commanded—while discounting neither the biblical base of grace nor law. Evangelical Christians, who followed the Protestant theology of Karl Barth from Switzerland, were proponents of a redemptive theology that prioritized the New Testament. However, in Bonhoeffer’s eyes the current context required moving toward more inclusive theological language; the work of the Spirit, and not just potentially divisive theology that focuses exclusively on Christ’s redemptive work on the cross, became an emerging theme in Bonhoeffer’s

²⁵ Bonhoeffer, *The Way of Freedom: Letters, Lectures and Notes, 1935-1939*, volume 2 of *Collected Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (London: Collins, 1966), 44.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁷ *Ethics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1955), 120. Also, see *Life Together*, 114-115. Cf. John de Gruchy (referring to the Messiah in Bonhoeffer’s *Cost of Discipleship*). *Witness to Jesus Christ*, 25.

writings.²⁸ His lecture on Acts and later *Life Together* exalt (over other ideals) community joined by the Spirit, which he recognized to be reflected in both Old as well as New Testaments.

In the continuation of his lecture on Acts 2 and the role of the Spirit, Bonhoeffer acknowledged the God who exposes true community—not one based solely on racial or ‘blood’ divisions. In Bonhoeffer’s words, the community of God’s people (both Jewish and Christian) was created to be essentially one or equal in value and not to be inherently divided, since God is One according to the unity proclaimed in the shared Scripture.²⁹ On the nature of the Spirit of community, Bonhoeffer wrote:

The Spirit exposes his community to the world. It immediately becomes the city on the hill, which cannot be hid. The Spirit comes in the Word....It is the unitive Word....it is precisely the world’s mockery that will again and again be the sign that the church is on the right road; it is a clearer sign than the world’s applause....Through the Spirit Peter embraces the promises of Israel. What happens here at Whitsuntide is fulfillment, which is given to the people of Israel. What happens in Christ is the fulfillment of the promise given to David. The church of the New Testament understands itself from the first moment of its existence to be indissolubly bound up with the church of the promise, for there is only the one God. A church which dissolved this unity would no longer be the church of the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit binds the church to Israel and to the Old Testament. Where the *filioque* is abandoned, the link with the people of Israel is abandoned too.³⁰

This *filioque* or brotherly fellowship is the critical theme on which Bonhoeffer ended his paper. He expounded it by writing that Peter’s speech in Acts 2 does not claim that all has been done; rather, he proclaimed the full, free grace of God which sets people along the “right road” to action, to repentance, to new life—along the express lines of the call:

²⁸ “Circular Letters of the War” to the Confessing Church in *Letters & Papers from Prison and Testament to Freedom*.

²⁹ This idea is based on the words of Moses: “The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut. 6:4). Likewise, Jesus affirmed the proclamation that “God is one and there is no other” (Mark 12:32).

³⁰ *The Way of Freedom*, 45-46.

“Let yourselves be called to the church.” God’s promises in the Old Testament belong to Israel, to which Christians are “indissolubly” linked through Christ.

Bonhoeffer, in his theological reflections on the relationship of the church to the Jews, became more interested in the Old Testament. He distanced himself from the ideas of a curse resting upon the Jews, of mission to the Jews, and that the church had replaced and disinherited Israel.³¹

Bonhoeffer used a biblical basis to argue that Christianity does not replace Judaism; the Old Testament shows lasting merit in religion that is based upon God’s eternal Word. In recognition of the commandment of discipleship and its link to another theme of the place of the church in the New Testament, Bonhoeffer stressed that the community of Israel cannot be abandoned, for God has not abandoned it according to the promises given in Scripture. Bonhoeffer tried to point Christians toward concern for the welfare of Jews within and without the church, based on a common spiritual legacy; “he affirmed their humanity and the right for dignified treatment because they were children of God.”³²

Therefore, in Spring of 1938 Bonhoeffer “felt shame” for the self-serving Old Prussian Synod “just as one feels shame for a scandal in one’s own family” when it abandoned the Dahlem Confession and accepted the imposition of an oath to the Führer with an official examination of clergy (even though “it already knew that a regulation was coming by which Jews were compelled to have a large ‘J’ stamped on their identity cards...the occasion of the flight of his twin sister’s family” to London).³³ In fact, the German Church was already doomed to capitulation from 1933 when Hitler ordered whole S.A. units to go to church in uniform and the Reich government “interfered substantially” in the church, so that by December 1933 it became a subordinate

³¹ Roberts, 91.

³² *Ibid.*, 129.

³³ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 507, 517.

organization of the National Socialist state and lost its entire Protestant youth (who were compulsorily incorporated into Hitler Youth).³⁴ Furthermore, the ‘muzzling decree’ of 4 January 1934 forbade any discussion on measures of the newly instituted church government on church premises or in church papers. The church lost control to the state.

By 1933 Bonhoeffer’s own position was muzzled when he helped draft a statement of faith for the Confessing Church, which omitted from its “Barmen Declaration” of the First Synod (May 1934) his paragraph that attacked the Nazis’ treatment of Jews.³⁵ Later, theologian Karl Barth issued a confession of guilt in a 1967 letter to Bonhoeffer’s friend Bethge about the lack of concern for Jews in general during church synods at that time:

[Barth] indicated that Bonhoeffer was the first and almost the only one to focus so centrally and energetically on the Jewish question in 1933. He expressed his regret that he omitted this issue in the Theological Declaration of Barmen of 1934. He mentioned that at that time, such a message would not have been well-received in the Confessing Church. He admitted that such possible rejection did not excuse him for his lack in his statements.³⁶

Bonhoeffer was marginalized by both well-meaning and myopic Confessing Christians, whose primary concern was the place of the Word of God in an increasingly state-run church. They failed to target the Jewish question; thus, Bonhoeffer refused to sign the Church’s “Bethel Confession,” which he himself had helped to draft. He said “all the references to the basic relationship with Israel, and hence with the Jewish people, had been watered down or removed...and in 1935 he told us: ‘Only someone who speaks out

³⁴ Wind, 82.

³⁵ Robertson, *My Soul Finds Rest*, 44. The Barmen Confession was “the six-point declaration adopted by Evangelical (Protestant) Church leaders opposed to the German Reich Church at their first synod held in Barmen, Westphalia, from 29 to 31 May 1934. Without mentioning Nazism, the Barmen Confession or Declaration categorically rejected any ideological addition to the revelation of the word of God in Jesus Christ. It did not, however, directly address the ‘Jewish question’.” *Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Glossary xxi.

³⁶ Roberts, 90.

for the Jews has the right to sing Gregorian chant’.”³⁷ Christ’s sacrifice for the Jews could not be neglected in light of his work of grafting Gentile Christians into Israel’s promise, even though Germans tried to claim it for themselves at the exclusion of their forebears. Bonhoeffer’s disaffection for his own church was based on the unwillingness of its leaders to see beyond doctrinal obstructions to acting on behalf of Jewish victims of state arbitrariness. He said to his Union colleague Erwin Sutz in autumn 1934: “There must in the end be a break with theological backing for restraint against state action— after all, it’s just anxiety. ‘Speak up for those who cannot speak’— who in the church is still aware that in such times this is the least demand that the Bible makes?”³⁸ In response to the Lutheran assemblies’ compromises with the state, Bonhoeffer wrote a circular letter on 25 August 1938 to the most beleaguered one-fifth in Westphalia and other ‘illegal’ pastors that stood firm:

In the first place, anyone who looks solely after himself is deluded...to anyone who wants to make us faint-hearted and diffident by telling us that we ought at least to salvage our remaining resources, that we have been battered, questioned, and locked up quite enough, we must reply that we are promising ourselves nothing at all from those resources... We have not attached our hearts to organizations and institutions, not even to our own. The words (*Werkerei*) that hang on those so-called church resources are just as godless as any others, and are bound to rob us of the prize of victory.³⁹

Bonhoeffer and his associates refused to attach their hearts to a self-catering church. In 1933 Bonhoeffer had protested that God’s will neither permitted passivity nor concern solely for the security of one’s own community, and he criticized his church’s synods.

³⁷ Bethge, *Friendship and Resistance: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995), 59.

³⁸ Bonhoeffer’s biographer writes: “Dietrich was quite clear about who the dumb [‘who cannot speak’ Prov. 31:8] were for whom the church had to speak. He was one of those who experienced the first wave of emigration and tried to support [Jewish] emigrants from Germany as much as possible.” Wind, 87-88.

³⁹ Bethge, *Friendship and Resistance*, 517.

People would be mistaken to infer from Bonhoeffer's idea of just action and empathy that Bonhoeffer stood alone among Germans. Such an inference would assume that for the most part the German people lacked these traits. To attempt psychologically to prove a sense of empathy singularly in Bonhoeffer would extend beyond the task of the historian. Rather, one can readily see from Bonhoeffer's words and actions that identification with Jews theologically became the basis of his just action and empathy. In this way Bonhoeffer was of unique German stock, although his thinking demonstrates correlations with a German Jew, Edith Stein, whose theological reflections also insinuate the need for resistance in an era of growing Nazi censorship and repression of freedoms. Despite the fact that Bonhoeffer and Stein both point early on (in a manner reminiscent of Christ's self-sacrifice) to a biblical sense of identification with the "weak" or the victimized,⁴⁰ debate continues whether Bonhoeffer's faith compelled him toward vicarious action—while Stein remains unquestioned with respect to 'sainthood' as a Christian martyr.⁴¹ However, Bonhoeffer's Christian purpose is self-evident. "The real difference between Christians and unbelievers, declared Bonhoeffer, is that Christians

⁴⁰ Bonhoeffer was acquainted with the acclaimed phenomenology of Berlin University's Husserl, whose protégés (both Jewish like himself) included Edith Stein and Emmanuel Levinas. Two decades after Bonhoeffer, Levinas reflected in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* on vicarious suffering (with references to Lam. 3:30 and Exodus 32:32) on a sense of the human as unconditionally bearing "one-for-the-other" in substitution even for another's guilt—in contrast to Heidegger's and Arendt's responsibility only to "passionate thinking" or solitary self-consciousness in the inevitable "existence of unequals." James Watson, "Levinas's Substitutions and Arendt's Concept of the Political," in *Postmodernism and the Holocaust*, eds. Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1984), 118, 121. Like Bonhoeffer's affirmation of the "real" (as opposed to a western dualism), in 1934 Levinas also recognized that the forceful philosophy of Hitlerism "is fundamentally opposed" to both Judaism and Christianity, which originally took not only the soul but also the body or human dignity seriously. Levinas as a Jew (like Bonhoeffer as a Christian) saw that one's humanity can "never be separated" from bodily experiences. Robert Manning, "Serious Ideas Rooted in Blood: Emmanuel Levinas's Analysis of the Philosophy of Hitlerism," in *Postmodernism and the Holocaust*, 126, 132, 134. Bonhoeffer's radical responsibility for the 'other' contradicts what Helmut Peukert writes of Levinas—that an ethics such as his could not have been developed by a German during the Holocaust. "Unconditional Responsibility for the Other," *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴¹ Edith Stein was beatified by Pope John Paul II at Cologne cathedral on 1 May 1987 and has become a popular subject of saintly studies. Waltraud Herbstrith, *Never Forget* (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies Publications, 1998), Introduction.

range themselves with God in his suffering, participating in the suffering of God in the life of the godless world.”⁴² In a lecture on *Vergegenwärtigung* (“Making Relevant”) to the Confessing Church of Saxony in August 1935, Bonhoeffer had already begun to challenge Christians toward a “complete ethic,” bearing Christ “as he comes through his Word” for the concrete situation:

The fact that I sit under the pulpit as man or woman, National Socialist or reactionary or Jew, coming from this or that field of experience, has in itself no special right...The community *must* suffer like Christ, without wonderment.⁴³

To accept suffering with Christ for others was Bonhoeffer’s own reason for self-sacrifice.

Similarly, on acting rightly for others’ behalf, Stein wrote in 1942, “Surrender is the Highest Act of Freedom.” Here, one reads of the “truly ethical” soul: “...only in seeking for the divine will can it truly reach its goal... Whoever truly wants, in blind faith, nothing more but what God wills, has, with God’s grace, reached the highest state a human being can reach. His will is totally purified and free of all constraint through earthly desires; he is united to the divine will through free surrender.”⁴⁴ The highest good, for Bonhoeffer as for Stein, was life freely lived for others with disregard for personal gain while imitating or communing with Christ.⁴⁵ Edith Stein had tried in vain to appeal to the Vatican so that Pope Pius XI might help the Jews. Then, she resolutely “was sacrificing her life to God for her Jewish people; with a special glow in her eyes” to the German soldier who deported Edith and sister Rosa Stein on the train to Auschwitz, she “shows the strong sense of solidarity with the Jewish people that she maintained all

⁴² Godsey, 18.

⁴³ *No Rusty Swords*, 311, 319.

⁴⁴ *Edith Stein: Essential Writings*, ed. John Sullivan, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 152-153.

⁴⁵ “... ‘God does not call everyone to martyrdom’... Later [Bonhoeffer] could remark, as if incidentally, that he expected an early death.” Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 564-565.

her life.”⁴⁶ Edith’s beckon to Rosa, “Come, we are going for our people,” can be related with some measure of similarity to Bonhoeffer’s *Letters* in prison. After being arrested following the failed attempt on Hitler’s life (yet altogether wary already of evidence that implicated his smuggling German Jews into neutral Switzerland), Bonhoeffer encouraged fellow jailed conspirators with the assurance of faith: “The only profitable relationship to others—and especially to our weaker brethren—is one of love, and that means the will to hold fellowship with them.”⁴⁷ None were oblivious to the price of standing for the Jewish people, as both Stein sisters and the Putsch conspirers paid with their own lives. However, surrendering one’s will by God’s grace was reckoned greater than the price exacted, for Christ had first shown the way to the “highest act of freedom” by laying down his own life in love.

3. Community at Finkenwalde

During the period between directing the illegal Preachers’ Seminary of the Confessing Church in 1935 and his departure to teach in America in 1939, the range of Bonhoeffer’s activity was exhaustive. His schedule was filled with teaching; writing and training illegally;⁴⁸ frequenting Berlin to acquire for the underground “collective

⁴⁶ From *The Hebrew Catholic* (September/November 1987), 90ff., quoted in Menahem Benhayim, “Of Saints and Martyrs,” in *Never Forget*, ed. Waltraud Herbstrith (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies Publications, 1998), 134.

⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer continued with his reckoning, “After Ten Years” (New Year 1943), by expounding Christ’s example: “We are not Christ, but if we want to be Christians, we must have some share in Christ’s large-heartedness by acting with responsibility and in freedom when the hour of danger comes, and by showing a real sympathy that springs, not from fear, but from the liberating and redeeming love of Christ for all who suffer. Mere waiting and looking on is not Christian behaviour. The Christian is called to sympathy and action, not in the first place by his own sufferings, but by the sufferings of his brethren, for whose sake Christ suffered.” *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Enlarged Edition (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 10, 14.

⁴⁸ In response to the Reich Church Minister’s decree on 2 December 1935, Bonhoeffer reportedly stated: “Everything we do here is now illegal and contrary to the law of the State. First there were the bans on newspapers and circular letters, and now copies run off on duplicating machines are forbidden.” Wind, 105

pastorate” recent information and provisions for subsistence;⁴⁹ investigating and providing support to imprisoned members of the beset Confessing Front—including twenty-seven of Bonhoeffer’s students (whose crime was that they “read out critical statements from pulpits”).⁵⁰ In all these ways, Bonhoeffer ensured an impact on German society through his influence on students and on church leaders. Larry Rasmussen writes, “Bonhoeffer used Proverbs 31:8 [“Speak up for those who cannot speak”] over and over again for calling the Confessing Church and others to exercise deputyship for the Jews,” as the notes for his 1935 lecture “The Interpretation of the New Testament” also makes clear:

Whether the Church is the Church of Christ depends upon its being for the Jews. “The service of the church has to be given to those who suffer violence and injustice. The Old Testament still demands right-dealing of the state, the New Testament no longer does so. Without asking about justice or injustice, the church takes to itself all the sufferers, *all* the forsaken of every party and of every status. ‘Speak up for those who cannot speak’ (Prov. 31:8). Here the decision will really be made whether we are still the church of the present Christ. The Jewish question.”⁵¹

The emphasis on accepting “*all* the forsaken” is Bonhoeffer’s. His openness to the Old Testament’s teaching on aiding those who suffer and in representing the silenced by protesting an unjust state did not ignore the plight of all Jews. According to his lecture’s opening and closing message to the students of Finkenwalde, the Church’s existence must be “for the Jews” at the present time.

⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer’s seminary at Sigurdshof, like others under his leadership at Finkenwalde and at Zingst, represented “an underground church without financial resources...The supplies of coal, kerosene, and food were often enough only for the next few days.” These members later distinguished themselves from others in the Confessing Church, who had capitulated under Nazi measures to ‘starve out’ treasonous clergy with the withholding of state-levied salaries, by calling themselves the ‘Confessing Front.’ Ibid., 104, 131

⁵⁰ After Werner Koch’s “miraculous escape” from death after a two-year imprisonment, Bonhoeffer organized a trip for Koch’s recovery and during the long car ride investigated conditions in concentration camp. Koch recalled, “None of my close friends asked about this as systematically as Dietrich Bonhoeffer. After every answer he lapsed into silence. Sometimes it was minutes before he asked the next question. I sensed the effect it was having on him...He was certain that it would happen to him.” Ibid., 123.

⁵¹ Rasmussen, 37 n.

Contrary to Yad Vashem's claim, this period of Church Struggle was not devoid of decisive actions by Bonhoeffer on behalf of all Jews.⁵² He not only labored on behalf of an increasingly marginalized minority within the Confessing Church; he also demonstrated efforts to thwart state-induced anti-Semitism. In 1936 Bonhoeffer followed up on his August 1935 lecture by subversively writing and publishing two Old Testament studies, in which he called Jews the "eternal people," the "true nobility," and "people of God."⁵³ Also that year, his handwriting "can clearly be recognized" in a statement drawn by the Second Provisional Leadership of the Confessing Church that attacked state arbitrariness and anti-Semitism: "If an anti-Semitism is forced on Christians within the framework of the national Socialist world-view which obliges them to hate Jews, they have to oppose to it the Christian command to love one's neighbor."⁵⁴ This insertion by Bonhoeffer unwittingly led to the first martyrdom of the Confessing Church and the imprisonment of two of his pupils (who unbeknownst to him had hastily published this statement).⁵⁵ The fact that the first agents of any sort of organized resistance within the German Church against state-induced anti-Semitism included Bonhoeffer and his pupils—though he himself was not officially traced to this deed at that time—is an indication of the profound impact that Bonhoeffer left on people to advocate for Jews.

Within an increasingly marginalized Confessing Church, Bonhoeffer continued to write in an effort to circumvent Nazi ideas. Biographer Edwin Robertson notes that, in writing his 1937 *Nachfolge* (literally "Discipleship" but entitled *Cost of Discipleship* in the English edition), Bonhoeffer subversively encouraged followers of Christ to view not

⁵² See thesis' Introduction for an explanation of the case by Yad Vashem's director, Mordecai Paldiel.

⁵³ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 436-437.

⁵⁴ Wind, 119.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

only fellow Christians but also Jews as one's "brother."⁵⁶ For support, Bonhoeffer drew on the Bible as the supreme authority, since "only in the Holy Scriptures do we get to know our own story. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God and Father of Jesus Christ and our God."⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer already hinted toward a scripturally based inclusiveness in his 1932 lecture, "The Right of Self-Assertion (*Selbstbehauptung*)."⁵⁸ This right (self-assertion that applies as much to communities as to individuals) is to live with responsibility for the kindred community (*Bruder*) and with a "readiness for sacrificial death for the other, yes, (even) for the enemy brother;" this is the cross Christians must carry not only for kin but also for the so-called "enemy" who is indeed a brother.⁵⁸ In the chapter on Thou Shalt Not Kill in *Nachfolge*, titled "The Brother," Bonhoeffer sternly warns of God's prohibition and "has the Church very much in mind when he sees how the 'national church', the German Christians, despise their brothers, the Jews, whether they are Christian Jews or not;" Bonhoeffer warned, "even anger is enough to overstep the mark."⁵⁹ Robertson's point about joint brotherhood is partly founded on Bonhoeffer's exemplary stand in *Nachfolge*:

Let the fellowship of Christ examine itself and see whether it has given any token of the love of Christ to *the victims of the world's contumely and contempt*, any token of that love of Christ which seeks to preserve, support and protect life. Otherwise, however liturgically correct our services are, and however devout our prayer, however brave our testimony, they will profit us nothing, nay, rather, they must needs testify against us that we have as a Church ceased to follow our Lord. God will not be separated from our brother: he wants no honour for himself so long as our brother is dishonoured.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Supported by Eberhard Bethge in an interview with Ann Nickson. *Bonhoeffer on Freedom*, 122. Bethge elsewhere writes: "cf. 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer unter den Verstummen?' in *Erst Gebot und Zeitgeschichte: Aufsätze und Reden 1980-1990* (Chr. Kaiser Verlag München 1991), 106; and Bonhoeffer's insistence on the *indissoluble link* between Christians and the Jewish people." *Ethics*, 89-90 n.

⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 62.

⁵⁸ Green, 132-133 (also see footnotes).

⁵⁹ Robertson, *Shame and the Sacrifice*, 147.

⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (SCM Press, 1959), 117.

In Bonhoeffer's view, the Jew is none other than the brother whose dishonour obscures self-serving Christians from God. The message in *Cost of Discipleship* was directed not only against fellow Germans (who disregarded their Jewish brothers) but also against an undignified state-induced process, which the Church was supposed to stop in order to preserve and protect the victims. Not coincidentally, Bonhoeffer's book was published in Germany on the brink of war—in the same month that Hitler directed his top military and foreign policy advisers that “a period of active expansion could now begin” (5 November 1937).⁶¹

By then, the Finkenwalde seminary was closed by the Gestapo and Bonhoeffer was able to direct his energies into helping the family of his twin Sabine plan their escape from Germany to Switzerland. While living at his sibling's home, Bonhoeffer concentrated on writing a report (based on the Finkenwalde experiment) entitled *Gemeinsames Leben* (“Life Together”). This was a reflective work intended for a dissident Evangelical audience, who would need to distinguish themselves from other communities with which they were ideologically in conflict. In his book, Bonhoeffer wrote scathingly of so-called Christians among his countrymen who were complicit in following state agendas delivered through the propaganda of a tyrant. By April 1938, news had reached Bonhoeffer of a new state law or “birthday gift” to the Führer that required not only soldiers but also civil servants (including German pastors) to pledge Hitler full allegiance; this coincided with the news of the “brutal and bestial” treatment of Jews following Hitler's invasion of Austria.⁶² Around that time, Bonhoeffer chastened Germans in *Life Together*: “The exclusion of the weak and insignificant, the seemingly

⁶¹ Johnson, *A History of the Modern World*, 352.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 353.

useless people, from a Christian community may actually mean the exclusion of Christ; in the poor brother Christ is knocking at the door.”⁶³ In order to shock discriminating minds, Bonhoeffer turned moral categories against German Christians due to their disdain for “the seemingly useless people” (whom readers could easily interpret to be the Jews). No longer was it the ‘other’ outside of the community who should be deemed untrustworthy. Instead, Bonhoeffer wrote that “he who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter;” the “proud and pretentious” (those who fashion out of an unspiritual “human love” a “visionary ideal of community” such as the Nazis’) demand that they be realized by God, by others, and by himself.⁶⁴ Such persons have “little regard for truth” but rather succumb to “the man who is furnished with exceptional powers, experience, and magical, suggestive capacities” (like Hitler’s) and then “uses force” or “psychological techniques and methods” in order “to dethrone the Holy Spirit, to relegate Him to remote unreality” so that “human absorption” will bolster the humanly constructed community.⁶⁵ Bonhoeffer sought to expose these proud Germans with their unspiritual visions as the true hypocrites—a category not applicable to the Jews as they believed. In the chapter on Community in *Life Together*, he critically contrasted truth in the community of the Spirit with the faults of human community, which is based on desire, on power, and on capacities or service to the human spirit with “a searching, calculating analysis of a stranger.”⁶⁶ Bonhoeffer condemned the lies that had bewitched a nation no longer righteous, once the heartland of Reformation, in writing: “God’s grace speedily shatters

⁶³*Life Together*, 38.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 27.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 32-34.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 31-32.

such dreams” and “surely must we be overwhelmed by a great disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and, if we are fortunate, with ourselves....because Christian community is founded solely on Jesus Christ, it is a spiritual and not a psychic reality.”⁶⁷ In *Life Together* along with his previous works, Bonhoeffer addressed a Christian church that lost their spiritual roots in Israel and in her promises from God’s Word—in which Christians participate solely by virtue of inclusion through the Spirit, whom Christ guaranteed with his atoning sacrifice (this theme appears in Bonhoeffer’s lecture on Acts). In Germans’ “searching” gaze and “calculating” analysis toward a recovery of grander days gone by, Nazis and German Christians missed the spiritual basis of what had made their nation great and chose the easy path that ultimately led to moral and physical destruction. Recognizing a shift of blame to Jewish scapegoats in people’s acceptance of anti-Semitism, later in *Ethics* Bonhoeffer accused Germans and not Jews of actually being contemporary “Pharisees” (reminiscent of religious hypocrites whom Jesus condemned for lacking love in Luke 11:42).

Bonhoeffer stood decisively against the Aryan Law and the oath of allegiance that Hitler’s regime was pushing on the newly formed German Christian Church of the Third Reich. However, at the same time that Bonhoeffer grew more vocal, former allies in the Confessing Church either disappeared into concentration camps or fell increasingly silent. As a result, his influence waned while his voice became marginalized in secret meetings of a church already banned. At a Confessing Church meeting in October 1938, he asked his remaining countrymen whether “instead of talking of the same old questions again and again” they could finally speak of “that which truly is pressing us:” what the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 26, 31.

Confessing Church has to say to the question of church and synagogue. Bonhoeffer loudly demanded a resolution to this burning issue and challenged Christians to theologize in new ways:

He described Judaism using the same terminology as he did for Christianity: he spoke of the equivalence, in God's eyes, of 'church and synagogue,' of the Jews as 'brothers' of Christians and 'children of the covenant.' These were radical statements at a time when the leaders of the German Evangelical Church were denying all links between Christianity and Judaism.⁶⁸

Bonhoeffer grew frustrated and then disillusioned⁶⁹ at the passivity of fellow Protestants, who left unimpeded the path for dominion by a totalitarian state—even to the point that the Nazis successfully established an 'Institute for the Research and Removal of Jewish Influence on the Religious Life of the German People' in 1939. Bethge in his biography concluded that "because of the weak actions of the Confessing Church 'in that evil year,' Bonhoeffer began to separate himself from the rearguard actions of its defeated remnants...and he lost faith in the church resistance."⁷⁰ The church had not effected justice for Jews.

4. Freedom for Activism

Bonhoeffer became particularly motivated toward unconventional action on behalf of the Jews after the horrific events of Kristallnacht ("Crystal Night") on 9

⁶⁸ Victoria Barnett, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website (2006). <<http://www.ushmm.org/bonhoeffer/>>

⁶⁹ Robertson, *My Soul Finds Rest*, 44.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 78. While Nazi neopagans "rejected Christianity in any form as a product of Judaism" and "lumped Confessing Church and German Christians together as Jewish-infiltrated groups," Doris Bergen has written that the Confessing Church opposed Nazism but was "not vocal in opposing the German Christian view of race." She quotes Uriel Tal in saying that "many Lutherans associated with the Confessing Church compared and equated Judaism with the *völkisch* movement, even with National Socialism itself"....Though such Confessing Christians "resolutely opposed racial anti-Semitism," they accused that "both defined themselves by blood in ways that led to chauvinistic ethnic racism," and they thereby "drew a common denominator between the Jew and the racist." Bergen, 35.

November 1938.⁷¹ That day, he marked the date 9.11.38 with an exclamation mark beside Psalm 74:8 in his Bible and several lines against the verses, which read, “they burned all the synagogues in the land...How long, O God, is the foe to scoff?”⁷² He also bracketed verse 9 in the margin: “We are given no miraculous signs; no prophets are left, and none of us knows how long this will be.” Bonhoeffer was not present at the underground seminary in Köslin when news of the burning of a local synagogue reached members of the Confessing Church in that part of Pomerania. “Everybody had the feeling that a grievous wrong had been done” and some of the students wanted to rush off “at once to try and perhaps save something,” but the fire had advanced too far after “S.A. men in uniform had prevented the fire-brigade from extinguishing the fire.”⁷³ After learning that this deed had been “a planned action,” as was the case everywhere in Germany, the Confessing preachers requested comments from Bonhoeffer. At this meeting, students discussed what Catholics long regarded as a “curse which had haunted the Jews since Jesus’s death on the cross.” Bonhoeffer countered with Scripture:

Bonhoeffer rejected this with extreme sharpness. We had a very full discussion of Matthew xxvii, 25 and Luke xxiii, 28, as well as Romans ix-xi. He utterly refused to see in the destruction of the synagogues by the Nazis a fulfillment of the curse on the Jews. This, he said, was a case of sheer violence. “If the synagogues burn today, the churches will be on fire tomorrow.” In this action the godless face of National Socialism had shown itself...⁷⁴

⁷¹ Purportedly triggered by the attempted assassination of the German ambassador in Paris by a deranged Polish Jew, *Kristallnacht* was the night when Nazi thugs were allowed, unhindered by the police, to “do what they wanted with Jews and Jewish property.” The broken glass from windowpanes of homes and from storefronts all over Germany lent the name *Kristallnacht* to this heinous event. Bonhoeffer was “appalled” a couple days later when he visited the smoldering ruins of the synagogues in Köslin (Pomerania) and in Stettin and saw the desecration of the Jewish cemetery in Schlawe. Edwin Robertson writes: “There is little doubt that these sights strengthened his decision to join the Conspiracy and destroy this monstrous tyranny.” Robertson, 76.

⁷² Bethge, *Friendship and Resistance*, 62-63.

⁷³ Gottfried Maltusch, “When the Synagogue Burnt,” in *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Wolf-Dieter Zimmerman and Ronald G. Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 150-151.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

Bonhoeffer denounced this type of contempt theology⁷⁵ (common originally to Catholics and then even to his fellow Lutherans) that suggested Jews were reaping the wrath of God in tragic events like that fateful night. Unlike Bonhoeffer's critics, eye-witnesses deny that Bonhoeffer tolerated the view that Jews continue to incur the wrath of God.⁷⁶

More significant than being another lesson for his students, Kristallnacht became a sort of turning point for Bonhoeffer. More consciously than ever before, "that was when Bonhoeffer saw parallels between the oppression of the blacks and the oppression of the Jews."⁷⁷ Racism and anti-Semitism are similar in that they represent collective or systemic forms of evil. One African-American scholar comments:

Both are forms of oppression in which one group of people dehumanizes another group of people and deprives them of their dignity. The oppressed groups are robbed of their freedom and in some cases their lives are imperiled. The plights of blacks in the United States and Jews in Nazi Germany represent sterling examples of racism and 'ethnic cleansing'.⁷⁸

This parallel of persecution continued to occupy Bonhoeffer's mind. On 22 June 1939 Bonhoeffer noted in his diary that "Negroes are prevented from exercising proper voting rights" and are "not included in the Methodist Union," and he immediately juxtaposed this thought in the same entry with another observation: posted signs say, "Notice:

⁷⁵ The concept of a Christian "teaching of contempt" for the Jews is described in a book by the French Jewish historian, Jules Isaac. Three main themes were identified in the teaching: the dispersion of Jews was divine punishment for the crucifixion of Christ; Judaism at the time of Christ was mere legalism without soul-value; Jews were guilty of Deicide. See Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).

⁷⁶ Ruth Zerner writes that Bonhoeffer retained elements of the Lutheran teaching of contempt in his supposed ambivalence toward the Jew as "the sign of the free mercy-choice and of the wrath of God." Zerner, 248-250. Bonhoeffer's response to Kristallnacht, considering *Life Together* and *Ethics* written for a Confessing audience, and his 1936 references to Jews as the eternal "nobility" or "people of God" suggest that his uses of the symbol of Judas or of the judgment pronounced on Christ's contemporaries had no prejudicial ahistorical implications but were aimed at German Christians and Nazi neo-pagans.

⁷⁷ Maechler, student of Bonhoeffer at the illegal seminary of Finkenwalde, interviewed in Martin Doblmeier, *Pastor, Pacifist, Nazi Resister*.

⁷⁸ Similarly, J. Deotis Roberts has also noted that "Bonhoeffer's observations on racism in the United States deepened his understanding of the oppression of the Jews in Nazi Germany." Roberts, 41.

‘Gentiles preferred’,” and a “strong increase in anti-Semitism.”⁷⁹ In considering the valiant fight of blacks for greater degrees of freedom and equality in America, Bonhoeffer began to understand the fight that he too would have to join in order to help liberate oppressed Jews in Europe. Thereafter, he was “driven by a great inner restlessness, a holy anger,” so that a “frightened” student in the Preachers’ Seminary recalled of Bonhoeffer’s righteous declaration:

“...secular freedom too is worth dying for.” I felt the oppressive nearness of somebody who had died an unnatural death....And yet he [Bonhoeffer] never forgot that at that time of the Church struggle and imminent war all of us were under sentence of death.⁸⁰

Bonhoeffer knew the path to choose without judging others who lacked the courage to fulfill the same level of call to freedom. After witnessing the full vent of Germans’ fury against Jews on Kristallnacht, he opted to struggle for their “secular freedom” instead of being limited to what might be interpreted as a strictly spiritualized mission or freedom.

Rather than setting limits on the ‘other’, Bonhoeffer was selflessly willing to have the ‘other’ put limits on his life. He theologized in a fresh way in connecting themes of peace, freedom, and God’s beloved creation in the Bible. He developed his schema of belief consistently from his student years to later days when he led the underground seminary of Confessing pastors at Finkenwalde, where he conceived the topic of his next book, *Life Together*. His exhortation toward ‘Christ existing as community’ was captured in this book, and here personal solitude is replaced by a Christ-activated consciousness of the other as neighbour. “When Bonhoeffer says in *Life Together* that ‘one is a brother to another person only through Jesus Christ’, he is emphasizing that self-

⁷⁹ *Way to Freedom*, 235-236. Paul Johnson writes of Hitler: “He authorized signs ‘Jews Not Welcome’ outside towns, which were theoretically illegal.” *A History of the Modern World*, 293.

⁸⁰ Hans-Werner Jensen, “Life Together,” in *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Wolf-Dieter Zimmerman and Ronald G. Smith, 153-155.

relation and relation with others must be mediated in a theologically and ethically meaningful way; they cannot be adequately explained in terms of an empty resoluteness.”⁸¹ His earlier focus on obedience to the Creator’s design simply adopted the concrete form of freely taking responsibility for one’s neighbour, whoever he or she may be. He admonished in *Life Together* that Christ’s command to love does not discriminate between ones group and another. Unlike human affection, which “constructs its own image of the other person, of what he is and what he should become,” this is the selfless love that God expects and aids:

Spiritual love does not desire but rather serves, it loves an enemy as a brother....it is something completely strange, new, and incomprehensible to all earthly love....This means that I must release the other person from every attempt of mine to regulate, coerce, and dominate him...⁸²

Bonhoeffer took for his model Christ, who loved and identified with others to the point of dying for them. “If human freedom is derivative of and in the image of divine freedom, then true human freedom involves the free and willing limitation of the self by the other.”⁸³ Likewise, herein Bonhoeffer’s path toward a spiritual and an eventual physical death was foretold.

Bonhoeffer began working out his idea of vicarious suffering (an individual bearing the guilt of others) while knowing himself to be faultless without sin. He himself was now painfully aware of the guilt of his nation against the “weaker brethren,” and believed that one’s imitation of Christ might exact even physical restitution as a

⁸¹ Charles Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 134.

⁸² *Life Together*, 35-36.

⁸³ Ann L. Nickson, *Bonhoeffer on Freedom: Courageously Grasping Reality* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), 66-68.

consequence of a political act from a guiltless party.⁸⁴ Seeing himself as this kind of vicarious representative, he confided in a fellow teacher at Finkenwalde, Oskar Hammelsbeck, with whom he had worked on memoranda for the Confessing Church on the Jewish question and on the liquidation of the mentally ill by the Nazis. Hammelsbeck later wrote of Bonhoeffer's confession:

...that he was involved in the resistance to Hitler, following his conviction that "the structure of responsible action includes both readiness to accept guilt and freedom...If any man tries to escape guilt in responsibility he detaches himself from the ultimate reality of human existence, and what is more he cuts himself off from the redeeming mystery of Christ's bearing guilt without sin and he has no share in the divine justification which lies upon this event."⁸⁵

Bonhoeffer thought that any hope of divine justification in the struggle for secular freedom required that one must innocently bear guilt. In light of the growing atrocities against Jews, Bonhoeffer was choosing to carry the guilt of his nation by resisting—not pardoning the perpetrators but representing an act of repentance or a German sacrifice on behalf of the Jews. He never assumed it was humanly possible to make restitution for a life taken (much less for millions of lives lost during the Holocaust).⁸⁶ However, Bonhoeffer sacrificed himself as one empowered in place of the powerless. His hope was victory over evil by the possible love of One who suffered the cross in humanity's stead.

⁸⁴ After imprisonment and his part in the assassination-plot, Bonhoeffer wrote: "Though robbed of freedom and honor, we stand tall before men with pride. And when we are wrongly decried, before men we declare our innocence freely...Only before Thee, maker of all, before Thee alone are we sinners." Robertson, *My Soul Finds Rest*, 146-147.

⁸⁵ *The Steps of Bonhoeffer*, ed. J. Martin Bailey and Douglas Gilbert (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969), 57.

⁸⁶ Bonhoeffer wrote: "We are certainly not Christ; we are not called on to redeem the world by our own deeds and sufferings, and we need not try to assume such an impossible burden....We are not Christ, but if we want to be Christians, we must have some share in Christ's large-heartedness by acting with responsibility and in freedom when the hour of danger comes, and by showing a real sympathy that springs, not from fear, but from the liberating and redeeming love of Christ for all who suffer. Mere waiting and looking on is not Christian behaviour." *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 14 (Prologue).

He hinted his change toward Jewish solidarity was a possibility in Christ in his book, *Life*

Together:

Where his truth enjoins me to dissolve a fellowship for love's sake, there I will dissolve it, despite all the protests of my human love. Because spiritual love does not desire but rather serves, it loves an enemy as a brother. It originates neither in the brother nor in the enemy but in Christ and in his Word.⁸⁷

Out of love for Christ and for God's Word, Bonhoeffer identified with the sentence upon the Jew while vicariously suffering on account of the sordid crimes of the nation with which he had once identified himself. He wrote letters of encouragement to the beleaguered minority within the Confessing Church that "was being deprived of its rights,"⁸⁸ still comprising three hundred-sixty "illegal" German pastors left behind (with others gone and forced to fight on the war front).⁸⁹ In his letters, Bonhoeffer described the decision of risking oneself for Jewish brethren as a "surrender" of love:

Death is outside us, and it is in us. Death from outside is the fearful foe which comes to us when it will....But the other is death in us, it is our own death....it belongs to us. We die daily to it in Jesus Christ or we deny him. This death in us has something to do with love towards Christ and towards men. We die to it when we love Christ and the brethren from the bottom of our hearts, for love is total surrender to what a man loves.⁹⁰

He concluded this paragraph with the statement that "our death is really only the way to the perfect love of God" and began leaning before the war's start toward treasonous activities that culminated in the plot to assassinate Hitler.⁹¹ Bonhoeffer thereby engaged

⁸⁷ *Life Together*, 35.

⁸⁸ Robertson, *Shame and the Sacrifice*, 170.

⁸⁹ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 568.

⁹⁰ Bonhoeffer's first circular letter of the war (20 September 1939). *Way to Freedom*, 254-255.

⁹¹ Diary entry at Union Seminary in New York, dated 21 June 1939: "they say that it was like the answer to a prayer when my coming was announced; they would like to have *me*; they cannot understand why I refuse; it upsets all their plans for the future....is it not irresponsible towards so many other men simply to say *no* to one's own future and that of many others? The (devotional) reading is again so harsh: 'He will sit as a refiner of gold and silver' (Mal. 3.3). And it is necessary. I don't know where I am. But he (God) knows; and in the end all doings and actions will be pure and clear." *Ibid.*, 234-235.

the “fearful foe” or “death from outside,” so that he might “perfectly” love both Christ and the Jewish “enemy” of the German state as a “brother.”

5. Second American Trip

Bonhoeffer would eventually heed the urgings of the Christian opposition in Germany and emigrate to America with the offer of a “refugee post” through Union Theological Seminary. En route to New York, where Bonhoeffer arrived on 12 June 1939 (the day he “began to see all the problems of German emigration”—including the displacement of Jews), he referred to Zechariah 7:9 (“Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy each to his brother”). He appealed to the German front:

That is what I would ask of you first, my brethren at home... That is a necessary warning and an indication of the task in America. It forbids any pride and makes the task a great one. We must see in the others brethren who are equally under the mercy of Jesus Christ and no longer live and speak from our own particular knowledge or experience; then we will not be prelatical, but merciful. May God remain merciful to *us!*⁹²

By “others,” Bonhoeffer compelled Christians to see as brothers those who were foreign and yet were equally under God’s mercy—just as Christians. He then beseeched Confessing Christians, in his circular Christmas letter that year, to see the value imparted on all humanity and not just on their own race by the incarnation of Christ: “Christmas is the physical acceptance of all human flesh by the gracious God.”⁹³ Mercy and acceptance must be extended to all humans.

Although Bonhoeffer had left for America to stand decisively against the military oath that he would have had to swear in being drafted to the army,⁹⁴ by July 1939 Bonhoeffer was already on a voyage home from U.S.A. He had been invited to stay

⁹² Letters dated 8 and 12 June 1939. *Way to Freedom*, 217, 215.

⁹³ *Witness to Jesus Christ*, 218.

⁹⁴ His 15 June 1939 letter to Dr. Leiper in Coombe-Pine, Lakeville. *Way to Freedom*, 244.

longer at Union Seminary in New York, but Bishop Bell recalled Bonhoeffer agonizing in his letters over the state of German affairs. It is evident from his *Ethics*, written upon returning to Germany, that Bonhoeffer was contemplating a spiritual motive for the political course that he inevitably joined:

The origin of action which accords with reality is not the pseudo-Lutheran Christ who exists solely for the purpose of sanctioning the facts as they are, nor the Christ of radical enthusiasm whose function is to bless every revolution, but it is the incarnate God Jesus who has accepted man and who has loved, condemned and reconciled man and with him the world.⁹⁵

Neither obedience in line with a nominally Lutheran state nor obedience in accordance with a political vision, but rather, sole obedience to the person of Jesus Christ could bring about Bonhoeffer's understanding of a spiritually based order of peace and of acceptance. Sensing his own fate before purchasing his passage homeward, Bonhoeffer wrote to Bishop Bell: "when news about Danzig reached me, I felt compelled to go back as soon as possible, and to make my decision in Germany." He surmised, "It is uncertain," with regard to America, "when I shall be in this country again."⁹⁶ He trusted God for the path.

Dietrich's mind was quickly set. While traveling through England (22 June 1939), he first broke the worrisome news about returning by saying to his parents that America had become "all terribly sensational and full of hatred and horribly pharisaical" (though he also reflected, "let us beware of pharisaic security because we must recognize that the faithful may also be numbered with the proud and come under the certain judgment of God").⁹⁷ He had resolved that God would not show favouritism. Bonhoeffer

⁹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 199.

⁹⁶ G. K. A. Bell, Bishop of Chichester, "The Church and the Resistance Movement," in *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 198.

⁹⁷ Bonhoeffer reflected on Psalm 119:21 ("You rebuke the arrogant") and on I Peter 5:5 ("...but gives grace to the humble") and wrote: "God hates the proud, who are sufficient unto themselves and who pay no

then lamented, “The person I am most sorry for about my decision is Sabine;” erstwhile, he informed Reinhold Niebuhr of his fateful departure for Germany:

Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose; but I cannot make that choice in security.⁹⁸

Bonhoeffer chose solitarily to vie for Germany’s defeat and returned to where he had no job and where he faced no security. He met and “handed over a will to Bethge” along the way in demonstration of this newfound attitude of activism: he willed to “go back to the ‘trenches’” of the underground battle to face the cost where many Germans were unwilling.⁹⁹

attention to divine or human laws. They give nothing for compassion and despise the words of God and his faithful.” Robertson, *My Soul Finds Rest*, 95.

⁹⁸ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 558-559, 553 passim.

⁹⁹ *Way to Freedom*, 226.

CHAPTER THREE

CONSPIRATOR

1. An Inclusive Concept of Peace

Back in Europe to join the resistance, Bonhoeffer wrote “The First Circular Letter of the War” to the younger men of the Confessing Front on 20 September 1939.¹

Toward a scriptural ethic, he wrote:

For our death is really only the way to the perfect love of God. When fighting and death exercise their wild dominion around us, then we are called to bear witness to God’s love and God’s peace not only by word and thought, but also by our deeds. Read James 4.1 ff.! The great peace for which we long can only grow again from peace between twos and threes. Let us put an end to all hate, mistrust, envy, disquiet, wherever we can. ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.’²

In his letter, Bonhoeffer rejected the self-protective preoccupations of Germans and the Nazi concept of peace (a guarantee only for “Aryans” in the world they sought to dominate). From that point on, Bonhoeffer began to recognize a relationship between The Sermon on the Mount, responsible action, and political involvement. His readiness for political action was already evident in 1938 at a Confessing Church meeting in Stettin, where Bonhoeffer challenged Hellmut Traub’s more conservative interpretation of the politics of Romans 13 (against opposing the governing authorities who “bear the sword” and on the meaning of love that sufficiently fulfills the law). Bonhoeffer’s silent meditation earlier in the discussion caused theologian Traub to later recall: “I at once

¹ These pastors in the church-led resistance were drafted into the armed forces, so that two-thirds of Bonhoeffer’s Finkenwalde students died as soldiers; conscientious objection was not an option for Germans or punishable by death. Hermann Stoehr, whom Bonhoeffer invited to Finkenwalde to talk about pacifism, was hanged in 1940 for refusing military service. Rasmussen, 114 n., 116 n.

² *Way to Freedom*, 255.

realized that what I had taken for ‘hesitation’ belonged to an entirely different category.”³ Bonhoeffer’s mind was set on action, not only for the victims of a tyrannical state, but also for putting a “spoke in the wheel” to end this tyranny (Bonhoeffer’s speech in “Church and the Jewish Question”). As a result, once back in Germany in 1939, Bonhoeffer condemned the political rhetoric that endorsed “fighting” for the eventual establishment of a German world order of “peace” and began writing in *Ethics* on “The Church and the World” and on “The Love of God and the Decay of the World.”

Bonhoeffer’s commitment to act “responsibly” in the most uncertain of times surpassed even the political resistance among other leading figures in the underground church movement. As seen in his first chapter of *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer’s understanding of “bearing witness” to perfect divine love extended beyond traditional limits on acceptable notions of causes or deeds. Bonhoeffer’s growing alarm “especially during the past twenty years” was that “the justification of the good has been replaced by the justification of the wicked...the forgiving love of Jesus for the sinful woman, for the adultress (*sic*) and for the publican, has been misrepresented, for psychological or political reasons, in order to make of it a Christian sanctioning of anti-social ‘marginal existences,’ prostitutes and traitors to their country;” hence, “the gospel lost its power.”⁴ This was the extreme banality of what he called “cheap grace,” which rendered the German church passive to evil. Christians had sanctioned the rise of the Nazis, who betrayed the hitherto moral fabric in German society. Bonhoeffer reasoned from an assessment of their deeds (or

³ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 525.

⁴ *Ethics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1955), 64. In his text, Bonhoeffer defines “good” in “its widest sense, that is to say, simply as the contrary of vicious, lawless and scandalous, as the opposite of public transgression of the moral law,” which then “contains an extremely wide range of gradations.” On the other hand, accusations of “prostitutes” and “publicans,” initially made by German Christian leaders (like Reinhold Krause who called Jews in the Old Testament “cattle traders and pimps” at Berlin’s Sports Palace rally in 1933), become labels Bonhoeffer used against Nazi-supporters. Bergen, 146.

lack thereof) that the very people who considered themselves to be defenders of truth were not ruled by it themselves. Hence, in *Ethics* Bonhoeffer warned with the tell-tale signs: “Wherever the word of God rules alone, there will be found faith and service.”⁵

Unsurprisingly, his reasoning from Matthew 5:10 indicted also “good” Christians:⁶

It is the beatification of those who are persecuted for the sake of a just cause, and, as we may now add, for the sake of a true, good and human cause (*cf.* I Pet. 3:14 and 2:20). This beatitude puts those Christians entirely in the wrong who, in their mistaken anxiety to act rightly, seek to avoid any suffering for the sake of a just, good and true cause, because, as they maintain, they could with a clear conscience suffer only an explicit profession of faith in Christ; it rebukes them for their ungenerousness (*sic*) and narrowness which looks with suspicion on all suffering for a just cause and keeps its distance from it....In times which are out of joint, in times when lawlessness and wickedness triumph in complete unrestraint, it is rather in relation to the few remaining just, truthful and human men that the gospel will make itself known.⁷

Bonhoeffer’s exposition on Christ’s Sermon on the Mount approved of pre-emptive defensive acts for the sake of restoring secular order (termed “a just cause” and the “human cause” of lawfulness). In the current time that was so “out of joint,”

Bonhoeffer chastised “ungenerous” and narrow-minded Christians who engaged in struggle for “only an explicit profession of faith in Christ” with the excuse of

maintaining a clear conscience. He explained in *Ethics* that prejudicial wrongs must be righted and “justification and renewal” be restored:

Forgiveness within history can come only when the wound of guilt is healed, when violence has become justice, lawlessness has become order, and war has become peace. If this is not achieved, if wrong still rules unhindered and still inflicts new wounds, then, of course, there can be no question of this kind of forgiveness and man’s first concern must be to resist injustice and to call the offenders to account for their guilt.⁸

⁵ *Ethics*, 260.

⁶ In Matthew 5:10, Jesus says: “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

⁷ *Ethics*, 61-62.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

Bonhoeffer stressed that (s)he who strives for real renewal and not (s)he who simply protects one's own conscience is right. In opening the way for "the good" other than fellow Lutherans to enter God's rule, Bonhoeffer separated himself from churchmen who would have nothing to do with anyone who joined the Jewish fight out of fear of also being seen as "prostitutes and traitors."⁹

On 17 July 1940, Eberhard Bethge and Dietrich Bonhoeffer were outdoors in Memel, Germany, when the news of France's surrender was announced over the loudspeaker. The surrounding crowd stood and cheered, sang patriotic songs, and raised their arms to Hitler. Bethge balked in amazement when Bonhoeffer did the same. However, he whispered and explained, "Raise your arm! Are you crazy! We shall have to run risks for very different things now, but not for this salute!" Bethge later reflected, "It was then that Bonhoeffer's double life began."¹⁰

The way to run new risks in the Jewish fight opened for Bonhoeffer through his brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi (married to Dietrich's older sister Christine). Dohnanyi's legal experience had begun as an official in the Ministry of Justice (from 1929), followed by supreme court judge in Leipzig (in September 1938), and finally 'special leader' (*Sonderführer*) of Admiral Canaris' staff in the army's intelligence (on 25 August 1939). Therefore, "Dohnanyi was constantly able to get a close-up view of the

⁹ "The prominence of Jews in the revolution and early Weimar Republic (1919-1933) is indisputable, and this was a very serious contributing cause for increased anti-Semitism in postwar years" with the nation's defeat. Gordon, 23. On the conflation of anti-Semitic propaganda in Germany, historian Paul Johnson also writes that "the Jew was not a figure of low comedy but a mortal, implacable enemy: the Germans should wrest all the power of modern technology and industry from the Jews, in order to destroy them totally. Even the sunbathing movement, under the impulse of Aryan and Nordic symbols, acquired an anti-Semitic flavour. Indeed in 1920s Germany there were two distinct types of nudism: 'Jewish' nudism, symbolized by the black dancer Josephine Baker, which was heterosexual, commercial, cosmopolitan, erotic and immoral; and anti-Semitic nudism, which was German, *Völkisch*, Nordic, non-sexual (sometimes homosexual), pure and virtuous." Johnson, *A History of the Modern World*, 119, 120.

¹⁰ Robertson, *My Soul Finds Rest*, 97.

Nazis' evil deeds."¹¹ He approached Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who already distrusted the Nazis.¹² His ecumenical contacts abroad would prove to be helpful in the anti-intelligence framework of the Putsch.

In keeping with what he had long considered *necessità*, in 1940 Bonhoeffer joined this Abwehr-led conspiracy that plotted to oust Hitler from the centre of power.

Bonhoeffer had weighed the personal cost in New York, and he accepted the risks:

To be an accessory or to be informed was dangerous in the Third Reich...Any knowledge of the actual situation, especially after the outbreak of war, exposed one to danger. But Bonhoeffer took considerable pains to have access to exclusive information, as he felt that private information was a necessary component of his responsibility for the future.¹³

His dangerous involvement in the Abwehr, the state-department that was secretly planning for a coup d'état under Colonel Hans Oster, began with Bonhoeffer's role as a courier—in growing acknowledgement of what was occurring in the German political resistance from early 1938 until the offensive in France on 10 May 1940. With his full knowledge, Bonhoeffer profoundly sullied himself. Stanley Hauerwas, author of *Performing The Faith*, writes that “Bonhoeffer understood how this part of his life did not fit with his theological convictions or his earlier commitment to pacifism.”¹⁴

However, “in those crucial years, no one was nearer to him than his brother-in-law Hans

¹¹ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 528.

¹² Excerpt by Bonhoeffer's Jewish brother-in-law, Gerhard Leibholz, who wrote in “Memoir” about Nazism: “That danger he understood to be nothing less than the ‘brutal attempt to make history without God and to found it on the strength of God alone.’” *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Fortress, 1961), 11. See also Hauerwas, 41 n.

¹³ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 526-527.

¹⁴ Hauerwas, 36. On “Friends,” Eberhard Bethge writes: “Not that Bonhoeffer turned pacifist on principle, he never became one; but to be actively obedient to the biblical demand for peace, to take active steps against preparations for war—these were the lasting results of the meeting with Jean Lasserre, who made a deeper impression on Bonhoeffer than he realized at the time. It is he whom the passage about a ‘saint’ in the letters from the Tegel prison refers to, on the day after the plot of 20 July had failed. It was he who struck the first spark for Bonhoeffer's great book *The Cost of Discipleship*.” Zimmerman and Smith, 47.

von Dohnanyi. Bonhoeffer received from him information, counsel, and, later, commissions, while Dohnanyi sought from him ethical certainty and enlightening conversations.”¹⁵ Bonhoeffer’s life was taking a turn, and his new vocation would abruptly involve an inimitable ministry role to fellow traitors.

2. Motivation

In hindsight, certain Christians mistake Bonhoeffer’s decision to join the conspiracy for a move toward all things ‘secular’—in contrast to the more ‘spiritual’ churchman and theologian with whom Christians are generally more comfortable. However, aside from Bonhoeffer’s aversion to being conscripted (with its burden of the oath sworn to Hitler),¹⁶ Bonhoeffer joined the conspiracy purely out of religious conviction and not out of a disparagement of God’s sovereignty or of the church. His purposes were three-fold: first, Bonhoeffer believed Christianity in a religionless world needs to be made “real” in the godless situation and not just in church pews—going to the world as Christ Himself did; second, Bonhoeffer was prepared to battle Hitler, whom he saw as the embodiment of an anti-Christ; and third, in holding to the biblical value of life, Bonhoeffer related the Bible to the current situation in order to determine the Christian’s course for responsible action.

First, he had admonished fellow Christians since the end of 1937 to join in repentance for the “shame” of their nation, which had abandoned true righteousness and “the people of God.” His stance was joined later by dissenting Church members, who, like Bonhoeffer, no longer maintained old allegiances. Wilhelm Niesel recalls that the Old Prussian Confessing Synod on 16-17 October 1943 approved Bonhoeffer’s

¹⁵ Ibid., 528.

¹⁶ Hauerwas, 35.

exposition of the commandment “Thou Shalt Not Kill” as well as his recent statement on the Ten Commandments, in which he gave “clear declaration” of the church’s sins.¹⁷ These documents were read from every pulpit of the Confessing Church on the Day of Penitence, but it was too late to undo injuries that had been perpetrated against Jews or Bonhoeffer, who was arrested early in 1943 on suspicion of being a political threat to Hitler’s regime. Pastor Martin Niemoeller, a friend of Bonhoeffer who was also wrongfully interned in a concentration camp (for leading anti-Nazi resistance in the Confessing Church) and learned about deaths of the Jews whom Bonhoeffer defended, declared: “This guilt weighs heavily on the German people and on the German name and on all of Christendom. These things happened in our world and in our name.” Like Bonhoeffer, Niemoeller recognized that “nobody wants to take the responsibility for the guilt,” and in retrospect, Niemoeller confessed on behalf of the Germans who had failed to act sooner: “We let God wait ten years.”¹⁸ Bonhoeffer stood as a stark reminder that opportunity should have been seized before the eruption of war to specifically aid the Jews. In the solitude of his prison cell, Bonhoeffer wrote of a “religionless time”—hearkening to a postmodern era—of which his thoughtful (albeit non-ecclesiastical) reasoning led him to new theological limits. He rejected an institutional paradigm of Church, which had objectively failed to render grace into reality and to validate creation. Instead, Bonhoeffer inverted the traditional approach to salvation by grace. Striving so that human life is not “deprived of the conditions which are proper to it” and forming an outward grace “on the very greatest visible scale” for the sake of ultimate reception—yet

¹⁷ Wilhelm Niesel, “From Keelson to Principal of a Seminary,” in *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Wolf-Dieter Zimmerman and Ronald G. Smith, 148.

¹⁸ Philip Friedman, *Their Brothers’ Keepers* (New York: Holocaust Library by Waldon Press, 1978), 100.

without conditions “in the knowledge of the ultimate” (word of God)—must take precedence over the inward process of “entry” (belief in Christ’s justifying grace):

...the reality of God meets the reality of the world and allows us to share in this real encounter. It is an encounter beyond all radicalism and beyond all compromise. Christian life is participation in the encounter of Christ with the world...[determining and establishing] manhood precedes justification...¹⁹

Religionless Christianity fulfills humanity for the sake of truth’s revelation but does not limit itself from participating with Christ in the world because of dogmatism or self-concern. Bonhoeffer referred to Christ as “the ‘breaker’ of all bonds” (Micah 2:13). He propounded following Christ’s example and not just doctrines. “Religion is only a garment of Christianity—and even this garment has looked very different at different times,” so that Bonhoeffer could write against a very “western form of Christianity” yet also speak of Christ as “the Lord of the *world*.”²⁰

In what way are we ‘religionless-secular’ Christians, in what way are we the *ecclesia* [Church], those who are called forth, not regarding ourselves from a religious point of view as specially favoured, but rather as belonging wholly to the world? I often ask myself why a ‘Christian instinct’ often draws me more to the religionless people than to the religious, by which I don’t in the least mean with any evangelizing intention, but, I might almost say, ‘in brotherhood’...The church stands, not at the boundaries where human powers give out, but in the middle of the village. That is how it is in the Old Testament, and in this sense we still read the New Testament far too little in the light of the Old. How this religionless Christianity looks, what form it takes, is something that I’m thinking about a great deal...on us in particular, midway between East and West, there will fall a heavy responsibility.”²¹

¹⁹ *Ethics*, 132-134, 137 passim.

²⁰ Bonhoeffer partially explains: “i.e. without the temporally conditioned presuppositions of metaphysics, inwardness, and so on.”

²¹ Letter from Tegel, dated 30 April 1944. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 279-282.

With “religionless Christianity,” Bonhoeffer could see himself “in brotherhood” even with non-Christians like Jews.²² He sought to represent an unoffending Church that understands repentance from the standpoint of the Old Testament and heals wounds of past guilt (also in secular “religionless” ways).²³ It was a timely response to the “heavy responsibility” that resulted from sins against Jews by his German nation. Bonhoeffer believed himself to be called by “Christian instinct” to bear responsibly this religionless Christianity into the midst of the secular world of political resistance.²⁴ An affidavit by Eberhard Bethge, duly sworn, presented this righteous cause of Bonhoeffer in a petition addressed to Mordecai Paldiel, Director of Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial. Filed in its final form on 6 April 1999, Bethge’s statement commented on Bonhoeffer’s motive for action: “he [Bonhoeffer] was unequivocal in telling me that his only connection to the Abwehr was as a cover to help him accomplish his rescue of Jews and to defeat the Nazis.”²⁵ It was his act of fulfilling a religionless Christian calling to Christ as Ruler of the world—not just of the Church. Bearing Christ’s life to Jews who were viewed with contempt and relegated to dark places is what Bonhoeffer believed Christian life entailed. Along this line, he wrote that faith is “something whole, involving the whole of one’s life. Jesus calls men, not to a new religion, but to life....When we speak of God in a ‘non-religious’ way, we must speak of him in such a way that the godlessness of the

²² Cf. earlier cautious use of the term “brothers” with reference only to Christians. *Life Together*, 112-113.

²³ Addressing usurpation of power with “arbitrary violence” or “brutal mishandling of the weak,” he wrote that historical guilt can be neither justified nor atoned for but must be healed of its wounds: “For the Church and for the individual believer there can be only a complete breach with guilt and a new beginning which is granted through the forgiveness of sin, but in the historical life of the nations there can always be only the gradual process of healing....the wheel of history cannot be turned back. Not all the wounds inflicted can be healed, but what matters is that there shall be no further wounds.” *Ethics*, 117-118.

²⁴ In the same passage re. the Old Testament model of Church and “religionless” faith, which contests Lutheran acts of piety, Bonhoeffer assures Bethge with Proverbs 22:12, which says: “The eye of the Lord keeps watch over knowledge.”

²⁵ © Holocaust Heroes (1998). <<http://www.holocaust-heroes.com/bonhoeffer.html>>

world is not in some way concealed, but rather revealed, and thus exposed to an unexpected light.”²⁶ Bonhoeffer unconditionally brought Jews condemned to death into life, because he wanted to expose truth as well as godlessness in Germany according to his sense of Christ’s non-religious or practical call.

Second, along with living out a relevant or “religionless-secular” calling, Bonhoeffer was motivated by a Christian ethic toward abrogating evil. He perceived compulsory demands upon himself in battling the personification of evil that he saw in Hitler. “For Bonhoeffer, Hitler was the anti-Christ who enjoyed destruction, slavery, death, and extinction for their own sake.”²⁷ In resisting the enemy Führer, Bonhoeffer neared the Jewish concept of warfare against an invading attacker.²⁸ John Pawlikowski writes that liberation texts about the Jewish Exodus from Egypt in the Hebrew Scriptures show “that power unevenly distributed in society will sometimes collapse only through warfare, and that somehow God is with the people when they undertake such a redeeming struggle for their liberation.”²⁹ In consideration of this and of Ezekiel 33:3-5,³⁰ Bradley Artson discusses biblical categories of war described in the Hebrew Torah: Conquest or *milhemet hovah* (Israel’s first ideological war “to secure the nation’s borders”) was “understood to be a one-time deal, a war divinely commanded and divinely pursued;” the aggressive war of *milhemet reshut* (an option “when the Jews know that the enemy is preparing for attack”) is preventative war “when there is no other way to prevent mass

²⁶ Letter to Bethge from Tegel, dated 18 July 1944. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 362.

²⁷ Roberts, 109. I John 2:18b-19 also reads: “...many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us.”

²⁸ Bonhoeffer quoted Psalm 144:1f. (“Blessed be the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle”) in encouraging his godson to learn “early in life ways (which we did not know) of fighting an enemy” and against “forces against which reason can do nothing.” Bonhoeffer’s “Thoughts on the Day of the Baptism of Dietrich Wilhelm Rüdiger Bethge,” *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 298.

²⁹ J. T. Pawlikowski, OSM, in *The Bible Today*, May 1983, 186.

³⁰ The passage in Ezekiel 33 commands a watchman to blow the horn to warn his people to defend themselves when he sees the sword advancing against the country.

starvation;” and finally, *milhemet mitzvah* (engagement with the enemy “when they attack us”) is purely defensive.³¹ Like the first count, in 1933 Bonhoeffer had tried negotiating with Hitler for peace by sending letters and by mobilizing pressure—similar to Joshua, who offered terms of peace (accepted by the Gibeonites) and freely permitted emigration (an option accepted by the Girgashites) before leading the Israelites’ Conquest of Canaan. However, unlike the biblical ending, Bonhoeffer and the Judeo-Christian world watched in horror as Hitler “did not limit his murder of the Jews to one country or to one war, did not permit them to flee, and did not permit them to choose to make peace.”³² Recalling the Babylonian Talmudic teaching that killing is permissible for Jews in a state of crisis, deterrence is recognized as short-term “crisis-management” response:

The mere fact that Judaism develops three categories of warfare, one of which is obligatory to this day, leads to the conclusion that absolute pacifism, the total renunciation of force, is not a traditional Jewish alternative. *Kohelet Rabbah* records that “one who becomes overly compassionate toward the cruel will end up being cruel to the compassionate.” There is cruelty in the world, and we are commanded to protect ourselves from that evil. In our unredeemed world, a total refusal to fight leads to accepting oppression, and that is no longer a Jewish option....Defense against attack is obligatory.³³

Like the Jews, Bonhoeffer came to the biblical understanding that, notwithstanding God’s proscription of taking lives, responsible people must equip themselves for legitimate war should an aggressor threaten the peace and lives given by God. Defence was mandated.

Bonhoeffer resorted to defensive action on behalf of the Jews, which was demanded by the current crisis and by imminent dangers overpowering these people of God. At a friendly estate in Klein-Krössin (Kieckow) in September 1940, Bonhoeffer

³¹ Bradley Shavit Artson, *Love Peace and Pursue Peace* (New York: United Synagogue of America Commission on Jewish Education, 1988), 119, 167-169, 196 passim.

³² *Ibid.*, 126.

³³ *Ibid.*, 249-250.

reflected on the pervasiveness of Nazism throughout the land. This war was foremost ideological, and he recorded in his chapter “Ethics as Formation” these thoughts on evil:

What is worse than doing evil is being evil. It is worse for a liar to tell the truth than of a lover of truth to lie. It is worse when a misanthropist practices brotherly love than when a philanthropist gives way to hatred. Better than truth in the mouth of the liar is the lie. Better than the act of brotherly love on the part of the misanthrope is hatred. One sin, then, is not like another. They do not all have the same weight. There are heavier sins and lighter sins. A falling away is of infinitely greater weight than a falling down. The most shining virtues of him who has fallen away are as black as night in comparison with the darkest lapses of the steadfast....It is not by astuteness, by knowing the tricks, but only by simple steadfastness in the truth of God, by training the eye upon this truth until it is simple and wise, that there comes the experience and the knowledge of the ethical reality.³⁴

Bonhoeffer hinted that the guilt of battle was associated with the “heavier sins” of evil people. On the other hand, there was room in God’s mercy for the “lapses” or “falling down” of those upright souls who sought to apply God’s truth to the ethical dilemmas in Bonhoeffer’s day. Therefore, he exhorted people to be like the “wise man,” who “looks only to God” to “replace our rusty swords with sharp ones;” for only one who is trained in God’s truth will be “able to look at the reality of the world freely and without prejudice. And that is how simplicity becomes wisdom.”³⁵ Hitler wielded prejudice like a weapon and deceptively turned people against defenseless Jews. The ethical solution was simple: overcoming evil with the perspective of godly training was likened to one’s spiritual act of service. In the current crisis Bonhoeffer became his nation’s ‘watchman’ (Ezekiel 33), but a pre-emptive strike was his last resort. Once nonviolent and legal means were exhausted, he accepted that evil could be stopped perhaps only by ending

³⁴ *Ethics*, 67.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

Hitler's life. "Bonhoeffer viewed the Nazi reign of terror as mandating an exception to the normal response to an unjust situation."³⁶ Therefore, he directly engaged in battle.

In *Ethics* Bonhoeffer attacked reason, religiosity, acts of duty, and private virtue even though these are common bases of ethical decision-making. Bonhoeffer believed that when crises arise, selfless struggle and responsible action would surpass the limitations and the omissions of deeds by all the duty-bound people in Germany:

They are so blind that in their desire to see justice done to both sides they are crushed between the two clashing forces and end by achieving nothing. Bitterly disappointed at the unreasonableness of the world, they see that their efforts must remain fruitless and they withdraw resignedly from the scene or yield unresistingly to the stronger party. Still more distressing is the utter failure of all ethical *fanaticism*. The fanatic believes that he can oppose the power of evil with the purity of his will and of his principle. But since it is part of the nature of fanaticism that it loses sight of the totality of evil and rushes like a bull at the red cloth instead of at the man who holds it, the fanatic inevitably ends by tiring and admitting defeat....within the limits of duty there can never come the bold stroke of the deed which is done on one's own free responsibility, the only kind of deed which can strike at the heart of evil and overcome it. The man of duty will end by having to fulfil (*sic*) his obligation even to the devil....he knows how to remain punctiliously within the permitted bounds which preserve him from involvement in conflict. He must be blind and deaf to the wrongs which surround him. It is only at the price of an act of self-deception that he can safeguard his private blamelessness against contamination through responsible action in the world.³⁷

Bonhoeffer tolerated neither safeguarding of one's private salvation ("purity of will") nor reasoned resignation that yields to power. Rather, he proposed that selfless struggle by God's people is necessitated in situations of crisis for there to be genuine peace. He said, "I shall be writing next time about Christians' 'egoism' ('selfless self-love'). I think we agree about it. Too much altruism is oppressive and exacting; 'egoism' can be less

³⁶ Roberts, 106-107.

³⁷ *Ethics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1955), 67-69.

selfish and less demanding.”³⁸ Bonhoeffer concluded, despite a “bad conscience,” the wise Christian should selflessly stand alone in an ideological war instead of being sacrificially bound to an evil kindred community. (S)he would be better off than the overly empathetic, “reasonable,” ethically fanatic (even pacifist), or “dutiful man” (cf. Kant)— indeed, better than the person of “private virtuousness.”³⁹ In comparison, every other ethical basis (even cloaked in ‘good’) is self-centredness and is unacceptable to the Creator. Bonhoeffer asked, “Does the question about saving one’s soul appear in the Old Testament at all? Aren’t righteousness and the Kingdom of God on earth the focus of everything?”⁴⁰ In battling evil, the Bible called for brave, righteous world-changers.

Third, beyond defending a selfless, responsible and “religionless” Christianity according to God’s truth, Bonhoeffer valued and felt compelled to save the lives of Jews. In order to comprehend how Bonhoeffer could reconcile himself for the Jews to a group that sought to murder a tyrant, one may examine the Bible (with relevant passage like II Chronicles 22:7-9), which was the source of Bonhoeffer’s freedom of action.⁴¹ Bonhoeffer knew and drew upon the principle that came to be expressed in the Halakah (Jewish law) and the Haggadah (Jewish scriptural interpretation), which he recognized

³⁸ Letter to Bethge from Tegel, dated 6 May 1944. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 287.

³⁹ *Ethics*, 145-158. For Bonhoeffer’s writing against either the “spontaneity”/ arbitrariness or the “divinity” of “fallen” reason; on the natural or “innate right” to resist non-*suum cuique*; on defensive war as a necessity, which ought to be distinguished from arbitrary killing. His Christian explanation is given on page 150: “To idealistic thinkers it may seem out of place for a Christian ethic to speak first of rights and only later of duties. But our authority is not Kant; it is the Holy Scripture, and it is precisely for that reason that we must speak first of the rights of natural life, in other words of what is given to life, and only later of what is demanded of life.... There is no right before God, but the natural, purely as what is given, becomes the right in relation to man. The rights of natural life are in the midst of the fallen world the reflected splendour of the glory of God’s creation.... They are guaranteed by God Himself. The duties, on the other hand, derive from the rights themselves, as tasks are implied by gifts. They are implicit in the rights. Within the framework of the natural life, therefore, we in every case speak first of the rights and then of the duties, for by so doing, in the natural life too, we are allowing the gospel to have its way.”

⁴⁰ Letter to Eberhard Bethge from Tegel dated 5 May 1944. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 286.

⁴¹ Concerns the divinely appointed son of righteousness, Jehu, who killed wicked Ahaziah (king of Judah) and Joram (“son of Ahab” king of Israel), as one “anointed by God” to destroy the royal house of Ahab.

for its “arbitrary combinations and amplification of the (biblical) text through imaginative speculation.”⁴² This does not mean that Bonhoeffer took lightly biblical commands against murder. When Dohnanyi asked Bonhoeffer—as he did again in prison—what Bonhoeffer thought about the New Testament passage “all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matt. 26:52), Bonhoeffer replied that “the word was valid for their circle too—we have to accept that we are subject to that judgment, but that there is now need of such men as will accept its validity for themselves.”⁴³ He did not discredit divine law yet defended joint acts of responsible justice in the current crisis. Bonhoeffer’s 1924 work on First Clement is particularly enlightening; here, he gave examples of “amplification of the law through halakic interpretation” in the New Testament (Matt. 22:31f.; Rom. 10:6; I Cor. 9:9; Gal. 3:16; 4:22f.) and in the Old Testament (with references to Chronicles, Kings and Samuel).⁴⁴ He accepted a Jewish practice that was unacceptable to many Christians at the time; he strove “to relate the sacred text to new perspectives in any way possible and then to set forth and allegorize its whole meaning and significance expressly for that situation.”⁴⁵ One must not forget that, even before the war, Bonhoeffer knew ‘insider’ information about Nazi crimes through his brother-in-law, Dohnanyi. Through this influence, Dietrich and three members of the Bonhoeffer family joined the political resistance.⁴⁶ “When the civilians and their offices had been effectively silenced

⁴² Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s seminar paper, “Jewish Elements in First Clement.” *The Young Bonhoeffer*, 221. In the footnotes one reads: “Halakah is the body of Jewish oral law concerning daily life and customs, formulated by scribes. Haggadah is interpretation of the extralegal parts of the Holy Scriptures.” In another place (p. 222), Bonhoeffer also writes: “Scriptural interpretation is gnosis, not simply reception. It is work on the sacred text that seeks to elucidate and uncover its ‘true meaning’.” This he sought to do.

⁴³ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 530. Cf. Dohnanyi’s letter to Bonhoeffer dated 23 April 1943 (Sacrow bei Potsdam). *Letters & Papers from Prison*, 25.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁴⁶ Hans von Dohnanyi had compiled the Guertner Diaries, a 2,200 single-spaced page record to educate people of Nazi atrocities, which was also a source at the Nuremberg trials following the war.

(Dietrich) saw the responsibility fall to the military; it was the appropriate agent for a police action to end a rule by criminals.”⁴⁷ As a challenge to Christian pacifists who might fault Bonhoeffer for this act of deterrence, the question should be asked whether the concept of annihilating an evil world-leader may have been sounder to Bonhoeffer and to fellow conspirators compared to the Nazi-led genocide that the world would witness by the close of the Second World War. The cost that Bonhoeffer weighed was a choice between the small group that plotted Hitler’s death or else the lives of countless Jews (plus the souls of a German civilization gone astray under Nazi control). In the end, Bonhoeffer chose to side with the Jews.

3. Smuggler and Informant

Bonhoeffer valued Jewish lives, regardless of their faith or background. He actively took two steps to help save them: first, he informed Rabbi Wise and ecumenical contacts against Hitler, an “ardent foe of Zionism,”⁴⁸ and second, Bonhoeffer operated as a smuggler in escorting endangered Jews to safety in Switzerland. In response to Hitler’s horrifying Final Solution, Bonhoeffer continued his operational participation in the provision of counter-espionage service until his arrest on 5 April 1943. “His journeys as ‘church visitor’ were to be considered a ‘front’ for information gathering” and “Bonhoeffer was now officially a ‘confidential’, though unpaid, agent for the Abwehr.”⁴⁹ This was partly a reaction to the mass deportations of Jews that started from Berlin in October 1941. A report of these events was compiled by Bonhoeffer and by another Confessing Church member in the Abwehr, Friedrich J. Perels—on behalf of whose

⁴⁷ See book notes for interviews with Franz Hildebrandt, Edinburgh, Scotland, (17 September 1968). Rasmussen, 137.

⁴⁸ Roberts, 42.

⁴⁹ *Testament to Freedom*, 37 (Introduction).

father (with a woman also of Jewish descent) Bonhoeffer enabled immediate escape out of Germany.⁵⁰ Deotis Roberts notes of his motive: “The historic Jesus, a Jew, was important to Bonhoeffer.”⁵¹ The deportations had likely precipitated Bonhoeffer’s autumn 1941 statement in his *Ethics* fragment: “The expulsion of the Jews from the West must necessarily bring with it the expulsion of Christ; for Jesus Christ was a Jew.”⁵² Bonhoeffer continued to explain the spiritual mandate for his insurrection soon afterward in his *Ethics*: “I am called to the defence of the property of another, in order that the freedom of control over life, property etc. might be preserved for the individual.” Bonhoeffer was decrying increased enforcement of the Nazis’ 1935 Nuremberg Laws with their “Aryanization” of Jewish property, or its forced sale to non-Jews, in precipitation of Hitler’s Final Solution from 31 July 1941.⁵³ However, from that time onward, Bonhoeffer’s writings could not be circulated as he was forbidden by the regime to publish any written work.⁵⁴ He would have continued to assist or to speak up for Jews, had his freedoms not been severely limited. For the safety of family and friends (also charged with treason) in prison, Bonhoeffer was required to carefully limit himself further until 20 July 1944 when his own struggle for survival ended in a death camp.

Bonhoeffer’s decisions that preceded imprisonment were neither out of whim nor of passion. He had carefully researched the activities and reasons of the coup-conspirers within the Abwehr. Furthermore, his ethics differed from the anti-rationalistic emotionalism (described as “pity and forgiveness”), by which his Union supervisor

⁵⁰ Beck, 68-9.

⁵¹ Roberts, 102.

⁵² Nickson, 125.

⁵³ Gordon, 144, 146. Nazis made the Jews into second-class citizens, denied the Jews’ former measure of participation in German life and society, and then, in 1938, “established the dispossession of the Jews in law.” Gutterman and Shalev, 49, 192.

⁵⁴ Nickson, 128, 147.

Reinhold Niebuhr defined love. Bonhoeffer uniquely developed his Christian ethics in the context of espionage and war, while Niebuhr's "transcendent" ethics identified solely with the sinner in fellow man.⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer spoke of natural rights and Christian identification with victims of violence. He wrote in winter of 1941 from Ettal of certain liberties, which, in cases of deprivation (such as "the seizure of defenceless and innocent people," a man's being separated from home and work and family "as though he were guilty of some crime," "arbitrary imprisonment," and "exploitation of the body" for sex or labour) should naturally be followed with "the right of mental and bodily self-defence."⁵⁶ In contrast to Niebuhr's *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, which Bonhoeffer critically re-read in prison, his own *Ethics* optimistically presented hope for a reconstituted and unified community by means of a Christian love that overcomes all social barriers. Bonhoeffer surpassed mere pity by identifying with people as 'brothers'—even Jews—in friendships extended *within* the uncertainty of the other's world.⁵⁷ Harkening to Niebuhr's example of Albert Schweitzer (a scholar who is noted scoffingly for attempting to bear responsibility for the needs of the Africans under "a sense of guilt for the white man's sins against the colored man"), Bonhoeffer became to the world this very figure of a "cloistered academic"-turned-activist. However, he went

⁵⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935), 219, 220, 229 passim. He writes: "Martyrs do not achieve martyrdom by taking thought...a strong devotion to a cause absorbs the individual in the cause so that the entire socio-spiritual impetus of the enterprise sustains him in the hour of crisis and endows him with resources which transcend anything possessed in his own right...Those who try to make the ethic of Jesus a guide to prudent conduct have, therefore, been anxious to point out that the naïve faith in God's providential care which underlies these injunctions had more relevance in the simple agrarian life of Palestine than in the economic complexities of modern urban existence. But it must be noted that they cannot be followed absolutely even in simple agrarian life." *Idem.*, 42, 216-217.

⁵⁶ *Ethics*, 182-184. See footnotes for Bonhoeffer's unfinished preparatory notes on a list of proposed paragraph topics for "natural rights."

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 169. Against living only for oneself, Bonhoeffer gives examples of the "unquestioned duty of the Christian," which requires that "a friend shall with his own body shield his friend's body from the bullet."

uniquely beyond merely appreciating the needs of the ‘other’ by doing the incomprehensible; Bonhoeffer completely overcame the distance between himself and *them*. He loved even non-Christian ‘brothers’ and associated with them in his life and in his death by understanding that Christ was a Jew. Bonhoeffer spoke in support of the “right” to self-defence, yet he also defended these powerless victims with his actions. While contemporary ethicists including Niebuhr had called cultural gaps “too great to allow such sympathies as manifest themselves in intimate communities and relations of contiguity to become effective,” Bonhoeffer confounded ethical minds with a strengthening sacrificial resolve that exceeded an ideal of “tenderness.”⁵⁸ He weighed the option of being enjoined by people he did not know and yet freely died for these Jews.⁵⁹ In Bonhoeffer’s eyes, intimate community with the ‘other’ was possible through God, who “made the two one and has destroyed the barrier” between Jew and Gentile with Christ’s sacrificial love (Ephesians 2:14). Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics* not only got tested; his ideas resulted from a practice of living life wholly for the sake of others.

Those who mistake Bonhoeffer’s resistance for simply an act of political conscience or of desperate abandonment of the Church are quite mistaken.⁶⁰ In Bonhoeffer’s actions, the quest for freedom in search of what is ‘good’ might appear to

⁵⁸ Niebuhr, 79. Differing from Bonhoeffer’s thought but recognizing the possibility of a similar “considerate” end (note below), Niebuhr concedes: “It is able to set moral goals transcending nature without being lost in other-worldliness. The degree of approximation depends upon the extent to which the Christian faith is not merely a theory, but a living and vital presupposition of life and conduct....Men cannot, by taking thought, strengthen their will.” *Idem.*, 214-215.

⁵⁹ *Ethics*, 165-167 *passim*. Bonhoeffer writes: “The right to live has as its counterpart the freedom to offer and to give one’s life in sacrifice. In the sense of sacrifice, therefore, man possesses the liberty and the right to death, but only so long as his purpose in risking and surrendering his life is not the destruction of his life but the good for the sake of which he offers this sacrifice....The freedom to die, which is given to human life in natural life, is abused if it is used otherwise than in faith in God.”

⁶⁰ Accusations of Bonhoeffer’s “desperate abandonment” are based on the view: “...the concern of both (Catholic and Protestant) churches was mainly for baptized Jews—an indication that their concern was primarily institutional rather than humanitarian or moral...the Confessing church was as interested in maintaining its independence as was the Catholic church, so it provided no strong protests against racial persecution on the basis of Christian ethics until these were by and large useless.” Gordon, 261-262.

be his ultimate goal; but in the end, it is not. Around the beginning of 1941, before embarking on his first espionage mission to Switzerland, Bonhoeffer had written about the effect of the word of God on a person: “In the rescuing light man for the first time recognizes God and his neighbour. The labyrinth of the life he has so far led falls into ruin. Man is free for God and his brothers.”⁶¹ In this type of personal confession, Bonhoeffer’s doomed act of nonconformity comes to represent a Christian sacrifice of simple obedience and of loving deputyship to God, from whom “freedom” (to be exercised for others) may emerge—somewhat like a by-product—in resemblance to that of its Origin. Bonhoeffer believed that, as with Christ, true followers are likewise beckoned to be free from sin in the service of God and of others:

He lives and acts not by the knowledge of good and evil but by the will of God. There is only one will of God. In it the origin is recovered; in it there is established the freedom and the simplicity of all action.⁶²

Bonhoeffer believed that, even in circumstances when right and wrong are unclear, fellowship with God or dependence on the divine will should be one’s primary goal. Although Bethge (also imprisoned by the Nazis) admitted that Bonhoeffer opted for secular means in ‘defeating’ the German nation, a Christian motive had led to the decision that apparently distanced him from the Church near the end of his life. Between the winter of 1941 and early 1942, Bonhoeffer wrote notes in preparation for the various *Ethics* chapters that indicate a possible reconciliation between The Sermon on the Mount and “the necessity of historical responsible action” with political involvement—i.e., acting out of “the love which proves itself” in obedience to “the words of One who lived in concrete responsibility for humanity.” In this second draft of *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer was

⁶¹ *Ethics*, 120.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 30.

no longer using The Sermon to espouse pacifism but to argue that certain exceptional circumstances appeal directly to the Christian's freedom to live in the Holy Spirit, "which is bound by no law."⁶³ Later, against Christians "incurring part of the guilt" for blood (Ezek. 3.17ff.), Bonhoeffer would add in a sub-section of *Ethics*' "State and Church" on "The Political Responsibility of the Church" and the need for its public proclamation:

It is part of the Church's office of guardianship that she shall call sin by its name and that she shall warn men against sin....The theme of the proclamation is not the wickedness of the world but the grace of Jesus Christ....it shall with all due deference address government directly in order to draw its attention to shortcomings and errors which must otherwise imperil its governmental office. If the word of the Church is, on principle, not received, then the only political responsibility which remains to her is in establishing and maintaining, at least among her own members, the order of outward justice which is no longer to be found in the *polis*....it arises from obedience to the Lord of both Church and government.⁶⁴

Bonhoeffer was pushed to extremes with the hope of restoring a just order in deference to one Lord of Church and state. Bonhoeffer was not attracted to politics; he saw himself as a representative or fulfiller of the church that makes real Christ's grace to the world.

Bonhoeffer's position was a marginal one within the church, and his move toward political action resulted in further ostracization. Eberhard Bethge notes, because the historical exigencies and calling from Christ may be unique for each individual, "Bonhoeffer did not expect his Church publicly to uphold him and put him on the intercession lists of the various congregations;" rather, he left his justification to God alone and knowingly forsook the support of a "protective" and commonly held ethic:

⁶³ On Zettels 28 and 19 of *Ethics*, notes found after Bonhoeffer's death, read footnotes re. the first draft of "History and Good" by Ilse Tödt, editor of the fragments written in preparation for it. Nickson, 126-128.

⁶⁴ *Ethics*, 345-346. Bonhoeffer speaks on the theme of grace on pp. 136-137: "To provide the hungry man with bread is to prepare the way for the coming of grace." The "preparing the way" cannot be thought of as "a matter of establishment of certain desirable and expedient conditions;" it is not "the realization of a programme of social reform." Although "concrete interventions in the visible world" (addressing hunger and need) are expected, "a spiritual preparation of the way will be followed by the merciful coming of the Lord" or exaltation of God's word as well. "Coming of grace" must be offered practically and inwardly.

Participation in this conspiracy offered the greatest difficulty to somebody belonging to the Lutheran tradition, for this tradition provided the office of guardianship, but not the possibility of revolutionary interference as a conspirator....Bonhoeffer could expect no protection from the Church. There was no precedent for what had to be done.⁶⁵

Bonhoeffer knowingly sacrificed any possibility of being remembered as a saint even while he progressed toward martyrdom. He knew he could neither justify his political intrigues nor explain the motives for them to students and to Christian friends.

Bonhoeffer began to identify with the secrecy, solitariness, and even the desperate angst that his Jewish brethren experienced. Eberhard Bethge said of his mentor, Bonhoeffer: "Because he was lonely he became a theologian, and because he was a theologian he became lonely."⁶⁶ On Memorial Day, 24 November 1935, Bonhoeffer had written a Finkenwalde sermon, based on his ponderings, called "Learning to Die." In it, the theologian speaks of suffering death in the Lord, but also of a "martyrdom of a silent loneliness."⁶⁷ Bonhoeffer expounded further on this lonely experience in a letter written to fellow conspirators in prison and gave it to them on Christmas 1942. He shared "from the perspective of the outcast" and expressed the feeling of "belonging to death already:"

We are only too familiar with life's anxieties and with all the other destructive effects of prolonged personal insecurity.... We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds; we have been drenched by many storms; we have learnt the arts of equivocation and pretence; experience has made us suspicious of others and kept us from being truthful and open; intolerable conflicts have worn us down and even made us cynical. Are we still of any use?⁶⁸

A year after Bonhoeffer's arrest (also when 437,000 Jews were shipped to Auschwitz in May-June 1944), Bonhoeffer wrote about moments of inner torment that he endured in

⁶⁵ Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr* (London: Collins, 1975), 131-132.

⁶⁶ Bethge, *Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, 23.

⁶⁷ *Testament to Freedom*, 267.

⁶⁸ *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 16-17.

the stillness of his prison cell. His autobiographical poem “Who Am I?” reveals a sense of personal frailty:

Restless, yearning and sick, like a bird in its cage,
struggling for the breath of life,
as though someone were choking my throat;
hungering for colors, for flowers, for the songs of birds,
thirsting for kind words and human closeness,
shaking with anger at capricious tyranny and the pettiest slurs,
bedeviled by anxiety, awaiting great events that might never occur,
fearfully powerless and worried for friends far away,
weary and empty in prayer, in thinking, in doing,
weak, and ready to take leave of it all.
Who am I? They mock me these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, you know me, O God. You know I am yours.⁶⁹

Bonhoeffer felt he had no one left but God in the end. Similarly, Hillel the Elder, a contemporary of Bonhoeffer in Frankfurt, summarized the Jewish experience of lonely torment in the “cage” of inner and physical persecution: “If I am not for myself, who is for me? But if I am for myself alone, what am I? And if not now, when?”⁷⁰ Once people knew their true identities, they would be hunted. Both Jews (in Hitler’s Reich) and Gentiles (five in all from the Bonhoeffer clan) shared the same death sentence. It had always been perceived through history that the Jews were ‘born’ into suffering, but Dietrich Bonhoeffer deliberately entered their condition of disrepute as a Christian. Like his Jewish counterparts, Bonhoeffer walked a lonely path in obedience to their one Lord.

Before his arrest and temporarily unsuspected by the Gestapo as a member of the Abwehr, Bonhoeffer took advantage of brief periods of respite. He used any free time toward developing *Ethics* in his room at the Bonhoeffers’ house. Also, from November 1940 until mid-February 1941, he wrote illegally while taking refuge at a monastery in

⁶⁹ Translation of “*Wer bin Ich?*” from *Widerstand und Ergebung. A Testament to Freedom*, 514.

⁷⁰ Translation from Hebrew inscription in the ‘cage’, *Jews in Frankfurt 1800-1950: Persecution and Self-Assertion* (Jewish Museum Frankfurt, 2002), panel 1.

Ettal, Germany before journeying on the first counter-intelligence mission to Switzerland. During the longest period of writing in Ettal, Bonhoeffer worked on a chapter called “The Last Things and The Things Before the Last.” In this part of *Ethics*, he pushed the Church toward political engagement with evil.⁷¹ Instead of pursuing a path of Christian radicalism or of ethical compromise, Bonhoeffer encouraged Christians to encounter the God who “meets the reality of the world and allows us to share in this real encounter.” This theme that considered the way that God’s ultimate (the “last things” of heaven) “leaves open a certain amount of room for the penultimate” (earthly “things before the last”) was his emphasis on the Church’s task in the world, which “must be preserved” according to the gospel if lives ought to be provided justification by grace or faith.⁷² Since, in entering creation, God validated all of it through Jesus Christ (who neither endorsed nor condemned established human orders), “it means that we have the right and the obligation to be men before God.”⁷³ Bonhoeffer then argued, “The destruction of manhood, of man’s quality as man (*Menschsein*), is sin,” which he recognized among corrupted Christians in Germany:

Christian radicalism, no matter whether it consists in withdrawing from the world or in improving the world, arises from hatred of creation. The radical cannot forgive God His creation...When evil becomes powerful in the world, it infects the Christian, too, with the poison of radicalism. It is Christ’s gift to the Christian that he should be reconciled with the world as it is, but now this reconciliation is accounted a betrayal and denial of Christ. It is replaced by bitterness, suspicion and contempt for men and the world. In the place of the love that believes all, bears all and hopes all, in the place of the love which loves the world in its very wickedness with the love of God (John 3.16), there is now the pharisaical denial of love to evil, and the restriction of love to the closed circle of the devout. Instead of the open Church of Jesus Christ, which serves the world till the end, there is now some allegedly primitive Christian ideal of a Church, which

⁷¹ *Ethics*, 132.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 132-134; cf. 124-125.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 129.

in its turn confuses the reality of the living Jesus Christ with the realization of a Christian idea.⁷⁴

Bonhoeffer accused both Germany's "godly" (within the Church) and "ungodly" (neo-pagans outside the Church) of the same sin that Jesus had rebuked in the exclusive Pharisees of ancient Israel;⁷⁵ all of them were guilty of loving a humanly created order (leaving room only to love those who were similar to them or who held to the same ideas) rather than loving God's creation all around. The nation of Germany had been deceived in its xenophobic self-idolatry. Although "Christ takes form among us here and now" in his Church in the West, "no single one of these nations can exist by itself or even be conceived as existing by itself;" indeed, "it is not written that God became an idea, a principle, a programme, a universally valid proposition or a law, but that God became man" to affirm humanity "in quite different guises."⁷⁶ Bonhoeffer had warned that Germans' contrariness to the Word must be cast off in repentance, lest the "vilest contempt for mankind goes about its sinister business with the holiest of protestations of devotion to the human cause" and the "base man grows baser...an ever more willing and adaptable tool in the hand of the tyrant" in the blinding "idolization of success."⁷⁷ On this prophetic note, Bonhoeffer temporarily stopped his work on *Ethics* to further the cause of Jews against Hitler.

While other Germans were under Hitler's sway, Bonhoeffer participated in the subversive work of "Operation 7," which escorted Jewish men and women from

⁷⁴ Ibid., 129-131.

⁷⁵ Earlier, around spring of 1940, Bonhoeffer had written in *Ethics* a section titled "The Pharisee" in the chapter on "The Love of God and the Decay of the World." Here, Bonhoeffer identified the Pharisee as "not an adventitious historical phenomenon of a particular time," but rather, as a distrustful person of "disunion with other men and with himself;" the guardian of an impartial order of piety, which forces people into situations of conflict; and, one who "laboriously maintains" distinctions between human laws of "logical alternatives" and suffering people, such as "a sick woman" healed on the Sabbath. Ibid., 30-34.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 85-88.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 74, 77.

Germany into Switzerland. His identification with the victims of Nazi oppression led him to collaborate with other secular officials who were equally committed to the welfare of the marginalized. Bonhoeffer and these Abwehr leaders were able to save the lives of a small group of German Jews on the pretext that they were agents of the Abwehr. Three of those fifteen for whom Bonhoeffer arranged escape by use of his church-contacts were unbaptised or practising Jews.⁷⁸ He became busy with coordinating checkpoints and arranging people to whom he could entrust these dangerously disguised “agents.” Passports and exchanges of money had to be created and then covered up. In Switzerland, Bonhoeffer also met repeatedly with Gerhart Riegner, World Jewish Congress representative, whose message about Hitler’s Final Solution was later delivered to Rabbi Wise and to the American public through London on 28 August 1942.⁷⁹ Bonhoeffer’s espionage activities and indicting messages were mounting, so that he could correctly guess that his fate was sealed.

Bonhoeffer sacrificed everything to help save the Jews, because he identified with Christ in the weakest of these ‘brothers’. In December 1942, Bonhoeffer wrote a ‘Christmas gift’ to two fellow conspirators, Hans Oster and Hans von Dohnanyi (who, in 1943, were imprisoned along with himself). Bonhoeffer sent this letter also to Bethge. In some measure similar, but a progression from his Christmas letter to the Finkenwalde brethren (wherein humanity is accepted “because Christmas is the physical acceptance of

⁷⁸ This nullifies the point, that Bonhoeffer did not concern himself with any except baptized (Christian) Jews, made by Yad Vashem. See comment from Henry’s “Righteous Gentile,” quoted in Beck, 66 n.

⁷⁹ Walter Laqueur, “The Mysterious Messenger and The Final Solution,” in *Commentary Magazine*, vol. 69, no. 3 (March 1980). <<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/archive/digitalarchive>>

all human flesh by the gracious God”),⁸⁰ Bonhoeffer transferred now the task of “physical acceptance” from God to humankind:

We have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled—in short, from the perspective of those who suffer.⁸¹

Harkening again to this Spirit of acceptance that leads to solidarity with others, Bonhoeffer wrote from his prison cell: “the age in which we live is not very suited to inflexibility. Each of us should try to accept and treat other people as they are. It’s always the best policy for all concerned.”⁸² The meaning behind acceptance by show of solidarity can be seen in “After Ten Years,” his Christmas letter of 1942. “We are certainly not Christ” and cannot redeem others, but in a “world come of age” Bonhoeffer proposed that “to defend passionately human dignity and reserve” must be the new “business” of Christianity: “Christ’s large-heartedness...from the liberating and redeeming love of Christ for all who suffer” is to “do justice to life in all its forms” with concern for “the sufferings of his brethren, for whose sake Christ suffered.”⁸³ Bonhoeffer shared a Christian motive for defending Jews with Hans Scholl (1918-1943),⁸⁴ leader of the White Rose anti-Nazi movement with whom Bonhoeffer began to partner at Munich University. The Gestapo arrested and hung the group of student activists in February

⁸⁰ “Letter to the Finkenwalde Brethren, Christmas 1939.” *Witness to Jesus Christ*, 216.

⁸¹ *Testament to Freedom*, 37.

⁸² Letter from Tegel, dated 30 September 1943. *Love Letters*, 75.

⁸³ *Testament to Freedom*, 483-486.

⁸⁴ Excerpt from a White Rose Foundation pamphlet: “Hans Scholl was condemned to death by the People’s Court on February 22, 1943, and executed the same day by the guillotine. A note was found on his desk: ‘Cross, for a long time you will remain the light of this earth’...His last words shouted from the guillotine: ‘Long live freedom!’” White Rose Page (2004). <<http://www.jlrweb.com/whiterose/hans.html>>

1943 a few days prior to Bonhoeffer's scheduled meeting for coordinating the resistance efforts.⁸⁵ Their crime was exposing injustice in an act of solidarity with the Jews.

Two months later, Bonhoeffer was arrested too and put in the Wehrmacht military prison at Tegel in Berlin. Bonhoeffer's phone in his parents' house had been tapped, and the Gestapo repeatedly interrogated him while the house and military files were searched for any suspicious evidence.⁸⁶ Even in prison, Bonhoeffer was among those exceptional Christians who suffered torturously as a consequence of their outspokenness on behalf of the many others who were silenced. A Jewish scholar once said, "during the Nazi years, Protestants uttered barely a word of protest against the treatment of the Jews, with the sole exception of Dietrich Bonhoeffer."⁸⁷

4. Life in Prison

With several family members and friends involved in the Abwehr-led Putsch, the Bonhoeffer family knew the risks they faced and awaited the worst. A conspirator in late 1942 had been interrogated over currency irregularities (the price of smuggling German Jews under Operation 7 to Switzerland), and Munich's Abwehr department was being closely scrutinized. Because Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hans von Dohnanyi's names were traced to Operation 7, despite a lack of precise information, they both expected to be arrested.⁸⁸ On 5 April 1943, Dietrich telephoned his parents' home from the Dohnanyis'. When an unknown male voice answered the phone, Dietrich cleaned his desk of traces of incriminating evidence and waited for the Gestapo to arrive. He and Dohnanyi were

⁸⁵ Bonhoeffer was connected to White Rose by Dr. Falk Harnack, who was a member of the socialists'/communists' Schulze-Boysen-Harnack resistance cell. Rasmussen, 174 n.

⁸⁶ Roberts, 108.

⁸⁷ Quoted by Boston's Stephen A. Wise in an article by Marilyn Henry for the Jerusalem Post, "Who, Exactly, Is a Righteous Gentile?" <<http://christianactionforisrael.org/isreport/righteous.html>>

⁸⁸ Being engaged and imprisoned, "during this period Dietrich made his will." Wind, 152-153.

arrested and taken to Tegel, the Wehrmacht interrogation prison. Especially after the failed assassination attempt in March 1943, when explosives detonated without sufficient force to fatally wound Hitler, the Bonhoeffer family was watchful of investigation-proceedings and expected the mass arrests in the Abwehr.

Books containing messages about fellow conspirators during trials were strategically smuggled into prison by his fiancée, Maria von Wedemeyer. However, between periods of difficult interrogation throughout his years in prison, Bonhoeffer also took time to read books of personal interest. These were largely related to the Bible or to theology and philosophy, but included requests for books that were outside of the Christian scope. Bonhoeffer did not neglect his studies of the Bible and still focused on theological reflection and writing during his prison years. Eberhard Bethge, who received Bonhoeffer's letters that specified his book-preferences, compiled a bibliography of his prison reading-material in "Über die Restbibliothek Dietrich Bonhoeffers." This list includes J. Wellhausen's *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte 3*, Kardinal Faulhaber's *Judentum Christentum Germanentum*, and thirty books related specifically to the Old Testament, which were not desirable of a person imprisoned by the Nazis, considering the charged anti-Semitic times in which Bonhoeffer was struggling to survive. He did not restrict himself from contemplating issues of scriptural truth, despite potential risk he could attract from scrutiny of the enemy.

Bonhoeffer had written on the cost of discipleship in 1937, but in the time following, he developed a political interpretation of discipleship that would demand even the life of a Christian for his or her Lord, who vicariously suffered with grace to reconcile even Jews and Gentiles. Bonhoeffer believed, contrary to evangelization and Crusades to

convert Jews in centuries past, the gospel of Jesus the Messiah embraces Jews who share the same Word with Christians. In his chapter on “The Church and The World,” Bonhoeffer criticized the church and sides with those outside of the Christian faith. He writes: “It was very necessary to protest against that bourgeois self-satisfaction which, by a convenient reversal of the gospel, considered being good simply as a preliminary to being Christian and which supposed that the ascent from being good to being Christian could be accomplished more or less without a break.”⁸⁹ Bonhoeffer did not base his decision of what was “good” on society’s preconceptions. Instead, like his Jewish contemporaries, Bonhoeffer’s standard of “goodness” derived from the biblical command to love God and his creation; he was not interested in socially derived labels and religion. Although his motives in joining the conspiracy needed to be kept confidential, Bonhoeffer’s standards for his actions were consistent with the biblical illumination in the Jewish Talmud, which says: “Is there then a righteous man who is good and a righteous man who is not good? But he who is good to Heaven and good to man, he is a righteous man who is good: good to Heaven but not good to man, that is a righteous man who is not good.”⁹⁰ From prison, Bonhoeffer wrote: “Our church, which has been fighting in these years only for its self-preservation, as though that were an end in itself, is incapable of taking the word of reconciliation and redemption to mankind and the world. Our earlier words are therefore bound to lose their force and cease, and our being Christians today will be limited to two things: prayer and righteous action among men.”⁹¹ Thus, a Dutch comrade, Visser’t Hooft, could remark after Bonhoeffer’s death on his “complete altruism”—notably in contrast to the English politicians among whom “the

⁸⁹ *Ethics*, 64.

⁹⁰ Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 40a (on Isaiah 3:10).

⁹¹ *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 300.

German resistance movement was not taken seriously” in July 1944 and in 1942 (when Visser’t Hooft had transmitted a memorandum co-drafted with Bonhoeffer to appeal for British support of the German resistance against Hitler). Visser’t Hooft recalls of Bonhoeffer’s “large-heartedness” in confession and in mission:

He made an important contribution to reconciliation in the years after the war...Personally I am convinced that no break occurred in his faith and in his thinking...He always preached a “cosmic” gospel, in the true sense. In his *Ethics*, written during his last years, he quotes the first chapter of the letter to the Colossians more than any other biblical passage...in the letter written in August 1944 he says, briefly and clearly: “everything depends on the words ‘in Christ’.” Therefore he had not stopped thinking in a radically Christocentric way. He only perceived still more clearly that Christ wants to break out of the systems, traditions, and institutions in which men have tried to enclose him. The point is not that a sort of “extraterritorial” church exists, side by side with the world. The point is that men and women, whether they have religious needs or not, “let themselves be drawn into the way of Jesus Christ, into the Messianic Event.”⁹²

In such a sense, Bonhoeffer lived and died to proclaim into full reality the way of the Messiah—not a stringent one that religiously categorizes people, but rather, the way that leads to love. Near the end of his life in prison, Bonhoeffer continued to inclusively harmonize the faiths of both Old and New Testaments in writing about Jesus:

He is not establishing a new table of absolute values...The decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount are not, therefore, two different ethical ideals, but one single call to concrete obedience towards the God and Father of Jesus Christ...there is the one and only word of God, which demands faith and obedience, and which is addressed to all mankind....The Church summons individuals and peoples to faith and obedience towards the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and in so doing she defines an area within which this faith and this obedience are at least not rendered impossible. This area is delimited by the ten commandments. Wherever there is no sign of transgression of the ten commandments, there, at least, there is no offence or scandal to prevent belief. The Church cannot indeed proclaim a concrete earthly order which follows as a necessary consequence from faith in Jesus Christ, but she can and must oppose every

⁹² Introduction by W. A. Visser’t Hooft, in *The Steps of Bonhoeffer*, ed. J. Martin Bailey and Douglas Gilbert (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969), 10.

concrete order which constitutes an offence to faith in Jesus Christ, and in doing this she defines, at least negatively, the limits for an order within which faith in Jesus Christ and obedience are possible. In their most general form these limits are given in the decalogue; and *in concreto* they will have to be defined ever anew....the law of the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is the law of all earthly institutions.⁹³

In stating the limitation of the Christian Church, which is in submission (against any “offence or scandal”) to the same “God and Father of Jesus Christ” whom the Jews recognized as Author of their Decalogue, Bonhoeffer pointed the faith of fellow Germans away from political or religious trappings and toward a common righteousness in God, who is the basis of all and is open to all.

This appreciation of life as a rootedness ‘in the world’ was found not only in Christ but also in the Jewish worldview—more than in German Lutheranism,⁹⁴ with which Bonhoeffer formally identified less and less. That everything sprang unequivocally from a peaceful theology for Bonhoeffer is evident by the manner in which he both endured and died at the hands of his oppressors— “certain” and “submissive” to God.⁹⁵ A year after being imprisoned at Tegel, Bonhoeffer wrote to Maria von Wedemeyer: “God is forever upsetting our plans, but only in order to fulfil his own, better plans through us.”⁹⁶ These words were in keeping with Bonhoeffer’s (creation) theology of life, which “must be a ‘yes’ to God’s earth” and requires “the faith that

⁹³ *Ethics*, 354-355, 357.

⁹⁴ The Darmstadt Word of the Council of Brethren of the Evangelical Church in Germany on the Political Path of our People is a stark contrast to Masada, a symbol of the Jewish people’s fight against Roman rule for a self-determined order of peace. This declaration of the Confessing Church (8 August 1947) recognized: “The word of reconciliation of the world with God in Christ has been addressed to us....We betrayed Christian freedom, which allows and, indeed, demands that we alter social patterns whenever such change is required by the life of the human community. We denied the right to revolution, but tolerated and even approved of the development towards absolute dictatorship....By thus setting up a political, social and ideological front we falsified God’s free offer of grace to all and left the world to fend for itself....” Protestant Student Parish of Berlin Technical University, 50 (Appendix).

⁹⁵ Testimony of the doctor at Flossenburg, the last person to interact with Bonhoeffer before he was hung. Robertson, *Shame and the Sacrifice*, 277.

⁹⁶ Letter dated 16 April 1944. *Love Letters*, 186.

endures *in* the world and loves and remains true to that world in spite of all the hardships it brings.”⁹⁷ His type of intellectualism came through a reflection that leads, he confessed, not toward “disintegration and relativism, but has entered into one’s whole attitude to life and not weakened, but strengthened, the impulses of life.”⁹⁸ However, Bonhoeffer’s thought remained wholly Christian, even as he increasingly identified with ‘the world’. Life and all it entails (including its preservation) had become a primary theme in his prison correspondence especially when he resumed writing to Confessing Christians, and Bonhoeffer was willing to take this creation theme to its limit. Back in April 1942, during a meeting of the Christian anti-Nazi resistance in Norway, both Bethge and von Moltke’s biographers agree that a friendship did not occur between Bonhoeffer and Helmuth von Moltke because of their disagreement on “whether it was wise and consistent with *Christian principles* to work for the assassination of Hitler...For, only Bonhoeffer, on Christian grounds, was “committed to the use of violence if necessary.”⁹⁹ Bonhoeffer believed in this necessity of considering struggle toward the preservation of life when, as already mentioned, most other Lutherans were constrained by a more conservative ethic as well as by a narrow, redemption-driven definition of ‘life’ and its earthly value.

In the overcoming of shame through restoration of fellowship, Bonhoeffer did not stop linking life with joy. Bethge rightly attributes, in a discussion on the years immediately prior to imprisonment and Bonhoeffer’s reason for engaging in resistance, the desire for the *joy* set before him to somehow compensate through his own being “the shame” of his German nation—

⁹⁷ Letter dated 12 August 1943. *Love Letters*, 48.

⁹⁸ Letter from Tegel, dated 1 March 1944. *Letters & Papers from Prison*, 224.

⁹⁹ Gordon, 124-125.

shame which, when it knows that it is seen, is reminded of something that it lacks, namely, the lost wholeness of life....Only when life is born, when the work is perfected, is the secret broken through by jubilant open joy....Shame is overcome only in the shaming through the forgiveness of sin, that is to say, through the restoration of fellowship with God and men.¹⁰⁰

Like the joy discovered at the end of the birth of new life, so Bonhoeffer sought to bring his life's work to perfection. In the same vein, Bonhoeffer wrote about living for the next generation to follow with references to baptism and the life of his godson, Eberhard Bethge's child, in *Love Letters from Cell 92* to Bonhoeffer's fiancée, Maria von Wedemeyer. The joy of "wholeness of life" sustained Bonhoeffer in his suffering, although he ultimately credited Christ. Not surprisingly, Bonhoeffer was a contrast and inspiration to the inmates around him.¹⁰¹ In a personal note from Tegel Prison, Bonhoeffer wrote of joy in God that relates to restored fellowship in God:

Stifter once put it very beautifully: 'Pain is the holiest angel, who reveals treasures that would otherwise have remained hidden in the depths for ever. People have become greater through it than through all the world's joys.' It is so, as I keep telling myself in my present predicament: the pain of deprivation, which is often physically perceptible, must exist, and we should not and need not argue it away. But it has to be overcome anew every time, so there is an even holier angel than pain, and that is joy in God.¹⁰²

Joie de vivre and restoration of life-giving fellowship with one's neighbour provided a glimpse of the hope by which Bonhoeffer endured imprisonment. In this, Bonhoeffer and

¹⁰⁰ *Ethics*, 24, 27.

¹⁰¹ Even though Admiral Canaris confided "It's hell in here," upon Bonhoeffer's doomed arrival to the underground cells at State Security Headquarters in Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse, fellow detainee (Fabian von Schlabrendorff) recalled: "He was always cheerful, always consistently friendly and obliging, with the result that—to my surprise—it did not take him long to psychologically captivate the guards, who were far from all brimming with the milk of human kindness. It was typical of our own relationship that he always tended to be the optimist, whereas I suffered from bouts of depression. It was always he who gave us encouragement and hope, and who never tired of repeating that no battle is lost until it has been given up for lost. He passed me countless slips of paper bearing words of consolation and good cheer taken from the Bible and written in his own hand." Excerpt from "Historical Notes." *Love Letters*, 226.

¹⁰² Letter dated 21 Nov. 1943. *Love Letters*, 96.

defendants of Judaism and the Jewish community, such as Edith Stein, shared much in common.¹⁰³

Bonhoeffer's hope of ever experiencing freedom outside prison walls was dashed when, on 5 October 1944, the Gestapo Commissar was handed secret papers that were found in a safe of the Abwehr branch at Zossen. The 'Zossen files' included information about Dietrich Bonhoeffer's involvement in the conspiracy as well as Hans von Dohnanyi's memorandum to generals regarding the attempted coup d'état. A wave of "intensified" interrogations and new arrests followed, so that Dietrich abandoned his plan to escape prison (so as not to further endanger his brother, who was arrested after Dietrich's uncle, Paul von Hase, had been executed), and Dohnanyi had the request smuggled to his wife for a lethal vial of dysentery bacteria.¹⁰⁴ While his comrades sank into despair or unsuccessfully attempted suicide, Dietrich was transported with other V.I.P. prisoners from Tegel to remote places of painful 'interrogation' for another half-year. His brother Klaus and brothers-in-law Rüdiger Schleicher and Hans von Dohnanyi were 'liquidated' during this time by Hitler's command.

Bonhoeffer was transferred to the notorious basement of the Gestapo headquarters on Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse, then to the bunker of Buchenwald camp (where he knew Paul Schneider, second martyr of the Confessing Church, was beaten to death),¹⁰⁵ and finally,

¹⁰³ Even after becoming a nun, Stein wrote a memoir about growing up Jewish in a traditional Jewish home.

¹⁰⁴ Hans von Dohnanyi wrote his wife: "They have everything, absolutely everything, against me, and in my own hand." Wind, 172-3.

¹⁰⁵ Schneider, who died at this Gestapo-run concentration camp on 19 July 1939, has been mistakenly noted by Christians and by Edwin Robertson (in his Prologue to *My Soul Finds Rest*) as the "first martyr" of the Confessing Church. On the earliest martyrdom (February 1937), Renate Wind writes of the legal advisor to the emergency church government of the Confessing Church, Friedrich Weissler: "As a 'full Jew' he was immediately separated from the two [Ernst Tillich and Werner Koch, pupils of Bonhoeffer] and sent to the notorious Sachsenhausen bunker. Anyone who ended up there had little chance of remaining alive. For six days Weissler was exposed to the sadism of the S.S. thugs and he finally died under the boots of Blockführer Zeidler." Wind, 120.

with secrecy to Flossenburg camp. Hitler had ordered without trial the execution of anyone possibly connected to the conspiracy. Consequently, on 9 April 1945, after conducting a church service at the concentration camp, Bonhoeffer was called and hung at the gallows—just days prior to the prisoners’ liberation by Allied victors. The doctor at Flossenburg, who attended to and watched Bonhoeffer until death, remarked about his final hour:

I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer, before taking off his prison garb, kneeling on the floor praying fervently to God. I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.¹⁰⁶

Bonhoeffer’s naked corpse was never recovered, and until an English memorial led by Bishop Bell and by Hildebrandt was widely broadcasted months later, Bonhoeffer’s fiancée and family did not know that he had died.

While being “entirely submissive to the will of God,” Bonhoeffer did not cease to relay words of undying faith and solidarity. After the Allied liberation, British prisoner-of-war Payne Best delivered to Bishop Bell in England the message from Bonhoeffer: “This is the end, for me the beginning of life. I believe in universal Christian brotherhood which rises above national interests and I believe that our victory is certain.”¹⁰⁷ Even in the final hour, Bonhoeffer declared his hope in Christ against injustice and prejudice.

¹⁰⁶ Robertson, *Shame and the Sacrifice*, 277. This account written ten years after Bonhoeffer’s death is the only eye-witness record.

¹⁰⁷ Wind, 180.

CONCLUSION

By the end of his life, Bonhoeffer's convictions evolved until he saw no distinction in value between the lives of Jews and the lives of Christians. He valued the religious inheritance of Jews and listened to their voice as well as to their teaching. This was evident when Bonhoeffer was only twenty years old and he immersed himself in Hebrew biblical studies. He also sought Jewish teaching in New York, where Bonhoeffer attended Rabbi Wise's sermons. His appreciation of the Jews' language and heritage helped him to identify with them and recognize their plight. At the introduction of the Aryan Clause and particularly after visiting and seeing the desecration of synagogues during Kristallnacht, Bonhoeffer spoke up for the Jews and quickly decried Hitler's anti-Semitic plans.

An examination of Bonhoeffer's whole theological corpus from beginning to end reveals that "no break occurred in his faith" with Bonhoeffer's transition from church-based to Abwehr-based activism. As Dutch comrade Visser't Hooft stated, Bonhoeffer retained a Christian motivation and "large heartedness" even through the so-called "secular phase" at the end of his life. His rich theological legacy extends from his years of state-resistance within the Confessing Church and within the political conspiracy. He developed a radical Christology (Christ's formation in us by existing *for* and *with* the 'other') in the contexts of the German Church, Barcelona, America, and the conspiratorial circle that ended with imprisonment and death. Both in the church and in the Abwehr, this peace-loving martyr spent his freedom for the Jews out of obedience to the Lord of the world, who accepted humiliation to the point of death on a cross and identified wholly with creation.

Bonhoeffer saw both in the unity of the Scriptures (the Old and the New Testaments) and in the peace of Christ's gospel hopes for Germany's restoration and for a reconciled community of Christians and Jews. Because of his underlying beliefs in Christ's command to concretize neighbour-love and in the Jewish nation as the noble bearer of divine revelation, Bonhoeffer theologized that Jews should be embraced on equal ground with Christians—as “brothers” and as “children of the covenant.” In contrast to fellow Germans (who demonized supposed racial or cultural traits of Jews), Bonhoeffer called into question their definitions of “good” and of what was approved by the status quo. Instead, he recognized adherers of Judaism to be loved by God and constitutive of “church” in a spiritual sense. He declared that they ought to be neither overlooked nor mistreated as inferiors by Christendom, despite the historical guilt and wrong notions that earthly institutions had wrought. In validating Jews and Judaism, Bonhoeffer moved toward concern for the security of Jews in general and risked his life to save both baptised and unbaptised Jews through Operation 7. The conspiracy phase of his life demonstrates a profound and unconditional identification with Jews, regardless of the labels that they carried.

Bonhoeffer uniquely reacted to his own church's failure to address the pressing issue of church-synagogue and state-Jewish relations and criticized German Christians' unwillingness to theologize in an inclusive way. He eventually found a path of anti-Nazi resistance in the *Abwehr*—not out of spiritual abandonment of the Confessing Church, but due to circumstances that left him no better recourse for the Jewish struggle. Bonhoeffer's open and unprecedented theology (and not any sort of renunciation of former ecclesiastical connections) led to the growing distance between himself and his

beloved and “persecuted” Church, for which he had fought valiantly. Bonhoeffer chose to align himself with friends of Jews who rose to their defence, and he did not seek to be understood so much as to understand the differentiated world in which he lived.

Bonhoeffer had studied Hans von Dohnanyi’s path in the resistance and knowingly allowed his life to be altered forever in choosing to save Jewish ‘brothers’ from Hitler’s machination. In the Abwehr, Bonhoeffer had to maintain a life of secrecy and often of seclusion; his past friendships were replaced with the exclusive company of fellow conspirers (whom he lost to death with their executions); he was not able to marry and sacrificed the quiet home of his dreams in order to move (as was required) from place to place. Then, at the age of thirty-nine his own life ended anonymously in a concentration camp. The insights he gained into issues of power during his school years and the risks that he assumed during the Church Struggle in Germany may have prepared him to some degree for the deprivations and the limitations on his freedoms in the years following. However, none could have conceived that someone so privileged and promising as he would have his life ended without so much as a proper grave.

Bonhoeffer made choices and chose relationships or alliances that marked him apart from his culture from a young age. He simply traveled a path toward martyrdom by accepting his Christian calling, which is mentioned in his *Cost of Discipleship* and is actualized with his radical interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount (“Blessed are the persecuted”). Bonhoeffer not only preached but also lived a life of identification with “the weak things” of the world.

His time in America was critical to the faithful progression toward increased activism. There, he first encountered the “true” gospel preached among the poor, and

“phraseology” was transformed to “reality” when he witnessed the social and political embodiment of Christianity in the black churches. Henceforth, Bonhoeffer became a living example of the Social Gospel. He studied and appreciated the ensuing struggle for freedom that resulted from racial oppression as evidenced by his interests in the plights of black Americans and of Gandhi’s India. Bonhoeffer became painfully aware of the “problems of German emigration” as roadblocks were erected to prevent the livelihood and the escape of Jews; thus, beginning in 1933 he notified Rabbi Wise of Hitler’s schemes in order that political pressure might issue from the American people against Nazi oppression. Bonhoeffer learned from the brave struggles of blacks and of Indians, so that he was the first to speak (and continuously spoke up) for persecuted Jews who were unable to fight themselves. Bonhoeffer’s American trip marks his simultaneous development into a Christian activist and a so-called ‘traitor’ to his own country.

Bonhoeffer entered his adult years with influence and stature, yet he learned to identify with the powerlessness of the Jews by contemplating the life of Christ. “Racism was not in his character” despite his sheltered aristocratic background, but Bonhoeffer gleaned insights into the problem of power or of the dominating ego as he studied the Bible for his theological program and for his ministry. He wrote on these themes in *Act and Being* and in *Ethics* and also spoke publicly (from the *Voxhaus*) against the crux of the problem of power when Hitler was inaugurated Chancellor of Germany. This protest of the root of anti-Semitism was the basis on which he stood in solidarity with Jewish ministers like Franz Hildebrand, and before going into exile with him, Bonhoeffer wrote about state-defiance or “putting a spoke in the wheel” as the proper response to the Nazis’ enactment of the Aryan Clause. Then, with the influences of Professor Seeberg’s

essential “category of the social” combined together with pacifism and with the black or social gospel, Bonhoeffer saw that responsible action demands “at the very least” speaking out for people with no voice and should culminate in acts of personal sacrifice. Bonhoeffer demonstrated this selflessness in his work among Jewish refugees in London and in New York and among German Jews saved through ‘Operation 7’. He opposed the state church in Germany and decried the Nazi agenda of war in ecumenical circles, yet he did not fail to also criticize his own Confessing comrades for their sins of omission; Bonhoeffer refused to sign the Bethel declaration because it did not speak against the state for disempowered Jews. As Bonhoeffer lost faith that the church resistance could be a vehicle for social change in Germany, he exposed the power-mongering of Hitler’s regime when Bonhoeffer became an informant to Rabbi Wise and to Bishop Bell of Nazi atrocities in 1933 and in the years following. Bonhoeffer related the situation of black Americans to that of European Jewry in a timely way; he sensed what was needed “to end a rule by criminals” and began research and counter-espionage activity for the Abwehr-led Putsch.

Bonhoeffer’s concern for baptized Jews in Germany grew into a more universal concern for all Jews everywhere as he harmonized the biblical faith-basis of Christians and of Jews. In both he recognized the Spirit’s presence by the promises of God in Scripture and by the common righteousness understood through a shared ethical ideal of selfless God- or other-orientedness, which can be found in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Decalogue (Ten Commandments). Therefore, Bonhoeffer saw the church as seen in the Old and New Testaments to be a spiritual entity, based on mutual ethical relationships as well as the unifying work of the Spirit. The creation theme also became

incorporated as a part of Bonhoeffer's evolving Christology that focused on commonalities between the gospels and Jewish thought: respect and justice toward life in obedience to Christ (God is *for* others); values of humility and of the "real" over the "metaphysical," since Christ participates in the world; also, preservation of order and of peace "between twos and threes" according to God's original design (which Christ reconciles or restores). In recovering the concept of the centrality of the community of God in the Hebrew Bible, Bonhoeffer began to meditate on "religionless Christianity" (which he also saw as the "form" of Christ) in an increasingly godless world.

Bonhoeffer's reflections led him to a theological acceptance of his role in the conspiracy; he saw himself as selflessly bearing God's love for life in preparing the fullness or perfection of human creation. He summarized these reflections during the time of the Finkenwalde experiment by saying in *Life Together* that spiritual love "serves" an enemy "as a brother" and originates "in Christ and in his Word." This goal of *filioque* or brotherly fellowship was an impetus for Bonhoeffer's joining the Jewish fight both before and after his conspiracy phase.

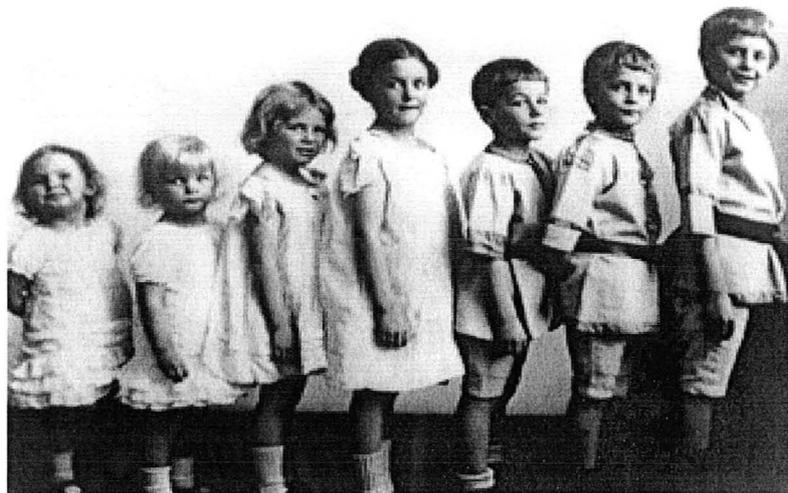
Ultimately, Bonhoeffer's progressive movement toward relating theological and political concerns emerged from a peace-theme that he read into the Sermon on the Mount and from the love of Christ that he recognized expressly for the Jews. Divine truth is not on the side of the powerful in their erection of humanly built dreams; rather, God resides in the community of the Spirit and desires "the order of outward justice" that guarantees sanctity of life—as do Christ and the Torah. In light of the sins of his guilty nation, Bonhoeffer defended a common humanity under the lordship of "the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob," who is "Lord of both Church and government."

Since God's heart is for the world and "the Spirit binds the church to Israel and to the Old Testament," Bonhoeffer increasingly focused on the plight of the Jews until his politics and theology became virtually inseparable. Social justice and the formation of 'real' — not just an inward — grace was the essence of Bonhoeffer's faith, seen in his actions and his relations with Jews.

A countercultural theology or understanding of both the church and its mission made Bonhoeffer unique among his *Volk*. He went beyond empathy, and from Christ's example and from Jewish teaching, came to view the Jews as true comrades. He identified with them in fellowship, in their Word and their language, in their moral life, in their experience of suffering and oppression, in their defensive as well as 'real' or 'worldly' ethics, and in their politics (with Bonhoeffer's involvement with Riegner of the World Congress of Jews and with Rabbi Wise of the American Jewish Congress). Bonhoeffer's interpretations of Scripture reveal a Christian church that "depends upon its being for the Jews," and his deeds demonstrated the uniqueness of his radical Christology and his views. He worked for the defeat of his nation as a demonstration of the "acceptance of *all* human flesh by the gracious God," and he did this peacefully — with "generousness of heart" and spirit. Bonhoeffer was a German who lived and died in fulfillment of the Christian command to love one's neighbour, the Jew. Until the end of his life, he did not hesitate to speak up and to fight for his Jewish "brothers" out of obedience to his Jewish Lord.

APPENDIX

Figure 1 - *Seven of Eight children in the Bonhoeffer Family*



Left to right: Sabine, Dietrich, Christine, Ursula, Klaus, Walter, Karl-Friedrich

Reprinted from the photo collection of the International Dietrich Bonhoeffer Society
<<http://www.dbonhoeffer.org/node/3>>

Figure 2 – *The Young Dietrich Bonhoeffer*



Reprinted from the website of Journey Films for Martin Doblmeier's film, "Bonhoeffer"
<<http://www.bonhoeffer.com>>

Figure 3 – *Dietrich Bonhoeffer at Tegel Prison (1944)*



Reprinted from the photo collection of the International Dietrich Bonhoeffer Society
<<http://www.dbonhoeffer.org/node/3>>

Figure 4 – *Former Gestapo Headquarters / Interrogation Site on Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse*

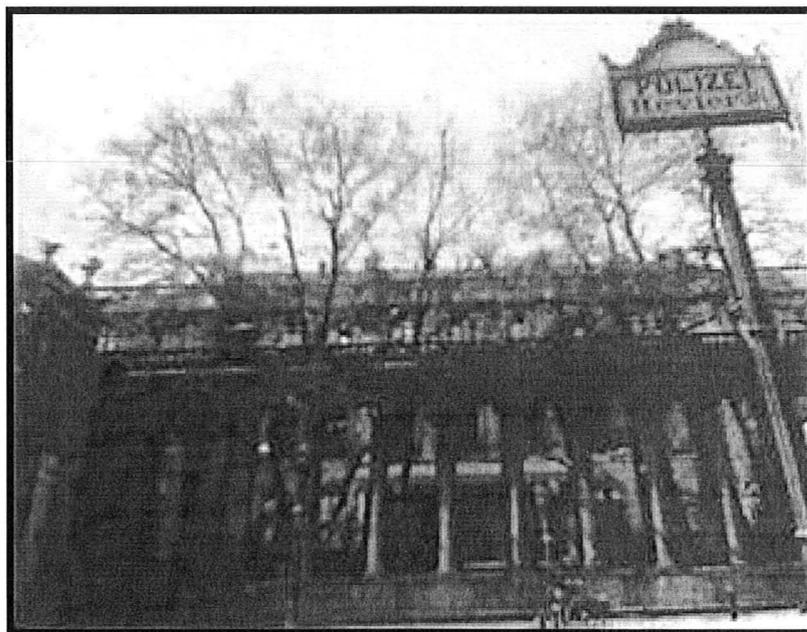


Photo courtesy of PreuBischer Kulturbesitz (Topographie des Terrors Open-Air Exhibit)

Figure 5 – *Plaque Commemorating Church-Resistance in front of Gestapo Headquarters*

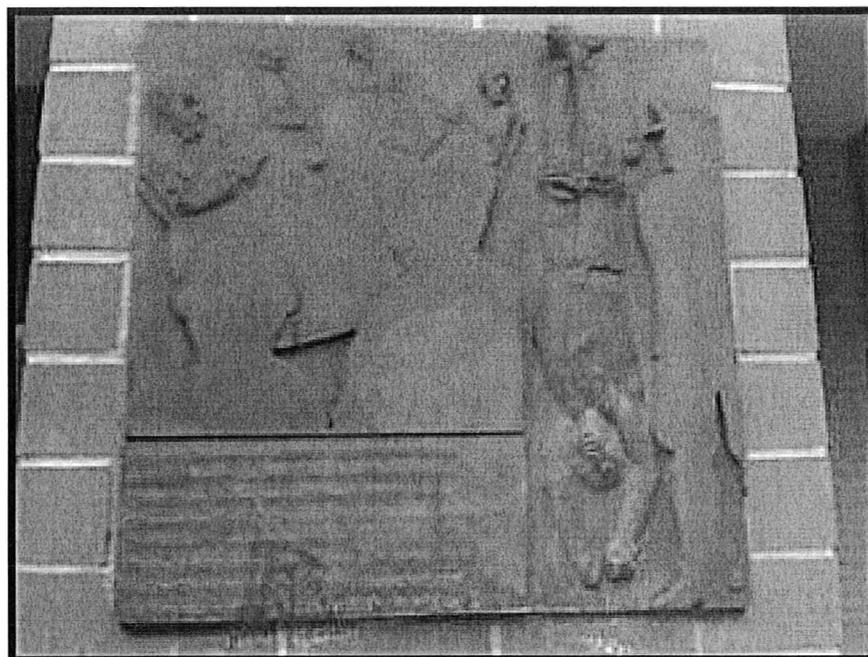


Figure 6 – *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Memorialized in Absentia at the Family Grave*



Photography by the author (Berlin 2005)

Figure 7 – Author outside Bonhoeffer's Interrogation Site at War Imperial Court



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