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DISCIPLESHIP IN A WORLD COME OF AGE: "REPRESENTATION"
IN THE THEOLOGY OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

by



DUANE EUGENE HIX, M.A.

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The dominant thesis in this study of the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is that his conception of discipleship, i. e. "representation", provides the proper basis for the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts. The first chapter of the study explicates Bonhoeffer's answer to his question "Who is Christ?". The second then interprets, through the vehicle of the forms of Christ, Bonhoeffer's analysis of the world come of age. These two chapters prepare for the third, which specifically details what Bonhoeffer means by "representation" and then relates "representation" to the biblical concepts of the Word and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. By comprehending these biblical concepts in light of "representation", the study shows that Bonhoeffer's earlier writings, e. g. the lectures on christology, The Cost of Discipleship, and the Ethics, provide an interpretative key to his enigmatic hypotheses about non-religious Christianity which are found in his Letters and Papers from Prison.

This present study of Bonhoeffer's theology furthers the corpus of research on his writings by providing a more complete explanation of the relationship between discipleship and non-religious interpretation than has hitherto been offered. Previous commentators have noted the relationship, and have offered preliminary examinations, but this present study both demonstrates the connection of

the rest of Bonhoeffer's thought to "representation" and also offers specific examples of biblical concepts interpreted non-religiously on the basis of "representation".

The implications of Bonhoeffer's non-religious interpretation on the basis of "representation" are profound and far-ranging, especially in regard to the structure and theology of ecclesiastical relationships, for example, between pastor and parishioner or between church and state. The place of the church in the community would be determined not by desire for a privileged status or even a separate domain, but by a sacrificial discipleship which would advocate the redistribution of church wealth into the hands of the poor. Underlying this very visible change in the church structure would be a theological interpretation of creeds and doctrines which is dominated by the necessity to unite word and deed, which seeks to understand doctrine not as a series of propositions requiring intellectual consent but as a statement of faith that includes a call to discipleship. On the other hand, a church community dominated by Bonhoeffer's non-religious interpretation based on "representation" would not advocate redistribution of its wealth, etc., because of any attempt to construct an earthly kingdom of God, but would instead simply attempt to allow itself to be conformed by Christ into His forms of the Incarnate One, Crucified One, and Resurrected One.

By his willingness to allow himself to be conformed to Christ, the Christian will discover that Christ is revealing Himself to man come of age as a hidden, suffering, Lord, and the Christian

will learn not to despair at the apparent absence of God in the world
come of age. Bonhoeffer's interpretation of biblical concepts on the
basis of "representation" will therefore have two primary implica-
tions: it will reveal to the modern Christian the presence of Christ
in the world and it will direct that Christian toward a conformation
with Christ the Crucified One.

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It is appropriate that I acknowledge the aid and support given to me in the writing of this dissertation. Dr. Gérard Valleé, my advisor, has been an invaluable source of constructive criticism. His patient and prompt scrutiny of the drafts of this study has enabled me to draw an amplified idea out of what was originally only an undeveloped insight. He also has headed my advisory committee, which has included Dr. James Lawson, Dr. Paul Dekar, and Dr. G. P. Grant, who were of assistance in the development of this study.

Dr. Eberhard Bethge generously set aside time during a visit to North America to discuss the thesis of this study when it was in the early stages of formation, and his suggestions and encouragement on that day proved very helpful, as have his numerous writings. I also am indebted to the International Bonhoeffer Society for Archive and Research for its aid in locating certain writings referred to herein.

I also extend my appreciation to my typist and to my many friends and fellow-students, both at McMaster and in Princeton, New Jersey, where I finished this writing.

Above all, I express my deep gratitude to my wife Medora, whose typing and proofreading abilities allowed me to concentrate solely on the writing of the text. Those abilities, however, are

secondary to her own interest in Bonhoeffer and her frequent questions about aspects of his theology, which have led me to think even more deeply about that theology and its relationship to my own understanding of the forms of Christ in the world.

ABBREVIATIONS

Subsequent to their first reference in the body of this study, the following primary sources and major secondary sources will be referred to by their corresponding abbreviations. See bibliography for complete references.

<u>Act and Being</u>	<u>A. B.</u>
<u>Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age</u> , ed. P. Vorkink	<u>B. W. C. A.</u>
<u>Christ the Center</u>	<u>C. C.</u>
<u>The Cost of Discipleship</u>	<u>C. D.</u>
<u>Creation and Fall/Temptation</u>	<u>C. F. / T.</u>
<u>Dietrich Bonhoeffer</u> , E. Bethge (German)	<u>D. B.</u>
<u>Dietrich Bonhoeffer</u> , E. Bethge (English)	<u>D. B. E.</u>
<u>Ethics</u>	<u>E.</u>
<u>Gesammelte Schriften</u> , I-VI	<u>G. S., I-VI.</u>
<u>Letters and Papers from Prison</u>	<u>L. P. P.</u>
<u>Life Together</u>	<u>L. T.</u>
<u>No Rusty Swords</u>	<u>N. R. S.</u>
<u>Sanctorum Communio</u>	<u>S. C.</u>
<u>True Patriotism</u>	<u>T. P.</u>
<u>The Way to Freedom</u>	<u>W. F.</u>
<u>World Come of Age</u> , ed. R. G. Smith	<u>W. C. A.</u>

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the thesis it seeks to prove is that discipleship, understood as "representation",¹ is the key to the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts and to a non-religious life in the world come of age. To understand this thesis requires knowing that for Bonhoeffer Christ is a hidden, suffering Christ, the Christ of the theology of the cross, who is the ground and highest example of "representation". An understanding of this thesis also requires knowing that for Bonhoeffer the world come of age² reveals Christ as a hidden, suffering representative because it dissolves religious, triumphalist conceptions of Him.

¹ John Godsey explains that translators render "Stellvertretung" variously throughout Bonhoeffer's writings. See John D. Godsey, "Reading Bonhoeffer in English Translation: Some Difficulties", in Peter Vorkink II, ed., Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), pp. 122-123. This present study chooses "representation" as the English word that best conveys the German "Stellvertretung". It should be construed fully in the sense of "to stand in the place of" another, to undergo exactly what the replaced person would have undergone. In order that the reader may recall this specific extended meaning of the word, "representation" will be always written within quotation marks. A precedent is set for such a translation by David Lewis, who translates Dorothee Sölle's Stellvertretung: Ein Kapitel Theologie nach dem "Tode Gottes" (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1965), as Christ the Representative: An Essay in Theology after the "Death of God" (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1967).

²"World come of age" is the most suitable translation for Bonhoeffer's own German phrase "Die mündige Welt". An extended definition of "mündig" is to be found in chapter two.

Three parts of this study are thus indicated: One chapter will answer the question: Who, according to Bonhoeffer, is the Christ that is revealing Himself to man? The second will answer the question: What, according to Bonhoeffer, is the nature of this new age, which has altered the way this Christ reveals Himself? And the third will answer this last question: In what new way is this Christ revealing Himself in this new age?

Regarding the first question, the first chapter will demonstrate that Bonhoeffer's christocentrism reaches its highest expression in a theology of the cross. In conjunction with this it will demonstrate that for Bonhoeffer Christ is not a static idea but a living Lord who reveals Himself differently in forms appropriate to different circumstances. It will emphasize how thoroughly Bonhoeffer's christology is in sympathy with the Chalcedonian definition of Christ and how his allegiance to that definition leads him to develop the theology of the cross, which enables him to see that God in Christ suffers and is hidden to mankind, even in His revelation.

To answer the second question, the second chapter of the study will explain Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the world coming of age on the basis of his conception of the different forms assumed by Christ in His concrete revelation. It will be argued that the world's coming of age is a providential act of God in Christ whereby Christ encounters humanity and helps it to accept Him in the timely form of the Hidden and Suffering One. It will be shown that Bonhoeffer foresees the direction in which this providential act is leading Christianity. Then it will be demonstrated how he develops his own theology

of the cross analogously. Ultimately he is able thereby to interpret the world come of age as one aspect of the continuing formation of Christ in the world.

Both of the previous two chapters of the study point toward the third, which will argue that when Bonhoeffer attempted to formulate a "non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts" he intended "representation" to be the center of that interpretation. To prove that point, the study will demonstrate how "representation" is inseparable from the Christ of the theology of the cross who demands that new non-religious interpretation. Then it will demonstrate that "representation", as non-religious interpretation, returns credibility to the church in the eyes of a mature, critical world. That renewed credibility of the church, for Bonhoeffer, helps prepare the way for the coming of the Word of God.

This thesis adds to the corpus of research on Bonhoeffer's theology a needed explanation of the relationship between discipleship and non-religious interpretation. Ernst Feil,³ Eberhard Bethge,⁴

³Ernst Feil, Die Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers (Zweite Aufl.; München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971), pp. 381-382.

⁴Eberhard Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologe, Christ, Zeitgenosse (3rd ed.; München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1970), p. 987. The 1970 edition, substantially the same as the 1967 edition, does benefit from an extended index and periodic corrections in the text, and omits previous appendices subsequently printed elsewhere. English: Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Man of Vision, Man of Courage, trans. E. Mosbacher, Peter and Betty Ross, F. Clark, W. Glen-doepel (London: Collins, 1970), p. 783. See also Eberhard Bethge, "The Editing and Publishing of the Bonhoeffer Papers", The Andover Newton Bulletin, LII, No. 2 (December, 1959), 19.

and others⁵ already conceive of non-religious interpretation as connected to discipleship, but none of them offers an explicit treatment of how the rest of Bonhoeffer's theology leads to that connection. Both Feil and Bethge reason convincingly that non-religious interpretation is more than simply an epistemological question or a question of language analysis. The present study agrees with their studies, but it further explicates the place of discipleship in such an interpretation and the way the theology of the cross leads Bonhoeffer to establish an intimate connection between "representation" and non-religious life in the world come of age.

Unless that connection is explained and accentuated, researchers into Bonhoeffer's thought will fail to see the revolu-

⁵For example, see John G. Block, Discipleship in the Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Rome: Tipografia di Patrizio Graziani, 1971). This is a published set of excerpts from his Ph. D. thesis, Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, including chapters on "The Quest for Christ" and "Costly Grace". Block contends that "costly grace" is the key to Bonhoeffer's discipleship, but fails to carry the implications of discipleship into other aspects of Bonhoeffer's thought. See also the unpublished Ph.D. thesis of Albert James Tittiger, "Christ and Discipleship: Key Concepts of the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer", (Institutio Spiritualitatis Pontificiae, 1973). Tittiger's work, which actually is centered more upon christology, likewise fails to derive any proper implications from Bonhoeffer's view of discipleship. Two writings which come close to the attempt of this present thesis are Gerhard Ebeling, "The Non-Religious Interpretation of Biblical Concepts", in his Word and Faith, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), pp. 98-161, and Geoffrey B. Kelly, "Revelation in Christ: A Study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theology of Revelation", (Ph. D. dissertation, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1972). See also Kelly's dissertation article by the same name published in Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses, L. 1. (May, 1974), 39-74. The relationship between these two well-written and thoughtful works and the present work will be analyzed in subsequent sections. Infra, pp. 200-201 and pp. 217-218.

tionary influence his work could exert on twentieth century theology. By relating discipleship to the interpretation of biblical concepts, Bonhoeffer is raising the possibility that faith -- and all theology related to it -- must be redefined on the basis of acts of "representation". If that possibility were to become reality, it would make his theology the foundation for many radical changes in theological method. He himself did not live to accomplish that project of redefining faith on the basis of "representation". Nor will the present study pretend to completion of such an extensive endeavour. It will, however, clarify certain theological principles in Bonhoeffer's thought which would have directed him in that project had he lived to undertake it. It will also provide examples of two biblical concepts non-religiously interpreted. This writing thus prepares the way for subsequent students of Bonhoeffer to use the guidelines of his theology and attempt the complete task of redefinition.

It is necessary in this introduction to address briefly the issue of continuity in Bonhoeffer's theology. If there is not at least an underlying unity of thought throughout his career, if the writings of his early academic period bear no relationship to those of the Finkenwalde period, and these in turn are divorced from the later Ethics and Letters and Papers from Prison, then the attempt of this thesis to show that Bonhoeffer's christocentrism leads him to his emphasis on discipleship is unjustifiable. Ultimate continuity in Bonhoeffer's thought is a prerequisite for this study.

Some of the earliest commentators on Bonhoeffer recognized this ultimate continuity in his thought but inappropriately inter-

preted it. They too readily limited any sense of personal development in his life and writings.⁶

This neglect of Bonhoeffer's personal development was corrected by the publication in 1967 of Eberhard Bethge's monumental biography of Bonhoeffer. This excellent volume provided commentators with an awareness of the different social, political, and psychological circumstances which accompanied Bonhoeffer's theological development. Thus, after Bethge, T. R. Peters has been able to undertake what he calls a "lebensgeschichtliche" interpretation whereby the "political-social realities" affecting Bonhoeffer's development are disclosed.⁷ And Clifford Green has shown the utility of the psychological concept of the ego in interpreting what Bonhoeffer termed his movement from "phraseology to reality".⁸ These two works exemplify the predominant tendency in current Bonhoeffer interpretation. They demonstrate the legitimate claim that theological truth can never be developed abstractly.⁹

⁶For example see Heinrich Ott, Reality and Faith: The Theological Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, trans. A. Morrison (London: Lutterworth Press, 1971), (original German edition in 1966).

⁷Tiemo Rainer Peters, Die Präsenz des Politischen in der Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1976), pp. 14-15.

⁸Clifford Green, The Sociality of Christ and Humanity: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Early Theology, 1927-1933 (Missoula, Montana: Scholar's Press, 1972), p. 148ff. For Bonhoeffer's own term see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, ed. and preface E. Bethge, trans. R. Fuller, F. Clarke, J. Bowden, et al. (3rd, enlarged ed., New York: Macmillan Co., 1972), p. 275.

⁹See Peters, p. 15.

It is the opinion of the present writer that the corrective embodied in studies such as these has prepared the field of Bonhoeffer-interpretation for a renewed look at the systematic continuity in his thought. While recognizing Bethge's biography and other historically-oriented studies as monitors against any simplistic over-extension of continuity and coherence, this present study regards Bonhoeffer's theology as more continuous and systematic than has often been done. This study will emphasize that Bonhoeffer was trained in systematic theology. It will accentuate that Bonhoeffer conceives of Christ as the Stellvertreter, the representative, both in his earliest work Sanctorum Communio and in the Letters... Bonhoeffer will be regarded here less like one who recognized an important change in his life from "phraseology to reality" and more like one who immediately complemented that admission by affirming that nonetheless, in his life, "Everything seems to have taken its natural course, and to be determined necessarily and straightforwardly by a higher providence."¹⁰

In its emphasis on the continuity of Bonhoeffer's theology, this present study agrees with the majority of commentators who believe Bonhoeffer's christology is the theme that provides such continuity.¹¹ Moreover, this study also recognizes that the con-

¹⁰L.P.P., p. 276. In this same letter Bonhoeffer himself declares that "I don't think I've ever changed very much...", and also draws a distinction between radical change and personal development.

¹¹For example, see Eberhard Bethge, "Bonhoeffer's Christology and his 'Religionless Christianity'", and "Turning Points

tinuity extends into other themes such as the analysis of religion and, in one sense, into the affirmation of worldliness. In recognizing such further continuity, the present study is in agreement with and indebted to the excellent work by Ernst Feil.¹² Feil's delineation of Bonhoeffer's early critique of religion and positive understanding of worldliness has enabled later commentators to see that the themes of the Letters . . . were proleptically displayed in Bonhoeffer's earliest sermons and addresses.

Feil's support for these extended dimensions of continuity has prompted this present study toward its more systematic examination of Bonhoeffer's thought. This form of interpretation should, however, be regarded as a complement to, and not a replacement of, historically-oriented, contextual, analyses. The affirmation of thematic unity in this study does not seek to eliminate the genuine personal development that occurred in Bonhoeffer's life and thought. That development, as well as the fundamental continuity underlying it, will be evident throughout the following chapters.

in Bonhoeffer's Life and Thought", in B.W.C.A., pp. 78-79 and pp. 47-49; and John D. Godsey, The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 264.

¹²Feil, especially Part III, pp. 223-269.

CHAPTER ONE

CHRIST AT THE CENTER OF BONHOEFFER'S THEOLOGY

By its affirmation that discipleship, as "representation", is the foundation of non-religious interpretation, this thesis is asserting that for Bonhoeffer Christ is best revealed in the world come of age through acts of "representation". But before the thesis can attempt to prove why "representation" is in fact the foundation of non-religious interpretation, and before it can attempt to prove the concomitant assertion that the world come of age has demanded that new form of interpretation, it must delineate Bonhoeffer's own conception of who Christ is, i.e. who it is that will be revealed to man in this new way in this new age. This is doubly true because in Bonhoeffer's view it is Christ Himself who, in His encounter with the world come of age, chooses to reveal Himself through non-religious categories. An explanation of this last view will be offered subsequently in the thesis. The present chapter, however, is devoted strictly to delineating Bonhoeffer's conception of who Christ is, especially as that conception pertains to the theology of the cross and the hidden, suffering God portrayed therein.

A. The Roots of Bonhoeffer's Christology in the Chalcedonian Definition

This study contends that Bonhoeffer sees Christ as the ground and highest example of "representation". But unless it can be demonstrated that he portrays Christ as the one who unites within

Himself the nature of God and the nature of man, Bonhoeffer's concept of "representation" cannot be used in the manner this thesis, and Bonhoeffer himself, wish. In his words: ". . . if Jesus Christ is not true God, how can he help us? If Christ is not true man, how could he help us?"¹ If Bonhoeffer does not conceive of Christ as both fully human and fully divine, Christ's acts of "representation" can be understood only as either purely human acts by a virtuous man or as strictly divine actions which could obviously not be conformed to by would-be disciples. Yet neither of these options is acceptable to Bonhoeffer.

That Bonhoeffer is not satisfied with a christology which interprets Christ as incomplete either in godhood or in manhood is evidenced by his allegiance to the definition of Christ offered by the council of Chalcedon. The problem faced by Bonhoeffer is precisely the same problem resolved by the ancient church in the Chalcedonian definition. By investigating Bonhoeffer's analysis of Chalcedon, found in his lectures on christology given in the summer of 1933 in Berlin,² his defense of the unity of Christ's two natures can be comprehended.

¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, True Patriotism, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden (London: Collins, 1973); p. 31.

²These lectures are reconstructed and reprinted in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gesammelte Schriften, Hg. Eberhard Bethge, Zweite Aufl. (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1960), pp. 166-242; the English translation is published in the American edition as: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (paperback ed.; San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978).

The task placed before the council of Chalcedon was to condemn Apollinarianism for an overemphasis on the divinity of Christ and Nestorianism for an overemphasis on His humanity.³ Chalcedon attempted that judgement by way of the homoousios, which means literally "of one and the same substance". To understand the homoousios is to understand the core of Bonhoeffer's christology, as he himself declares:

If it is not permissible to speak of homoousia, then once again everything is at stake Why is the statement of the identity of being of Christ with the Father necessary and firmly to be held? Only thus can the biblical witness that God reveals himself in Christ be sustained. Only then can we talk of a revelation of God. In the concept of revelation it is presupposed that God is identical with himself in his revelation. Otherwise we are not strictly concerned with a revelation, but with an appearance or an idea.⁴

There is in the Chalcedonian definition the assertion that Christ is both homoousios with God the Father and homoousios with men, and that His two natures are held together in Him " . . . without con-

³See, for example, the documents presented in Henry Bettenson, ed. Documents of the Christian Church (2nd ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 44-52. Bonhoeffer himself subsumes Apollinarianism under the larger heading of Docetism, and characterizes Nestorianism more 'along the lines of its insistence that there is a conjunction and not a full union of God and man in Christ. The result of this conjunction, however, was that ". . . it was no longer possible to talk of an incarnation of God . . .", and the divine nature of Christ was downplayed. See C.C., pp. 86-87.

⁴C.C., pp. 98-99. The translation of the final sentence is corrected from "manifestation" to "appearance". See G.S. III, p. 228: "Sonst handelte es sich streng nicht um Offenbarung, sondern um eine Erscheinung oder Idee."

fusion, without change, without division, without separation; . . ."⁵

Chalcedon demands therefore that a genuine union between the divine and human be found in Christ.

Bonhoeffer's defense in Christ the Center of the complete union of natures in Christ leads him to explicate the Lutheran doctrine of the communicatio idiomatum or the unio hypostatica.⁶ This doctrine affirms, in the face of logical difficulties, the necessity of preserving both natures completely and indissolubly in Christ. The implications and meaning of the communicatio idiomatum are then delineated in the form of three genera: the genus idiomaticum, which means ". . . whatever is true or is said of one or the other nature can be ascribed to the whole person of the God-man."⁷; the genus apotelesmaticum, which means that the ". . . saving acts which are ascribed to the person of Jesus Christ can also be ascribed to the individual natures."⁸; and the genus maiestaticum, which Bonhoeffer develops to a greater extent, which means that ". . . those things which are predicated of the eternal deity may and must also be ascribed to the human nature."⁹

⁵Bettenson, p. 51.

⁶C.C., p. 89ff.

⁷Ibid., p. 90.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 91.

An alternative to the genus maiestaticum of Lutheran dogmatics was offered by Reformed theologians through their conclusion that the natures are united in Christ but that nonetheless the eternal Logos also remained outside of the flesh, extra carnem. But Bonhoeffer criticizes this Reformed doctrine, known as the extra Calvinisticum, in the same way it was criticized by early Lutheran theologians, claiming that the relationship of the natures would then be no closer than having two planks glued together side by side.¹⁰

By retaining so resolutely the genus maiestaticum, Bonhoeffer is plainly affirming that all acts of Christ are acts both of God and of man.¹¹ In the cradle Christ is God and man. In the temple He is God and man. On the cross He is God and man. And even in the resurrection and ascension He is both God and man. Two quotations spanning nearly ten years of his writings exemplify the continuity with which he asserted the genus maiestaticum: "Even as the risen one, Jesus Christ remains the man Jesus in time and space. Because Jesus Christ is man, he is present in time and space; because Jesus Christ is God, he is eternally present. The presence of Christ requires the statement 'Jesus is fully man'; but it also requires the other statement, 'Jesus is fully God'."¹² And

¹⁰C.C., pp. 92-93.

¹¹Bonhoeffer does say, however, that Luther ". . . certainly runs the risk of not keeping the nature of Jesus separate from the nature of Christ." (C.C., p. 93.) But Bonhoeffer will nonetheless not let that possible danger lead him away from allegiance to the genus maiestaticum.

¹²C.C., p. 45.

regarding the Ascension, he notes later:

What was real from the first moment of Christ's being a man, and still remained hidden in the state of humiliation, i.e. the permeation of the human nature by the properties of the divine nature, is manifested in the state of exaltation. The manhood that has been assumed, the man Jesus Christ, enters the eternity of the Father. ¹³


It would be wrong to interpret the genus maiestaticum as if the Logos were simply united to the individual man Jesus and the incarnation were therefore nothing more than the Logos assuming the characteristics of only this one individual man. That would jeopardize Bonhoeffer's attempt to interpret the union of the two natures in Christ as the basis of representative discipleship. In accordance with accepted doctrine, Bonhoeffer argues against that more individualist conception. In a 1939 Monatsbrief he explains:

God became man by taking upon himself human nature, not by taking an individual man. This distinction was necessary to preserve the universality of the wonder of Christmas. 'Human nature', that is, the nature, essence, flesh of all men, i.e. my nature, my flesh; human nature, that is, the embodiment of all human possibilities. . . . Therefore, where Jesus Christ is, there we are, whether we know it or not; that is true because of the Incarnation. What happens to Jesus Christ, happens to us. ¹⁴

The thorough union of natures portrayed through the

¹³T.P., p. 50.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 30.



communicatio idiomatum culminates for Bonhoeffer in a description of Christ in terms of finitum capax infiniti, "the finite can hold the infinite".¹⁵ This description of Christ as the finite one who is the infinite one as well is for Bonhoeffer the highest definition of Christ. It is the final and simple expression of all the complexities of the communicatio idiomatum and the genus maiestaticum. It reflects adequately the paradoxes of Chalcedon by maintaining the idea of the human Logos, the God-man, the one who unites opposite natures wholly and without divisions. Throughout this thesis, the phrase finitum capax infiniti will be used to express the central meaning of Bonhoeffer's christology.

In the Chalcedonian definition the Logos becomes finite, according to Bonhoeffer, in a manner which has far-reaching implications for discipleship. The divine Logos undergoes humble birth into the temporal world, entering the status exinanitionis, the humiliation. He does so by a renunciation of His divine powers, or at least by ". . . not exercising the divine properties and powers through the human nature for the duration of the earthly life . . .".¹⁶

¹⁵C.C., p. 93. The full phrase reads: finitum capax infiniti, non per se sed per infinitum, translating as "the finite can hold the infinite, not by itself, but it can by the aid of the infinite!"

¹⁶Ibid., p. 94. The precise wording of this quotation is important. It would be incorrect for Bonhoeffer to claim that Christ has totally abdicated His divine properties and powers, since then Christ would no longer remain the Son of God. But He can and does renounce the use of those properties and powers.

This emptying of Christ into human form, this renunciation, is kenosis, and is employed by Bonhoeffer to accentuate the fullness of the presence of the divine within the human.¹⁷ In terms relevant to discipleship, kenosis means that during His physical life on earth Christ made use of no privileges or powers which were not also available to other human beings. The discipleship evident in the obedience of Christ is possible for obedient disciples as well. Bonhoeffer's acceptance of kenosis forces him to recognize that Christ is obedient not because He is divine but precisely because He is fully human.¹⁸

This obedience by Christ the incarnate God, being equally open to human disciples, reinforces again the unity of natures in Christ and the fullness of His humanity. Bonhoeffer is able to look upon Christ as both the ground and highest example of representative discipleship because he believes that, as the incarnate God, Christ

¹⁷ Bonhoeffer's explicit acceptance of kenosis in his Christology lectures is not as evident as his implicit approval of it, his own opinions being subordinated at this point because of the primarily descriptive task of the chapter. It is obvious, however, that the only described alternative to kenosis, viz. that there is merely a concealment of Christ's divine powers during his earthly life (krypsis chreseos), is unfavorably received by Bonhoeffer. See C.C., pp. 94-95.

¹⁸ Kenosis is wrongly understood if it is thought to mean that God ceases to be God because of a complete emptying into man. Some commentators on Bonhoeffer who see him as a forerunner of the "Death of God" theology make that very mistake, and thus claim Bonhoeffer's affirmation of kenosis as part of a patripassianism. See specifically Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton, Radical Theology and the Death of God (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Co., 1966), especially pp. 113-118 and 9-21; see also Paul Van Buren's less radical essay "Bonhoeffer's Paradox: Living with God without God", in B.W.C.A., pp. 1-24.

gives strength and grace to His disciples, and as the incarnate God, Christ makes use of no power that is not also open to man.

B. Christ in the Forms of Reality

The Chalcedonian definition of Christ is distinguished by its resolute determination not to dissolve any of the tension or paradox inherent in its affirmation that the two distinct natures of Christ are united. It is precisely this which proved to Bonhoeffer the truth of the definition. He saw that such a definition forces the believer to confront Christ personally in the midst of an undissolved tension rather than comfortably to look for Him as an idea while resting in the sanctuary of a neatly defined, previously resolved concept. To this end he applauds the wisdom of the church fathers:

The ancient church meditated on the question of Christ for several centuries. It imprisoned reason in obedience to Jesus Christ, and in harsh, conflicting sentences gave living witness to the mystery of the person of Jesus Christ. It did not give way to the modern pretence that this mystery could only be felt or experienced, for it knew the corruption and self-deception of all human feeling and experience. Nor, of course, did it think that this mystery could be thought out logically, but by being unafraid to express the ultimate conceptual paradoxes, it bore witness to, and glorified, the mystery as a mystery against all reason.¹⁹

Chalcedon's paradox demands that men give up the comfort of coming to Christ when and if they wish and denounces their attempts to see Christ in any form they wish to see Him:

¹⁹T.P., p. 29.

. . . there is no longer any possibility of assimilating him [Christ] into the existing order of the human logos. The only real question which now remains is: 'Who are you? Speak for yourself!' The question, 'Who are you?', is the question of dethroned and distraught reason; but it is also the question of faith: 'Who are you? Are you God himself?' This is the question with which christology is concerned.²⁰

This section on "Christ in the Forms of Reality" attempts to show how Bonhoeffer refuses to portray Christ as an idea able to be incorporated at will into man's previously-conceived rational framework. Thus it attempts to show how Bonhoeffer constantly portrays Christ as one who appears to men in different forms, forms of reality which break through all human attempts to encapsulate or limit Christ, forms which lead an individual through the obstacles in any particular age toward a personal confrontation with Christ.

The importance of this section should be emphasized. Unless it can be proven that Bonhoeffer's christology exhibits a Christ who addresses men in different forms, forms which call men to the question of faith, it will be impossible for this study to defend its hypothesis that Christ appears in the form of the suffering and hidden servant in order to call the mature, worldly, modern man to God and to faith. For the hypothesis to be defended it must be shown not only that Bonhoeffer affirms the unity of two distinct natures in Christ, as Chalcedon does, but also that he affirms that this God-man reveals Himself to man in a form appropriate to the time.

²⁰C.C., p. 30.

Throughout Bonhoeffer's writings this latter theme is addressed and emphasized -- from his acceptance of Chalcedon's continued tension between Christ's natures, to his insistence that Christ exists pro me, to the later-developed inclusive concept of Christ as reality. An explicit development of that theme must now be initiated in order to establish the basis for Bonhoeffer's later conception of Christ as one who chooses a hidden and suffering form to reveal Himself to the man come of age.

1. Background Themes Affecting the Conception of Christ as Reality

To understand Bonhoeffer's theme of the forms of Christ it is necessary to begin with his belief that Christ Himself is the one ultimate reality (Wirklichkeit), for the forms of Christ are forms of reality. When he says that Christ alone is reality, Bonhoeffer believes that the final source of truth for men is neither the empirical world and one's sense impressions of it nor an independent abstract truth existing separately from that empirical world. Thus he affirms: ". . . reality is first and last not lifeless; but it is the real man, the incarnate God. It is from the real man, whose name is Jesus Christ, that all factual reality derives its ultimate foundation and its ultimate annulment . . ." ²¹ This means that man corresponds to reality only by corresponding to Christ the Real One, and therefore that truth lies only in correspondence to Christ,

²¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, ed. E. Bethge, trans. Neville H. Smith (Paperback ed.; New York: Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 228.

to the form He assumes in the world.

Bonhoeffer's fullest development of the distinctive theme of Christ as reality is found in the Ethics. But that distinctive theme does not arise without roots, nor does it overturn the continuity of his thought when it does arise.²² At earlier times during his life Bonhoeffer's key concept of Christ as reality is implicit in his treatment of related traditional themes. An examination of those underlying themes will prepare the way for an extended definition of Christ as reality.

a) The writings of Bonhoeffer's early years of theological training understandably portray a preoccupation with the proper definition of theology and especially with the place of reason in theology.²³ He adopts the characteristic Protestant position that reason is tainted by the Fall of Adam: "The Fall affects the whole of the created world . . ."²⁴ Reason's fallen status renders it incapable of

²²See Ethics, the chapter entitled "Christ, Reality, and Good" (pp. 188-213), for Bonhoeffer's detailed explanation of reality. Ernst Feil very clearly has shown the continuity of the theme of reality throughout Bonhoeffer's thought. See Feil, pp. 86-115, the chapter entitled "Der Begriff 'Wirklichkeit'", especially his attempt to show Bonhoeffer's early opposition to Möglichkeit as prefiguring his later allegiance to Wirklichkeit. The present section of this study is much indebted to Feil's analysis.

²³See, for example, the basic theological papers written while he was at Union Seminary in New York: "The Religious Experience of Grace and the Ethical Life" (1930-1931), G.S. III, pp. 91-99; "Concerning the Christian Idea of God" (1931), ibid., pp. 100-109; "The Theology of Crisis and its Attitude Toward Philosophy and Science" (1931), ibid., pp. 110-126. Also note Bonhoeffer's address "Concerning the Theological Foundations of the World Alliance" (1932), G.S.I., pp. 140-158.

²⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall/Temptation, ed.

direct access to God in thought and dooms it forever to a self-enclosed existence:

. . . reason is entangled in itself. In these circumstances 'to understand oneself' can only mean 'to understand oneself from oneself', 'I am' means 'I think' (cogito-sum). 'God is' means 'the mind comes to itself, knows in the unity of consciousness'. In this way the ground seems to crumble under any proposition of genuine belief in God²⁵

This critique of the self-enclosure of reason is thus the first theme which depicts Bonhoeffer's early intimation that Christ is reality. For reason that is enclosed upon itself is incapable of

E. Bethge, trans. John C. Fletcher and Kathleen Downham (New York: Macmillan Co., 1971), p. 76. To say that this conception of reason is one of the premises of Protestant theology is not to say, however, that there are no differences at all between Bonhoeffer and Luther in regard to their understanding of reason. This thesis is aware that in Luther there remains a place for natural reason in theology, albeit, of course, in a very limited way. He says, for example; in an Epistle Sermon on Trinity Sunday: "The reason and wisdom of man may go so far as to reach the conclusion, although feebly, that there must be one eternal divine being, who has created and who preserves and governs all things." In Hugh T. Kerr, ed., A Compend of Luther's Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 37. Would the revelational theology which Bonhoeffer espouses allow even this positive function to reason? Note, however, that Bonhoeffer does maintain a place for reason in natural theology in his later discussion of the ultimate/penultimate distinction. Infra, pp. 123-128.

²⁵Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Act and Being, trans. Bernard Noble (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), p. 32. The implied references to Descartes and Hegel in this quotation leave open the question of whether or not the philosophical use of reason by these two thinkers is actually indicative of all philosophical use of reason. Also, his whole treatment of reason here shows how Bonhoeffer is misinterpreted by statements such as: ". . . he remained therefore under the spell of the tradition of thought of the Greek confirmation of truth." Hans Schmidt, "The Cross of Reality?", in Ronald Gregor Smith, ed., World Come of Age, trans. R. G. Smith, et al. (London: Collins, 1967), pp. 245-246.

breaking out of itself to encounter reality as it actually exists. The primary error of philosophy, which continues to believe in reason's capacity for direct access to the transcendent, is therefore that it distorts reality. By believing that what it is seeing is actually reality rather than its own projected view of reality, philosophy unwittingly places its trust in itself rather than in the giver of true reality. Bonhoeffer expounds this viewpoint in his early writing "Concerning the Christian Idea of God":

The last 'reality' for all consistent philosophical reflection must be an ego, which is removed from all conceivability, a 'nichtgegenständliches Ich'. Thinking does violence to reality, pulling it into the circle of the ego, taking away from it its original 'objectivity'. Thinking always means system and system excludes reality.²⁶

Only when accompanied by constant awareness of its limitation and self-enclosure can thought be a means of encounter with the reality of Christ. This encounter cannot be genuine without an earlier revelation of Christ to man that breaks into reason's circle. Reason can therefore be employed only a posteriori. Bonhoeffer's early certainty about the self-enclosed nature of reason therefore made him acutely aware of the need for Christ to reveal Himself in a way which penetrates reason's circle and redirects the person away from ego-centered reflection.

b) His characteristic Protestant conception of reason's fallenness and self-enclosure leads Bonhoeffer to an even more important tenet of his theological tradition, viz. that God in Christ

²⁶G.S. III, p. 101.

reveals Himself not in propositions but as a person. This in turn adds impetus to his later full development of Christ as reality because it is the personal Christ who is to be encountered in reality.

When Bonhoeffer delivered his Christology lectures of 1933 he did not begin by addressing the topic of the historical Christ made known in creeds and councils, but by questioning and encountering the present Christ. He began his lectures not by asking "How does salvation occur in Christ according to the councils?" or "What is the specific relationship of man to God found in Christ that explains salvific union?" or "How is the claim of Christ possible?" but with the simple question "Who are you?" spoken directly to the present, personal Christ.²⁷ As noted above, this direct question is ". . . the question of dethroned and distraught reason; but it is also the question of faith . . ."²⁸ The questions of "How?" and "What?" are questions in which: "An unknown object can become known when it is possible to place it in an already existing classification."²⁹ And this signifies that human reason again declares itself lord by assigning to the encountered subject a place in a pre-set pattern. Only the question "Who are you?", which speaks to Christ as a person, allows the subject full rein to answer as it sees fit, even to the point of challenging the authority of the original questioner: "The question is turned round and

²⁷See C.C., pp. 28-31.

²⁸Ibid., p. 30 and supra, p. 21.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 28-29.

directed at the human logos, 'Who are you that you ask this question? Are you in the truth that you can ask this question? Who are you then that you can only ask about me, when I restore you, justify you and give you grace?'"³⁰

The point advanced by Bonhoeffer in his insistence that questioning about Christ must begin with "Who?" rather than "How?" or "What?" is that only when Christ is encountered as a person can His revelation break through the self-enclosed circle of human reason and speak to man without obstruction. The present Christ met by the question "Who?" confronts the one asking the question, renders his powers helpless, and prepares the way for true learning about Christ from an attitude of faith.³¹

c) The belief that Christ reveals Himself as person manifests itself in Bonhoeffer's theology in a related theme, viz. that God is not an abstract religious idea who reveals Himself as static truth. Because God reveals Himself as Christ the Incarnate One,

³⁰C.C., p. 34

³¹For this reason it is important that later editions of the English translations of the Letters . . . have corrected an earlier translation error in the April 30, 1944 letter to E. Bethge. Bonhoeffer says, in announcing the theme which is occupying his theological thoughts while in prison: "Was mich unablässig bewegt, ist die Frage, was Christentum oder auch wer Christus heute für uns eigentlich ist." Widerstand und Ergebung (Neuausgabe; München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1970), p. 305. Thus it is "who Christ is", not "what Christ is". The translator's mistake of saying "what" renders the impression that Bonhoeffer has moved away from his earlier position of the 1933 lectures. This is not so. It is still the confrontation with the person of Christ that matters. English readers must be grateful to John Godsey, "Reading Bonhoeffer in English Translation: Some Difficulties" in B.W.C.A., p. 129, for noting this and other translation difficulties.

he is neither abstract nor static. Bonhoeffer is committed to believing that divine truth must relate to ". . . the concrete psychophysical man,"³² man continually arising and passing in time, affected by changing circumstances. Any view of divine revelation which sees it as static truth would lose the proper living character of revelation and would separate itself from that concrete psychophysical man. According to Bonhoeffer, it is precisely for this reason that Luther criticized Scholasticism: "Luther recognized the insufficiency of the scholastic form of thinking for an interpretation of the facts of revelation. He sees in the notion of substance a great danger in making revelation static and depriving it of its actual livingness."³³

Luther's opposition to "the notion of substance" exposes the connection between divine revelation as static truth and God as an abstract religious idea. It is because God is wrongly interpreted as idea that His revelation is believed to be static. Bonhoeffer's early writings are full of explicit arguments against such idealism,³⁴

³²A. B., p. 42.

³³See his article "The Theology of Crisis and Its Attitude Toward Philosophy and Science", G.S. III, p. 117-118. Out of this attitude against idealism arise implications for Bonhoeffer's conception of proper Christian ethics, and this will be examined in the final chapter. It should be noted here, however, that when Bonhoeffer speaks against interpreting revelation in terms of static general "principles" (cf. G.S. III, p. 119), he is referring to the German word Prinzip, which actually conveys a harsher, more rigid law allowing very little reference to changing circumstances. The English translation "principle" does not connote the same degree of strictness.

³⁴See, e.g., A. B., pp. 25ff.

and his later formulation of Christ as reality develops in full opposition to idealist conceptions.

Bonhoeffer's belief that Christ is reality means that any attempt to go behind or around Christ to a previously conceived notion of God is doomed to failure. Yet this, to Bonhoeffer, is precisely what idealism attempts to do. Because of the self-enclosure of human reason, Bonhoeffer sees it as fruitless to attempt to conceive of God through any means other than the Incarnate One, who breaks into that human circle of thought. But if God is conceived of as an abstract idea, and the incarnation merely as a manifestation of that abstract idea, then obviously it must seem that there is a still more "real" reality behind Christ, and Christ Himself is not allowed genuinely to call into question reason's self-enclosure. Reason will merely go behind Christ to something it sees as more basic, e.g. the idea of God as truth. But since, in Bonhoeffer's opinion, this idea is again nothing but a disguised notion of reason's own creation, once more reason ends up simply reflecting upon itself: "When a man proceeds against the concrete Word of God with the weapon of a principle, with an idea of God, he is in the right from the first, he becomes God's master, he has left the path of obedience, he has withdrawn from God's addressing him."³⁵

Bonhoeffer's early allegiance to the theology of Karl Barth is further evidence of his opposition to idealist conceptions of Christ, since Bonhoeffer himself expresses his approval that "Barth's theol-

³⁵C.F./T., p. 68.

ogy from the very beginning was connected with an energetic attack against idealism."³⁶ Both men were aware of the threat to Christ's continued genuine presence among men that would arise if that presence were interpreted as a mere idea that has no thoroughgoing rootedness in the changing historical events of men's lives.

It is not only the modern philosophical school of idealism that errs by conceiving of God as an abstract religious idea. This actually is the failure of all philosophy, according to Bonhoeffer, and as evidence of this belief he cites how an uncritical acceptance of Greek philosophy led to the docetic heresy: "The origin of this way of thinking lies in the Greek antithesis between idea and phenomenon. What appears in the world is inessential compared with what exists in the world of ideas."³⁷ That Platonic division has rendered docetism incapable of recognizing Christ as anything other than an ultimately unreal manifestation of the idea of God. It

³⁶G.S. III., p. 119. One commentator on Bonhoeffer's relation to Barth has described Barth's later thought as unsympathetic not only to idealism, but also to all philosophic grounding. Referring to a statement in the Kirchliche Dogmatik, he says Barth cut out from his early work ". . . every reference that 'might give the slightest appearance' of giving theology a basis or support in philosophy." Franklin Sherman, "Act and Being", in Martin E. Marty, ed., The Place of Bonhoeffer (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 106.

³⁷C.C., p. 76. It remains an open question, one which lies beyond the scope of this inquiry, whether Bonhoeffer is right in interpreting idealism and Platonism in a similar way here. It is questionable whether his frequent use of "abstract" and "concrete" are adequate to describe the Greek antithesis of idea and phenomenon. The possibility exists that the Greek "idea" may mean something quite different from what Bonhoeffer believes.

believes that what is most real must finally remain unaffected by worldly concerns and exigencies, since only the eternally unchangeable is thought to be genuinely real, and therefore that Christ -- if He is to be genuinely real -- can be no more than an emanation of the divine. Thus the incarnation is mistaken and diluted.

This forthright opposition to God as an abstract religious idea culminates for Bonhoeffer in a dilemma that has important consequence for the thesis of this present study. Bonhoeffer discovers that because docetism and idealism have influenced theology, because the error of abstract idea repeatedly arises, Christianity has been thoroughly misinterpreted through the ages, and specifically in the modern world. Out of that misinterpretation a prominent threat to Christianity has arisen. Bonhoeffer begins to discover and express that threat in his Ethics:

If God were merely a religious idea there would be nothing to prevent us from discerning, behind this allegedly 'ultimate' reality, a still more final reality, the twilight of the gods and the death of the gods. The claim of this ultimate reality is satisfied only in so far as it is revelation, that is to say, the self-witness of the living God.³⁸

The so-called "Christian" conception of God, when it is a conception of God as abstract idea, itself prepares the way for the eclipse of faith in God, since that abstract idea cannot hold reason from pushing on behind all ideas to its own constructions. Only that which is more than idea can arrest its movement; only the Incarnate One can.

In saying, therefore, that Christ as real person, and not

³⁸E., p. 189.

Christ as abstract idea, is the one reality, Bonhoeffer is disagreeing with statements like that of Nietzsche, that Christianity is Platonism for the masses. One commentator on Bonhoeffer, André Dumas, has recognized this:

Nietzsche accused Christianity of being only a 'Platonism for the people' -- of imposing a false dualism on the world, of sacrificing the tragic beauty of the everyday world to the illusion of an ideal world because of resentment at its lack of power, or refusing to accept that what we call 'truth' is only an expression of the 'life force'. Bonhoeffer quite simply believed that in Jesus Christ God and reality are creatively united in a struggle in which the everyday world is not destroyed, and God does not withdraw.³⁹

Bonhoeffer is thus affirming that Christianity can be exonerated from Nietzsche's charge that it imposes a false dualism only if it will eliminate the notion that God is an abstract idea. He is wanting to replace that abstract idea with his conception of Christ as reality, for such a Christ will unveil the distortion inherent in any dichotomy between the "beauty of the everyday world" and the "illusion of an ideal world". He is prepared to state with certainty

³⁹André Dumas, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality, trans. R. McAfee Brown (New York: Macmillan Co., 1971), p. 37. However, Dumas still equates reality with the empirical world rather than seeing Christ Himself as reality. This is consistent with the rest of Dumas' commentary, which tries to argue that God and the empirical world are joined in Bonhoeffer's thought as in an Hegelian synthesis. But Bonhoeffer does not speak of the empirical world as reality nor does he employ Hegelian method. Any synthesis that occurs is based on the paradox of Christ's own communicatio idiomatum, and it is a synthesis of God and man, not idea and matter.

that: "Christ does not dispense with human reality for the sake of an idea which demands realization at the expense of the real."⁴⁰

There must, however, exist a coherent alternative to God as abstract idea. In another important theological concept appearing in his early writings Bonhoeffer expounds and embraces the traditional alternative: revelation in history.

d) Revelation, in the person of Christ, breaks through human reason's self-enclosedness by appearing in history:

. . . the self-revelation of personality cannot be executed in the sphere of idea. The idea is in the realm of generality. Personality exists in "oneness" because of its freedom. The only place where "oneness" might occur is history. Therefore, revelation of personality -- that is to say, the self-revelation of God -- must take place in history if at all.⁴¹

It is the "oneness" of the incarnation that Bonhoeffer is intending here. Because God reveals Himself in history rather than in the realm of ideas, Christ the Word is to be interpreted not as dogma or doctrine but as the personal revelation of God. Because He is person He encounters the human questioner in a way which crushes any human attempt to pull Him into a pre-conceived reality. In history God thus encounters man in a way which sets man's limits. In so doing, God gives an historical incident an identity of its own which exists above and beyond man's own interpretation of it through his own values and ideas. History is thereby, according to Bonhoeffer-

⁴⁰E., p. 85.

⁴¹G.S.III, p. 104.

fer, given an "ontological" status by God.⁴² It is no longer merely the realm for symbolic occurrences of divine ideas but, confronting man in an unavoidable way, it demands a decision from him either of acceptance or rejection of God's self-revelation: "The true attitude of man toward history is not interpretative, but that of refusing or acknowledging, that is to say, deciding. History is the place of decision, nothing else."⁴³

Revelation's rootedness in history gives it a concreteness which otherwise would be lacking. The concrete event of revelation in history drives home to the hearer that God is confronting him here and now. The authority and urgency of the revelation of God are communicated through the force of events that surround the hearer, making response to the command inescapable. One of Bon-

⁴²G.S. III, p. 106. Bonhoeffer's brief treatment of history here is inadequate to explain the intricacies of the concept. It is regrettable that Bonhoeffer does not ever systematically discuss the meaning of history and its implications for his theology. For clarification see Feil, pp. 199-205 and also Jürgen Moltmann, "Die Wirklichkeit der Welt und Gottes konkretes Gebot nach Dietrich Bonhoeffer", in E. Bethge, Hg., Die Mündige Welt, Bd. III (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1960), pp. 42-67. The best brief explanation of Bonhoeffer's use of the word history is in Geoffrey Kelly, "Revelation in Christ . . .", thesis, pp. 419-420; dissertation article, pp. 50-51. He corrects an earlier statement by John Bowden that Bonhoeffer does not distinguish between the German words Historie and Geschichte. Bonhoeffer does recognize that a distinction has been made, but he refuses to admit that the distinction is a valid one. According to Kelly, "Bonhoeffer considered liberal theology's attempt to separate the historical Jesus from the existentially present Christ as a sterile and suicidal quest. There is no evidence that he ever departed from this position in his later writings. For Bonhoeffer, the Jesus of history is the Christ of faith." See C.C., p. 70ff.

⁴³Ibid.

hoeffer's helpful illustrations of this is found in his address to the Youth Peace Conference in 1932: ". . . the commandment: You shall love your neighbour, is as such so general that it needs the strongest concretion in order to hear from it what that means for me here and now. And only as such a concrete word to me is it God's word."⁴⁴ Without the immersion in the particular events of history surrounding an individual, the command to love one's neighbour degenerates into an easily avoidable abstract principle of ethics. Revelation manifests itself concretely because only thus is the authority of God upheld, only thus does it remain command. "A commandment must be concrete or it is no commandment."⁴⁵

There is a place, according to Bonhoeffer, from which those concrete commands should properly arise. That place is the church. Because the incarnation immerses Christ into the events of history, into concreteness, the commands and concerns of the church likewise are immersed in particular events in concrete circumstances rather than in proclamations of universal principles. The church in the world is ". . . the presence of Christ on earth . . ."; it is the living, present Christ, the "Christus praesens".⁴⁶

⁴⁴G.S.I, pp. 145-146. (My translation) ". . . das Gebot: Du sollst den Nächsten lieben, ist als solches so allgemein, dass es der stärksten Konkretion bedarf, um daraus zu hören, was das heute und hier für mich bedeutet. Und nur als solches konkretes Wort zu mir, ist es Gottes Wort."

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 146. (My translation) "Ein Gebot muss konkret sein oder es ist kein Gebot."

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 144. (My translation) "Die Kirche ist die Gegenwart Christi auf Erden, die Kirche ist der Christus praesens."

And only because it is this presence do its commands have authority, says Bonhoeffer. So, "As the word from the authority of the Christus praesens, the word of the church must be a valid, binding word here and now."⁴⁷ The counterpart of this is also true for Bonhoeffer, namely that unless the church immerses itself in the concrete historical events surrounding it, it will lose contact with the concretely incarnate Word and will cease to be the true church.⁴⁸

To see God's revelation in Christ within particular, concrete historical events was the overriding concern of Bonhoeffer's first writing, Sanctorum Communio.⁴⁹ In his words from the subtitle, the book was a "dogmatic inquiry into the sociology of the church". The concreteness provided in situations within the church counters any generalizing tendencies and universal principles. This

⁴⁷G.S.I, p. 144. (My translation) "Als das Wort aus der Vollmacht des Christus praesens muss das Wort der Kirche heute und hier gültiges, bindendes Wort sein."

⁴⁸This latter statement, though intimated earlier, does not mature until the Letters . . . See, for example, the close similarity between what Bonhoeffer says at this youth conference (*ibid.*, pp. 146-147), i.e. how the church must know enough about particular circumstances to risk bold and particular commands, and his condemnation of the churches in the "Outline for a Book" in L.P.P., p. 381.

⁴⁹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Sanctorum Communio, trans. R. Gregor Smith (London: Collins, 1963). Numerous commentators on Bonhoeffer have rightly advanced the hypothesis that the concreteness of revelation is a central theme in Bonhoeffer's thought. See Feil, esp. pp. 99-115, and William Kuhns, In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum Press, 1967), pp. 14ff. Bethge is very forthright about the centrality of this theme: "If I were to try to summarize what had been Bonhoeffer's theme, I would suggest 'the concreteness of revelation'." in "The Editing and Publishing of the Bonhoeffer Papers", p. 20.

determines Bonhoeffer's belief that theology must be practised only within the church.⁵⁰ Christ's concrete body the church reappears as the theme of Act and Being, which shows that the error of two different philosophical presuppositions of theology lies in a disregard for concreteness in revelation:

. . . inasmuch as analysis of revelation in terms whether of act or being produces concepts of knowledge unsuited to bear the whole weight of revelation, the idea of revelation must be envisaged within the concretion of the idea of the church, i.e. . . . where both kinds of analysis encounter each other and are drawn together in one.⁵¹

The church is thus to Bonhoeffer the place where the concrete historical revelation of Christ is made visible. Because Christ exists as the church",⁵² and Christ reveals Himself in concrete historical circumstances, the church itself will necessarily be concrete and immersed in historical issues. If the church ceases to be so, Christ no longer exists as church, and it loses its proper form and its mandate. Because it is so, its concrete commands take effect on their hearers.

e) When the belief that God reveals Himself in history in a concrete manner is joined with the belief that God reveals Himself

⁵⁰See S.C., pp. 173-175, and especially A.B., p. 144, e.g.: "Because theology turns revelation into entity, it may only be practised where the living person of Christ is himself present to acknowledge or destroy that entity."

⁵¹A.B., pp. 15-16. (Note printing error in English translation, p. 16, line 1.)

⁵²S.C., pp. 100ff.

as person, the result in Bonhoeffer's thought is his acceptance of the doctrine of "Christus pro me". Not only does Christ exist in history rather than in the realm of ideas, not only does He exist as person rather than principle, He also exists with and for the individual man, always in contact with him, always in salvific confrontation:

Christ is Christ, not just for himself, but in relation to me. His being Christ is his being for me, pro me. This being pro me is not to be understood as an effect emanating from him, nor as an accident; but it is to be understood as the essence, the being of the person himself. The core of the person himself is the pro me. That Christ is pro me is not an historical, nor an ontic statement, but an ontological one. Christ can never be thought of as being for himself, but only in relation to me.⁵³

For Bonhoeffer Christ thus-exists, ontologically, only for and in relationship to others. His essence is His concreteness in His relationship to man. He does not exist outside of relationship to man and should therefore not be sought outside of such relationships. But that in no way means that Christ's essence is reduced merely to act, that there is no continuity to His existence, no eternal certainty in His promises. On the contrary; Bonhoeffer defends against such a purely actualistic interpretation:

. . . what is decisive about the pro me structure is that being and act of Christ are maintained together in it. Actio Dei and praesentia Dei, the for you existence and being there for you are joined together. . . . He [Christ] is the one who has really bound himself in the freedom of his existence to me. And he is the

⁵³C. C., p. 47.

one who has preserved his contingency freely in being there for me.⁵⁴

The doctrine of the Christus pro me, uniting the act and being of Christ into a relational, concrete reality, directs the discussion back to the original question: What is meant explicitly by Bonhoeffer's conception of Christ as reality? The five themes discussed hitherto have been traditional theological concepts incorporated in Bonhoeffer's early theology, themes that merge sympathetically to provide a background for his conception of Christ as reality and to root that conception in solid theological principles. But these five themes do not exhaust the meaning and implications of the conception of Christ as reality, for in the Ethics Bonhoeffer begins to expand on it and comprehend its extended import. That new expanded conception will now be examined.

2. The Definition of Christ as Reality

Two major themes appear in the Ethics that explain what Bonhoeffer means by Christ as reality.⁵⁵ The first stipulates that

⁵⁴C.C., pp. 47-48. Bonhoeffer speaks in his later writings not only of a "Christus pro me" but also of a "Christus pro nobis" (see E., p. 297). This adds evidence to the fact that the Christ who must be understood relationally propels Bonhoeffer toward an ever-broadening awareness of who it is that Christ must stand in relation to.

⁵⁵Bethge's reconstruction of the fragments that now constitute the Ethics is explained in his "Editor's Preface to the Newly Arranged Sixth German Edition", E., pp. 11-14. There he dates the fragmented writings on Christ and reality as beginning in September of 1940 and ending toward the spring of 1942.

Christ alone is the mediator and foundation of all true knowledge about reality, and that correspondence to Him is truth. The second postulates that Christ reveals Himself as this reality by his concrete formation in the world, and that he thereby demands the conformation of man to His form.

His belief that Christ is reality means first of all, then, that Bonhoeffer realizes that all other bases of judgement, all other foundations of thought or ethical decision ". . . themselves lie embedded in a quite different ultimate reality, namely, the reality of God, the Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer."⁵⁶ It means that all knowledge of humanity, of the world, and of God must proceed from and through Christ, who is the revelation of that creating, reconciling, and redeeming God. Circumvention of Christ deprives knowledge of any trustworthiness: "All things appear distorted if they are not seen and recognized in God. All so-called data, all laws and standards, are mere abstractions so long as there is no belief in God as the ultimate reality."⁵⁷

If knowledge attained in circumvention of the reality of Christ is untrustworthy, this implies for Bonhoeffer that knowledge does not arise in reference to potentiality or possibility, but solely in reference to a given actuality. This he had already established in his early writings when he deduced that the concept of possibility ". . . has no place in theology and therefore in theological anthro-

⁵⁶E., p. 188.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 189.

pology."⁵⁸ It also was evident in his critique of Martin Heidegger in Act and Being. First quoting Heidegger's statement in Sein und Zeit: "Dasein is not something 'present at hand' which has also the endowment of potentiality . . . it is primarily potentiality. Dasein is what it can be, and as it is its possibility to be,"⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer then criticizes this reduction of being into possibility. He argues that possibility lacks sufficient force to break through reason's self-enclosure, and that therefore Heidegger is destined to find only an "illusory transcendence" rather than a real transcendence. His critique is thus that those seeking to arrive at knowledge by means of reference to their possibilities have restricted any attempt to know God and man to man's own ". . . self-'projection on the lines of his authentic potentiality'."⁶⁰

In the Ethics itself, the rejection of knowledge based on human possibility is reflected in Bonhoeffer's refusal to ground Christian ethics on considerations about man's own capacities and methods of doing good:

Whoever wishes to take up the problem of a Christian ethic must be confronted at once with a demand which is quite without parallel. He must from the outset discard as irrelevant the two questions which alone impel him

⁵⁸See his 1930 inaugural lecture in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, excerpts from Gesammelte Schriften, 1928-1936, ed. Edwin Robertson, trans. Edwin Robertson and John Bowden, trans. revised John Bowden and E. Bethge (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1970), pp. 59-60.

⁵⁹A.B., p. 60.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 69.

to concern himself with the problem of ethics, 'How can I be good?' and 'How can I do good?', and instead of these he must ask the utterly and totally different question, 'What is the will of God?' . . . If the ethical problem presents itself essentially in the form of enquiries about one's own being good and doing good, this means that it has already been decided that it is the self and the world which are the ultimate reality.⁶¹

Therefore not what one can potentially do, but what already is, viz. the given reality of God in Christ, becomes the source of knowledge about goodness: ". . . the question of good can find its answer only in Christ."⁶² Proper judgement about truth therefore does not arise for Bonhoeffer from reliance upon one's own capacity for correct decision, but in allowing a prior reality to reveal itself through oneself. To speak of Christ as reality therefore demands dependence upon a previously-given actuality. It means that: "The problem of Christian ethics is the realization (Wirklichwerden) among God's creatures of the revelational reality of God in Christ."⁶³

The key to this definition of Christian ethics for Bonhoeffer is realization. By regarding ethics as the human realization of a previously-existing reality, Bonhoeffer erases the hitherto-accepted definition of ethics as the accomplishment of a "should-be" in the face of an inequitable "is".⁶⁴ The antithesis between the "ought"

⁶¹E., p. 188.

⁶²Ibid., p. 189.

⁶³Ibid., p. 190.

⁶⁴Ibid.

and the "is" is overcome because the given reality -- since it is the reality of God in Christ -- is good already. Therefore the one doing good does not impose his own possibilities or his own conception of what should be upon a malleable reality, but instead he participates in a given, actual, concrete, reality so that its goodness is "realized" among men. Participation in the reality of God in Christ becomes the one means of doing good. "Only if we share in reality can we share in good."⁶⁵

This overcoming of the antithesis between the "is" and the "ought" by interpreting Christ as reality reflects Bonhoeffer's reconciliation of an even greater dichotomy, viz. that between a holy, divine, supernatural sphere and a human, lowly, natural sphere. He believes that just as Christ the Real One has shown that the separation between what is and what should be is illusory, so does Christ show that the division of reality into two realms -- one sacred and one secular -- is also illusory:

There are not two realities, but only one reality, and that is the reality of God, which has become manifest in Christ in the reality of the world. Sharing in Christ we stand at once in both the reality of God and the reality of the world. The reality of Christ comprises the reality of the world within itself. The world has no reality of its own, independently of the revelation of God in Christ.⁶⁶

⁶⁵E., p. 191.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 197. The implications of Bonhoeffer's rejection of two sphere thinking are of course closely enmeshed with his reaction against "religion", and will be detailed in the chapter on the components of the world come of age, infra, pp. 78-82.

The danger of thinking in terms of two antithetical spheres lies in the ease with which man thereby avoids Christ as the source of true knowledge about the world and God. According to Bonhoeffer, the believer who has divided the world into two realms has implicitly alleged that both the divine and the natural are accessible without mediation by Christ, even though in the incarnation Christ has proclaimed the falsity of such conclusions. Christ is relegated to one sphere or another, to live either as a docetic idea or an ebionitist man ". . . raised to divine honours . . ." ⁶⁷ A man whose thought is dependent upon the two-sphere division refuses to acknowledge the one truth of Chalcedon which Bonhoeffer will not surrender, viz. the full union of God and man in Christ. And because he fails to uphold Chalcedon's definition, that man constantly commits this blunder described by Bonhoeffer in the Ethics:

. . . he abandons reality as a whole, and places himself in one or other of the two spheres. He seeks Christ without the world, or he seeks the world without Christ. In either case he is deceiving himself. Or else he tries to stand in both spaces at once and thereby becomes the man of eternal conflict . . . ⁶⁸

When Christ's unity is known, however, the proclivity to separate reality into antagonistic spheres is diminished. When He is perceived as the sole reference point and foundation of all true knowledge about both God and world, i.e. when the incarnation is properly comprehended, Christ destroys all attempts at bifurcation

⁶⁷C.C., p. 82.

⁶⁸E., p. 197.

of reality. Reality becomes known as unity, a unity approachable only through Christ:

In Christ we are offered the possibility of partaking in the reality of God and in the reality of the world, but not in the one without the other. The reality of God discloses itself only by setting me entirely in the reality of the world, and when I encounter the reality of the world it is always sustained, accepted, and reconciled in the reality of God.⁶⁹

With this, Bonhoeffer is affirming the first part of his definition of Christ as reality, viz. that all reality is unified in Christ, who thus becomes the mediator and foundation of all true knowledge about reality. Henceforth, nothing real can be known outside of the reality of Christ.

Participation in the being of Christ is thus participation in the unified reality of the human and the divine. But the second postulate of Bonhoeffer's, viz. the mode of revelation which prompts that participation, needs now to be explained. Knowledge of how he apprehends Christ's revelation in reality and man's participation in that reality is crucial for a correct understanding of Bonhoeffer's theology. If Christ's existence as reality is a revelation of eternally true principles which are expected to confront man in the same form regardless of changing worldly circumstances, then by Bonhoeffer's own presuppositions man's reason will circumvent that reality and will depend on a more basic reality. The scandalon of Christ's confrontation with man will be lost and the revelation of the true

⁶⁹E., p. 195.

reality which is the purpose of the confrontation will be misheard and misshaped to man's own ends. For Bonhoeffer to be consistent with his own theological presuppositions and for this present writing to hold correctly that he believes Christ purposely assumes the form of the Suffering One in order to speak to man come of age, it must be shown that when Bonhoeffer proclaims Christ as reality he is proclaiming that Christ reveals Himself concretely in a unified reality by coming in a worldly form which will call estranged man to Him.

Preparation has already been made for such a statement through Bonhoeffer's earlier interpretation in the christology lectures of Christ's revelation as historical, personal, and concrete. Now in the Ethics the expanded dimension of Christ's reality is combined with that earlier interpretation to result in the doctrine of the form of Christ in the world, referred to in the Ethics specifically as "formation" or "conformation".⁷⁰

⁷⁰"Formation" and "conformation" are translations of the German "Gestaltung" and "Gleichgestaltung". Cf. Ethik.; Zsgg. und Hg. E. Bethge (8. Aufl.; München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1975), p. 85. John A. Phillips has addressed the meaning of formation and conformation in Christ for Us in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 133-141 especially. The original title of this work when published in England was The Form of Christ in the World (London: Collins, 1967). This original title obviously better conveys the place in Bonhoeffer's theology of formation and conformation. Phillips, however, approaches Bonhoeffer's introduction of these concepts as if Bonhoeffer were attempting ". . . to free his Christology from his ecclesiology in order to describe a Christ moving about freely in the world; no longer a Christ identified with a church fighting against the world for her existence". (p. 187) Though he properly understands the relationship between an expanded vision of reality by Bonhoeffer and the development of the theme of formation, Phillips should be questioned for saying that

For Bonhoeffer, Christ's revelation in the world, just like His revelation in the church, occurs not in the form of static Christian principles but in the form of a real man. Thus conformation to Christ in the world does not occur by aligning one's own desires and potentiality to those static principles but by allowing oneself to be formed in conformity to the Real One. Formation by Christ in the world takes place in the conformation to Him by those who give up their own potentiality and conform to the one given reality. Thus Bonhoeffer says: ". . . formation comes only by being drawn in into the form of Jesus Christ. It comes only as formation in His likeness, as conformation with the unique form of Him who was made man, was crucified, and rose again."⁷¹ Bonhoeffer sees how the initiative in formation is taken completely away from man and placed in the hands of God. And he notes the appropriateness of this because the formation of Christ in the world is actually the revelation of Christ to the world, and that revelation must occur in such a way as to subjugate human effort to divine initiative.

That subjugation of human effort to divine initiative does occur because Christ the real man manifests Himself for every new age in an ever new form, viz. as the concrete neighbour, the

this "frees" Bonhoeffer's Christology from his ecclesiology. On the contrary, the ecclesiology is strengthened through the expanded vision of reality, receiving new roots in Christ but in a larger context.

⁷¹E., p. 80.

"other".⁷² Christ thus comes with an identity that confronts the one to whom He is revealing Himself. By assuming this form He denies the ascendancy of the interpretive reason of the one receiving revelation. The real man is the historical, concrete, personal neighbour who cannot be made into the image desired by the hearer of revelation. Christ's formation in the world thus takes place not in timeless principles but in real men immersed in reality.

The forms which Christ takes in these real men are the forms which He Himself, the historical Christ, has borne. As Bonhoeffer has said above, these are the forms ". . . of Him who was made man, was crucified, and rose again."⁷³ He forms Himself in the form of the Incarnate One, the Crucified One, and the Resurrected One.

Bonhoeffer believes that Christ forms Himself as the Incarnate One, that He reveals concretely the reality of His incarnation, when He shows to the one seeking conformation to Him that he must be fully human, a real man:

It is man's right and duty that he should be man. The quest for the superman, the endeavour to outgrow the man within the man, the pursuit of the heroic, the cult of the demigod, all this is not the proper concern of man, for it is untrue. The real man is not an object either for con-

⁷²This is evident from the start in Bonhoeffer's writing. Cf. S.C., pp. 36-37, where he discusses the neighbour as a "Thou" sustained by God: ". . . every human thou is an image of the divine Thou. The character of the Thou is in fact the form in which the divine is experienced."

⁷³E., p. 80.

tempt or for deification, but an object of the love of God.⁷⁴

Christ thus forms Himself as the Incarnate One when those seeking conformation to Him accept the fullness of their humanity as a redeemed gift of God. One of the most central and pregnant points in Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the incarnation is his insistence that it is not an ideal or better world into which God enters, that it is not a perfect, ideal man that God loves, but the world as it is and man as he is:

What we find abominable in man's opposition to God, what we shrink back from with pain and hostility, the real man, the real world, this is for God the ground for unfathomable love, and it is with this that He unites Himself utterly. God becomes man, real man. While we are trying to grow out beyond our manhood, to leave the man behind us, God becomes man and we have to recognize that God wishes us, too, to be real men.⁷⁵

This is not merely an implication of the incarnation of God, it is the meaning of the incarnation itself. It is the final assurance of the certainty of God's love for all men. They need not overcome their humanity to be loved by God for it is precisely their humanity into which God has chosen to enter.⁷⁶ "Out of love for man God becomes man. He does not seek out the most perfect man in order

⁷⁴E., p. 81.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 71.

⁷⁶This does not, of course, imply that the sinful state of man is justified because of what it is, but that the sinner is justified in spite of what he is. To hold otherwise would be to raise again the cheap grace against which Bonhoeffer protested in The Cost of Discipleship.

to unite Himself with him, but He takes human character upon Himself as it is."⁷⁷ The revelation to men of Christ's incarnation is thus denied whenever humanity is considered despicable and insufficient, whether by those who call themselves the church or by those who call themselves nihilists. The revelation to men of Christ's incarnation is furthered whenever conformation to the true humanness of the real man occurs, since it is to that man that Christ comes in His fullness.

Christ forms Himself as the Crucified One, according to Bonhoeffer, and conforms others to this form, when the real man realizes that he is ". . . a man sentenced by God."⁷⁸ When the real man has been conformed to the Incarnate One and lives a full human life, he must precisely in that fullness realize that he nonetheless has been judged and found wanting because of the sin in him. The Crucified One reveals Himself to the world in the act of showing to the real man his sin. And to Bonhoeffer, the recognition of a man's own sinfulness must be taken to pronounced lengths: "He cannot raise himself up above any other man or set himself before him as a model, for he knows himself to be the greatest of sinners. He can excuse the sin of another, but never his own."⁷⁹ Knowledge of one's own sin, of one's own actual state before God, arises for Bonhoeffer from the acceptance of the form of the Crucified One.

⁷⁷E., p. 72

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 82.

⁷⁹Ibid.

With this conformation the real man himself becomes judged, shamed, the subject of the contempt and derision of others. But exactly in this he is saved from death and he discovers the right relationship with God. By being conformed to the Crucified One, the real man is taken by Christ to a proper knowledge of himself:

What befell Christ befalls every man in Him. It is only as one who is sentenced by God that man can live before God. Only the crucified man is at peace with God. It is in the figure of the Crucified that man recognizes and discovers himself. To be taken up by God, to be executed on the cross and reconciled, that is the reality of manhood.⁸⁰

In this passage then, Bonhoeffer sees that Christ reveals to man the meaning of His crucifixion when those seeking to hear His revelation allow themselves to become crucified with Him, when they accept the form of the Crucified One.

Yet for Bonhoeffer the forms of Christ as the Incarnate One and the Crucified One are complemented by the form of Christ as the Risen One, even as the incarnation and crucifixion are themselves complemented by the resurrection. In the midst of his enjoyment of the fullness of human life, the one conformed to the Incarnate One realizes the sentence and judgement of God upon him. So too will that same person, in the depths of suffering caused by his conformation to the Crucified One, realize the coming hope and redemption that will result when he is conformed to the Risen One. Christ reveals to the world the truth of His resurrection by assuming

⁸⁰E., p. 75.

His form in one who is resurrected with Him. Bonhoeffer speaks of this man who has undergone conformation to the incarnation and crucifixion as one who now should be formed as the new creation, a new creation borne by Christ in His form as the Risen One.⁸¹

Through the concrete participation of the real man in the resurrection of Christ the hope of Christianity is properly proclaimed.

Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the forms of Christ as the Incarnate, Crucified, and Risen One testifies again that Bonhoeffer's conception of Christ's revelation to man is not one which allows static ideas to be incorporated into a previously-existing human conceptual framework. Instead, for Bonhoeffer, Christ reveals Himself to man in the form of His personal reality, proclaiming Himself in different forms in order always to speak concretely and authoritatively. Because in Bonhoeffer's thought the form of the reality in which Christ reveals Himself is that of the concrete, historical, personal neighbour, the forms of Christ confront and overcome as nothing else can the tyrannical moulding tendencies of human rationality.⁸²

The picture of Bonhoeffer's Christ accounted thus far evidences the complete unity of the natures of God and man, as is proclaimed in the Chalcedonian definition. It also portrays Christ as a concrete, historical, personal reality who is the mediator and foundation for all true knowledge about reality. It proclaims that the

⁸¹E., p. 79.

⁸²Supra, pp. 44-45.

reality of Christ cancels and transcends all attempts to gain knowledge of reality through human possibility. It extends the reality of Christ across any gap which separates spheres of holiness from spheres of worldliness and in that extension abolishes such gaps, thus showing Christ's Lordship over all of reality. And finally it exhibits how Christ reveals Himself not in static ideas but in the living forms of the real man, forming and transforming man into His own image of the Incarnate, Crucified and Risen One.

The picture of Christ that has been presented thus far, however, does not yet depict all the distinctive features of Bonhoeffer's conception of Christ. Missing from the picture is one concern to which Bonhoeffer returned frequently, viz. the importance of complementing an emphasis on the freedom of Christ's revelation with an emphasis on how that freedom arises from the subjugation of Christ in the incarnation. Bethge clarifies this concern of Bonhoeffer:

The early dialectical theologians, including Bonhoeffer, had asked whether revelation could be understood without removing it from the sphere of God's freedom into that of our control. Bonhoeffer went further and asked: How can revelation be understood so that its very preciousness is preserved by the fact that its tangibility, its self-disclosure, is apparent? While other dialectical theologians thought of the sovereignty of revelation as gloriously manifest in its freedom and its intangibility, Bonhoeffer quite after Lutheran fashion thought of it as apparent in its self-disclosure.⁸³

The Christ who establishes His sovereignty precisely by surrendering

⁸³Bethge, "The Editing and Publishing of the Bonhoeffer Papers", p. 20.

Himself into the hands of men assumes a foremost position in Bonhoeffer's christology. Bonhoeffer develops his vision of such a Christ through the theology of the cross.

C. Christ as Hidden and Suffering: The Theology of the Cross in Bonhoeffer's Christology

Because of its affirmation that the person of Christ unites the nature of God with the nature of man, the Chalcedonian definition declares that God Himself undergoes suffering when Christ suffers on the cross. It has been shown that Bonhoeffer adheres to that definition of Christ. He develops the theme of the suffering God in terms of Luther's theology of the cross. The theology of the cross is central to Bonhoeffer's thought, for it constitutes both the focal point of his christology and the principle of interpretation for his analysis of Christ's relation to the world come of age. As the focal point of his christology it underpins Bonhoeffer's epistemological christocentrism by demonstrating that only Christ's revelation in hiddenness is a trustworthy revelation of God. As the interpretive principle for Bonhoeffer's analysis of Christ's relation to the world come of age, it proclaims that Christ in the form of the Crucified One calls man come of age to a life of sacrificial discipleship. This present section restricts itself to the first of these points, to the description of the place the theology of the cross occupies within Bonhoeffer's christology. The explanation of how he employs his own conception of the theology of the cross as an interpretive principle in his analysis of the world come of age must be held in abeyance until the components of the world come of age have themselves

been explained.

Through an analysis of the theology of the cross in his thought, this present section will establish that Bonhoeffer regards Christ as the representative, the Stellvertreter, who as the Crucified One suffers in the place of others. That concept of "representation" is Bonhoeffer's most complete statement of who is Christ. It revitalizes his christology, giving the doctrines of kenosis, finitum capax infiniti, and formation new relevance.

1. The Theology of the Cross in Luther's Heidelberg Disputation

Bonhoeffer's emphasis on Christ the Crucified One is indebted to his Lutheran heritage,⁸⁴ especially to Luther's own doc-

⁸⁴The continual indebtedness of Bonhoeffer to Luther is exhibited by Bonhoeffer's own writings and by commentaries on him. There is evidence of this in an early paper completed by Bonhoeffer for a 1925 seminar on Luther under the supervision of Karl Holl (included in G.S.V., pp. 64-95), entitled "Luthers Stimmungen gegenüber seinem Werk in seinem letzten Lehrejahre". In his biography, Bethge notes Bonhoeffer's study of Luther under Karl Holl and Reinhold Seeberg, and relates that Bonhoeffer had worked through major commentaries on Luther's Addresses on the Epistle to the Romans. Cf. D.B., pp. 97-101, D.B.E., pp. 46-49. André Dumas' interpretation reduces the significance of the "Lutheran" interpretations of Bonhoeffer. Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality, pp. 243-254. See also T.R. Peters, who documents what he calls Bonhoeffer's ". . . growing critique of Luther's fundamental political-theological positions . . ." (My translation.) ". . . eine wachsende Kritik an politisch-theologischen Grundpositionen Luthers . . ." Peters, Die Präsenz des Politischen in der Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers, p. 95. But Peters nonetheless does agree that Bonhoeffer inherits certain themes from Luther, and that Bonhoeffer's relation to Luther, though critical, is a critical reception. Such critical reception is best exemplified in Bonhoeffer's inheritance of the theologia crucis of Luther, in what Peters calls Bonhoeffer's "Deszendenz-Christologie". (p. 113) On this point, Peters is in agreement with most commentators on Bonhoeffer. See, for instance, Volker Weymann, "Religiöses und religionloses Christentum", Reformatio:

trine of the theology of the cross as it is first delineated in the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518. Four key theses in that Disputation mark Luther's central thoughts on the topic. Because of Bonhoeffer's dependence on these theses it is necessary to take them as the point of departure for this section.⁸⁵

- (18) It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.
- (19) That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible

Zeitschrift für evangelische Kultur und Politik, XXIII (Nov.-Dec., 1974), 619. Especially see Feil, p. 219: "Just because Bonhoeffer has distinguished himself from other theologians in the question of Christology should not lead to the conclusion that Bonhoeffer had drawn up a fundamentally new and completely idiosyncratic Christology. Rather it has been rightly pointed out that Bonhoeffer put forward a 'lutheran condescension-christology', that is, a Christology which makes central God's 'whole fullness precisely in complete condescension (Phil. 2)', in which God's transcendence is concealed within his descendance." (My translation.) "Dass Bonhoeffer sich von anderen Theologen in der Frage der Christologie abgesetzt hat, darf allerdings nicht zu dem Schluss führen, Bonhoeffer habe eine grundsätzlich neue und völlig eigenwillige Christologie entworfen. Vielmehr wurde zu Recht darauf hingewiesen, dass Bonhoeffer eine 'lutherische Kondenszendenz-Christologie' vertreten hat, d. h. eine Christologie, die Gottes 'ganze Fülle gerade in der vollständigen Herablassung (Phil. 2)' in die Mitte stellte, in der Gottes Transzendenz in seiner Deszendenz verborgen ist." Another pertinent comment is made by Regin Prenter: "The point of comparison between them [Luther and Bonhoeffer] is the way they have correlated the theology of the cross with the theology of the Word." Regin Prenter, "Bonhoeffer and the Young Luther", in R.G. Smith, ed., World Come of Age (London: Collins, 1967), p. 161.

⁸⁵The explanation of Luther's theology of the cross which is briefly recapitulated here has been offered in greater detail in Walther von Loewenich, Luthers Theologia Crucis (5. Aufl.; Witten: Luther Verlag, 1967), and in Regin Prenter, Luther's Theology of the Cross, Facet Books Historical Series Pamphlets; Reformation, No. 17 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

in those things which have actually happened (Romans 1:20).

- (20) He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.
- (21) A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.⁸⁶

Embedded in these four theses are four major theological tenets of Luther. Of prime importance is the centrality of Christ in theology. Theses 19 and 20 postulate that, for Luther, thought about God is not theology unless it encounters God's ". . . human nature, weakness, foolishness"⁸⁷ made known in Christ. Scholasticism, representative to Luther of thought about God which does not know Christ's weakness and foolishness, cannot rightly be called theology.⁸⁸ Indeed, it is condemned by God by means of the visible cross, for it leads not to worship of the true God but to self-

⁸⁶Theodore Tappert, ed., Selected Writings of Martin Luther: Vol. I, 1517-1520 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 77-79. The study by von Loewenich, Luthers Theologia Crucis, has argued decisively that -- despite the fact that the theology of the cross is mentioned explicitly only in the Heidelberg Disputation -- it is nonetheless to be found throughout all of Luther's thought as an unstated central principle.

⁸⁷Tappert, p. 78.

⁸⁸At first glance, Luther's citation of Rom. 1:20 in thesis 19 is troublesome: "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made." This seems directly to contradict Luther's thesis. The difficulty is resolved by understanding that the focus of the thesis is that Christ is the proper subject of theology. Even though men should perceive, and at times have perceived, God's invisible nature from the evidence of history and the created world, nonetheless knowledge of God's invisible nature is not enough. The more positive statement in thesis 20 --

inflation:

Because men misused the knowledge of God through works, God wished again to be recognized in suffering, and to condemn wisdom concerning invisible things, so that those who did not honor God as manifested in his works should honor him as he is hidden in his suffering.⁸⁹

It is only Christ, in the form of the Crucified One, who can judge improper thought about God. It is only He who can thus be the true subject of theology. Thought about the visible cross leads man to worship the true God, and thought about God is not theology unless it leads to worship of the true God. Hereafter for Luther, all theology must begin with christology. God can be known rightly only through Christ.

The second major theological tenet of Luther present in these theses is his insistence that the law is given by God to cause men to despair in the face of their inability to fulfill the law. It is by the proclamation of the law that man learns of his need for grace: "The law wills that man despair of his own ability, for it leads him into hell and makes him a poor man and shows him that he is a sinner in all his works."⁹⁰ One who has not known the despair which

that only a person who sees God through suffering and the cross is a true theologian -- supports this interpretation. Even the pagans have seen God's invisible nature in past things, but only one who sees the cross can be a Christian theologian. "Now it is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross." (Tappert, pp. 78-79).

⁸⁹Tappert, p. 78.

⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 77-78.

the law brings will continue to trust in his own ability and will not know his need for grace. But by being taken to the cross on which he is killed by the law, the Christian surrenders all claim to self-sufficiency. Insofar as the Christian avoids this death of his self-righteousness at the hands of the law he avoids the grace of Christ.

The third tenet follows from the second. Because God in Christ is known for Luther in the despair occasioned by the law, because grace comes in judgement and salvation from the cross, it may be said that God is a hidden God who reveals Himself in the opposite of what is expected. "Thus God destroys the wisdom of the wise"⁹¹ In the form of the Crucified One God reveals His victory, in the cross His glory, in weakness His strength, in folly His wisdom. By this Christ remains the scandalon to man. On Him human reason stumbles.

Finally, since it is only the cross which judges improper thought about God and shows the visible and manifest things of God, Luther holds that it is only in the cross that true knowledge of reality is found. It alone can say what a thing really is, good or evil. "He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil."⁹² By undergoing the cross of despair occasioned by the law, the Christian, in Luther's view, will know what is good in the eyes of God as com-

⁹¹Tappert, p. 79.

⁹²Ibid.

pared to that which is good in the eyes of men.

It is at this point that the close connection between Luther and Bonhoeffer can be seen. By saying that the theologian of the cross knows how to call what is good good and what is evil evil, Luther is proclaiming the reversal of the common notion of reality, viz. that notion of reality which is perceived outside of Christ. From this starting point Bonhoeffer builds his own conception of Christ as reality, i.e. his belief that neither isolated historical occurrences nor abstract ideas constitute the ultimate reality, but only Christ Himself. For both Bonhoeffer and Luther, faith in Christ becomes a living in constant contradiction to the accepted and the expected, a looking for God's hiddenness in His visibility and His visiblenss in His hiddenness. And to both of them, it is only a faith which has comprehended the cross that can comprehend God's revelation in hiddenness.

This reversed perspective on reality which Bonhoeffer and Luther share is only the first indication of Bonhoeffer's indebtedness to Luther's theology of the cross. Of equal importance is Bonhoeffer's belief in the epistemological centrality of Christ for the knowledge of God. Luther's recognition that scholastic thought about God would not find the real God and that it would not lead to worship of Him is reflected in Bonhoeffer's insistence that a theology dominated by the conception of God as idea will only lead man back to his own rational postulations.⁹³ Christ alone, in His incarnate and humili-

⁹³Cf. supra, pp. 20-30.

ated form, must be the mediator between God and man for both Luther and Bonhoeffer, because only He reveals God in a way which subjugates the rationality of the one seeking God.

There are also specific indications in Bonhoeffer's thought that he employs Luther's belief that the law of God takes man to despair so that His grace may restore man to life. One of his letters to the Finkenwalde Brethren in 1939 relating to the subject of their proclamation is of special importance:

We are preachers of justification by grace alone. What must that mean today? It means quite simply that we should no longer equate human ways and aims with divine ways and aims. God is beyond all human plans and actions. Everything must be judged by him. Anyone who evades this judgement of God must die, anyone who subjects himself to it will live; for to be judged by God is grace that leads to life. He judges in order to have mercy, he humbles in order to exalt. Only the humble will succeed. God does not confirm human action, but cuts across it, and thereby draws our gaze above, to his grade.⁹⁴

By drawing man to despair of his own righteousness, the law causes man to surrender his own notions of God and draws him instead toward a commitment to a God which he does not yet know. At this point both Luther and Bonhoeffer integrate the theology of the cross with their doctrine of justification by faith alone. The surrender of one's preconceived notions of God and the commitment to an unknown, hidden God who comes in the unpredicted form of the Crucified One is the act of faith required by God. Bonhoeffer be-

⁹⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Way to Freedom, excerpts from Gesammelte Schriften, 1935-1939, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden (London: Collins, 1966), p. 253.

believes that the crucifixion shows to man that there is genuine faith only ". . . when the search for certainty out of visible evidence is given up."⁹⁵ The revelation of God to man which prompts man's response of faith is a revelation in hiddenness. Only a hidden revelation will prompt the proper obedient response. If the revelation were not a revelation in hiddenness, man would not respond in faith alone, but would depend on his own rational construction of the God being openly presented to him. Von Loewenich describes this dynamic at work in Luther's thought in this way: "The Deus absconditus is none other than the Deus revelatus. God is absconditus for the sake of revelation. Revelation is possible only in concealment, and the Deus revelatus must as such be absconditus."⁹⁶

The paradox remains, however, both for Luther and Bonhoeffer, that it is a visible cross and suffering which is a sign of Christ, and this does reveal to man the invisible, hidden God. Yet this does not contradict their belief that the revelation which calls man to faith is a hidden revelation. Indeed, Bonhoeffer claims that ". . . it is exactly the fact that God really entered history which makes Him invisible for human eyes."⁹⁷ Precisely because Christ makes Himself no greater than other men and enters the world, men

⁹⁵C.C., p. 110.

⁹⁶Von Loewenich, Luthers Theologia Crucis, p. 29. (My translation) "Der Deus absconditus is kein anderer als der Deus revelatus: Gott is absconditus um der Offenbarung willen. Offenbarung ist nur möglich in der Verhüllung, der Deus revelatus muss als solcher absconditus sein."

⁹⁷G.S. III, p. 113.

are caught by the scandalon and are forced to recognize that their conceptions of God are mistaken and that they must have faith in a hidden, suffering God who comes in forms opposite to their expectations. Revelation does occur, but it occurs in the form of the suffering, hidden Christ. This eliminates any possibility of faith being an intellectual assent to propositions about the nature of acts of God, for faith is a commitment to a hidden, unknown God.

The explication of these points of similarity between Bonhoeffer and Luther have supported the premise of this section that Bonhoeffer's theology is greatly influenced by the theology of the cross. That premise is further supported by Bonhoeffer's own statements, as for example this assertion from a 1942 letter to his sister and brother-in-law in England: ". . . it is good to learn early enough that suffering and God is not a contradiction but rather a necessary unity; for me the idea that God himself is suffering has always been one of the most convincing teachings of Christianity."⁹⁸ His own affirmation of the theology of the cross is also found much earlier in his writings. It is already in evidence when he writes in the christology lectures:

If we are to deal with the deity of Jesus, we must speak of his weakness. In christology, one looks at the whole historical man Jesus and says of him, that he is God

If we speak of Jesus Christ as God, we may not say of him that he is the representative of an idea of God, which possesses the characteristics of omniscience and omnipotence . . . ; rather, we

⁹⁸G. S. VI, pp. 557.

must speak of his weakness, his manger, his cross.⁹⁹

The theology of the cross which these two excerpts exemplify is one which, though loyal to Luther's previous orientation, nonetheless develops through Bonhoeffer's own insights into a concept more contemporary to his own age.

2. Bonhoeffer's Own Extension of the Theology of the Cross into Identification and "Representation"¹⁰⁰

That more contemporary conception which Bonhoeffer develops is seen throughout his writings in his attempt to show the continuing identification of the cross of the disciple with the cross of Christ and in his conception of the Crucified One as the representative who suffers for man. Here Bonhoeffer is building on Luther's own thought and is preparing the way to take the theology of the cross into an arena of application.

Bonhoeffer is convinced that the cross which is borne by a disciple in the name of Christ is one with the cross of Christ itself. This stems from his conception of the church as the body of

⁹⁹C.C., p. 104.

¹⁰⁰Although both of these concepts will receive more extensive examination in chapter 3, especially regarding their relationship to Bonhoeffer's prison letters, their relation to the theology of the cross can be briefly explained here. Indeed, only by establishing their relationship to the theology of the cross can the close dependence of Bonhoeffer's extensive development of the concept of "representation" upon his theology of the cross be seen.

Christ¹⁰¹ and from his understanding of the forms of Christ in the world. Christ the Crucified One reveals Himself concretely by taking form in the individual suffering of His disciples. His cross is formed in the cross which His disciples bear. Bonhoeffer expounds this theme in a 1934 sermon on II Corinthians 12:9:

Why is suffering holy? Because God suffers in the world through man and whenever he comes he has to suffer from man again. God suffered on the cross. Therefore all human suffering and weakness is a sharing in God's own suffering and weakness in the world. We are suffering! God is suffering much more. Our God is a suffering God. Suffering forms man into the image of God. The suffering man is in the likeness of God. 'My strength is made perfect in weakness,' says God. Whenever a man in a position of weakness -- physical or social or moral or religious weakness -- is aware of his existence with God and his likeness to God, he shares God's life God glorifies himself in the weak as he glorified himself on the cross. God is mighty where man is nothing.¹⁰²

The moral or religious weakness in which man becomes aware of his existence with God is the weakness of despair brought on by the law of God. Here it is a well accepted theological principle that God kills in order to make alive again. But Bonhoeffer would extend that principle to the physical and the social sphere. He would argue that the very visible suffering and rejection of a disciple for the sake of Christ is also a means whereby God carries man to death,

¹⁰¹See infra, pp. 196-207. Also see Clifford Green, The Sociality of Christ . . ., especially chapters II and III, for examination of Bonhoeffer's early views of the church.

¹⁰²G.S. IV, p. 182.

so that in his own cross of suffering the disciple can better understand and experience the cross of Christ. And through that experience of his own suffering the disciple will comprehend that he is participating in the cross of Christ as it is formed concretely at that moment. Indeed, it is precisely in his participation in Christ's cross that the disciple sees Christ's revelation in its proper concreteness. Only here is he challenged by the revelation and only here is his faith strengthened. In Bonhoeffer's eyes it is the willing assumption of the cross by the disciple that marks the difference between a vital faith and an indolent faith based on intellectual acceptance of propositions: "When I acknowledge a miracle nothing happens to me. But faith is there when a man so surrenders himself to the humiliated God-Man that he bets his life on him, even when this seems against all sense."¹⁰³ The identification of the cross of Christ with the cross of the disciple is thus an expression of the concrete formation of Christ in the world in the form of the Crucified One. In his participation in that cross the disciple sees Christ's suffering in his suffering, and is called to a still deeper faith by the demands of the concretely-revealed Christ.

This identification does not occur only once but whenever Christ forms Himself as the Crucified One in concrete revelation to man. This follows from Bonhoeffer's general conception of all revelation, which he describes in Act and Being: "It follows, therefore, that we may not interpret the christian revelation as 'having hap-

¹⁰³ C.C., p. 110.

pened', that for man living in the Church, in the present, this unique occurrence is qualified as future."¹⁰⁴ In Christ the Center Bonhoeffer reiterates this conception of revelation and sharpens its focus in his affirmation that "Christ goes through the ages, questioned anew, misunderstood anew, and again and again put to death."¹⁰⁵

The point to be garnered from his belief in this continuing revelation of Christ is that Bonhoeffer believes that the theology of the cross is an illuminating means of interpreting events which happen again and again in the lives of disciples. As the suffering of Christ repeats itself daily in His disciples, and as they recognize the identity of their cross with Him, His revelation speaks to them again and again. This recurring revelation of Christ through the identity of the cross of Christ with the cross of man is Bonhoeffer's first major development on Luther's theology of the cross.¹⁰⁶

In conjunction with Bonhoeffer's insistence that the cross of the disciple is identified with the cross of Christ is found his affirmation that Christ is the representative, the Stellvertreter who takes the place of others. The cross is the supreme example for Bonhoeffer of Christ's "representation" for others. He proclaims the importance of that "representation" in a 1935 sermon on

¹⁰⁴A. B., p. 120.

¹⁰⁵C. C., p. 35.

¹⁰⁶It is not implied here that Bonhoeffer's development of Luther's theology of the cross in this direction is unique. See von Loewenich, p. 137ff.

Isaiah 53:

Faith knows: it is HE whom God has smitten for us He, the Nameless One, has entered into the place in which I and mankind should suffer The Nameless One has cracked open the order of the world. Its order is that everyone must vouch for himself before God He contravenes this law and bears the punishment and judgement for others.¹⁰⁷

From this it can be seen that "representation" is Bonhoeffer's specific expression of the doctrine of atonement. As the representative, Christ atones for the sins of man by standing under the judgement that is due to man. He "represents" man before God's seat but He does so in His own form. For Bonhoeffer, that "representation" by Christ includes the full acceptance of the guilt of others. This is proof of the fullness of Christ's incarnation, that He assumes the guilt of others, for thereby Christ becomes the most guilty of all criminals:

Jesus does not desire to be regarded as the only perfect one at the expense of men; He does not desire to look down on mankind as the only guiltless one while mankind goes to its ruin under the weight of its guilt; As one who acts responsibly in the historical existence of men Jesus becomes guilty.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷G.S.IV, p. 212. (My translation) "Der Glaube erkennt: das ist ER, den Gott für uns geschlagen hat Er, der Namenlose, ist an die Stelle getreten, an der ich und die Menschheit stehen sollten. Er leidet, wo ich und die Menschheit leiden sollten Der Namenlose hat die Ordnung der Welt zerbrochen. Ihre Ordnung ist, dass jeder für sich selbst einzustehen hat vor Gott Er zerbricht dieses Gesetz und trägt die Strafe und das Gericht der anderen."

¹⁰⁸E., pp. 240-241.

In the concept of "representation" Bonhoeffer's interpretation of Christ as existing pro me reaches its fullest extension. Christ's existence for man goes as far as His death on the cross. As the Crucified One who exists pro me, Christ reveals that the character of God is not one of isolated aseity but one of involved "representation". Revelation itself, Bonhoeffer argues in Act and Being, is an example of God's existence for others at His own expense, for He surrenders His Word into the hands of man:

In revelation it is a question less of God's freedom on the far side of us, i. e. his eternal isolation and aseity, than of his forthproceeding, his given Word, his bond in which he has bound himself, of his freedom as it is most strongly attested in his having freely bound himself to historical man, having placed himself at man's disposal. God is not free of man but for man. Christ is the Word of his freedom. "God is there," which is to say: not in eternal non-objectivity but . . . 'haveable', graspable in his Word within the Church.¹⁰⁹

God's revelation among men, being 'haveable' by them, is subject to their abuse. Its perfection is sullied as the words of revelation enter into the everyday affairs of men. What happens to these words of revelation happens also to the Word Himself. His acceptance of the guilt of others in atonement for them is Christ's existence in "representation" for others at the expense of His perfect status before the Law of God. He exists pro me at His own expense. To be for and with man, then, Christ must assume their guilt and represent them before God. This points toward the historical and logical culmination of Bonhoeffer's concept of "representation" by

¹⁰⁹A.B., pp. 90-91.

Christ, the simple appellation given to Christ in the Letters Christ is there called "the man for others".¹¹⁰ There His existence pro me is extended into the One who in "representation" surrenders Himself for others.

But precisely in the surrender of Himself for others Christ established Himself all the more solidly in the world. And exactly in his "haveability" or malleability among men Christ establishes His Lordship and true transcendence. His "representation" for others is the basis of a reclaimed sovereignty among men. Here Christ exhibits the characteristics of the theology of the cross by revealing His perfectness in the assumption of guilt. Bonhoeffer expresses this paradox by saying: "His 'being there for others' is the experience of transcendence. It is only this 'being there for others', maintained till death, that is the ground of his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence."¹¹¹ Christ discloses Himself in the opposite of what is expected.

Disclosure of Christ, however, even in a form opposite to what is expected, is not immediate or automatic. In His form as the representative, in His atonement, Christ shows through His own hiddenness that God exists as a hidden God, and it is because of

¹¹⁰L.P.P., pp. 381-382. Clifford Green has demonstrated the continuity of the theme of representation in Bonhoeffer's theology. Cf. Green, The Sociality of Christ . . ., pp. 328-330. See also Bethge's remarks in "Bonhoeffer's Christology and his 'Religionless Christianity'", in B.W.C.A., p. 69.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 381.

this that Bonhoeffer describes God as absent. This means, to Bonhoeffer, that God at times absents Himself from His people. It is with this absent God that Bonhoeffer's essay "Temptation" is concerned: "God shows himself in temptation not as the gracious, the near one, who furnishes us with all the gifts of the Spirit; on the contrary He forsakes us, he is quite distant from us; we are in the wilderness."¹¹² Christ must become, therefore, not only the representative of man before a judging God, but also the representative to man of an absent God, for in the absence of God man finds Christ: "All temptation leads the believer into the deepest solitude, into abandonment by men and by God. But in this solitude he finds Jesus Christ, man and God."¹¹³ Here then the dynamic of the theology of the cross is again evident. Precisely in the absence of God man finds Him through Christ the representative. God again reveals Himself in the opposite of what is expected. In His absence He reveals Himself in His most complete presence with man. Expected to be present in His comforting and in His provision of sufficient grace, God reverses the circumstances and precisely in those things is absent. He relies upon Christ the representative to present Him to man. Bonhoeffer believes therefore that only by looking for Christ the representative will a man in the midst of temptation and abandonment find the God who appears to have forsaken His people.¹¹⁴

¹¹²C.F./T., p. 103.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 127.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

It will be advantageous at this juncture to review the components of Bonhoeffer's idea of Christ that have been explicated in this first chapter and to underscore those that most directly affect the thesis of this study. It will be remembered that the question which this first chapter addresses is: Who, according to Bonhoeffer, is the Christ that is revealing Himself to man?

To Bonhoeffer Christ is primarily the God-Man, the one person who unites completely the nature of God with the nature of man. This is the Christ described by the Chalcedonian definition and developed through the Lutheran doctrine of communicatio idiomatum. It may be said of this Christ, through the genus maiestaticum, that in Him the predicates of God must be expressed of man as well. His allegiance to the communicatio idiomatum impels Bonhoeffer to believe that every act of Christ is an act both of God and man. Thus every action which affects Christ affects God and man in Him and every revelation of Christ is a revelation both of God and man.

The Christ of Chalcedon is complemented in Bonhoeffer's theology by his understanding of Christ as reality. Christ, who unites God and man in His person, also unites all disparity between separate spheres and becomes the one source of knowledge about either the divine or the human reality. He is the judge of all other possible bases of reality, including any empiricist dependence on the tactile world or any idealist dependence on a doctrine of God as idea. Christ's revelation in reality is perceived by Bonhoeffer as a concrete, personal, historical revelation that calls the human recipient of revelation into obedience so that the hearer's human rationality

will not form Christ's Word into an innocuous or familiar series of propositions. The reality of Christ in revelation assumes a form suitable to the circumstances so that the hearer may be weaned toward God. His form may be that of the Incarnate One, the Crucified One, or the Risen One. These were the forms of Christ's body while He was on earth and they remain the forms of His body the church as it now exists on earth.

It is with Christ formed as the Crucified One that Bonhoeffer and this thesis are primarily concerned, especially in regard to Christ's form in discipleship. Bonhoeffer interprets Christ the Crucified One through the theology of the cross, which he inherits from Luther and extends into his own expanded conception of reality. Christ in the theology of the cross reveals a hidden God in the opposite of what is expected. The suffering of God is shown to be His victory and His folly is shown to be His wisdom. Here Bonhoeffer affirms the identification of Christ's cross with the disciple's own cross, and here he offers his belief that Christ is the representative who suffers in the place of others. The Christ of Bonhoeffer's theology of the cross reveals Himself to man, but His revelation is hidden from all but those who look with the eyes of faith.

That the revelation of God in Christ is a hidden revelation constitutes the major dilemma for Bonhoeffer as he surveys the contemporary scene, for he surmises that the true revelation of Christ is being mistaken and dangerously distorted. The paramount question becomes: to whom is Christ revealing Himself?

. . . who, then, can see the revelation in con-

cealment? Nobody but those to whom Christ Himself reveals this most secret mystery of His revelation in weakness. Nobody but those to whom God gives the faith, which is not offended, but which sees God's judgement and grace in the midst of human weakness, sin and death, where otherwise man can see only godlessness . . . This is the real world of biblical faith, which sees God's work not on the top, but in the depth of mankind. And because faith sees God in Christ, it sees God, the same God of Christ, in man's own life, in man's own sin, weakness and death as judgement and as grace.¹¹⁵

This quotation evidences Bonhoeffer's belief that Christ is still revealing Himself, that Christ is fulfilling His promise to be with His church to the end of time. But Bonhoeffer perceives that the promise is being fulfilled in a hidden manner, that the revelation is being given to an unexpected recipient today. It will be the task of the second chapter of this study to demonstrate why Bonhoeffer believes revelation must be given in the new hidden manner, why he thinks Christ is revealing Himself to an unexpected and unexpectant recipient, and why he believes that the changed circumstances that have demanded that new hidden revelation can be transformed to reveal the work of Christ. Just as this first chapter has answered the question: Who, according to Bonhoeffer, is the Christ that is revealing Himself to man?, so must the second chapter ask the next

¹¹⁵G.S. III, p. 114. This is an early (1931) quotation by Bonhoeffer which reflects most salutarly the concerns of this thesis. It expresses his interpretation of Christ as the representative, it reflects his identification of Christ's cross with the cross of the disciple, and it proclaims Christ's revelation in hiddenness.

logical question: What is the nature of the age that is altering the way Christ is revealing Himself?

CHAPTER TWO

THE WORLD COME OF AGE AS SUSTAINED BY CHRIST

Bonhoeffer's interpretation of Christ as one who reveals Himself historically and concretely in the forms of the Incarnate One, the Crucified One, and the Resurrected One assures him that Christ continues to reveal Himself to the world despite man's repeated failure to discern His contemporary form.

It is the objective of this second chapter to recount Bonhoeffer's description of the new age into which the newly formed Christ has come. That objective will entail both a straightforward examination of the specific characteristics of the religionless man come of age and an analysis of the theological framework within which Bonhoeffer interprets that world come of age.¹ In that theo-

¹Bonhoeffer's use of the phrase "come of age" (mündig werden) is present periodically throughout his earlier writings. See G.S. II, p. 36, where the phrase is used politically, and G.S. IV, pp. 257, 260, 268, 271, where it is used in homiletics. However, in these early periodic references there is no connotation that the world as a whole has come of age nor that there are new responsibilities incumbent upon Christians as a result of the world's new maturity. Ernst Feil has reasoned impressively that Bonhoeffer first employs the phrase "world come of age" with its mature and full meaning in the letters of June 8, 1944 and following, after his exposure to Wilhelm Dilthey's Von deutscher Dichtung und Musik and his Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit Renaissance und Reformation. (Feil, pp. 355-368.) It is true that many of Bonhoeffer's latest letters are filled with references to subjects, characters, and insights mentioned in these and other works of Dilthey, as Feil claims (e.g., p. 358), and he is correct to emphasize their importance. Yet this discovery should not be over-extended to imply that therefore the full and mature meaning of the phrase "world come of age" must be determined exclusively through an examination of the

logical framework Bonhoeffer proposes that Christ Himself transforms and sustains the world come of age, and that the new form assumed by Christ is one which calls man to active participation in the new age. The two parts of the objective are united by the fact that when the Christian is called by Christ to participate in the new age he must repudiate his religiousness and must live non-religiously in a non-religious world.

It is essential to substantiate this two-part objective in order to establish the need for and possibility of Bonhoeffer's new means of proclaiming and interpreting Christ's revelation. If the claim of this thesis is to be demonstrated, namely that discipleship in the form of "representation" is the key to the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts, then it must first be established why Bonhoeffer believes the old means of interpretation are no longer adequate. The question, in other words, becomes: "What has occurred in the world's coming of age that has invalidated religious methods of interpretation?" Only after this question has been appropriately answered can the final chapter of this study detail why Bonhoeffer's non-religious interpretation based on "representation" would not be invalidated in a like manner. Secondly, unless it is estab-

letters subsequent to June, 1944. Were that the case, Bonhoeffer's important earlier references to autonomy and Mündigkeit, as in the Ethics section "Inheritance and Decay" (E., p. 100), must be ignored. Or, of greater importance, it would be necessary to ignore the key theological principles already at work in Bonhoeffer's thought that enabled him properly to recognize and utilize Dilthey's analysis. Those principles are present in the Ethics as well as the Letters The present explanation of the world come of age will depend primarily upon these two writings.

lished here that Bonhoeffer believes it is Christ who calls the world to maturity, it cannot be affirmed that Bonhoeffer sees Christ Himself calling the Christian to the life of representative discipleship that is non-religious interpretation.

A. The Religionlessness of Man Come of Age

Religious interpretations of biblical concepts are no longer valid because, in the process of the world's coming of age, a new aspect of the human spirit has emerged -- a new maturity, worldliness, responsibility, nonreligiousness, to which the gospel must be directed in a fresh way. Christ has assumed a new form to speak to this new dimension. It is the task of this present section to recount Bonhoeffer's description of the man who embodies the spirit of the world come of age. Only then will it be possible to recognize the new form in which Bonhoeffer believes Christ is revealing Himself.

When Bonhoeffer considers the man who embodies the spirit of the world come of age, he considers him theologically. That is, he considers him primarily with regard to the impact this new dimension of man is making upon the reception of the revelation of God's Word in Christ.² The foremost factor in this reception is the religionlessness of man come of age. Bonhoeffer indicates this in the Letters . . .:

²Bonhoeffer repeats frequently: "The question is: Christ and the world that has come of age." L.P.P., p. 327. It is not the new development itself but its relation to Christ that is central.

The time when people could be told everything by means of words, whether theological or pious, is over, and so is the time of inwardness and conscience -- and that means the time of religion in general. We are moving toward a completely religionless time; people as they are now simply cannot be religious anymore.³

The changed personality of this new man means therefore that when Bonhoeffer wishes to describe how emergence of worldliness in men affects the reception of revelation he must describe their religionlessness.

What, however, is religionlessness? Indeed, what, to Bonhoeffer, is religion? To offer an explicit, simple, statement of Bonhoeffer's definition of religion is troublesome, for he himself does not explicitly offer a comprehensive definition. It is more appropriate to speak, as Bonhoeffer does, not of religion as an entity, but of a religious attitude. That attitude entails two primary motivations and manifests itself in three forms.

One of the two prime motivations may be called the self-justificatory attitude of the religious man. It is evident in Bonhoeffer's criticism of how the religious man attempts ". . . to make something of oneself (a sinner, a penitent, or a saint) on the basis of some method or other . . ." and how he is ". . . in the first place ~~thinking~~ about one's own needs, problems, sins, and fears."⁴ Concerned primarily about his own welfare, the religious man attempts to justify his actions and his very existence by creating his own self-

³L.P.P., p. 279.

⁴Ibid., p. 361.

fulfilling identity which, unwittingly, places him in a sphere of reality apart from the Real One. The other motivation is allied to the first. This consists in the readiness of the religious man to picture God in a triumphalist manner. Thus Bonhoeffer warns that the "decisive difference" between true Christianity and other religions is that true faith can see the hidden and suffering God, whereas "Man's religiosity makes him look in his distress to the power of God in the world" ⁵

Throughout the first portion of this chapter the centrality of these two motives will be revealed through a specific examination of three characteristic manifestations of the religious attitude, manifestations which are made evident by Bonhoeffer's critique: two-sphere thinking and its resultant individualism; metaphysical categorizations of God; and the privileged status of religion. ⁶

⁵ L.P.P., p. 361.

⁶ All study of Bonhoeffer's critique of religion is indebted to Eberhard Bethge for the extensive treatment given that subject in his biography. See D.B., pp. 774-782. There Bethge divides Bonhoeffer's definition of religion into seven strains. This present study greatly benefits from that categorization, and will not attempt to duplicate his thorough descriptions. But it will attempt to summarize those seven strains through fewer, more inclusive, categories. See a slightly different treatment in Feil, pp. 345ff., who believes Bonhoeffer finally interprets religion as an "historically conditioned, transitory form of expression" which may be necessary as a first step to true expression. A third analysis, offered by Clifford Green (The Sociality of Christ . . . , pp. 309-315), interprets the essence of "religion" as an interplay between a weak, dependent humanity and a God of power. This distillation by Green is helpful, especially given Bonhoeffer's distinction between sins of weakness and sins of strength (cf. L.P.P., p. 345). But Green portrays Bonhoeffer's definition of religion solely as an "operational" definition, a definition involving primarily a "psychic posture", and not referring as such to "morphological" or "institutional" issues. This is ques-

1) "Thinking in terms of two spheres" is Bonhoeffer's pejorative label for the tendency among Christians to juxtapose and contrast two different spheres of life: ". . . the one divine, holy, supernatural and Christian, the other worldly, profane, natural and un-Christian."⁷ This juxtaposition is the result of an incomplete appreciation of Christ's reality, thereby reflecting an unwillingness to accept that Christ's incarnation is complete. Having affirmed in the Ethics that the Christian should participate fully in the reality of God, ". . . such that I never experience the reality of God without the reality of the world or the reality of the world without the reality of God."⁸, Bonhoeffer immediately laments that "As soon as we try to advance along this path, our way is blocked by the colossal obstacle of a large part of traditional Christian ethical thought."⁹, namely the thinking in terms of two spheres.

Two-sphere thinking is reflected in monasticism and in the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms,¹⁰ but also in less apparent

tionable terminology. Green's reading of "religion" as a way of "behaving, feeling, and thinking" contributes to an interpretation which would regard the impact of "religion" upon the institutional forms and structures of the church as negligible. On the contrary, Bonhoeffer is specifically concerned about that very impact. It prompts him to extend his non-religious interpretation to topics such as the cultus and the visible outward form of the church (L.P.P., p. 382).

⁷E., p. 196.

⁸Ibid., p. 195.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Bonhoeffer is elsewhere very quick to defend Luther against the charge of two-sphere thinking. He fixes the blame instead on Luther's later interpreters. In C.D., p. 239, Bonhoeffer

principles, like the "Enthusiastic" renunciation of the physical world in favour of an attempt at the forceful establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.¹¹ In all these instances the Christian alleges that the physical, earthly, sphere must be repudiated or at least strictly subjugated to the heavenly sphere. Such a Christian deems that God is absent from the reality immediately surrounding him, and looks behind it to a heavenly reality. For this reason Gerhard Ebeling and R. G. Smith respectively describe this religious attitude as ". . . supplementing reality by God . . ." ¹² and as ". . . an attitude which regards man's life as being somehow completed by the addition of God."¹³ Instead of simply accepting the reality already given by God, "religion" seeks to isolate a realm within reality which it believes to be more divine, more worthy of God, and in which a man may have his own special religious identity.

Yet Bonhoeffer recognizes that man come of age rejects any attempt to supplement or complete the reality around him with an imported idea of a higher reality: "Man has learnt to deal with

restates Luther's intention: "The other-worldliness of the Christian life ought, Luther concluded, to be manifested in the very midst of the world, in the Christian community and in its daily life. Hence the Christian's task is to live out that life in terms of his secular calling. That is the way to die unto the world."

¹¹E., p. 196.

¹²Gerhard Ebeling, "The Non-Religious Interpretation of Biblical Concepts" in his Word and Faith, p. 160.

¹³R. G. Smith, "Introduction", in W.C.A., p. 15.

himself in all questions of importance without recourse to the 'working hypothesis' called 'God'.¹⁴ The new worldliness of man scorns any use of religion as an opiate to numb human nerves to vivid physical reality, and repudiates the religious denigration and postponement of earthly hopes. It rejects the supplementing of reality by God both because the Christian no longer needs that supplement and because it detracts from a full participation in the reality at hand. The worldly Christian exhibits a kind of love that Bonhoeffer endorses in a letter to Bethge: "If a man loves, he wants to live, to live above all, and hates everything that represents a threat to his life."¹⁵ Bonhoeffer knows that man come of age regards religion as a threat to full life. He also knows, consequently, that the use of religion to palliate the vitality and joys of earthly life can only be hated by man come of age. If Christianity is to be reconciled to this new maturity in man, it must be rid of any two-sphere thinking that denigrates earthly joy.

Two-sphere thinking includes not only a separation of the world into heavenly and earthly spheres but also a separation of man himself into the inner man and the outer man. It is here that two-sphere thinking culminates in what to Bonhoeffer is a particularly troublesome aspect of religion, viz. individualism. Individualism has arisen as an illegitimate extension of the legitimate theological

¹⁴L. P. P., p. 325.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 302.

emphasis on individual redemption from personal sin.¹⁶ Individualism develops from the two-sphere separation of man and contributes to the failure of modern Christianity to disclaim all underhanded 'methodist' programs which attempt to despoil man come of age of his new maturity.¹⁷

Individualistic two-sphere thinking divides man into his inner self and his outer self and considers his outer, physical, self as little more than a transient hindrance to full communion with God. The inner, spiritual, man, however, is looked upon as the true self, most capable of divine communion. But Bonhoeffer, using biblical evidence, denies that this is a legitimate distinction:

. . . the Bible does not recognize our distinction between the outward and the inward. Why should it? It is always concerned with anthropos teleios, the whole man. The 'heart' in the Biblical sense is not the inner life, but the whole man in relation

¹⁶Bonhoeffer's rejection of individualism does not imply that he rejects the concept of personal sin. See L.P.P., pp. 158, 170, 341, and 345. The inclusion here of individualism within the theme of two-sphere thinking is not meant to imply that two-sphere thinking will inevitably produce the inward-looking, anti-social privatism that Bethge criticizes as individualism (D.B., pp. 98ff., D.B.E., p. 778). Thinking in two spheres may as easily engender a concentration on those external dimensions of religion which lead to a simply metaphysical or conceptual understanding of faith. However, while two-sphere thinking may exist without individualism, individualism may not exist without the prior two-sphere thinking that has wrenched the "individual soul" out of its physical and social environment. Bonhoeffer's treatment of individualism in the Letters . . ., e.g. p. 344ff., is set within his larger theme of the " . . . displacement of God from the world, and from the public part of human life . . ." (p. 344) Only after divinity has been relegated to heaven and away from earthly realities does the temptation to privatistic spiritualism arise.

¹⁷A further discussion of this follows. See infra., pp. 128-131.

to God. But as a man lives just as much from 'outwards' to 'inwards' as from 'inwards' to 'outwards', the view that his essential nature can be understood only from his intimate spiritual background is wholly erroneous.¹⁸

Bonhoeffer deduces from this scriptural interpretation his belief that faith will be misinterpreted if it is seen merely as spiritual: "The 'religious act' is always something partial; 'faith' is something whole involving the whole of one's life."¹⁹ He therefore regards the two-sphere division of man as inimical to faith because it reduces faith from a complete act to a partial act and restricts it to the nebulous area of man's "intimate spiritual background". Whether manifested in the individualist division of man into his inner and outer self, or in the division of reality into physical and spiritual realms, two-sphere thinking is rejected by Bonhoeffer because it insufficiently perceives the fullness of the incarnation.

2) The second characteristic of religion which Bonhoeffer believes²⁰ is alienating religious Christianity from man come of age is the conception of God by means of metaphysical categories and the use of those metaphysical constructions of God as an explanation for the mysterious universe. Bonhoeffer is convinced that Christianity must completely dissociate itself from metaphysical language and metaphysical presuppositions.²⁰

¹⁸L. P. P., p. 346.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 362.

²⁰Bonhoeffer uses the word "metaphysics" in a specific, restricted sense. His rejection of metaphysics in religion does not imply that there is nothing super-natural or metaphysical about God

When Bonhoeffer describes the metaphysical aspect of religion he describes two interrelated themes: the improper interpretation of divine transcendence and the evasive use of God as deus ex machina.

Bonhoeffer rejects the religious conception of divine transcendence because that conception interprets transcendence as otherworldliness:

Our relation to God is not a 'religious' relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being imaginable -- that is not authentic transcendence -- but our relation to God is a new life in 'existence for others', through participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendental is not infinite and unattainable tasks, but the neighbour who is within reach in any given situation.²¹

Yet the religious believer does not look for that neighbour with whom he may experience transcendence, for religion is unable to dispense with the notion that divine transcendence exists only outside of this world. God is thought to be transcendent because He provides answers to the questions man cannot answer. He is

but that it is only through the Incarnate One that God is known. See, e.g. L.P.P., p. 286: "It is not with the beyond that we are concerned, but with this world as created and preserved, subjected to laws, reconciled, and restored. What is above the world is, in the gospel, intended to exist for this world" This does not deny the existence of the "beyond" but rather accentuates the immanent. It is therefore wrong to believe, as do some commentators, that when Bonhoeffer rejects metaphysics he is rejecting something as broadly-defined as ". . . an attempt to describe the structure of our understanding of how things are generally . . ." Paul Van Buren, "Bonhoeffer's Paradox: Living with God without God", in B.W.C.A., p. 9.

²¹Ibid., p. 381.

deemed transcendent because His power goes beyond the boundaries that restrict human beings and because He is the ". . . super-structure of existence . . ." ²² which makes life possible in the first place.

Past systems of physics have supported religion's view of God as a metaphysically transcendent Being existing beyond the limits of the world. But Bonhoeffer's familiarity with contemporary theories of physics, though limited, convinced him that this was no longer the case. ²³ Thus in his description of the rise of the world come of age Bonhoeffer can state that "The classical cosmos was finite, like the created world of the Middle Ages. An infinite universe, however it may be conceived, is self-subsisting, etsi deus non daretur . . ." ²⁴ The infinite universe conceived of in modern physics has no place for a God who is an unlimited giver of physical life, since the concept of the creator-God is unnecessary. Yet the religious believer maintains this previous metaphysical image of God and the concomitant theological doctrines, either oblivious to the changing physical conception of the universe or arrogantly presuming that the new theory will quickly pass away. He continues to inter-

²²D. B., p. 980, D. B. E., p. 777.

²³See Bonhoeffer's expressions of indebtedness to C. F. von Weizsäcker in L. P. P., pp. 311-312, etc. E. Feil has explained the importance of von Weizsäcker for Bonhoeffer's late development. See Feil, pp. 359-360.

²⁴L. P. P., pp. 308-311.

pret divine transcendence as divine separateness. God remains posited outside the world, transcendent by virtue of His eternity, omnipotence, and distance.

What concerns Bonhoeffer, however, is that the religious understanding of the infinity and omnipotence of God is being slowly rendered unnecessary by man's increasing mastery over his own previous limitations.

Man has learnt to deal with himself in all questions of importance without recourse to the 'working hypothesis' called 'God'. In questions of science, art, and ethics this has become an understood thing at which one now hardly dares to tilt. But for the last hundred years or so it has also become increasingly true of religious questions; it is becoming evident that everything gets along without 'God' -- and, in fact, just as well as before. As in the scientific field, so in human affairs generally, 'God' is being pushed more and more out of life, losing more and more ground.²⁵

It is the inevitable result of the religious conception of divine transcendence as metaphysical limitlessness that the man come of age, apparently becoming limitless himself, will supplant God and render Him at best into a harmless afterthought. It is this supersession of God by man that brings Bonhoeffer to the idea that the religious conception of divine transcendence as metaphysical limitlessness has to be eliminated.

Until the time when the man come of age becomes able to discard the 'God hypothesis' completely, God will still have a place in human affairs. But Bonhoeffer charges that even when the author-

²⁵L. P. P., pp. 325-326.

ity of God's power was not being threatened by man's coming of age, the religious position accorded to God in human affairs was a distorted one. Because God was understood as metaphysically omnipotent, He was invoked to solve problems lying beyond the limits of human explanation:

Religious people speak of God when human knowledge (perhaps simply because they are too lazy to think) has come to an end, or when human resources fail -- in fact it is always the deus ex machina that they bring onto the scene, either for the apparent solution of insoluble problems, or as strength in human failure -- always, that is to say, exploiting human weakness or human boundaries.²⁶

The relegation of God to the limits of human existence engenders the conception of God as a deus ex machina, one who sweeps down from a sheltered abode to rescue man from difficulty, depositing him in a safe place before swinging back up to the transcendent heaven. God becomes reserved for the "boundary situations"²⁷ in men's lives, and is not understood as the center of human existence. This conception of God as deus ex machina is the second error of metaphysically-inclined religion.

Man come of age rejects religion and its metaphysically-conceived God primarily because God as a deus ex machina is no longer necessary to support his conception of the universe. But

²⁶L. P. P., pp. 281-282.

²⁷A more explicit account of Bonhoeffer's conception of boundary situations (Grenzfälle) is in E., pp. 238-239, under his discussion of necessitas. It is to be understood that Bonhoeffer does not deny the existence of boundary situations in human lives, but he does deny that it is primarily in these situations that man is to find God.

also, as Bonhoeffer describes, such a God can speak to man only after the exhaustion of human resources rather than in the height and depth of earthly life. Man come of age describes such other-worldliness, so Bonhoeffer petitions religion for a reversal of that other-worldly orientation:

. . . God is no stop-gap; he must be recognized at the center of life, not when we are at the end of our resources; it is his will to be recognized in life, and not only when death comes; in health and vigour, and not only in suffering; in our activities, and not only in sin. The ground for this lies in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He is the center of life, and he certainly didn't 'come' to answer our unsolved problems.²⁸

Only a renewed conception of God that abandons the interpretation of divine transcendence as metaphysical omnipotence and the use of the deus ex machina will be respected by man come of age. The elimination of these two factors allows Bonhoeffer to diminish the role of such metaphysics in Christianity and facilitates his attempt at a non-religious interpretation.

3) The final major characteristic of religion that is incompatible with the maturity of man come of age is what Bethge terms "privilege".²⁹ By "privilege", two concepts are intended:

²⁸L.P.P., p. 312. See also p. 282.

²⁹D.B., pp. 983-984, D.B.E., pp. 779-780. Bonhoeffer does not explicitly denote privilege as a characteristic, though it is certainly implied by the tenor of his total critique. Thus Bethge makes a slight separation between the first two characteristics, metaphysics and individualism, and the rest of Bonhoeffer's critique. He refers to Bonhoeffer's statement in L.P.P., pp. 285-286: "What does it mean to 'interpret in a religious sense'? I think it means to speak on the one hand metaphysically, and on the other hand individualistically." This is the most explicit statement of Bonhoeffer

the estimable, advantaged social position which is afforded to church members because of their affiliation with the church; and the advantages and exemptions from responsibility which the church as an institution claims for itself because of a misinterpretation of its status as the church of God. A religious church thus grants privileges to its adherents and accepts privileges of its own.

"Privilege" is the least theoretical and consequently most obvious characteristic of religion, its effects immediately visible in everything from the material wealth of the church to the added incentive to list one's church affiliation on a job application. Bethge analyzes the manner in which privilege has led to a corrosion of true faith:

Faith becomes a possession that is deserved or undeserved, as the case may be Its practice becomes the luxury, hedged around with convention, of certain classes of society, who have time to afford it, or else are compelled by their circumstances to do so. Religion had become, in fact, the strongest guarantor of the safety and continuation of the existing order, power structure and ways of thought.³⁰

This is precisely what Bonhoeffer recognizes in his analysis of the state of the church in the "Outline for a Book": "Sociologically, no effect on the masses -- interest confined to the upper and lower middle classes. A heavy incubus of difficult traditional ideas."³¹

about his definition of religion. Bethge's remaining characteristics are gleaned from Bonhoeffer's implicit ideas.

³⁰Ibid., p. 983, D.B.E., p. 780.

³¹L.P.P., p. 381.

There is a less obvious yet even more dangerous principle imbedded in the "privilege" of religion, viz. that the church has made religion a requirement for salvation. Bonhoeffer exhibits his concern about this in his comparison of the privilege of religion to the biblical debate about whether circumcision is a requirement for salvation: "The Pauline question whether περιτομή (circumcision) is a condition for justification seems to me in present-day terms to be whether religion is a condition for salvation. Freedom from περιτομή is also freedom from religion."³² When considered as a prerequisite, circumcision became an advantage for certain prospective Christians. But it blocked the way to full communion for many who otherwise had received the full grace of the Spirit, as well as signifying a limitation on the extent to which that Spirit could legitimately operate. The requirement that religious attitudes be the prerequisite for faith commits the same error, Bonhoeffer believes, the error of depriving the faithful but non-religious man of the fellowship of the church of Christ. The religious church assumes for itself an improper advantage by stipulating that all those who do not share in religious attitudes toward God cannot participate in the fellowship of Christ.

The privilege which religion assumes for itself arises partly due to the two-sphere thinking that promotes individualism and metaphysics, partly due to the idealist tendency to objectify God, and partly due to the religious man being oblivious to the suffering

³²L.P.P., p. 281.

Christ. Regarding the first, Bonhoeffer is convinced that religious believers consider themselves protected from the exigencies of earthly events because they have been transferred into a better sphere of existence where Christ is fully exercising His sovereignty. Thus Bonhoeffer can ask of Bethge:

In what way are we 'religionless-secular' Christians, in what way are we the ἐκ-κλησία, 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? In that case Christ is no longer an object of religion, but something quite different, really the Lord of the world.³³

With the eradication of the separation of life into two spheres the privileges accruing to a religious church must disappear also. The religious man can no longer elevate himself above other men, because, as Bonhoeffer affirms, Christ does not exercise His sovereignty in only one realm but is the Lord of the world as well.

This leads to a second factor prompting religious privilege -- the oblivion of the religious man to the suffering Christ. The privileged religious man assumes that he is privileged because he is a guardian of the religious truth, and that he is deserving of the advantages granted to such a position. But Bethge, formulating Bonhoeffer's critique, warns that ". . . an interpretation of the Gospel . . . that establishes priests (as the givers of life) or theologians (as the custodians of truth) as the guardians and rulers of the people of the Church, creating and perpetuating a situation of

³³L. P. P., p. 280-281.

dependence", is forgetting that the Gospel it interprets is ". . . the Gospel of the powerlessness of Christ . . ." ³⁴ Any religious Christian who establishes and perpetuates his privileged position by the proclamation and interpretation of the Gospel is thereby betraying the Gospel itself. The Gospel of the powerlessness of Christ wrongly becomes the means of preserving the elevated status and power of the church. Thus Bonhoeffer criticizes the church because it ". . . has been fighting in these years only for its self-preservation, as though that were an end in itself . . ." ³⁵

Oblivion to the suffering Christ is the result of a third factor which prompts a religious church to secure a privileged position for itself, viz. the objectifying of God. The particular theological error in this objectifying tendency has been explained above, ³⁶ but the religious implication of that error must be specified now. Bonhoeffer is certain that the objectifying of God, the conception of Him as abstract, static truth, contributes to the human tendency to interpret God in a form pleasing to man. By conceiving of God as

³⁴D. B., p. 984, D. B. E., p. 780. Regarding the 'dependence' that is created, Bethge understands that this is one instance in which religion exhibits its "methodism" and its belief that the world cannot exist without the "tutelage" that priests or theologians provide.

³⁵L. P. P., p. 300. In this respect note Bonhoeffer's criticism of two contemporary theological movements. He rebukes the attempt at a neo-orthodox Lutheranism as ". . . the attempt to rescue the church as an institution of salvation . . .", and he laments the direction the Confessing Church had recently taken by characterizing it in this way: ". . . standing up for the church's 'cause', but little personal faith in Christ." (Ibid., p. 381.)

³⁶Supra, pp. 24-30.

abstract truth the revelation of God is deprived of its ability to penetrate reason's self-enclosure and speak to the man of God as He actually is rather than God as man wishes Him to be.³⁷ The result of the inability of revelation to penetrate through man's own reason is religious man's belief that he is receiving and implementing the revelation from God when it is actually his own rational constructions he is receiving and implementing. His creation of a privileged position for himself thus arises from a wrong hearing and wrong interpretation of revelation because God has been objectified. Were revelation heard rightly by the religious man, Bonhoeffer is convinced it would point toward the suffering Christ who destroys any pretense to privilege and advantage in Christianity. In stark contrast to religious privilege manifested in a wealthy church, Bonhoeffer concludes in his "Outline for a Book" that "The church is the church only when it exists for others. To make a start, it should give away all its property to those in need."³⁸ But that new direction away from privilege and advantage can only begin, he believes, when the image of the suffering Christ replaces the image of the objectified, static, avoidable, God in the minds of religious men.

To conclude this section, it need only be reiterated that Bonhoeffer is convinced that man come of age rejects the church

³⁷See supra, pp. 25-26, and Bonhoeffer's articles: "Concerning the Christian idea of God" and "The Theology of Crisis and its Attitude Toward Philosophy and Science", G.S. III, pp. 100-109 and 110-126.

³⁸L. P. P., p. 382.

and its privileged position because it is a self-serving, sheltered institution founded upon an outmoded metaphysical hypothesis. When, "for the sake of intellectual honesty",³⁹ religious Christianity is finally forced to give up that working hypothesis of God, then, Bonhoeffer believes, the church will forsake its privileged status and will recognize that it ". . . must come out of its stagnation . . ." and ". . . move out again into the open air of intellectual discussion with the world . . ." ⁴⁰

There are thus three major characteristics of the religionlessness of the man come of age: his rejection of two-sphere individualistic thinking, of metaphysics, and of ecclesiastical privilege. Insofar as the revelation of the Word of God is interpreted through these religious vehicles, man come of age will be incapable of hearing that Word correctly. Bonhoeffer is aware, however, that an overwhelming amount of Christian proclamation is still encumbered by these religious presuppositions,⁴¹ and thus the revealed Word remains unheard by the mature new man. To the religionless, worldly, responsible spirit in the new man who is inheriting the earth, the religious church can say nothing.

If, then, the world's coming of age has destroyed the only mode of interpreting biblical concepts presently known in the church,

³⁹L. P. P., p. 360.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 378.

⁴¹See ibid., p. 328, where Bonhoeffer laments that even the Confessing Church ". . . has lapsed . . . into conservative restoration."

how can Christian proclamation survive? It is only, Bonhoeffer believes, because the religious interpretation of biblical concepts is a transient, incomplete form of Christianity -- which is followed by a more complete, expressive form of interpretation -- that Christian proclamation can continue when religion has been eclipsed.⁴² And thus the most vital characteristic of the world come of age is not that it is religionless and unsympathetic to traditional interpretation, but that it is a moment in the life of Christianity, indeed in the life of the body of Christ Himself which, -- by eclipsing religious interpretation -- prepares the way for a more complete vision of Christ's formation in the world. It must therefore be demonstrated in the ensuing part of this chapter that the religionlessness of the world come of age, though apparently an autonomous human development, can also be interpreted as a vehicle whereby Christ

⁴²See ibid., p. 280, for example, where he conjectures that ". . . the western form of Christianity, too, was only a preliminary stage to a complete absence of religion" The specific question concerning the validity of Bonhoeffer's belief that religion will pass away cannot be addressed in detail in this study. It is true that, despite his indebtedness to Karl Barth's negative conception of religion, Bonhoeffer disagrees with Barth by claiming the transiency of religion. See Feil, pp. 324-354. Barth argues that religion ". . . is always there even apart from Christianity . . ." Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1956), I, Pt. 2, p. 281. Yet Bonhoeffer, as noted, argues that religion is only a preliminary stage. Numerous commentators express disagreement with Bonhoeffer on the transience of religion and thus doubt the possibility of a nonreligious Christianity. See, e.g. Theodore Wedel, "Man Come of Age", Union Seminary Quarterly Review, XVIII, No. 3 (1963), p. 329, or James Mark, "Bonhoeffer Reconsidered", Theology, LXXVI, No. 64 (1973), p. 592, or Walter Harrelson, "Bonhoeffer and the Bible", in Marty, ed., The Place of Bonhoeffer, p. 138.

reveals Himself more completely and concretely to man. It must be explained how Bonhoeffer's perception of this hopeful dimension of the world come of age allows him to welcome the non-religious man as a herald of Christ.

B. The Forms of Christ in the World Come of Age

1. Understanding the World Better

than it Understands Itself

The thesis of this study -- that "representation" is the key to Bonhoeffer's non-religious interpretation -- can be demonstrated only when it has first been explained why Bonhoeffer believes Christian interpretation and proclamation of any nature can still occur in the world come of age.

This study holds that Bonhoeffer's belief that Christ is still present in the seemingly godless world come of age -- and thus his belief that Christ demands Christian proclamation in non-religious language -- is interwoven with his schema of the forms of Christ. It is the purpose of this present section to relate Bonhoeffer's analyses of religion and the world come of age to that schema of the forms of Christ and to exhibit thereby the appropriateness of that schema as an interpretive theological framework for the enigmatic reflections of his final years.

In the previous chapter, preliminary aspects of Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the forms of Christ as Incarnate, Crucified,

and Resurrected One were expounded.⁴³ It was affirmed there that Bonhoeffer believes Christ forms Himself differently, given the differing situations of the recipients of revelation, in order that His revelation always be concrete, personal, and unavoidable. In this way Christ remains the Real One, and speaks to each individual in the manner he or she is most likely to hear. The argument of this present section utilizes that view of Christ's concrete formation in revelation, and also builds upon the characteristics of religionlessness delineated above. For now it is to be suggested that individual Christians in the world come of age, existing in an environment of religious and non-religious tendencies, of tutelage and autonomy, will be most affected by the revelation of Christ if it is offered in the two forms of the Incarnate One and the Crucified One; and that the religious dimension of the individual Christian is more concretely affected by Christ formed as the Incarnate One whereas the non-religious dimension of the individual Christian is more concretely affected by Christ formed as the Crucified One. An explanation of these suggestions must now be offered.

The justification for the overall attempt to place Bonhoeffer's analysis of the world come of age in his own christological interpretative framework is provided by Bonhoeffer himself in the Letters . . ., especially in the June 8, 1944, letter to Bethge. Bonhoeffer does here reprove various unsuccessful theological attempts to interpret the world come of age, because of their reli-

⁴³Supra., pp. 45-49.

religious attempts ". . . to understand the world better than it understood itself"⁴⁴. But he nonetheless emphasizes that: "Of course, the world must be understood better than it understands itself, but not 'religiously' . . .".⁴⁵ And later in the same letter he offers his own principle for that better understanding: "Thus the world's coming of age is no longer an occasion for polemics and apologetics, but is now really better understood than it understands itself, namely on the basis of the gospel and in the light of Christ."⁴⁶ Christ Himself is regarded as the key to deciphering the impact of the world come of age upon the individual Christian. Through Him alone, and not through either religious or secular principles, can the direction and purpose of the new age be known.⁴⁷

Likewise, in the letter of May 24, 1944, to Renate and Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer recalls the words of a Paul Gerhardt hymn, a hymn emphasizing the providence of God in the workings of Christ. He accentuates for the Bethges the God who stands

⁴⁴L. P. P., p. 327.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 328.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 329.

⁴⁷Thus when Bonhoeffer, ibid., pp. 327-328, criticizes Heim and Althaus and Tillich, he is not criticizing them for their desire to understand the world come of age better than it understands itself, but only for the improper orientation of their attempts to do so. Bonhoeffer's attempt to understand the world come of age on the basis of Christ has been interpreted by some as a "religious" endeavour prompted by the very "methodist" tendencies Bonhoeffer elsewhere deplores. See, e.g., David Hopper, A Dissent on Bonhoeffer (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 133, and Hanfried Müller, Von der Kirche zur Welt (Hamburg-Bergstedt: Herbert Reich Evangelischer Verlag, 1966), p. 385. The invalidity of this

"im Regiment", at the helm, who rules so as to bring all that He does or allows to happen to a good end.⁴⁸ The attempt to decipher a theological reason for the war and the dawning new age was very much on his mind at that point.

There is also further support for the contention that Bonhoeffer interprets the world come of age on the basis of the revelation of Christ, support that is rooted in two themes-developed earlier in his thought. The first arises in the christology lectures of 1933 when Bonhoeffer established that Christ is not only the center of human existence and nature but also the center of history:

The meaning of history is tied up with an event which takes place in the depth and hiddenness of a man who ended on the cross. The meaning of history is found in the humiliated Christ.

With this every other claim of history is judged and settled. History is here led to its boundary with its own promises. By its nature it has come to an end. Yet, by setting this boundary, Christ has at the same time again become its centre and its fulfilment. When the totality of history should stand before God, there Christ stands.⁴⁹

Then by building upon this early premise, Bonhoeffer later, in the Ethics, draws the specific conclusion that the reality of Christ is intrinsically connected with the reality of the world. Therefore these realities should be interpreted together: ". . . the whole

criticism becomes evident when it is seen that religion is erased precisely by the same Christ who is the interpretive key to the world come of age. See infra, pp. 102ff.

⁴⁸L. P. P., pp. 364-365, n. 33 (cf. Widerstand und Ergebung, p. 337); also, L. P. P., p. 384 (Widerstand und Ergebung, p. 417).

⁴⁹C. C., pp. 62-63.

reality of the world is already drawn in into Christ and bound together in Him, and the movement of history consists solely in divergence and convergence in relation to this centre."⁵⁰ The history of the so-called "secular" world will thus disappear when viewed from the perspective of Christ, and instead the whole reality " . . . shall always be seen in the movement of being accepted and becoming accepted by God in Christ."⁵¹

Coupled with this concept of Christ as the center of history is Bonhoeffer's constant affirmation that an historical event must be interpreted not in terms of whatever contemporary or past events might circumscribe it but in terms of the future toward which Christ is drawing it. Thus, for example, he explains to his Finkenwalde students:

The present is primarily defined not by the past, but by the future, and this future is Christ, it is the Holy Ghost It is a most fatal confusion of present and past to think that the present can be defined as that which rests itself and carries its criterion within itself. The criterion of the true present lies outside itself, it lies in the future, it lies in Scripture and in the world of Christ witnessed in it.⁵²

The conjunction of this concept with the first one means therefore that Christ is not only the center of history but also its future. As future, Christ defines the present, and in order to do so He participates in the very events that comprise the present.

⁵⁰E., p. 198.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²N.R.S., pp. 311-312.

These two early themes of Bonhoeffer further support a christological interpretation of the world come of age.⁵³

Given that these statements of Bonhoeffer both from the Letters . . . and from earlier writings justify the use of a christological framework to interpret his analysis of the world come of age, the particular schema of the forms of Christ that will be employed here also requires explanation. That schema is developed primarily in the Ethics, within the chapters "Ethics as Formation", "Christ, Reality and Good", and "History and Good".⁵⁴ The schema utilizes the premises from his earlier writings mentioned above and then directs them toward an understanding of reality.

⁵³Numerous commentators on Bonhoeffer even argue that the world come of age is a necessary consequence of his interpretation of the incarnation. See, e.g., Feil, p. 312. See specifically Gerhard Ebeling, "Non-Religious Interpretation . . .", p. 135: ". . . the Christian faith has a causative share in the modern process of secularization. And that, too, not merely in the sense of a fault on the church's part . . . it is the working out in history of what the Christian faith itself implies for our relation to the world . . ." For a diverging interpretation see Rainer Mayer, "Christsein in einer mündig gewordenen Welt: Zur Neuinterpretation Dietrich Bonhoeffers", in Christsein in einer pluralistischen Gesellschaft, Hg. Hans Schulze und Hans Schwarz (Hamburg: Friedrich Wittig Verlag, 1971). Ebeling's belief that Christianity has a "causative share" in the process of the world's coming of age could threaten the alleged autonomy of that process. Bonhoeffer seems to maintain dialectically both that the movement is toward autonomy and yet that it is also guided and maintained by something outside itself. To be faithful to Bonhoeffer, Ebeling's interpretation must not destroy all sense of autonomy in the process of coming of age. This present study stands in sympathy with Ebeling's thesis, but realizes that the complementary view must also be affirmed. For a succinct recapitulation of Bonhoeffer's emphasis of the autonomy of the world's coming of age, see Clifford Green, The Sociality of Christ, pp. 306-309.

⁵⁴Cf. E., 64-88, 188-213, 214-263. According to Bethge's dating, Bonhoeffer developed the ideas in these chapters from the autumn of 1940 through early 1942.

The correct knowledge of reality, Bonhoeffer argues, is attained only by unswervingly focusing on divine truth: "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."⁵⁵ The name of that divine truth on which one focuses, Bonhoeffer knows, is Jesus Christ, who in reconciling the world to God becomes the key to reality: "The figure of the Reconciler, of the God-Man Jesus Christ, comes between God and the world and fills the centre of all history. In this figure the secret of the world is laid bare, and in this figure there is revealed the secret of God."⁵⁶ Christ is thus rightly understood as the Real One, the one around whom all reality revolves.⁵⁷

But at this point Bonhoeffer develops that conception of the Real One by focusing on the multi-dimensional nature of Christ. In the figure of that Real One are the three forms of revelation, the forms assumed by the historical Jesus Christ: the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected God. In one particular section of the Ethics⁵⁸, Bonhoeffer analyzes three basic ethical questions: disdain for the real world and people as they really are, the overemphasis

⁵⁵E.; p. 65.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 70.

⁵⁷Cf. supra, pp. 36-51.

⁵⁸E., pp. 71-79.

on success, and a temptation toward idolization of death. Then he interprets them through these three forms of Christ's revelation. Bonhoeffer shows that the individual who despises the real world and the real man must learn of the affirmative presence of the Incarnate One. He shows that the individual who measures goodness by success must confront the Crucified One. And he shows that the individual who is tempted by despair and idolization of death must discover the victory of the Resurrected One.

This schema of interpreting the relationship of Christ to an individual by means of the forms of Christ will here be utilized to explain, in part, the relationship of Christ to individual Christians in the world come of age. It is suggested here that when, in the Letters . . ., Bonhoeffer says that "Faith is participation in this being of Jesus (incarnation, cross, and resurrection) . . ." ⁵⁹ he is referring to the relation between the Christian and the forms of the revelation of Christ.

The subsequent sections of this study will elaborate on the forms of that relationship. However, because this study is ultimately directed toward the dynamic between the crucified Christ and the worldly, religionless, modern individual, the focus of these subsequent sections will be on the forms of Christ as Incarnate One and Crucified One, and will not attempt to explicate the relation between the Christian and the form of Christ as the Resurrected One.

⁵⁹L.P.P., p. 381.

2. The Incarnate One Revealed in the World Come of Age

When Christ reveals Himself in the form of the Incarnate One in the world come of age, He is forming Himself to speak to that aspect of the individual that most resists the maturity of the new age, viz. the religiousness of man. When Bonhoeffer perceives Christ in the form of the Incarnate One, he perceives Christ calling man out of his metaphysical and individualistic two-sphere thinking and his privileged position and into the full life of mature worldliness demanded in the world come of age. In the midst of religiousness, the fact that Christ exists as the Incarnate One vindicates the immersion in the earthly, human, affairs of life that is characteristic of the man come of age.

Bonhoeffer is convinced that such immersion in the earthly, human, affairs of life is an integral part of a complete Christian life, precisely because knowledge of the incarnation is indispensable to a complete understanding of Christ. The Christian who rushes past worldly concerns to settle in the comfort of religious security forgets that in the Incarnate One God expressed His love for that same real, earthly, world:

God loves man. God loves the world. It is not an ideal man that He loves, but man as he is; not an ideal world, but the real world. What we find abominable in man's opposition to God, what we shrink back from with pain and hostility, the real man, the real world, this is for God the ground for unfathomable love, and it is with this that He unites Himself utterly. God becomes man, real man. While we are trying to grow out beyond our manhood, to leave the man behind us, God becomes man and we have to recognize that

God wishes us men, too, to be real men.⁶⁰

The incarnate Christ is found precisely in the earthly events and human actions that the religiousness of man wishes to bypass. Yet in bypassing those events, the religious man fails to discover the "Yes" given by God to the created world in the Incarnation. Bonhoeffer sees that affirming the incarnation of Christ immediately destroys the comfort of religious two-sphere thinking, because Christ's incarnate formation declares that ". . . there is no real possibility of being a Christian outside the reality of the-world . . ." ⁶¹

This blocks any attempt at a forceful reconstruction of reality by a brand of Christianity that is dissatisfied with the reality it is given. Thus, Bonhoeffer affirms, "Christian reform" that stems from hatred of the world is disclosed as little more than an impatient radicalism that denies the incarnation: "The world remains the world because it is the world which is loved, condemned and reconciled in Christ. No man has the mission to overleap the world and to make it into the kingdom of God." ⁶²

Bonhoeffer commends the maturity and worldliness of modern men which prompt them to live right in the midst of earthly, human concerns, because in those earthly affairs modern man can come to know the incarnate and earthly Christ. Because Christ has taken form within earthly concerns as the Incarnate One, Christ can

⁶⁰E., p. 71.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 200.

⁶²Ibid., p. 232.

communicate an essential part of Himself to those who participate in those same earthly moments. In this respect, Bonhoeffer regards the actions of the man come of age who ". . . allows the world ever anew to disclose its essential character to him"⁶³ as indicative of a greater openness and obedience to Christ than are the actions of a more religious man who professes obedience but ignores the concrete world into which Christ entered.

Because Bonhoeffer places such emphasis on the earthly concerns of the man come of age and how they reveal the Incarnate One, it will be advantageous to explain what Bonhoeffer means by those human concerns. He primarily alludes to two factors: the earthly happiness or sorrow that results from the attainment or loss of the objects of this-worldly desires, and the concrete social responsibility that results from a high regard for the importance of the earthly political issues daily affecting mankind.

In opposition to the prevalent religious attitude which cautions against earthly desire, Bonhoeffer repeatedly affirms, especially in the Letters . . ., that the deep desire for earthly happiness, as expressed by the man come of age, is most decidedly not contrary to Christ. Bonhoeffer's essay "After Ten Years", addressed to his friends and fellow conspirators in 1942,⁶⁴ begins with the advice that "Time lost is time in which we have failed to . . . live a full human life, gain experience, learn, create, enjoy, and

⁶³E., p. 233.

⁶⁴L.P.P., pp. 3-17. See note 1, p. 17, esp.

suffer"⁶⁵ Only shortly after writing this essay he returns to the same theme in a letter to Bethge, chastising false Christian composure: "There is such a thing as a false composure which is quite unchristian. As Christians, we needn't be at all ashamed of some impatience, longing, opposition to what is unnatural, and our full share of desire for freedom, earthly happiness and opportunity for effective work."⁶⁶ Against the warning that the Christian must distrust worldly satisfaction because of the temporality of this world, Bonhoeffer rejoins:

That is indeed something essential, but it must come last of all. I believe that we ought so to love and trust God in our lives, and in all the good things that he sends us, that when the time comes (but not before) we may go to him with love, trust, and joy We ought to find and love God in what he actually gives us; if it pleases him to allow us to enjoy some overwhelming earthly happiness, we mustn't try to be more pious than God himself and allow our happiness to be corrupted by presumption and arrogance, and by unbridled religious fantasy which is never satisfied with what God gives. God will see to it that the man who finds him in his earthly happiness and thanks him for it does not lack reminder that earthly things are transient.⁶⁷

And again, arguing against a false patience and the facile acceptance of an easy providence that marks much of Christianity, Bonhoeffer tells Bethge that this ". . . is probably in most cases nothing but

⁶⁵L. P. P., p. 3.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 132.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 168-169.

a euphemism for indifference and indolence"⁶⁸ and that:

I think we honor God more if we gratefully accept the life that he gives us with all its blessings, loving it and drinking it to the full, and also grieving deeply and sincerely when we have impaired or wasted any of the good things of life, . . . than if we are insensitive to life's blessings and may therefore also be insensitive to pain.⁶⁹

It is paramount to Bonhoeffer that the religiousness of man should be eliminated. For then the Christian can begin to open himself to the depths of happiness or sorrow experienced by the man come of age, rather than blunting sorrow by calling in God as a deus ex machina or blunting happiness by the quick warning that worldly pleasures are fleeting. Without the full experience of life the Christian will fail to know the earth to which the Incarnate One has come. Without participation deeply in earthly existence, the Christian must necessarily overlook the reality which Bonhoeffer believes is thoroughly permeated with Christ. It is this to which Bonhoeffer is referring when he claims a "this-worldliness" for Christianity:

During the last year or so I've come to know and understand more and more the profound this-worldliness of Christianity. The Christian is not a homo religiosus, but simply a man, as Jesus was a man I don't mean the shallow and banal this-worldliness of the enlightened, the busy, the comfortable, or the lascivious, but the profound this-worldliness, characterized by discipline and the constant knowledge of death and resurrection. I think Luther lived a this-worldly life in this sense.⁷⁰

⁶⁸L. P. P., p. 191.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 191-192.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 369.

This affirmation of the desire for earthly happiness and well-being that is characteristic of the man come of age is complemented, Bonhoeffer sees, by an earnest acceptance of worldly responsibility. The religious man, by calling upon God as the One who is finally responsible for all things, reduces his own obligation to responsible action. But the man come of age, unhindered by that God-hypothesis, assumes ultimate responsibility for worldly events on the basis of his autonomy. This free responsibility is the second characteristic of the man come of age that Bonhoeffer believes will guide the religious individual toward a deeper realization of the incarnate Christ.

There are numerous instances in the Letters . . . in which Bonhoeffer calls for the abandonment of premature reference to God's providence. He does so because he wishes to emphasize the need for free responsibility of man in the new age. In a sermon written for the wedding of Eberhard and Renate Bethge, Bonhoeffer blesses the very earthly happiness they will find, and warns that:

We ought not to be in too much of a hurry to speak piously of God's will and guidance. It is obvious, and it should not be ignored, that it is your own very human wills that are at work here, celebrating their triumph; the course that you are taking at the outset is one that you have chosen for yourselves; what you have done and are doing is not, in the first place, something religious, but something quite secular. So you yourselves, and you alone, bear the responsibility for what no one can take from you. . . . Unless you can boldly say today: 'That is our resolve, our love, our way,' you are taking

refuge in a false piety.⁷¹

A second pertinent instance of Bonhoeffer's belief that there must be free responsibility in Christianity arises from his severe disappointment in his fellow Christians who failed to oppose the rise of Nazism. In the essay "After Ten Years" he recognizes the inability of the majority of his Christian countrymen to forsake their traditional obedience to the state and to their divinely-established vocations and "callings" in order to engage in the necessary responsible action of opposing and toppling Hitler. Thus, regarding the typical German religious man, he says:

Calling and freedom were to him two sides of the same thing. But in this he misjudged the world; he did not realize that his submissiveness and self-sacrifice could be exploited for evil ends The fact could not be escaped that the German still lacked something fundamental: he could not see the need for free and responsible action, even in the opposition to his task and his calling⁷²

It was not the German Christian, who justified his subservience to the state with traditional Lutheran doctrine and a belief that providence had rightly ordered the world, but the non-religious man come of age, who was unhindered by whether or not providence had rightly ordered events, that assumed what Bonhoeffer regarded as the final responsibility, viz. conspiring to overthrow the government.⁷³

⁷¹L. P. P., pp. 41-42.

⁷²Ibid., p. 6.

⁷³Note Bethge's unhesitant claim that Bonhoeffer was one of only a few Christians to collaborate in the conspiracy, along with ". . . numerous people from the middle class and the nobility, from

These two examples from the Letters . . . are prefigured in Bonhoeffer's explanation of freedom and responsibility found in the Ethics. There he emphasizes that freedom and responsibility are inseparable and corresponding concepts. As one increases, so does the other. The most free man must be the most responsible man, and as the most responsible man he can depend on no final providence to extricate him from any unpleasant consequences of his responsible acts:

The responsible man acts in the freedom of his own self, without the support of men, circumstances or principles, but with a due consideration for the given human and general conditions and for the relevant questions of principle. The proof of his freedom is the fact that nothing can answer for him, nothing can exonerate him, except his own deed and his own self. It is he himself who must observe, judge, weigh up, decide and act.⁷⁴

Bonhoeffer is certain that, unless Christians accept the precarious and challenging responsibility of freedom without referring constantly to God as one who relieves final responsibility from man, they will fail to partake sufficiently in the responsible life wherein they will discover the Incarnate One.

the military and the socialists . . .", D.B., p. 889, D.B.E., p. 696. See, in fact, the whole section entitled "The Boundary Situation", D.B., pp. 889-896, D.B.E., pp. 696-702.

⁷⁴E., p. 248. It should be noted here, to prevent a loss of perspective on this issue, that Bonhoeffer continues this discussion of freedom and responsibility by reminding that all acts of responsible freedom are performed in an ". . . obligation to God and to our neighbour . . .", p. 249.

A full participation in the desires for earthly well-being and in the free responsibility of the mature, worldly man is thus the only route whereby Bonhoeffer believes the Christian can genuinely experience all the dimensions of Christ, including the earthly, human, incarnate Christ. By being completely human, by living fully in the present human joys and pains and hoping fully for the realization of future human happiness, the Christian understands the heights and depths of the life into which Christ entered and in which He was crucified.

By experiencing these fruits of the incarnation -- which to Bonhoeffer means being conformed to the Incarnate One -- the Christian realizes a vital dimension in the revelation of Christ. This is the dimension of genuine affirmation of earthly existence. This does not imply that Bonhoeffer wishes a divinization of man, nor that he is advocating an uncritical acceptance of all aspects of the world on account of some inherent goodness it might possess. It does mean, however, that Bonhoeffer is convinced that the worldliness and humanness emphasized by man come of age teach religious man that he must go through the world and not around the world in the search for God:

Just as in Jesus Christ the reality of God entered into the reality of the world, so, too, is that which is Christian to be found only in that which is of the world, the 'supernatural' only in the natural, the holy only in the profane, and the revelational only in the rational. The unity of the reality of God and the world, which has been accomplished in Christ, is repeated, or more exactly, is realized, ever

afresh in the life of men.⁷⁵

Bonhoeffer has now discovered that only through a free, responsible immersion in earthly affairs can the Christian overcome his religiousness and receive a more complete revelation of Christ. That discovery provides Bonhoeffer with the key to saying that the world is better understood than it understands itself. Exactly here where Bonhoeffer celebrates the autonomous worldliness of man come of age, he also offers a theological framework within which that autonomous worldliness may be interpreted as an occasion for a fuller revelation of Christ. When he states that the world come of age ". . . is now really better understood than it understands itself, namely on the basis of the gospel and in the light of Christ,"⁷⁶ he is affirming that modern man's autonomous worldliness, which arose in defiance to the Church, has been encountered by Christ and transformed. A theology which has discovered this, and which regards the world come of age from this proper christological perspective, will be able to witness to the revelation. A theology which does not know this will remain either a wholly religious theology or a wholly secular theology, and will be unable to witness the revelation of Christ through the world's new maturity.

When Bonhoeffer advocates that free, responsible, earthly life for the Christian, however, he does so within the limits allowed by Christ. His fervent summons to religious man to emulate

⁷⁵E., pp. 198-199.

⁷⁶L. P. P., pp. 328-329.

the worldliness of the man come of age will be misinterpreted and overemphasized unless those limits set by Christ are known.⁷⁷ For Bonhoeffer also maintains that Christ formed as the Incarnate One offers to man a revelation which is incomplete, which requires completion by Christ's other forms of revelation. Thus the incarnate Christ will call man through a mature worldliness to the next dimension of revelation, where Christ speaks primarily as the Crucified One. Bonhoeffer therefore can legitimately advocate mature worldliness while simultaneously remembering the limits of life as exemplified by the Crucified One. The affirmation of worldliness is thus always situated as one aspect of the dialectical tension that exists between the Incarnate One and Crucified One.

The complexity of that dialectical tension is a stumbling-block to the Christian. It causes him always to remember that he must live as a worldly, responsible man with all the vigour given

⁷⁷It is because he fails to consider sufficiently these limits imposed by Christ on man's worldliness that Hanfried Müller, for example, fails to distinguish between Bonhoeffer's legitimate affirmation of worldliness and an unlimited ". . . healthy, common, socially active, strong, optimistic, world-mastering atheism." "Concerning the reception and Interpretation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer", in W.C.A., p. 207. For a further development of Müller's interpretation see his Von der Kirche zur Welt, pp. 355-395, esp. p. 356, where Müller characterizes Bonhoeffer's later theology with these words: "The combination of the theologia crucis with immanent optimism thus appears to us as the new way that Bonhoeffer opens up for us in the last letters." (My translation) "Die Verbindung der theologia crucis mit immanentem Optimismus also erscheint uns als der neue Weg, den Bonhoeffer uns in den letzten Briefen erschliesst." For the difference between Müller's "immanent optimism" and the more profound sense of "hope" to which Bonhoeffer refers, see infra, pp. 143-144.

him by the Incarnate One. And yet it prompts him finally to see that the very worldliness he desires, the earthly joys and responsible deeds, lead inevitably on beyond themselves to their limit in the Crucified One. The vehicle whereby Bonhoeffer explains -- but does not explain away -- the stumbling block of that dialectical tension must now be examined.

3. The Ultimate/Penultimate Distinction as the Interpretive Key to the Tension Between the Incarnate and Crucified Forms of Christ

Given the complexity of the dialectical tension between the form of Christ as Incarnate One and the form of Christ as Crucified One, and given, secondly, the incomplete and preliminary nature of the Ethics and the Letters . . . in which Bonhoeffer develops his conception of the world come of age, it becomes essential to discover and examine the framework within which Bonhoeffer interprets the relationship of the worldliness of man to the limits imposed on that worldliness by Christ's form of the Crucified One. This present study believes that this framework can be found in Bonhoeffer's own schema of the distinction between the ultimate and the penultimate allegiances of a Christian.

Bethge's editorial organization of the Ethics, based on probable composition dates for Bonhoeffer's interrupted writings, exhibits the appropriateness of this distinction as an interpretive

framework.⁷⁸ Bonhoeffer's first major explanation of the ultimate and penultimate occurred within weeks of his first major reference to the world come of age. His concern for the concreteness of revelation prompted Bonhoeffer to investigate closely how Christ reveals Himself as the Incarnate One in the world come of age and also how Christ limits that form of His revelation by His own second form. Penultimate truths exhibit Christ revealing Himself as the Incarnate One, ultimate truths exhibit Him calling man on through this first form to the next.

In explanation of his distinction between ultimate and penultimate Bonhoeffer holds that there are three fundamental truths which a proper Christian theology must maintain as the final word, namely: 1) that New Testament gospel transcends Old Testament law; 2) that faith, not works, justifies; and 3) that the Word of God, proclaiming God's all-sufficient supernatural grace, cautions against trust in natural human abilities.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, Bonhoeffer says, once those truths have been accepted as the ultimate, they must be

⁷⁸See the "Editor's Preface to the Newly Arranged Sixth German Edition", E., pp. 11-14. Chapter III, which includes the section "Inheritance and Decay" that speaks of a people who have come of age; was written, according to Bethge, in September, 1940. The following chapter, "The Last Things and the Things before the Last", was written in November of that same year, and the heading for the chapter is found on notes from the September writings. Indeed, Bonhoeffer's own suggested title for the Ethics was "The preparing of the way and the entry into possession." Ibid., p. 8.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 120-151.

immediately complemented by what seem to be their opposites, namely: 1) that the gospel upholds the law and is dependent upon it for meaning; 2) that faith itself demands works and is often chronologically preceded by and always accompanied by works; and 3) that a life lived in total dependence upon an all-sufficient supernatural grace validates, and is nurtured by, a natural life which makes reasonable use of natural human abilities. It is Bonhoeffer's conviction that contemporary religious Christians, attempting to uphold only the ultimate truths, neglect the secondary, penultimate truths and thereby threaten the unity and depth of meaning of those same ultimate truths.⁸⁰ His concentration on the ultimate/penultimate distinction is an attempt to remedy that neglect in such a way that the penultimate truths may be embraced more completely and religious man may thus see the Incarnate Christ.

The relationship between the ultimate and penultimate truths of Christianity reflects the dynamic reciprocity and paradox of the schema of the forms of Christ. Neither ultimate nor penultimate exists harmoniously without its complement. Bonhoeffer, for example, first of all defines the penultimate on the basis of the ultimate:

It is everything that precedes the ultimate . . . everything which is to be regarded as leading up to the last thing when the last thing has been found There is, therefore, no penultimate in itself; as though a thing could justify itself as being a thing before the last thing; a thing becomes penultimate only through the ultimate, that is to

⁸⁰E., p. 134.

say, at the moment when it has already lost its own validity. The penultimate, then, does not determine the ultimate; it is the ultimate which determines the penultimate. The penultimate is not a state or condition in itself, but it is a judgement which the ultimate passes upon that which has preceded it.⁸¹

This appears at first blush to give full priority to the ultimate over the penultimate. But, lest the ultimate be thought to exist in and of itself, Bonhoeffer offers this rejoinder:

For the sake of the ultimate the penultimate must be preserved. Any arbitrary destruction of the penultimate will do serious injury to the ultimate. If, for example, a human life is deprived of the conditions which are proper to it, then the justification of such a life by grace and faith, if it is not rendered impossible, is at least seriously impeded From this fact it follows that it is necessary to see that the penultimate, too, is provided along with the preaching of the ultimate word of God⁸²

Bonhoeffer's exposition of the ultimate and penultimate in this chapter of the Ethics is in fact a series of affirmations and counter-affirmations.⁸³ First he accentuates the ultimate, denouncing any suggestion, for example, that human resistance can withstand the all-consuming power of the coming Christ. Then, in the face of that first statement he counters by affirming: "There are conditions of the heart, of life and of the world which impede the reception of grace in a special way, namely, by rendering faith infinitely diffi-

⁸¹E., p. 133.

⁸²Ibid., p. 134.

⁸³Ibid., pp. 133-143.

cult."⁸⁴ But immediately following a plea for an active amelioration of such penultimate human resistance to grace, he reaffirms that only the coming Christ Himself can overcome those obstacles and that human efforts are vain and damning if they claim to make possible the coming of Christ.⁸⁵ But then once again Bonhoeffer must reiterate that the Christian obligation to work for the coming of Christ is in no way mitigated by Christ's ultimate power.⁸⁶ The distinction between ultimate and penultimate truths seems to rely on a series of contraries.

That contrariety is softened when Bonhoeffer introduces the familiar Biblical idea of the Wegbereitung, the "preparing of the way": "Preparing the way for the word: this is the purpose of everything that has been said about the things before the last."⁸⁷ The penultimate truths exist only to prepare the way for the ultimate truths. This exemplifies how certain acts which precede a significant event receive their meaning and validation only with the later occurrence of the event they foretell. The straightening of the highway, the exalting of the valleys and the levelling of the mountains depend for their existence and meaning upon the coming of the Lord; yet this event does not precede them, it follows them. The

⁸⁴E., p. 136.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷See ibid., p. 135 where Bonhoeffer develops the theme of the preparing of the way by locating it in scriptural passages.

obstacles to the coming of grace must be actively removed so that the way of coming may be made straight and hospitable. But the knowledge of what obstacles should be removed in preparation for the coming is provided, Bonhoeffer would argue, only by the grace of Him who is yet to come. The ultimate sustains and defines the penultimate, and, by so doing, instills it with an importance it would otherwise lack. Because the ultimate prepares its own way by means of the penultimate, the faithful execution of the penultimate is imperative. But it remains troublesome that these ultimate truths are preceded by what seem to be their very opposites. How, referring to Bonhoeffer's three examples, can the Old Testament prepare for the New Testament gospel? How can the doing of good works prepare for the graceful gift of faith? How can a positive evaluation of the natural life prepare for a life of total dependence on a supernatural all-sufficient grace? Each of these three examples must be examined in turn to see how Bonhoeffer believes such apparent opposites complement one another.

1) Bonhoeffer supports the traditional theological principle that the Old Testament law prefigures the New Testament gospel by its preparation of the way for the coming of Christ.⁸⁸ The law is

⁸⁸His christological interpretations of Old Testament passages exhibit this belief. See especially C.F./T., pp. 11-94; "König David", G.S. IV, pp. 294-320; "Die erste Tafel der zehn Worte", G.S. IV, pp. 597-612; and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible, trans. James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974). Bonhoeffer's mode of Old Testament interpretation is analyzed by Francis Andersen, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Old Testament", The Reformed Theological Review, XXXIV, #2 (May-August, 1975), pp. 33-44; and by

seen as a necessary preliminary which, interpreted along Pauline lines, is given to increase sin so that grace might abound. This reflects Bonhoeffer's reminder that the law itself must come to man through Christ:

The commandment cannot stem from anywhere but the origin of promise and fulfillment, from Christ. From Christ alone must we know what we should do . . . from him as the one who gives us life and forgiveness, as the one who has fulfilled the commandment of God in our place, as the one who brings and promises the new world. We can only perceive the commandment where the law is fulfilled⁸⁹

Here the penultimate law which points to the ultimate gospel receives its validity from that which succeeds it. Were it not for the fulfillment of the law by Christ the penultimate would die.

And yet this is a fulfillment of the law by Christ, a submission by Him to its demands, an acceptance of the penultimate law by the One who brings the gospel's ultimate truth. The gospel is itself validated by Christ's acceptance of the legitimate claims of the law. Bonhoeffer affirms: "Jesus manifests his perfect union with the will of God as revealed in the Old Testament law and prophets. He has in fact nothing to add to the commandments of God, except this, that he keeps them."⁹⁰

The law is nonetheless disarmed by Christ of any arro-

Martin Kuske, The Old Testament as the Book of Christ: An Appraisal of Bonhoeffer's Interpretation, trans. S.T. Kimbrough, Jr. (Westminster: Philadelphia, 1976).

⁸⁹N.R.S., p. 162.

⁹⁰C.D., p. 111.

gant pretensions to the final truth. It is humbled to a penultimate status even though Christ Himself submits to its demands, because this law is the law of Christ's own creation. It is created for the purpose of glorifying the gospel. Bonhoeffer offers a helpful illustration of this aspect of the ultimate/penultimate relationship, in which the gospel humbles the law, in his short exposition of "The First Table of the Ten Commandments". His starting point is a physical description of the ark:

In the ark of the covenant, which is the throne of the gracious presence of God, lie both tables, enclosed, surrounded, and covered by the grace of God. Whoever wishes to speak of the Ten Commandments must seek them in the ark of the covenant, and so must, at the same time, speak of God's grace.⁹¹

In this way Bonhoeffer illustrates that, despite the noble position of the law, it nonetheless derives its life and force from the grace of the gospel.

Above both of Bonhoeffer's affirmations, however -- that the penultimate law is of marked importance and that the gospel's ultimate grace brings validity to the law -- stands his repeated warning that neither the law nor the gospel can be separated from one another. If this occurs, he predicts, each will settle in a secluded area and neither will reveal the form of Christ manifested in them. Unless the unity of law and gospel is understood, neither can be understood separately:

⁹¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The First Table of the Ten Commandments", in Preface to Bonhoeffer: The Man and Two of His Shorter Writings, ed. and trans., John D. Godsey (Philadelphia:

There can be no preaching of the law without the gospel, and no preaching of the gospel without the law. It is by no means the case that the law is intended for the world and the gospel for the congregation. Both the law and the gospel are alike addressed both to the world and to the congregation.⁹²

2) Ultimate and penultimate characterize not only the New Testament and the Old Testament but faith and good works as well. Bonhoeffer is certain that good works must accompany justification by faith alone. And yet he knows that the capacity to perform those works, as well as any final validity which they possess, comes not from themselves but from the faith which accomplishes them. In the Ethics Bonhoeffer explicitly affirms both sides of this concept:

A life is not justified by love or by hope, but only by faith. For indeed faith alone sets life upon a new foundation, and it is this foundation alone that justifies my being able to live before God But faith never is alone. As surely as faith is the true presence of Christ, so surely, too, is it accomplished by love and by hope.⁹³

Fortress Press, 1965), p. 55.

⁹²E., pp.357-8.

⁹³Ibid., pp. 121-122. The language of the ultimate and penultimate found here in the Ethics is foreshadowed by Bonhoeffer's discussion of cheap grace and costly grace in The Cost of Discipleship. Cheap grace arises when such an unwarranted emphasis is placed on the ultimate justification by grace through faith that the penultimate need to do good works is thereby neglected. See C.D., pp. 35-47. At one point in the Ethics Bonhoeffer even revives this earlier language by saying that it is necessary for Christians to attempt to be like Christ Himself, for: "Otherwise the gospel would lose its value, its great price. Dear mercy would become cheap." E., p. 124.

As Bonhoeffer views them, the works of hope and love become signs of faith's presence. Yet they are signs known only in retrospect, for it is faith which gives them meaning. This retrospection helps to decipher a paradox of faith, for despite the fact that faith is the source of good works of love, to human eyes this active obedience of doing good works often appears antecedent to the reception of the gift of faith by grace. Indeed, because it is the active, determined, execution of works of love which seems to prepare the way for faith, it appears that the penultimate generates the ultimate rather than vice-versa. But again Bonhoeffer indicates that this is a mistaken understanding of faith, for it fails to see that chronological precedence is an insufficient guide to this relationship. To this end he asserts the mystery that occurs in belief: ". . . man believes, and in believing, he has already received Christ to himself."⁹⁴ Precisely in the deliberate human affirmation of belief, which requires the good works of penitence and active love, the pre-existing presence of faith is discovered. Precisely in the execution of the penultimate the finality of the ultimate is found.

3) The final theme requires a more extensive examination, since it underlies the other two themes and best exhibits the intricate relationships shared by the ultimate and penultimate. This theme is the affinity between natural human abilities and a supernatural, all-sufficient grace. Bonhoeffer believes that the loss of

⁹⁴E., p. 122.

the concept of the natural was a damaging blow to Protestant theology and that it should therefore be recovered.⁹⁵ The fault for this loss lay with an uncomplemented emphasis on self-existing, unapproachable grace and on the utter condemnation of all things outside this grace:

Before the light of grace everything human and natural sank into the night of sin, and now no one dared to consider the relative differences within the human and natural, for fear that by their so doing grace as grace might be diminished. It was its treatment of the concept of the natural that demonstrated most clearly that this Protestant thought was no longer conscious of the true relation of the ultimate to the penultimate.⁹⁶

Not only was the realm of the natural thereby left without any guidance, but the understanding of grace also suffered. Grace was isolated from the experiences of men in their everyday lives.

However, given the decisive Reformation emphasis upon justification by grace through faith alone, and given the emerging radical critique of the scholastic evaluation of reason,⁹⁷ Protestantism was forced by its own principles to refrain from placing any trust in the natural abilities of mankind. Therefore, although Bon-

⁹⁵E., p. 143.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 144. Ernst Feil has observed that Bonhoeffer's attempt to recapture a recognition of the natural has been a special contribution to Protestant thought. See Feil, p. 301.

⁹⁷Bonhoeffer's awareness of the difference between his own evaluation of reason and that of scholasticism can be noted in E., p. 146, n. 5. See also supra, pp. 20-22.

hoeffler wishes to discover a place for the natural in contemporary Protestant thought, he realizes he must do so on a new basis, not on the basis of the immediate access of reason to God, which had been the basis in pre-Reformation thought. And he realizes he must do so in such a way that the ultimate, all-sufficient grace is not subordinated to the penultimate, natural human abilities.

Bonhoeffer satisfies both of these requirements by relating the natural to Christ:

The concept of the natural must, therefore, be recovered on the basis of the gospel
The natural is that which, after the Fall, is directed towards the coming of Christ. The unnatural is that which, after the Fall, closes its doors against the coming of Christ.⁹⁸

It is thus Christ Himself, who comes to man with a grace that ultimately takes no account of the relative levels of goodness in the world, that nonetheless sustains and preserves natural virtues so that they may prepare the way of His coming. All the natural world had been affected by the fall of Adam,⁹⁹ and because of its fallenness it can never attain to an ultimate status. It will inevitably remain penultimate. But because Christ directs the natural toward Himself and preserves it, while allowing the unpreserved unnatural to disintegrate, man can be conformed toward Christ by

⁹⁸E., p. 144.

⁹⁹Indeed, according to Bonhoeffer's characterization, the natural only emerges after the fall. Before the fall man exists not as a natural being but as a creature: "The concept of the natural . . . differs from the concept of the creaturely . . . in that it implies an element of independence and self-development which is entirely appropriate to what it denotes. Through the Fall the 'crea-

participating fully in the natural life.

It is necessary, however, to introduce a means of distinguishing the natural from the unnatural. Bonhoeffer realizes that it is insufficient for him to declare that "The natural is the form of life preserved by God for the fallen world and directed towards justification, redemption and renewal through Christ"¹⁰⁰ unless he explains how man can know that natural form of life.

The instrument Bonhoeffer offers for knowledge of the natural is reason. It is a brand of reason limited by the form of the natural but facilitated by its content:

Formally the natural is determined through God's will to preserve it and through its being directed towards Christ. In its formal aspect, therefore, the natural can be discerned only in its relation to Jesus Christ-Himself. As for its contents, the natural is the form of the preserved life itself, the form which embraces the entire human race. On this side in relation to its contents, man's 'reason' is the organ of knowledge of the natural.¹⁰¹

Final knowledge of the natural thus comes only with the gift of Christ's grace which defines and validates the penultimate.¹⁰² All estimation of the natural that occurs outside of Christ's form must therefore founder, and all estimation that occurs before Christ's

ture' becomes 'nature'. The direct dependence of the creature on God is replaced by the relative freedom of natural life." (Ibid., p. 145.)

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid., pp. 145-146

¹⁰²Ibid.

final revelation in glory must be tentative. But Bonhoeffer does not abandon the penultimate there. Within that final tentativeness he allows reason a decisive knowledge of the natural, permitting firm penultimate decisions about what is to be preserved and protected and what is to be discouraged. Reintroduced by Bonhoeffer into the penultimate sphere, reason is properly subordinate to grace and sustained by faith. It cannot pretend to the ultimate sphere. But it can and does prepare the way for the ultimate.

Reason is well suited to this preparation within the natural sphere, because "The natural and reason are related to one another as the form of being and the form of consciousness of the preserved life."¹⁰³ Reason is exercised to perceive what is universal in all that is now existent.¹⁰⁴ And because that which is now existent is that which has been preserved by God to prepare for the final coming of Christ, reason perceives those attributes which are preserved universally, in all men, as preparation for

¹⁰³E., p. 146. Bonhoeffer's repeated reference to the "preserved life" reflects his earlier concern to refute the German Christian doctrine of the "orders of creation". In 1932 at the Berlin Youth Conference he commented on the potential danger of that doctrine: ". . . in the light of the concept of orders of creation, certain ordinances and features of the world were regarded as valuable, original, 'very good' in themselves, whereas the concept of orders of preservation meant that each feature was only a feature preserved by God, in grace and anger, in view of the revelation in Christ." (N.R.S., p. 176.) Bonhoeffer's phrase "orders of preservation" more adequately conveys that creation must be understood only through the resurrected Lord who suffered for its preservation.

¹⁰⁴E., p. 146. "Reason perceives the universal in what is given . . ." and also: reason ". . . is adapted to the function of introducing into the consciousness, of 'perceiving', as a unity

Christ. Knowing the natural facilitates a full participation in that natural, universally preserved life. And this participation, for Bonhoeffer, is preparation for the coming of Christ. Thus -- in the language of the forms of Christ -- to participate fully in the natural world affirmed by the Incarnate One is to prepare for the further revelation of Christ, who comes next as the Crucified One. Reason, by recognizing that which is preserved by the ultimate, becomes the instrument of Christ's revelation, and the rationally known natural world is relegated to its proper position as that which prepares for the coming of inscrutable, supernatural grace.

In this context of Christ's preservation of the natural, Bonhoeffer's particularly vivid denunciation of "methodism" can be suitably examined. By "methodism" Bonhoeffer means the religious attitude which, having used two-sphere thinking to reduce faith to the intimate spiritual realm of the individual, then engages in a ". . . 'clerical' sniffing-around-after-people's-sins in order to catch them out"¹⁰⁵, so it can prove to people thereby that they really do need Christ. This attitude is challenged by Bonhoeffer in two statements in the Letters . . . First, he regrets that God's presence is defined in "personal" and individualistic terms:

The displacement of God from the world, and from the public part of human life, led to the

whatever is entire and general in the real."

¹⁰⁵L. P. P., p. 345. "Methodism" is the appropriate translation of Bonhoeffer's German term Methodismus, and of course does not refer specifically to the Methodist denomination.

attempt to keep his place secure at least in the sphere of the 'personal', the 'inner', and the 'private'. And as every man still has a private sphere somewhere, that is where he was thought to be most vulnerable. The secrets known to a man's valet . . . have become the hunting ground of modern pastoral workers.¹⁰⁶

Then, on the basis of those secrets, methodist pastors and their "secularized counterparts" employ guilt to drive the individual toward despair and into the grip of a religious conception of redemption. They:

. . . demonstrate to secure, contented, and happy mankind that it is really unhappy and desperate and simply unwilling to admit that it is in a predicament about which it knows nothing, and from which only they can rescue it. Wherever there is health, strength, security, simplicity, they scent luscious fruit to gnaw at or to lay their pernicious eggs in. They set themselves to drive people into inward despair, and then the game is in their hands.¹⁰⁷

At the foundation of this practice, which Bonhoeffer excoriates as "a revolt of inferiority" and "religious blackmail",¹⁰⁸ lies the unwillingness of religious pastors to accept the natural, worldly realm of mature human existence. The penultimate realm, in which there is a healthy human desire for earthly well-being and a ready acceptance of the autonomy¹⁰⁹ required for social and

¹⁰⁶L. P. P., p. 344.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 326. Bonhoeffer mentions specifically existentialist philosophy and psychotherapy as the "secularized offshoots" of this religious methodism.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 344.

¹⁰⁹Bonhoeffer's use of the terms "freedom" and "autonomy" in describing the nonreligious, worldly man (e.g. see E., pp.

political responsibility, is denied its proper existence by methodism. This means that methodism wishes to withdraw the Christian message from the events of the everyday life of the individual and restrict it to the ". . . so-called 'ultimate questions' -- death, guilt -- to which only 'God' can give an answer and because of which we need God and the church and the pastor."¹¹⁰ Christ is reduced from one who stands at the crossroads of man's everyday natural existence to one who is pulled into human life only in emergency situations, only in extremities. But for Bonhoeffer this destroys the whole intention of the incarnation, which affirms this natural, penultimate realm precisely so that when the ultimate topics are broached, they may be regarded from the proper perspective. In resisting methodism Bonhoeffer is saying therefore that -- aside even from its pointlessness and ignobility¹¹¹ -- methodism is

96-103 and 248-254) will be wrongly construed if the terms are interpreted in the extreme sense of absolute liberty to do whatever one pleases. Bethge remarks that ". . . the autonomy of 'the world come of age' . . . is not to be understood as the freedom of a Titan, but rather a freedom born of humility." (D.B., p. 958, D.B.E., pp. 757-758.) Bonhoeffer would also never admit that freedom is the essence of true personhood. On the contrary, he warns that ". . . the demand for absolute liberty brings men to the depths of slavery." (E., p. 102.) This betrays the impropriety of one commentator's application of the following statement to Bonhoeffer: "Man is of inestimable value only as a person; he is a person only when he is the master of his own action, the architect of his own life." Hiroshi Obayashi, "Implicit Kantianism in Bonhoeffer's Conception of Religionless Christianity", The Northeast Asia Journal of Theology, V-VI (1970-1971), p. 117.

¹¹⁰L. P. P., p. 326.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 327.

frankly unchristian because it persistently misunderstands the importance of a healthy, natural life in which man may find his earthly roots.¹¹² Instead of appealing to man in the moments when he is ashamed of his humanity, Christianity must, to Bonhoeffer, speak to man at the height of his humanity:

I therefore want to start from the premise that God shouldn't be smuggled into some last secret place, but that we should frankly recognize that the world, and people, have come of age, that we shouldn't run man down in his worldliness, but confront him with God at his strongest point.¹¹³

That "strongest point" at which Bonhoeffer believes the individual must be confronted with God is the point at which his freedom, his creative activity, his mature responsibility, and his prosperity and happiness attain their highest potential. This is the moment at which the natural most vividly directs the individual toward the supernatural and the penultimate directs him toward the ultimate.

¹¹²From the beginning of his writings Bonhoeffer emphasized this need for firm roots in a healthy earthly life. An early example of this is in a 1929 address to his Barcelona congregation (G.S. III, pp. 48-58, esp. 57-58), where he employs the Greek mythological character of the giant Antaeus, who was invincible as long as his feet were on the ground. Every time Antaeus was thrown down, he gained more strength from the ground beneath him. The Christian, Bonhoeffer affirmed through the use of this illustration, must not flee the earth, but must live in it with both feet planted firmly in the daily heritage handed down to him.

¹¹³L.P.P., p. 346. The English translation loses the impact of the original German. Bonhoeffer actually says: ". . . dass man den Menschen in seiner Weltlichkeit nicht 'madig macht' . . .", which translated literally says that one should not take a man in his worldliness and "make him worm-eaten", or draw him down to his lowest, most filthy point, before one then confronts that man with God. See W.E., p. 379.

With this examination of the three themes included in Bonhoeffer's distinction between the ultimate and penultimate allegiances of the Christian, it is now possible to understand more concretely the theological grounds upon which he entreats religious man to emulate non-religious man. When Bonhoeffer reviles religious man for denigrating earthly joys and responsibilities it is because Christianity itself, properly understood in its penultimate form, affirms those very joys and responsibilities.

The Old Testament, for example, penultimate to the final word of the gospel, is a celebration of passion (which Bonhoeffer finds, for example, in the Song of Songs).¹¹⁴ It is dominated by a thoroughly this-worldly interpretation of redemption which sets man free for responsible life.¹¹⁵ It promotes health and prosperity, both of which can be understood under the genus of "blessing": "In the Old Testament -- e.g. among the patriarchs -- there's a concern not for fortune, but for God's blessing, which includes in itself all earthly good. In that blessing the whole of the earthly life is claimed for God, and it includes all his promises."¹¹⁶ Thus even though he believes the New Testament is dominated by the symbol of the cross, by Christ's suffering on earth and the expectation of the suffering of the disciples, Bonhoeffer will not allow this

¹¹⁴L. P. P., p. 303.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 336, e.g.: ". . . redemptions referred to here are historical, i.e. on this side of death Israel is delivered out of Egypt so that it may live before God as God's people on earth."

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 374.

final word to obliterate its predecessor. The ascendancy of the cross above the blessing should never lead, he says, to the idea ". . . that fortune and suffering, blessing and cross are mutually exclusive and contradictory . . ." ¹¹⁷ When religious man prematurely surrenders or bypasses that worldliness found in the Old Testament, he is bypassing the means whereby he may find full meaning in the New Testament. Bonhoeffer upholds the Old for the sake of the New, blessing for the sake of renunciation, fortune for the sake of the cross.

This same dynamic is evident in the mechanics of the other two themes of the penultimate. The religious believer who waits endlessly for the gift of enabling faith before he engages in responsible action is neglecting the penultimate prediction that faith never arises unaccompanied by works. So Bonhoeffer reminds religious man of the need to take a first step, which will possibly be condemned as sinful, precisely for the sake of the faith which subsequently may be discovered to have been present all along:

Luther had to pass through the monastery, and Paul through his bigoted zeal for the law; even the thief had to go through guilt to the cross: for only thus could they hear the last word A way must be traversed, even though, in fact, there is no way that leads to this goal ¹¹⁸

And to the religious Christian who, denigrating all the natural abilities of man, refuses to involve himself in social and political af-

¹¹⁷ L. P. P., p. 374.

¹¹⁸ E., p. 124.

fairs, Bonhoeffer responds with a very negative evaluation of the "good" man who "withdraws in disgust" from the everyday world: "Of course, his contempt for mankind is more respectable and upright, but it is also more barren and ineffectual. In the face of God's becoming man the good man's contemptuous attitude cannot be maintained" ¹¹⁹ The religious "good" man, failing to live fully in the natural, has weakened the penultimate and thereby threatened the proper reception of the ultimate, the supernatural. He thus has denied the Incarnate One.

It has been demonstrated that Bonhoeffer's distinction between the ultimate and penultimate truths of Christianity is the vehicle whereby he explains the dialectical tension between the forms in which Christ concretely reveals Himself to different individuals. All of Bonhoeffer's statements in the Letters . . . and the Ethics in which he entreats religious man to emulate the non-religious man come of age are his attempt to fulfill the penultimate so that the ultimate may be known as it intends itself to be known. All of these statements are at the same time entreaties to realize the affirmation of earthly existence made in the incarnation precisely so that when Christ reveals Himself in the form of the Crucified One that revelation will be received with its proper depth. Through an examination of this form of Christ as the Crucified One it will be possible to discover further reasons why Bonhoeffer believes Christ has called the world come of age into His service. It will

¹¹⁹E., pp. 73-74.

consequently be possible to discover how Christ further reveals Himself in the new age.

4. The Crucified One Revealed in the World Come of Age

Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the world come of age depends not only upon his conception of Christ in the form of the Incarnate One, who repudiates unworldliness and religion, but also upon his conception of Christ in the form of the Crucified One, who accentuates the fact that mature worldliness must be complemented by sacrificial discipleship. To view the world come of age only on the basis of the revelation given in the incarnation is, for Bonhoeffer, to see only part of all that Christ is accomplishing in the world come of age. Not only in his later works, but in his early writings as well, Bonhoeffer expresses his conviction that knowledge of the revelation of God through the ages must be sought in the suffering and crucifixion of Christ: "The meaning of history is tied up with an event which takes place in the depth and hiddenness of a man who ended on the cross. The meaning of history is found in the humiliated Christ."¹²⁰ Without an attempt to see how Christ reveals Himself as the Crucified One, therefore, the interpreter of

¹²⁰C. C., p. 62. The appearance of this idea in the christology lectures evokes the possibility that Bonhoeffer's interpretation of events through Christ's forms could be employed to interpret the sequence of ages or eras of history, e.g. the rise of the secular age on the heels of the age of tutelage. It is even possible to perceive tendencies in such a direction in Bonhoeffer's letters of June 8 and July 18, 1944 (L. P. P., pp. 327+362). But, to attempt to develop those tendencies would be to propose a speculative schema too grandiose for the facts.

the world come of age will not discover the hidden significance of the encounter of Christ with the modern world. It is the purpose of this present section to explain why Bonhoeffer thinks Christ is revealing Himself as the Crucified One in the world come of age.

In order that the multi-dimensionality of the concrete revelation of Christ may be known, Bonhoeffer's dialectical analysis emphasizes first that only one who encounters Christ as the Incarnate One can rightly hear the call of the Crucified One. This is indicated in Bonhoeffer's belief that genuine Christianity degenerates into religion whenever it attempts to rush past the earthly world affirmed by the Incarnate One. However, Bonhoeffer then shows that the counterpart of this first statement is also true, i.e. that the worldly life affirmed by Christ's revelation as the Incarnate One can only be maintained when it willingly issues into the life affirmed by the crucified Christ:

A life in genuine worldliness is possible only through the proclamation of Christ crucified; true worldly living is not possible or real in contradiction to the proclamation or side by side with it, that is to say, in any kind of autonomy of the secular sphere; it is possible and real only 'in, with and under' the proclamation of Christ. Without or against the proclamation of the cross of Christ there can be no recognition of the godlessness and godforsakenness of the world, but the worldly element will rather always seek to satisfy its insatiable longing for its own deification. If, however, the worldly element establishes its own law side by side with the proclamation of Christ, then it falls victim entirely to itself and must in the end set itself in the place of God. In both these cases the worldly element ceases to be worldly; if it is left to its own devices the worldly element will not and cannot be merely worldly The freedom and the courage

are lacking for genuine and complete worldliness, that is to say, for allowing the world to be what it really is before God, namely a world which in its godlessness is reconciled with God.¹²¹

On the basis of this quotation it is possible to understand why, for the sake of the revelation of Christ, Bonhoeffer distinguishes between a ". . . shallow and banal this-worldliness of the enlightened, the busy, the comfortable, or the lascivious . . ." and the much more positive "profound this-worldliness, characterized by discipline and the constant knowledge of death and resurrection."¹²²

The first worldliness attempts either to exist without its limits which are maintained by the Crucified One, or to exist alongside its limits in a separate realm. Either way, Bonhoeffer insists, the true limit is forgotten and the revelation of Christ in the modern age is misinterpreted by a man who is unable to understand himself or the world properly, since the limits in terms of which he thinks are unreal, self-created limits. The second worldliness, however -- precisely because worldly man is shown his own proper

¹²¹E., pp. 297-298. This passage written in the winter of 1942-1943 shows marked similarity to letters written to Bethge in 1944, especially that of July 18. The continuity evidenced here casts doubt upon the accuracy of statements by Hanfried Müller and others who argue that there is notable discontinuity between the Ethics and the Letters . . . See, for example Müller, Von der Kirche zur Welt, p. 31: ". . . on April 30 [1944] begins his series of letters which he -- starting from the fact that 'we are approaching a completely religionless time' -- develops his new theological thoughts." (My translation) ". . . am 30. April beginnt seine Reihe von Briefen, in denen er -- ausgehend von der Tatsache, dass wir 'einer völlig religionlosen Zeit entgegengehen' -- seine neuen theologischen Gedanken entwickelt."

¹²²L. P. P., p. 369.

limit in the crucifixion -- attains to the wisdom wherewith worldly man interprets correctly. By recognizing Christ revealed as the Crucified One, the Christian secures his worldliness and protects himself, according to Bethge's interpretation ". . . from deifying or demonizing his secularity again, and from falling into hopeless skepticism."¹²³ He thereby remains open to the complete revelation of Christ.

Through his understanding that the proper limits for the worldly man lie in the Crucified One, Bonhoeffer's dialectical thinking has introduced a substantial check on any one-sided interpretation of Christ's revelation based exclusively on the Incarnate One. Now, instead of wishing to emphasize that ". . . that which is Christian is to be found only in that which is of the world, the 'supernatural' only in the natural, the holy only in the profane, and the revelational only in the rational",¹²⁴ Bonhoeffer chooses to emphasize the counterpart of this statement, which is necessitated by the complementarity of the relationship of the Incarnate One to the Crucified One. Therefore Bonhoeffer now says: ". . . what is

¹²³Eberhard Bethge, "Bonhoeffer's Christology and his 'Religionless Christianity'", in B.W.C.A., p. 58. On another occasion Bethge voiced his recognition of the danger inherent in the phrase "world come of age". He opposed using it as the title for the commentaries on Bonhoeffer's thought published during the 1950's and 60's (that is, the publications which do now, despite his objections, bear the title Die mündige Welt). He feared this title would contribute to the "deifying of secularity", to the misbelief that it is an "optimistic analysis" of the present age that was the center of Bonhoeffer's thought. See his "The Editing and Publishing of the Bonhoeffer Papers", p. 5.

¹²⁴E., p. 198.

Christian is not identical with what is of the world. The natural is not identical with the supernatural or the revelational with the rational . . . they adopt a polemical attitude towards each other and bear witness precisely in this to their shared reality . . ."¹²⁵

With the implication that there exists a "polemical attitude" between the first and second forms of Christ, Bonhoeffer is implying not only that the Crucified One facilitates and completes a mature worldliness but also that He criticizes and judges worldliness. Christ in the world come of age is therefore characterized not only by His revelation as the real man but also by His revelation as judge.

Bonhoeffer does not hesitate to express the depths of judgement of the world that is signified by the form of the Crucified One, even though only briefly prior to such expressions of judgement he affirms the goodness of the world. In the Ethics, for example, immediately after the reminder that God Himself entered human reality and thereby expressed His love of creation, Bonhoeffer nonetheless exclaims: "Jesus Christ the crucified -- this means that God pronounces its final condemnation on the fallen creation. The rejection of God on the cross of Jesus Christ contains within itself the rejection of the whole human race without exception. The cross of Jesus is the death sentence upon the world."¹²⁶ The world come of age is included under that death

¹²⁵E., p. 199.

¹²⁶Ibid., pp. 131-132.

sentence; despite his embrace of the worldly life affirmed by the Incarnate One, the man come of age still participates in the crucifixion of Christ.

Because Bonhoeffer beholds Christ as the Crucified One who passes judgement upon the world, he is able to see the godlessness of religion in both a hopeless and a hopeful form:

There is the godlessness in religious and Christian clothing, which we have called a hopeless godlessness, but there is also a godlessness which is full of promise, a godlessness which speaks against religion and against the Church. It is the protest against pious godlessness insofar as this has corrupted the Churches, and thus in a certain sense, if only negative, it defends the heritage of a genuine faith in God and of a genuine Church.¹²⁷

This concept of hopeful godlessness points toward the center of Bonhoeffer's explanation of what the Crucified One reveals to the world come of age. It is necessary to examine that center of the explanation now.

The proper conception of what Bonhoeffer believes is the center of the revelation given by Christ the Crucified One is gleaned from some of the most enigmatic statements in all of his writings, viz. those statements in the Letters . . . which proclaim that ". . . the world that has come of age is more godless, and perhaps for that very reason nearer to God, than the world before its coming of age."¹²⁸ This paradox entails two antithetical claims: that

¹²⁷E., p. 103.

¹²⁸L.P.P., p. 362.

Christ has indeed judged the world come of age and found it godless; and that precisely in that godlessness the world stands nearer to God. The paradigm of the Crucified One, by permitting Bonhoeffer his vision of hopeful godlessness, allows him legitimately to maintain that paradox. Otherwise he would be left finally in sympathy either with the religious man who readily agrees that the world come of age is godless, or with the shallowly secular man who refuses to acknowledge any criticism of his secularity. Bonhoeffer remembers that the crucifixion of Christ, which seemed to sound the death knell for the hopes of the apostles, instead prepared the way for the final resurrection of Christ and the genuine birth of the church. And on that basis he also believes that the world come of age, which at first blush is inimical to the church, can foster and prepare the way for a more complete blossoming of faith and the rebirth of the church.

In this respect, despite the enigma, Bonhoeffer celebrates the maturity of the world come of age precisely because it has been judged godless by the Crucified One. Thus, instead of using a form of "methodism" to explain away the apparent godlessness, Bonhoeffer wishes the man come of age to be as godless as he can be, both in the sense of small gods, i.e. idols, and in the sense of the one true God. And the Christian must emulate this worldly man: "He must therefore really live in the godless world, without attempting to gloss over or explain its ungodliness in some religious way or other. He must live a 'secular' [weltlich] life, and thereby share in God's

suffering.¹²⁹ By living fully in the godlessness of the world, by sharing in the sufferings of God, the Christian undergoes the same genuine spiritual death, forsaken by man and God,¹³⁰ that Christ Himself experienced in the crucifixion. Yet this very abandonment, like the crucifixion itself, prompts the new life that begins with the resurrection. Bonhoeffer therefore sees the Christian discovering God in crucifixion and abandonment. And because this discovery arises in the revelation of the Crucified One, Bonhoeffer believes that it must be God Himself, in Christ, who is leading man towards his own crucifixion:

. . . we cannot be honest unless we recognize that we have to live in the world etsi deus non daretur. And this is just what we do recognize -- before God! God himself compels us to recognize it. So our coming of age leads us to a true recognition of our situation before God . . . God would have us know that we must live as men who manage our lives without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34). The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God.¹³¹

¹²⁹L.P.P., p. 361.

¹³⁰Bonhoeffer interprets the cry of forsakenness from the cross as an indication of complete abandonment by God in the hour of need. Thus Christ is thought to suffer in spirit as well as in body. See ibid., p. 14, and C.F./T., pp. 105-106 on the "Complete Temptation of Christ".

¹³¹L.P.P., p. 360. The phrase etsi deus non daretur has been translated variously; at times "as if God did not exist", "as if there were no God", "even if there were no God", and "even if there is no God". An extensive examination of the phrase and its translations is offered by Geoffrey B. Kelly, "Revelation in Christ", thesis, pp. 380-386; dissertation article, pp. 56-59. See also Feil, pp. 361ff, for an explanation of how this phrase ar-

If Bonhoeffer therefore thinks of the Crucified One as a judge, it is as a judge who restores a person to wholeness. The condemnation is no less severe, despite its salutary goal. It still strips even the mature worldly Christian of all righteousness and reveals his ignominy: "Man cannot glory now in his humanity, nor the world in its divine orders. The glory of men has come now to its last end in the face of the Crucified, bruised and bloody and spat upon."¹³² Yet, for Bonhoeffer, what the judgement kills in a person is a shallowly optimistic dependence upon one's new worldliness. And Bonhoeffer beholds the Crucified One replacing it with a more profound hope, a hope which, like the new worldliness, is ". . . characterized by discipline and the constant knowledge of death and resurrection."¹³³ In an Advent letter to the brethren of the Confessing Church in 1942, Bonhoeffer proclaims the depth of this hope:

The joy of God has been through the poverty of the crib and the distress of the cross; therefore it is insuperable, irrefutable. It does not deny the distress where it is, but finds God in the midst of it, indeed precisely there; it does not contest the most grievous sin, but finds forgive-

rives in Bonhoeffer's vocabulary through Wilhelm Dilthey, although it is originally attributable to Hugo Grotius. For the present purpose of this thesis, it will suffice to remember that the mood of the phrase is the subjunctive, implying, in other words, a condition contrary-to-fact. Bonhoeffer is obviously not implying that God is dead, as more radical readers of his last letters postulate.

¹³²E., p. 132.

¹³³L. P. P., p. 369.

ness in just this way; it looks death in the face,
yet finds life in death itself.¹³⁴

Thus far, this section has demonstrated that there are two characteristics in Bonhoeffer's view of Christ revealed as the Crucified One. First, Christ calls the individual on through a full participation in the earthly life affirmed by the Incarnate One and guides him toward the realization that his worldliness cannot remain genuine and complete unless it freely issues into the sacrificial life exemplified by the Crucified One. Christ secondly judges the world come of age, since even the mature man come of age still participates in the crucifixion of Christ, and thereby reveals the hopeful godlessness that characterizes the present age. This godlessness, when it is now interpreted through the prism of Christ's formation as the Crucified One, discloses that an apparent abandonment by God actually carries man to a profound hope that remembers the promise of the resurrection.

The final characteristic of Bonhoeffer's conception of the Crucified One stems directly from his allegiance to the theology of the cross. This final characteristic is the hiddenness of the Crucified One. The revelation of the Crucified One to the world come of age is a hidden revelation, hidden in the judgement required of man and the suffering borne by Christ. In the important letter of July 16, 1944, Bonhoeffer explains to Bethge the place God occupies in the new age:

¹³⁴T.P., p. 189.

God lets himself be pushed out of the world and on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matt. 8:17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering.¹³⁵

The meaning of Christ's revelation is not immediately evident but is hidden behind the opposite of what is expected. Whereas Bonhoeffer's belief that the world come of age is best interpreted and preserved by Christ would prima facie seem to indicate that Christ would be powerfully evident in that which He sustains, the opposite is true. He is weak, hidden. The world's coming of age seems to overpower the church of Christ and obfuscate any attempted vision of God. The world come of age does seem godless, for it is indeed evident that ". . . 'God' is being pushed more and more out of life, losing more and more ground."¹³⁶ Thus Bonhoeffer is scarcely surprised that "Roman Catholic and Protestant historians agree that it is in this development that the great defection from God, from Christ, is to be seen . . ."¹³⁷ But he knows that because these historians fail to discern the promise hidden in this apparently atheistic movement, the promise of the Crucified One whose power and grace is hidden under the cross, they ". . . play off God and Christ . . ."¹³⁸ against the movement toward mature

¹³⁵L. P. P., pp. 360-361.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 326.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Ibid.

worldliness. In so doing they miss the revelation of Christ Himself, who, previously hidden, now providentially appears to the faithful in the form of the Suffering One.¹³⁹

An example of Bonhoeffer's positive evaluation of the new age because it reveals a previously hidden Christ arises in a meditation he penned on the occasion of the baptism of his godson. The meditation is a prediction of the turbulence arriving in the revolutionary age into which the boy is born. It regrets the passing of "the old country parsonage"¹⁴⁰ and admits that the child will learn even in his youth that ". . . the world is controlled by forces against which reason can do nothing . . ." ¹⁴¹ Yet despite the harshness of the age and the adversities it raises for faith, Bonhoeffer vows: "In spite of that, I can only say that I have no wish to live in any other time than our own, even though it is so inconsiderate of our outward well-being. We realize more clearly than formerly that the world lies under the wrath and grace of God."¹⁴² It is this above all else that Bonhoeffer regards as important in man's relationship to the world come of age, viz. that, when he looks correctly, the individual in the new age will see more clearly

¹³⁹Note the perceptive comment of one commentator: ". . . Bonhoeffer's proclamation of the absent God is, in reality, a preliminary to asserting his more vital presence." J.C. Hoffman, "Providence in a World Come of Age", Canadian Journal of Theology, XIV (1968), p. 91.

¹⁴⁰L.P.P., p. 295.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 298.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 297.

than before that the world is judged and redeemed by God. Bonhoeffer welcomes the adversities of the age because precisely in those adversities the Hidden One reveals Himself more completely and accurately: ". . . the development towards the world's coming of age . . . opens up a way of seeing the God of the Bible, who wins power and space in the world by his weakness."¹⁴³ Thus as the Crucified One, hidden and suffering under the godlessness of the new age, and as the Incarnate One, who confirms and encourages active participation in that new age, Christ has revealed Himself in the world come of age.

This returns the discussion to the two-fold objective of this second chapter, which is to describe the specific characteristics of religionlessness and the manner in which Christ encounters the religionless man come of age. The major characteristic of the new religionless age for Bonhoeffer is that in it men are guided and sustained by Christ as He forms Himself in revelation to them. The forms of the Incarnate One and the Crucified One have been shown to be especially relevant. Not only therefore are modern, worldly, Christians religionless, so that they reject two-sphere individualistic thinking, metaphysical propositions about God, and the privilege of religion, but they also are called to be religionless by Christ Himself. Who is the new man come of age to whom Christ is revealing Himself? He is a religionless, worldly man. This new religionless man has rendered invalid the old means of

¹⁴³L.P.P., p. 361.

proclamation and interpretation. But because this mature man has been supported in his religionless maturity by Christ Himself, Bonhoeffer is confident that one can discover divine purpose behind the rise of religionlessness. He knows that proclamation and interpretation of Christ are not dead, but that they have assumed a new form.

Yet, although Bonhoeffer knows that proclamation and interpretation are not dead, the major difficulty which he faces, the difficulty to which he devoted much of his thought, is still unresolved. That is: "How is Christ to be proclaimed and interpreted to, by, and for, this new religionless, worldly man?" "By what means will the man come of age discover his indebtedness to Christ and his sustenance in Him?" Bonhoeffer disallows all "methodist" attempts that repudiate the new-found worldliness, as well as all attempts to address mature man as if he were still religious. So Bonhoeffer must offer a new way. But his life was ended before that new way could be systematically thought. Nonetheless, an attempt must be made to begin that new way. On the basis of the undeveloped concepts contained in his final writings and the foundational ideas explicated in his earlier years, the third chapter of this study will make such an attempt.

CHAPTER THREE

"REPRESENTATION" AS THE KEY TO THE NON-RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION OF BIBLICAL CONCEPTS

The purpose of this final chapter is to demonstrate how Bonhoeffer's conception of "representation" is the key to his unfinished attempt to define the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts. To accomplish this objective it will be necessary first of all to explicate the elements constitutive of "representation" (Stellvertretung)¹ in Bonhoeffer's theology. This will occupy the greater part of the chapter. Then an attempt will be made to relate these elements to other themes in Bonhoeffer's theology, in order that the foundation for non-religious interpretation that exists in his thought may be exhibited. That such a foundation does exist in his thought will be revealed through an actual non-religious interpretation of three biblical concepts, viz. the Word and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. This final step will show how Bonhoeffer's belief that ~~interpretation~~ should be based on "representation" would eliminate from Christian proclamation the undue preoccupation with metaphysics, the individualism that arises from two-sphere thinking, and the privileged character of faith, all of which beset religious Christianity.

Hitherto, this study has prepared for the affirmations of

¹See supra, p. 1, n. 1.

this final chapter by examining Bonhoeffer's conception of Christ and his understanding of the world come of age. It has been seen that, because of Bonhoeffer's adherence to the Chalcedonian definition of Christ and the communicatio idiomatum, it can be said that the actions of Christ are to be regarded as the actions of God. This has been coupled with Bonhoeffer's belief that Christ reveals Himself concretely and historically through other realities and that the forms of that revelation are His forms as the Incarnate One, the Crucified One, and the Risen One. An explanation of Bonhoeffer's theology of the cross has indicated that Christ the hidden, crucified, suffering redeemer is at the heart of his theology.

The christocentrism of Bonhoeffer which the first chapter has recounted is complemented by a description of the religionless man come of age in the second chapter. Above all, the second chapter has established that Bonhoeffer believes that the advent of religionless man has necessitated a new, non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts if Christian interpretation and proclamation are to survive in a non-religious world. Yet it was seen that Bonhoeffer believes that Christ Himself has guided and sustained this non-religious age so that He may therewith purge Christianity of many of its detrimental accompaniments and redirect it toward Himself. It was seen that to Bonhoeffer Christ forms Himself both as the Incarnate One -- so that He may draw Christians out of their outmoded religious form of faith and into a more mature faith -- and as the Crucified -- so that he may address the non-religious dimension of the individual who has come of age and direct it toward

sacrificial discipleship.

In light of the conclusions of these previous chapters, the setting for this final chapter should be understood as follows: First, Bonhoeffer holds that it is Christ who, in guiding and sustaining the world come of age, seeks to redirect Christianity away from "religion". Secondly, it is with Christ in the form of the Crucified One that Bonhoeffer is most concerned in his discussion of non-religious interpretation. This follows because the individual who is in most need of the non-religious interpretation of Christ's revelation has already been confronted with Christ formed as the Incarnate One. He has therefore already assumed a responsible, mature, religionless attitude toward faith, and now stands in need of its complement. Thirdly, the new interpretation of biblical concepts occasioned by the advent of the world come of age must, according to Bonhoeffer, demonstrate again that Christ's revelation is historical, concrete, personal, and dynamic, rather than static, abstract, propositional and unalterable. Finally, Bonhoeffer affirms that any new interpretation of biblical concepts will fail if it presupposes that man come of age should retreat into a religious stage and renounce his mature, responsible, worldly status. This would not only be a ". . . salto mortale . . . back into the Middle Ages . . .",² but would also, he believes, be asking Christ to repudiate a moment of His formation in the world. These four tenets, established thus far throughout the study, form the setting within which

²L.P.P., p. 360.

this final chapter develops.

A. The Elements of "Representation" in Bonhoeffer's Thought

The culmination of the treatment of Bonhoeffer's understanding of Christ in chapter one related his belief that Christ is the representative who takes the place of others on the cross. There "representation" was regarded as Bonhoeffer's specific expression of the doctrine of atonement. The essence of that act of atonement was captured by Bonhoeffer in the expression "the man for others", by which, in the Letters . . ., he referred to Christ. In this first part of the present chapter, however, the concern is not so much with Bonhoeffer's conception of Christ as the representative as with his conception of how individual disciples are called by Christ to become representatives themselves, to exist as "men for others" in their own right. The intention now, in other words, is to trace and describe the steps in the movement toward representation from the perspective of the disciple, the one who is being led toward representative discipleship by Christ.

1. The Need for Metanoia

The first of the elements of "representation" described by Bonhoeffer is metanoia³, the turning-away from that which separates the disciple from Christ. In his exposition of Luke 9:57-62 in The

³Metanoia is employed hereafter because its two English equivalents, "conversion" or "repentance", are insufficiently inclusive.

Cost of Discipleship, Bonhoeffer interprets that turning-away as a definite break with one's previous existence:

If we would follow Jesus we must take certain definite steps. The first step, which follows the call, cuts the disciple off from his previous existence. The call to follow at once produces a new situation The call to follow implies that there is only the one way of believing on Jesus Christ, and that is by leaving all and going with the incarnate Son of God.⁴

Involving this break with the past, metanoia will as a matter of course require a confession of guilt on the part of the would-be disciple. Indeed, if Bonhoeffer regards metanoia as the first element of "representation", he likewise regards confession as the first, and essential, step in metanoia: "The only way to turn back is through recognition of the guilt incurred towards Christ."⁵ "Representation" itself is in fact rendered wholly impossible unless sin is confessed, for in confession the prospective disciple first admits that he wishes to live in and with Christ. In confession, Bonhoeffer holds, one is daring to listen to and act upon the " . . . message of liberation through truth"⁶ in which the Gospel says to the Christian: "You are a sinner, a great desperate sinner; now come, as the sinner that you are, to God who loves you. He wants you as you are; He does not want anything from you, a sacrifice,

⁴C.D., p. 52.

⁵E., p. 110.

⁶Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, trans. and intro. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row), 1954, p. 11.

a work; He wants you alone."⁷

Confession entails an admission of sin. And, akin to his insistence that Christ's revelation is concrete, Bonhoeffer also insists⁸ that confession should be the admission of concrete, particular sins rather than general attitudes or nebulous inclinations: ". . . confession should deal with concrete sins. People usually are satisfied when they make a general confession. But one experiences the utter perdition and corruption of human nature, in so far as this ever enters into experience at all, when one sees his own specific sins."⁹ Through this confession of specific, concrete sins, as through his practice at Finkenwalde of having the ordinands make confession to a brother and fellow sinner rather than silently to God alone,¹⁰ Bonhoeffer defends against both the easy evasion of confession and the self-delusion that forgiveness has been gained when true confession has really only been parodied by the Christian.

Yet, if an attempt is made to delineate what Bonhoeffer believes are the specific sins that must be confessed in order for the Christian to make the needed break with his past errant existence and enter into metanoia, it must be conceded that these sins --

⁷Ibid.

⁸This is most evident in his more pastoral writings like Life Together.

⁹L. T., p. 117.

¹⁰See ibid., pp. 115-120, and D. B., pp. 532-533, D. B. E., pp. 383-384.

precisely because they are particular and concrete -- are known only to the penitent and to God. And again, because the revelation of Christ is historical, speaking differently to individuals at different times in their lives, the sins which hinder acceptance of that revelation will likewise change even within the life of a particular individual. The variation in the types of sin which trouble different individuals at different moments is paralleled by the manner in which the formation of Christ, as incarnate, crucified, or risen, demands variant responses depending upon the particular form in which Christ chooses to disclose Himself.

A revealing instance of the variant responses to the different formations of Christ in the world is Bonhoeffer's own change between the time of his writing The Cost of Discipleship and his later prison years which produced the Letters . . . (This change is in fact of sufficient consequence to necessitate an inquiry into the relationship of these two writings. Through that inquiry it will be possible to return and explain the one factor that Bonhoeffer believes unites all of the concrete, particular sins that must be repudiated in metanoia.)

Although the theme of "representation" and descriptions of its elements are in evidence throughout his writings,¹¹ Bonhoeffer

¹¹This is well-documented by Clifford Green, The Sociality of Christ . . ., pp. 329ff. He exhibits there that from the time when the concept of "active being-for-one another" arose in Sanctorum Communio, Bonhoeffer considered Christ as the "Stellvertreter" and advocated a perception of human and divine freedom as freedom "for" the service of others rather than from commitments. Even when the specific term "representation" is absent from certain

addresses the theme most extensively in The Cost of Discipleship and in the Letters¹² Yet it is evident that these two works are marked by contrasting attitudes toward the relationship of the disciple to the world.¹³ Bonhoeffer himself is aware of the contrast, as is indicated when he writes from prison to Bethge:

I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life, or something like it. I suppose I wrote The Cost of Discipleship as the end of that path. Today I can see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by what I wrote.

I discovered later, and I'm still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in the world that one learns to have faith.¹⁴

This discovery marks a considerable difference from those statements in The Cost of Discipleship in which Bonhoeffer's intent is to create ". . . the situation where faith is possible . . ." ¹⁵ so that thereby he, and other Christians, might become obedient disciples to Christ. Such a "situation" implied that a ". . . break

of his writings, Bonhoeffer conveys an analogous meaning through the terms mitkreuzigen and mitleiden or teilnehmen and teilhaben.

¹²There are also pertinent sections in the Ethics, notably chapters II, III, V, and VI, but these express the theme in similar fashion to the Letters . . . and need not be examined separately.

¹³See Ernst Feil's reference to "a new phase" that begins with the Ethics that separates Bonhoeffer's earlier relationship to the world (Weltbezug) from his later writings. Feil, p. 189. In this evaluation Feil agrees with other commentators, among them Bethge, in W.C.A., p. 52 and B.W.C.A., p. 57. Others see less of a break between these two writings, e. g. William Kuhns, In Pursuit of Bonhoeffer, p. 83..

¹⁴L.P.P., p. 369.

¹⁵C.D., p. 56.

with all our immediate relationships is inescapable."¹⁶ It implied that the call to metanoia is a call to prospective disciples that ". . . frees them from all earthly ties, and binds them to Jesus Christ alone. They must burn their boats and plunge into absolute insecurity in order to learn the demand and gift of Christ."¹⁷

In the Letters . . . Bonhoeffer significantly modifies that position. There he is concerned precisely to have the disciples not "burn their boats" or cut off their "earthly ties", but rather to keep those ties strong and to remain in their boats so that they may venture out into the depths of earthly, human experience.¹⁸

The contrast between the two writings calls into question the procedure of using concepts from both The Cost of Discipleship and the Letters . . . in a description of metanoia, since apparently the attitudes repudiated by Bonhoeffer at the earlier stage of his life differ markedly from those repudiated later. Yet two factors alleviate the difficulty presented by the contrast. First, Bonhoeffer's different views can be understood, as noted above, in terms

¹⁶C.D., p. 88.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁸A Christmas Eve letter to Renate and Eberhard Bethge in 1943 reveals Bonhoeffer's great emphasis on keeping alive earthly relationships and his hesitation in allowing God to take their place: ". . . nothing can make up for the absence of someone whom we love, and it would be wrong to try to find a substitute It is nonsense to say that God fills the gap; he doesn't fill it, but on the contrary, he keeps it empty and so helps us to keep alive our former communion with each other, even at the cost of pain." L.P.P., p.176.

of his formulation of the forms of Christ. And secondly, the attitudes which are repudiated in each case, though seemingly so different, can be reduced to one underlying sinful disposition.

If The Cost of Discipleship understands metanoia as a breach with one's immediate relationships in the secular world, it is because at the time of that writing Bonhoeffer does not yet realize the extensive implications of the incarnation. At that time he is only beginning to comprehend Christ's formation as the Incarnate One. He is only criticizing that ". . . shallow and banal this-worldliness of the enlightened, the busy, the comfortable, or the lascivious . . .",¹⁹ so that this shallow this-worldliness will not be mistaken for the ". . . profound this-worldliness, characterized by discipline and the constant knowledge of death and resurrection."²⁰ Only after cheap grace and lascivious worldliness are demolished can Bonhoeffer begin to perceive the implications of the incarnation of Christ and prescribe a profound worldliness to the disciple.

The Letters . . ., however, are written from the vantage point of one who is now aware of the implications of the incarnation and is seeking to prepare the way for formation in the world by the Crucified One. Informed by that first stage, Bonhoeffer can no

¹⁹L.P.P., p. 369. See again the reference in note 13, supra, to the new phase in Bonhoeffer's regard for worldliness that began with the Ethics.

²⁰Ibid.

longer say that metanoia means a breach with one's worldly relationships. Now, in the spirit of the Incarnate One, Bonhoeffer knows that true metanoia involves living a worldly existence precisely so that one may ". . . share in God's suffering . . ." right in the midst of a godless world.²¹

Therefore the difference between the conception of metanoia in the two writings is determined by the form of Christ to which Bonhoeffer is responding at that particular time of his own life. Still, both writings firmly advocate metanoia. And in both cases it is in response to the call of Christ that they do so.

Although the difference between his two conceptions of metanoia is diminished because both arise as a response to the one Christ who simply reveals himself variously, it still appears that the form of sin Bonhoeffer believes must be repented and repudiated when he writes The Cost of Discipleship differs from the form of sin he believes needs to be repented and repudiated in the Letters . . . This difference, however, is only apparent. At their root,

²¹L.P.P., p. 361. It should be reiterated that the difference between the earlier writing and the Letters . . . is not simply that, earlier, Bonhoeffer regarded the world as evil and godless and that later he came to regard it as good. The Letters . . . still regards the world as godless, as under God's harsh judgement. The difference, rather, is that the disciple is no longer told to avoid that godless world but rather to immerse himself in it. Thereby, being crucified by that godless world, he will discover the one God who also is crucified by it. See supra, pp. 141-144.

the forms of sin in both periods are attempts at self-justification. And self-justification is one of the major dispositions of the religious attitude, as was related in the previous chapter. Because self-justification manifested itself in different forms at variant periods of Bonhoeffer's life, it was necessary to combat that self-justification through the repudiation of its different specific manifestations, even as it was likewise necessary that Christ address Himself to the situation in different forms.

His belief that the root of these different sinful attitudes is self-justification is expressed by Bonhoeffer in the Letters . . . when he writes to Bethge that "To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to make something of oneself (a sinner, a penitent, or a saint) on the basis of some method or other, but to be a man -- not a type of man, but the man that Christ creates in us."²² And again, he confesses: "One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman (a so-called priestly type!), a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one."²³ In both of these passages Bonhoeffer speaks of the attempt to "make something of oneself", to carve an individual identity for oneself. Yet whether that be a religious or a non-religious identity, Bonhoeffer opposes any attempt to create

²²L.P.P., p. 361, and also see supra, pp. 75-77.

²³L.P.P., pp. 369-370.

an identity for oneself, for ultimately a process of justification of that identity would begin, and one would then take oneself and one's own identity far too seriously. Metanoia is the exact opposite attitude of concern about one's own identity. It is characterized by Bonhoeffer as: ". . . not in the first place thinking about one's own needs, problems, sins and fears, but allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ, into the messianic event" ²⁴

In The Cost of Discipleship the situation appears to be slightly different, but again the attitude that must be repudiated can be interpreted as self-justification. Those whom Bonhoeffer is addressing there cannot be accused of forthright attempts at self-justification, since their unhesitant acceptance of the doctrine of justification by grace alone would appear to be their greatest insurance against such a deviation. The difficulty arises, Bonhoeffer asserts, when the justification of the sinner degenerates into justification of the sin, and justification of the sin arises when the doctrine of justification by grace alone is appropriated as a starting point. It arises, in other words, when the startling realization that one is justified only by grace becomes so familiar that it is presupposed as an assumption which one never really encounters rather than as a joyous discovery at the end of a long struggle:

If grace is God's answer, the gift of Christian life, then we cannot for a moment dispense with following Christ. But if grace is the presupposition for my Christian life, it means that I set out to live the Christian life in the world

²⁴L. P. P., pp. 361-362.

with all my sins justified beforehand. I can go and sin as much as I like, and rely on this grace to forgive me, for after all the world is justified in principle by grace.²⁵

With the doctrine as a static principle, the Christian turns even the costly gift of grace into his own weapon and, Bonhoeffer warns, uses it to avoid obedience to Christ. The Christian permits himself to do and become whatever he wishes, again carving an identity for himself and justifying that identity, reducing the check of the law upon his behavior by too readily assuming that he is already justified and protected from the law. "It is under the influence of this kind of 'grace'", Bonhoeffer laments, "that the world has been made 'Christian', but at the cost of secularizing the Christian religion as never before."²⁶ Justification by Christ becomes slyly reduced to a form of self-justification.

Whether one is speaking in regard to the Letters . . . or to The Cost of Discipleship, one may therefore characterize metanoia in this way: it is the confession of and turning-away from the sinful disposition toward self-justification, whether that be in religious or secular clothing; metanoia is honesty, "ultimate honesty", Bonhoeffer claims, the honesty which requires repudiation of one's self-awareness -- whether religious or worldly -- so that one becomes like a child again.²⁷ It arises as a response to the call of

²⁵ C.D., p. 42. Translation corrected, cf. Nachfolge, p. 21.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 42.

²⁷ L.P.P., p. 360.

discipleship from Christ.²⁸ And it may differ in form from individual to individual or -- in the same individual -- from one time period to another depending upon the form of Christ to which one is responding.

2. Conformation as the means of the formation
of Christ in the world

To say that metanoia is the first element of "representation" is to raise two related questions: What characterizes the individual who does confess and repudiate his sinful disposition toward self-justification?, and What process transforms the sinful individual into one who is willing to enter into metanoia? Bonhoeffer answers these questions by means of the doctrine of conformation (Gleichgestaltung).

In the previous chapters,²⁹ conformation was mentioned in the context of Christ's formation into the world as the Incarnate, Crucified, and Resurrected One. Here, however, conformation is regarded from the perspective of the disciple's own reception of those forms.

Bonhoeffer arrives at his conception of conformation through the knowledge that only in such a state of complete "conformity" to

²⁸This second aspect of metanoia illustrates the ultimate/penultimate distinction at work in Bonhoeffer's mature theology. The disciple who confesses and repudiates his sin may indeed do so before he is aware that he is responding to grace through the call of Christ. This is nonetheless a response, a penultimate act of freedom within the ultimate grace of God. Grace itself demands the first step. Bonhoeffer refers to metanoia as a "first step" in C.D., p. 57.

²⁹Supra, pp. 43-49 and 103ff.

Christ will metanoia be complete. The disposition toward self-justification, issuing into human attempts to create personal identity, to "make something of oneself", is finally met and conquered only in the complete conformation of the disciple with Christ. Bonhoeffer's belief that self-justification is overcome through conformation to Christ is shown in his affirmation that conformation is not just another ideal or goal which men may bend to their own uses:

This is not achieved by dint of efforts 'to become like Jesus', which is the way in which we usually interpret it. It is achieved only when the form of Jesus Christ itself works upon us in such a manner that it moulds our form in its likeness (Gal. 4:19). Christ remains the only giver of forms. It is not Christian men who shape the world with their ideas, but it is Christ who shapes men in conformity with Himself.³⁰

As long as discipleship is regarded as a goal to be attained, it will not be free from the disposition toward self-justification, for it will become part of the identity created by the individual in his attempt to "make something of himself". Christ Himself will be made into part of the individual's "project", and Bonhoeffer's warning that "Christ is not a principle in accordance with which the whole world must be shaped"³¹ will be forgotten.

Thus the impropriety of construing Bonhoeffer's view of "representation" as an imitatio Christi is revealed, for the form of Christ does not enter into the world because of human effort to be like Christ, but by the renunciation of such human effort and the

³⁰E., p. 80.

³¹Ibid., p. 84.

acceptance of the form with which Christ is moulding the world.

Here Bonhoeffer stands within the tradition initiated by Luther. As Walther von Loewenich has demonstrated,³² this conformation is precisely what Luther opposed to the works-righteousness of the Romanists:

. . . we must differentiate sharply between the idea of conformitas and that of imitatio. The concept of imitatio remains completely within the bounds of morals; in it it is a matter of man's 'doing'. The concept of conformitas bursts these bounds; it stands in connection with suffering, and indeed not with a self-chosen suffering, but with one sent from God.³³

Von Loewenich's comment illuminates a principle which will be discussed subsequently but which can be mentioned now: imitatio is self-chosen, knowingly and deliberately; but conformation is given by Christ in His own time and place and is received by the Christian in the midst of circumstances that frequently prohibit him from knowing of his own transformation. Conformation completes itself only when, all attempts at self-justification having been laid aside, the Christian has no identity of his own outside of Christ and thus experiences Christ within him rather than the effects of his own

³² von Loewenich, Luthers Theologia Crucis, pp. 142ff.

³³ Ibid., p. 143, n. 157. (My translation) ". . . müssen wir scharf unterscheiden zwischen dem Gedanken der conformitas und dem der imitatio. Der Begriff der imitatio bleibt durchaus in den Schranken des Moralischen; es handelt sich bei ihm um ein Tun des Menschen. Der Begriff der conformitas sprengt diese Schranken; es steht im Zusammenhang mit dem Leiden, und zwar nicht mit einem selbst-erwählten, sondern einem von Gott gesandten Leiden."

identity.³⁴

The distinction between imitation and conformation can also be regarded in terms of Bonhoeffer's conception of the image of God. Bonhoeffer is aware, both in Creation and Fall³⁵ and in The Cost of Discipleship³⁶, that the fundamental cause of the fall of man is his willful act of attempting to become like God rather than accepting his already-given formation as the image of God. The opposition Bonhoeffer draws between imago dei and sicut deus in Creation and Fall³⁷ is extended into this option he establishes in the later writing: "Either man models himself on the god of his own invention, or the true and living God moulds the human form into his image."³⁸ The first option results in the fall from grace; the second is the effect of the restoration of that grace.

Conformation thus depends utterly upon the image of God

³⁴John A. Phillips, in "Radical Christology: Jesus and the Death of God", Cross Currents, XIX, no. 3 (Summer, 1969), p. 285, differs from this view, and says that especially in The Cost of Discipleship, but elsewhere as well, Bonhoeffer ". . . develops the imitation of Christ largely in terms of a vigorous and moving, but sectarian formulation of the monastic tradition . . ." A close examination of Bonhoeffer's language, especially in the section of The Cost of Discipleship titled "The Image of Christ", will demonstrate that Phillips is mistaken here. In support of this critique of Phillips, see James A. Todd, "Participation: An Overlooked Clue", Encounter, XXXIV, no. 1 (Winter, 1973), 27-35.

³⁵C.F./T., pp. 35-40, 64-76.

³⁶C.D., pp. 269ff.

³⁷C.F./T., pp. 69-76.

³⁸C.D., p. 270.

coming to man and conforming man in accordance with that image, rather than having man create his own image and willfully conform to that. It is precisely this that Bonhoeffer means when he writes in the Letters . . . that the Christian must become ". . . not a type of man, but the man that Christ creates in us."³⁹ When Bonhoeffer speaks of the image of God, whether in his earlier writings or his Ethics and Letters . . ., he is therefore speaking of Him who does the conforming of man to Himself, not of an ideal to which man, by an effort of the will, conforms himself.

The change of form that occurs in God when the divine image assumes the image of fallen man and conforms man to Him becomes the basis for the next step in Bonhoeffer's definition of conformation. While thoroughly human, Christ is nonetheless perfect and sinless in His humanity. This perfection in Christ Bonhoeffer accepts because of the Chalcedonian definition of Christ. The sinless perfection of Christ means to Bonhoeffer that Christ presents to man the perfect form of humanity, and that if one is conformed to Christ one is conformed to the proper form of humanity, because Christ Himself is the proper form of humanity. In the context of a description of Christ's formation in the church, Bonhoeffer says:

One can speak of formation and of world only if mankind is called by name in its true form, which is its own by right, which it has already received, but which it merely fails to understand and accept,

³⁹L. P. P., p. 361.

namely, the form of Jesus Christ, which is proper to man.⁴⁰

That Christ Himself is the proper form of humanity has major implications for Bonhoeffer. It means not only that one is fully Christian only when one is conformed to Christ, but also that one is fully human only when one is conformed to Christ. The proper study of man bears not on man, but on Christ. Henceforth, Bonhoeffer believes that one must look not to one's fellows, but to Christ, to discover what true humanity is. And, looking upon Christ, the disciple discovers that he will not be fully human until he participates in all the acts of Christ. Thus Bonhoeffer attests: "To be taken up by God, to be executed on the cross and reconciled, that is the reality of manhood."⁴¹

The formation of Christ involves, therefore, not only the image of God becoming man by assuming human flesh, but also the image of God assuming that flesh in such a sinless manner as to be the perfect form of humanity. And correspondingly, when Bonhoeffer defines conformation, he affirms that it involves not only Christ becoming like man but also man becoming like Christ. Again, however, this becoming like Christ is not a matter of imitating Him, but of being formed by Him toward Himself.

At this point the relation between conformation and "representation" receives clarification. Conformation is a vital element

⁴⁰E., p. 84.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 75.

of "representation" because when the disciple is conformed to Christ, according to Bonhoeffer, he becomes part of that cross section of humanity⁴² which is both the representative of Christ to others and the representative of true humanity to others. Conformed to Christ, the disciple is restored to the image of God from which man has fallen. Only when restored to this image will the disciple's attempts to confess and repudiate his disposition toward self-justification meet with success, and only then can he be a true representative, in Bonhoeffer's estimation.

If therefore an answer were now to be given to the two questions which arose at the beginning of this section, the following could be said: the process that transforms the individual into a disciple willing to enter into metanoia is, according to Bonhoeffer, the conformation of that individual to the image of God, this conformation being not an ideal or goal to be attained by an act of the will but rather the "in-dwelling" or formation of Christ within that individual. The one who is conformed to that image thereby assumes the proper form of humanity, this being precisely the form of the man, Christ. The extent to which the conformed man undergoes metanoia is determined by the extent to which he represents Christ to others.

It is in this regard that Bonhoeffer can say: "The Christian may now serve so that Christ may be magnified in my body,

⁴²This "cross section of humanity" is the church, which Bonhoeffer regards as the Body of Christ. See infra, pp. 197ff.

whether by life or by death' (Phil. 1:20)."⁴³ In order to continue to be conformed to Christ and to remain a representative of Him, however, the disciple must assume the third of Bonhoeffer's elements of "representation", single-minded obedience.

3. Singlemindedness as that which maintains conformation to Christ

From Sanctorum Communio to the Letters . . . Bonhoeffer emphasizes the importance of undistracted, single-minded obedience to Christ. He speaks of such obedience in various terms: in Act and Being he speaks of the "innocence" of the child⁴⁴ and in Temptation of the "innocence" of those who cling to the Word with undivided hearts;⁴⁵ in The Cost of Discipleship he depicts the "simplicity" of the carefree life;⁴⁶ in the Ethics he uses the phrase "Christ's total and exclusive claim";⁴⁷ and in the Letters . . . the attitude is depicted again as simplicity.⁴⁸ The term "singlemindedness" to be used here stands for all these allied sentiments. It is defined by Bonhoeffer in The Cost of Discipleship as the state in which ". . . nothing is allowed to come between Christ and ourselves Thus the heart of the disciple must be set upon

⁴³C.D., p. 220.

⁴⁴A.B., p. 184.

⁴⁵C.F./T., pp. 102f.

⁴⁶C.D., pp. 154-161.

⁴⁷E., pp. 57-59.

⁴⁸L.P.P., p. 212.

Christ alone."⁴⁹

The singlemindedness Bonhoeffer advocates is single-mindedness toward the Word of Christ, i. e. toward Christ as the Word. Nothing must be allowed to come between the disciple and the Word addressed to him. Therein lies the true wisdom of the disciple and the means whereby conformation to Christ is maintained:

Where the word is, there shall the disciple be. Therein lies his true wisdom and his true simplicity But wisdom, however spiritual it may be, must never lead the disciple along a path which cannot stand the test of the word of Jesus. Only the truth of that word will enable him to discern what is wise. But to deviate from the truth for the sake of some prospect or hope of our own can never be wise, however slight that deviation may be. It is not our judgement of the situation which can show us what is wise, but only the truth of the Word of God. Here alone lies the promise of God's faithfulness and help. It will always be true that the wisest course for the disciple is always to abide solely by the Word of God in all simplicity.⁵⁰

A further exposition of what Bonhoeffer means by single-mindedness is found in his interpretation of the Beatitudes, particularly the one regarding the pure in heart. It is only those ". . . who have surrendered their hearts completely to Jesus that he may

⁴⁹C. D., p. 154. The German word that Bonhoeffer uses, Einfalt, can be translated either as "simplicity" or as "singleness". It can carry the connotation of "foolishness", but is nonetheless to be distinguished from a witless foolishness. Cf. Nachfolge, pp. 147, 186-187.

⁵⁰C. D., p. 191. See also infra, pp. 172ff.

reign in them alone"⁵¹ that are aptly described as pure in heart. They are given hearts that are ". . . undefiled by their own evil -- and by their own virtues too."⁵² They possess a ". . . child-like simplicity like Adam before the fall, innocent alike of good and evil."⁵³

It is significant for Bonhoeffer's interpretation of this verse that the reward for purity of heart is a vision of God. The assertion that conformation to Christ is maintained by singlemindedness is borne out by this view. These who look with an impure heart will look anywhere but at Christ. They will see not God, but themselves and their own self-justifying projects: "Only they will see God, who in this life have looked solely onto Jesus Christ, the Son of God."⁵⁴ Those who succeed in curbing completely their own interference with the reception of the Word will be those who see God.

The singlemindedness that is required for the vision of God entails a unity with Christ and His word that could not exist if the disciple were to depend upon his own conscience or his own sense of shame. Singleminded representatives are marked by a knowledge that conscience is an insufficient guide to obedience: ". . . their hearts are not ruled by their conscience, but by the

⁵¹C. D., p. 101.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 191.

will of Jesus."⁵⁵

Bonhoeffer develops his understanding of shame and conscience in Creation and Fall and especially in the Ethics. Shame, first, arises only after the loss of the original unity that existed between Adam, his "other" (viz. Eve) and God:

'Their eyes were opened' (Gen. 3:7). Man perceives himself in his disunion with God and with men. He perceives that he is naked. Lacking the protection, the covering, which God and his fellow-man afforded him, he finds himself laid bare. Hence there arises shame. Shame is man's ineffaceable recollection of his estrangement from the origin; it is grief for this estrangement and the powerless longing to return to unity with the origin.⁵⁶

Because shame is an effect of the disunion with God, it cannot function as a remedy for the disunion. Indeed, as long as shame is exercised, the starkness of the disunion is confirmed and made manifest. The starkness of the contrast does, Bonhoeffer holds, serve a positive function, for knowledge of the disunion is better than ignorance of it. Shame is kept awake, he says, ". . . and with it the memory of the disunion with the origin . . ." ⁵⁷ But although the disciple would at times feel shame and be reminded thereby of his disunity, he would not then be in a state of true representation, of true conformation to Christ. For in true conformation, Bonhoeffer believes, the individual has his eye so single-

⁵⁵C.D., p. 191.

⁵⁶E., p. 20.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 21.

mindedly fixed on Christ that the disunion from which shame arises is dissolved by a complete formation of Christ in that individual.

The conscience, in Bonhoeffer's understanding, is still one further step away from union with the Word, since ". . . it presupposes disunion with God and with man and marks only the disunion with himself of the man who is already disunited with the origin."⁵⁸ In the exercise of the conscience, the fallen creature is aware of the disunion only within himself and remains unaware of that deeper disunion which underlies his own division. The conscientious man, by trusting in the conscience, furthers his separation from the Word because what he believes is unity is in fact disunion. Conscience assumes a dangerous status then, pretending ". . . to be the voice of God and the standard for the relation to other men."⁵⁹ All attempts at reunion now arise from disunity.

When Bonhoeffer interprets shame and conscience along these guidelines, he reveals the necessity of a singleness of mind that will rediscover and uphold the original unity with the Word. There is still, however, one more major obstacle preventing such a reunion, viz. a whole system of values based upon the language of good and evil. Bonhoeffer interprets good and evil not as two sides of the fundamental division of all reality, but as two sides of a humanly-created, willful attempt to design new meaning in a broken

⁵⁸E., p. 24.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 25.

world. In Creation and Fall he distinguishes between the Hebrew "tob" (good) and "ra" (evil) and explains that man comes to know these only after his disunion with God, this disunion being the moment of man's death: "The man who knows of tob and ra at the same moment knows of his death. Knowing of tob and ra is itself his death. Man dies of the knowledge of good and evil."⁶⁰ Man dies of the knowledge of good and evil because henceforth even his achievement of the good in life will itself be only the achievement of his own attempt to live on the basis of his own abilities and by his own wisdom: ". . . something is demanded of me which I am not in a position to fulfil. I am to live out of my own self, from my own resources, and I cannot."⁶¹

The singlemindedness which Bonhoeffer requires of the representative, that he might remain conformed to Christ, cuts through the division of good and evil and reveals the hopelessness of an ethic based upon the division. Singlemindedness holds the representative "beyond good and evil", within the union to Christ's word that dissolves the human attempt to live out of one's own resources. Thus in the midst of the frustrations and anxieties arising from that fruitless attempt, the disciple will meet, says Bonhoeffer, a far better fate if he will renounce both good and evil

⁶⁰C.F./T., p. 55. See also pp. 67ff. where Bonhoeffer intertwines the origin of good and evil with the first "religious" question, the question of the serpent to Eve prompting her to evaluate for herself the validity of the divine command.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 56.

and embrace single-minded obedience:

Because the simple man knows God, because God is his, he clings to the commandments, the judgements and the mercies which come from God's mouth every day afresh. Not fettered by principles, but bound by love for God, he has been set free from the problems and conflicts of ethical decision. They no longer oppress him. He belongs simply and solely to God and to the will of God.⁶²

Bonhoeffer does not consider the singlemindedness of the representative to be a willful human work. To combat this misinterpretation, the relation between singlemindedness and conformation has been emphasized. Bonhoeffer does refer to single-minded obedience as a "response" to the call of Christ.⁶³ He grants that ". . . it is only through actual obedience that a man can become liberated to believe."⁶⁴ But that obedience is itself merely an answer to the preexisting, enabling, call of grace. Singlemindedness does not seek to replace but rather issues from the divine grace that calls a man toward representation.

Likewise it is not to be thought that the singlemindedness Bonhoeffer recommends is a blindfolded stubbornness that is oblivious to worldly occurrences. On the contrary, because it is toward Christ and His Word that the representative is single-minded, Bonhoeffer believes that the representative will be awakened to the totality of existence, to real existence in the real world: "The more

⁶²E., p. 68.

⁶³C.D., p. 72.

⁶⁴Ibid.

exclusively we acknowledge and confess Christ as our Lord, the more fully the wide range of His dominion will be disclosed to us."⁶⁵ This awareness by the representative of the range of Christ's dominion is possible only because Bonhoeffer conceives of Christ as reality, as the Incarnate One who opens up a vision of what is real existence in the midst of illusion. Because, as stated earlier,⁶⁶ Christ is the mediator and foundation of all understanding about reality, and because correspondence to Him is truth, the representative will exist in a truthful correspondence to reality only by singlemindedly clinging to Christ: "It is precisely because he looks only to God, without any sidelong glance at the world, that he is able to look at the reality of the world freely and without prejudice."⁶⁷ That uninterrupted look at God is what Bonhoeffer refers to as the "wisdom" of the representative, since -- as he demonstrates both in The Cost of Discipleship at his exposition of Matt. 10:16b (. . . be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves)⁶⁸, and in the Ethics -- simplicity or singlemindedness toward Christ is the very same thing as wisdom: "The wise man is the one who sees reality as it is, and who sees into the depths of things. That is why only that man is wise who sees reality in God. To understand reality is not the same as to know about outward

⁶⁵E., p. 58.

⁶⁶Supra, p. 37ff.

⁶⁷E., p. 68.

⁶⁸C. D., pp. 190-191.

events. It is to perceive the essential nature of things."⁶⁹ Single-mindedness holds the representative close to that essential nature of things, viz. Christ, and thus, in retaining his conformation to Christ the representative retains his proper relationship to the world.

This idea of singlemindedness developed above, which is construed primarily from Bonhoeffer's statements in The Cost of Discipleship and the Ethics, is complemented rather than destroyed by Bonhoeffer's further unfolding of his theology. Singlemindedness has not been eliminated from the Letters . . ., but remains alongside the emphasis upon an open-minded worldliness. Two specific instances in the Letters . . . reveal his continued solicitude for the theme of singlemindedness. In one of his final letters from prison to Bethge, Bonhoeffer considers the theme, calling simplicity ". . . an intellectual achievement, one of the greatest."⁷⁰ And only briefly prior to this letter, he raises the issue of singlemindedness in a fragment on the theme of chastity, which he defines in this way: "The essence of chastity is not the suppression of lust, but the total orientation of one's life toward a goal. Without such a goal, chastity is bound to become ridiculous."⁷¹

In both of these instances, especially in his distinctive definition of chastity, Bonhoeffer reveals a possible connection be-

⁶⁹E., pp. 68-69.

⁷⁰L. P. P., p. 385.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 376.

tween singlemindedness and open-minded worldliness: a religious conception of chastity, founded upon a disdain for the world and an individualistic ethic, suppresses human emotion and earthly desire. A non-religious definition, which centers on singlemindedness, opens up the individual to affirmation of and participation in earthly hopes and desires without fear of becoming subjected to them. Singlemindedness establishes the cantus firmus around which the polyphony of life can play: "Where the cantus firmus is clear and plain, the counterpoint can be developed to its limits."⁷²

Rather than being outstripped by newer, more inclusive themes in the Letters . . ., singlemindedness enters into a new dimension of relevance to the representative, and becomes the guarantor of true worldliness, of a worldliness properly understood. Now, in singleminded conformation to Christ, the representative does not rail against the world but welcomes it as the proper arena for that conformation.

4. Hiddenness, suffering and rejection as the consequences of singleminded conformation

Whereas the representative, in single-minded conformation to Christ, is able to correspond to reality because Christ has formed Himself as the Incarnate One, the next element of "representation" points directly toward Christ's form as the Crucified One. Bonhoeffer's conception of "representation" includes the belief that the representative will be unaware of his conformation to Christ and of his

⁷² L. P. P., p. 303.

consequent righteousness and that the representative will suffer and be rejected by the world on account of that conformation. In these consequences the relation between "representation" and the theology of the cross can be observed.⁷³

As there is a hidden revelation of Christ according to the theology of the cross, so there also is hiddenness in the disciple's representation. A pertinent question, however, is "From whom is representation hidden?" Bonhoeffer certainly does not mean that the disciple's acts of representation are hidden from the world; indeed it is important that they be open and visible. He affirms the need for such visibility by emphasizing Matt. 5:16: "Let your light so shine before men."⁷⁴ But that visibility is not, he says, the real objective: ". . . the visibility is never an end in itself; and if it becomes so we have lost sight of our primary aim, which is to follow Jesus . . . Our activity must be visible, but never be done for the sake of making it visible."⁷⁵ The hiddenness of "representation", according to Bonhoeffer, is occasioned instead by the single-minded obedience explained above. Since representative activity is not to be hidden from the world, then, if it is hidden from anyone, it must be hidden from the representative himself, who

⁷³See infra, pp. 192-202.

⁷⁴C.D., p. 141. The visibility of representation will also be emphasized later in this study in regard to the recovery of credibility in proclamation.

⁷⁵Ibid.

has his eye fixed so resolutely on Christ that he is unaware of his own conformation and its righteousness:

From whom are we to hide the visibility of our discipleship? We are to hide it from ourselves. Our task is simply to keep on following, looking only to our Leader who goes on before, taking no notice of ourselves or of what we are doing. We must be unaware of our own righteousness. . . . Thus we hide the visible from ourselves in obedience to the word of Jesus.⁷⁶

The light that is broadcast into the world by the representative is therefore a by-product. It radiates " . . . only because he follows Christ and looks solely to him."⁷⁷

Bonhoeffer visualizes the representative as one who not only has the righteousness of his conformation hidden from him but who also is ignorant of his own needs and desires because of his singlemindedness. Thus self-denial is given a new definition, being no longer a willful renunciation of desires but a consequence of the hiddenness that accompanies representation. It is not only that the representative refuses to satisfy his longings; he has become ignorant of those longings because he is not looking at himself but at

⁷⁶C.D., p. 142. Fuller's translation here is very free. See Nachfolge, p. 134. Among other liberties, he has altered the third person narrative to the first person and has omitted the phrase "Natürlich sieht er das Ausserordentliche auch, aber er bleibt sich selbst darin verborgen", which is translated "Naturally he (der Nachfolgende) sees the extraordinary as well, but he remains hidden from himself therein."

⁷⁷Ibid.

Christ: "Self-denial is never just a series of isolated acts of mortification or asceticism To deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only him who goes before" ⁷⁸ Eberhard Bethge interprets Bonhoeffer's idea here by saying that the true uniqueness and mystery of the disciple who follows after Christ is that, like Christ Himself, he ". . . has no interest in his own uniqueness." ⁷⁹

By implication, Bonhoeffer's statements about the hiddenness of representation raise questions about his possible stance on an issue which today is being much discussed, viz. unconscious Christianity. In The Cost of Discipleship he says: "Christ's virtue, the virtue of discipleship, can only be accomplished so long as you are entirely unconscious of what you are doing. The genuine work of love is always a hidden work." ⁸⁰ This notion of unconscious discipleship warrants a brief excursus here, for it is probable that Bonhoeffer, who returned to the theme in the Let-

⁷⁸C.D., pp. 77-78.

⁷⁹Bethge, "Bonhoeffer's Christology . . .", in B.W.C.A., p. 70. The idea that the righteousness of his conformation is hidden from the disciple is also an implication of the theology of the cross in Luther's thought. Von Loewenich observes that Luther interpreted Psalm 1:6 (The Lord knows the way of the righteous : . . .) to show that not man, but the Lord knows who is just. He adds that the Christian life is ". . . so deep that the saints themselves do not know about their most personal life. They have no inkling of the honour in which they stand before God." Luthers Theologia Crucis, pp. 131f. (My translation) "Sie [the Christian life] ist aber so tief, dass die Heiligen selbst nicht um ihr eigenstes Leben wissen. Sie ahnen gar nichts davon, in welcher Zierde sie vor Gott dastehen."

⁸⁰C.D., p. 143.

ters,⁸¹ would have much to say on both sides of the debate about unconscious Christianity that has arisen since his death.

If Bonhoeffer were to be interpreted as an advocate of what is known today as unconscious Christianity, numerous objections could be raised. First, in the Letters . . . Bonhoeffer stipulates: "The question how there can be a 'natural piety' is at the same time the question of 'unconscious Christianity' . . .".⁸² His identification of unconscious Christianity with natural piety appears to put it in opposition to the major portion of his theology, since it is precisely natural piety which he opposes: for example, see his denouncement of a religious a priori in the Letters . . .⁸³ and his warning concerning the cor curvum in se in the christology lectures.⁸⁴ There is also a passage of importance in the Ethics, in which Bonhoeffer places himself in strict opposition to any notion of unconscious Christianity that would rely on a non-christological definition of love. Having quoted 1 Cor. 13, he explains:

God is love; that is to say not a human attitude, a conviction or a deed, but God Himself is love. Only he who knows God knows what love is; it is not the other way round; it is not that we first of all by nature know what love is and therefore know also what God is. No one knows God unless

⁸¹See Bonhoeffer's letter of 27 July, 1944 and Bethge's reply of 24 August, L. P. P., pp. 373 and 394. See also Bonhoeffer's note on p. 380: "Unconscious Christianity: the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. Matt. 25."

⁸²Ibid., p. 373.

⁸³Ibid., p. 280.

⁸⁴C. C., p. 31.

God reveals Himself to him. And so no one knows what love is except in the self-revelation of God. Love, then, is the revelation of God. And the revelation of God is Jesus Christ.⁸⁵

There are other instances, however, in which Bonhoeffer appears to be more amenable to unconscious Christianity, especially if it is employed within a limited context. Thus in the Ethics he offers a subsection entitled "Christ and Good People" in which he questions the presupposition that explicit knowledge of Christ is necessary before Christian virtue can be practiced: ". . . we in our time must say . . . that before a man can know and find Christ he must first become righteous like those who strive and suffer for the sake of justice, truth and humanity."⁸⁶ There are thus "good people" who, although they do not yet -- and perhaps never will -- confess Christ and don't see Him as the basis of their just action, are nonetheless related to Him, perhaps even more than those with verbal confession on their lips. In the same subsection Bonhoeffer also interprets the phrase in the Beatitudes, on the blessing of those that are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, as a blessing of all who so suffer, not just those who suffer for a specifically Christian cause.⁸⁷

Other of Bonhoeffer's theological concepts can also be interpreted as supporting a view of unconscious Christianity,⁸⁸ but

⁸⁵E., pp. 50-51

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 61.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 60.

in the final analysis it must be recognized that Bonhoeffer only attributes to unconscious Christianity a "penultimate" function. That is, it must never, in his mind, be considered equivalent to a confessing knowledge of Christ, which is attained in the self-revelation of Christ to His disciples. But like the specific penultimate realms, viz. the Old Testament law, good works, and the use of natural abilities,⁸⁹ unconscious Christianity can act as a preparing of the way for the ultimate relationship to Christ. It has no meaning or legitimacy if it is severed from this confessing, conscious relationship; in order to be valid it must be sustained by the ultimate for the sake of the ultimate. Bonhoeffer summarizes his view on the relationship of conscious and unconscious Christianity in the Ethics:

Humanity and goodness should not acquire a value on their own account, but they should and shall be claimed for Jesus Christ, especially in

⁸⁸For example, when Bonhoeffer addresses "The Concept of the Mandate" in the Ethics, pp. 287-292 (see also 344-346), he is establishing a structure within which unconscious Christianity could operate. By their free and proper obedience within these divinely-established institutions, men, in their everyday conduct, are being unconsciously formed closer toward the form of Christ. The mandates are ordained so that through them the form of Christ may emerge in the world and thereby lessen the sharpness of the division between man and God. Larry Rasmussen, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), addresses the question of the mandates similarly. But his use, pp. 41ff., of the mandates to demonstrate that Bonhoeffer eventually advocates a "universal humanist" form of representation is improper. It is possible that Rasmussen is conceiving of the mandates as orders of creation rather than, as Bonhoeffer himself advocates, as orders of preservation. See the report on Bonhoeffer's address to the Berlin Youth Conference, N.R.S., pp. 175ff.

⁸⁹Supra, pp. 114-135.

cases where they persist as the unconscious residue of a former attachment to the ultimate. It may often seem more in earnest to treat a man in this situation simply as a non-Christian and urge him to confess his unbelief. But it will be more Christian to claim precisely that man as a Christian who would himself no longer dare to call himself a Christian and then with much patience to help him to the profession of faith in Christ.⁹⁰

This attitude is doubtless partly responsible for Bonhoeffer's increasing openness toward and respect for the responsible, worldly man since Bonhoeffer understands the new maturity of man come of age as transformed and sustained by Christ Himself.⁹¹

Bonhoeffer's acceptance of a limited conception of unconscious Christianity is compatible with his frequent expressions of the ignorance he himself had regarding his own faithfulness. That ignorance of his own goodness is best exemplified in the Letters . . ., where in the 15 December, 1942 letter to Bethge and in his poem "Who Am I?" he expresses the ambiguity with which he regards himself, not knowing whether he is performing valuable services for others and exhibiting Christian virtues or failing miserably in his performance of what Christ expects of him. Thus in the final stanza of the poem he writes:

Who am I? This or the other?
Am I one person today, and tomorrow another?

⁹⁰E., p. 143.

⁹¹The relation between this attitude and the new worldliness is never made explicit, but intimations of the interrelationship between unconscious Christianity and the reception of the world come of age are present in "After Ten Years", L. P. P., pp. 3-17.

Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
 and before myself a contemptibly woebegone
 weakling?
 Or is something within me, still like a beaten-
 down army,
 yielding in disorder in the face of victory already
 achieved?
 Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions
 of mine.
 Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine!⁹²

From this expression of his uncertainty about his own righteousness it is evident that Bonhoeffer himself experienced the hiddenness of representation that arises from single-minded conformation to Christ. His own uncertainty paradoxically provides a certain witness to others of the genuineness of Bonhoeffer's experience of the hiddenness of representation.

One final point may be made regarding such hiddenness. The act performed without concern about one's own righteousness in the act is the proper, responsible act. This can be seen in Bonhoeffer's statement in the Ethics that "Ultimate ignorance of one's own good and evil, and with it a complete reliance upon grace, is an essential property of responsible historical action."⁹³ Insofar as the disciple maintains a consideration for his own righteousness, his reasoning will remain within the realm of good and evil, which to Bonhoeffer still represents a stage of separation from unity with

⁹²L. P. P., pp. 347-348. For the original, see Widerstand und Ergebung, pp. 380-381. The translation is altered slightly here: "weicht" is here rendered as "yielding" rather than "fleeing", and "vor" as "in the face of" rather than as "from".

⁹³E., p. 234.

Christ.⁹⁴ As long as the disciple considers the goodness or evilness of his own actions he will remain in the self-justificatory realm that Bonhoeffer terms "ideology": "All ideological action carries its own justification within itself from the outset in its guiding principle, but responsible action does not lay claim to knowledge of its own ultimate righteousness."⁹⁵ Truly responsible action, therefore, is not performed in accordance with a pre-existing ideology concerned about whether or not one is being righteous or doing good but is performed solely in single-minded obedience and complete reliance on divine forgiveness of whatever sin might accompany responsible action. One's own righteousness is thus hidden from oneself because this is what responsible action requires. When such righteousness appears, responsible action degenerates into self-justificatory ideology.

His character as a representative is hidden from the one who is single-mindedly conformed to Christ not only because the representative looks only at Christ and not at himself, but also because, contrary to the reception he believes his unselfishness deserves, he suffers at the hands of the world and is rejected by it. Bonhoeffer includes suffering and rejection, as well as hiddenness, in his exposition of this fourth element of "representation."⁹⁶

⁹⁴Supra, pp. 174-176.

⁹⁵E., p. 234.

⁹⁶Numerous commentators have concluded that Bonhoeffer's inclusion of suffering within his discussion of discipleship is a further sign that he is fundamentally influenced by the tradition of the theo-

There are three questions that are pertinent to Bonhoeffer's thought on the suffering and rejection involved in "representation", specifically: Why must the representative suffer?; What is the suffering borne?; and What is the result of the suffering?

The first question Bonhoeffer answers resolutely with a statement in The Cost of Discipleship regarding the cross which every representative must undergo: ". . . it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. When it comes, it is not an accident, but a necessity. It is . . . the suffering which is an essential part of the specifically Christian life."⁹⁷

The representative must suffer and be rejected by the world because Christ Himself suffered and was rejected. Being conformed to Christ, the representative can expect nothing but to undergo His fate. Suffering is thus not pursued as a means whereby one earns merit, but is the necessary consequence of conformation. It is

gy of the cross. Some, however, extend this proper conclusion to undue lengths. See, e.g. Joachim Schwarz, "Leiden und Lernen: Ein systemtheoretischer Versuch zu Bonhoeffers Leidenstheologie", Evang. Theologie, XXXII (Nov.-Dec., 1972), 552. Schwarz attempts an interpretation of Bonhoeffer's conception of suffering along the lines of a "cybernetic" system, which utilizes language and concepts quite foreign to Bonhoeffer's own thought.

⁹⁷C.D., p. 78. This statement calls into question the opinion of Dorothy Sölle, Christ the Representative . . ., pp. 92-93, that Bonhoeffer interprets representation too much in terms of "responsibility without dependence". (She also criticizes Barth as being guilty of the opposite, "dependence without responsibility.") Her criticism of Bonhoeffer simply does not mesh with his doctrine of conformation or with the statements such as this from the Ethics: "The responsible man is dependent on the man who is concretely his neighbour in his concrete possibility." (p. 227)

unsought for, harsh, and yet ultimately redemptive.⁹⁸

Because Bonhoeffer interprets suffering as the necessary consequence of conformation, he regards suffering as the sign of the true disciple. He recalls that ". . . Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true Church, and one of the memoranda drawn up in preparation for the Augsburg Confession similarly defines the Church as the community of those 'who are persecuted and martyred for the gospel's sake'."⁹⁹

Yet all suffering is not suffering borne for the sake of Christ. It is necessary, therefore, for Bonhoeffer to differentiate true Christian suffering from, for example, a self-induced punishment or a cowardly acceptance of unpleasantness. It is necessary for him, therefore, to define what is meant by suffering.

Suffering is, first of all, quite simply the pain and the loss that beset the representative when he sacrifices that which he cherishes and when he is persecuted for his opposition to the way of the world. Thus Bonhoeffer writes to Bethge from Tegel prison that ". . . physical sufferings, actual pain and so on, are certainly to be classed as 'suffering'."¹⁰⁰ But he is definitely aware that the suffering of Christ, i. e. the suffering the representative must go through, extends beyond physical and mental pain. Indeed, if physical and mental pain alone were involved, suffering might evoke sym-

⁹⁸The redemptive nature of suffering will be examined shortly. See also *supra*, pp. 59-61.

⁹⁹*C. D.*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁰*L. P. P.*, p. 232.

pathy for its tragic character. True suffering in Christ, he holds, also must involve rejection:

Had he only suffered, Jesus might still have been applauded as the Messiah. All the sympathy and admiration of the world might have been focused on his passion. It could have been viewed as a tragedy with its own intrinsic value, dignity and honour. But in the passion Jesus is a rejected Messiah. His rejection robs the passion of its halo of glory. It must be a passion without honour.¹⁰¹

In rejection, symbolized by the cross, suffering loses any pretense of being a sort of trial which really only hardens the will and thus prepares for ultimate victory. The representative not only suffers but is rejected. He exists, as did Christ, with little hope of victory this side of death.¹⁰²

When Bonhoeffer emphasizes that the representative will be rejected and must live as Christ on the way to the cross, he is affirming that the suffering and rejection borne by the representative comes not only from men in the world but also from God. In this fact the representative is both bewildered and given cause for rejoicing. It is bewildering, says Bonhoeffer, because on the one hand "The Christian knows that suffering in this world is linked with the fall of man, and that God does not will sickness, suffering, and death."¹⁰³ But Bonhoeffer also says that that same Christian, when

¹⁰¹C.D., p. 76.

¹⁰²See the discussion of the suffering Christ in the theology of the cross and the theme of abandonment by God, supra, pp. 57-68.

¹⁰³C.F./T., p. 119.

looking upon the cross of Christ, will discover that the suffering of the cross is ordained by God. This is the meaning of Bonhoeffer's exposition in The Cost of Discipleship of Matt. 26:39-42, which recounts Christ's suffering in Gethsemane. There he establishes that the cup of suffering is ordained by God precisely so that, in drinking it, Christ may overcome suffering.¹⁰⁴ Here the representative discovers his cause for rejoicing: knowing that the suffering does come from God, and that it has been laid by God upon the one who alone is able to disarm it, the representative can now know, as Bonhoeffer states, that ". . . suffering is overcome by suffering, and becomes the way to communion with God."¹⁰⁵ This way to communion would not result were suffering from men only.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴C.D., p. 81.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶There remains a paradox at the center of Bonhoeffer's definition of suffering, however, since he occasionally stipulates that the representative, so long as he is conformed by grace, cannot experience real suffering. In The Cost of Discipleship, for instance, he says that "Suffering means being cut off from God. Therefore those who live in communion with him cannot really suffer" (p. 81). Similarly, in a letter to Bethge from prison, Bonhoeffer complains that his prison stay is being overdramatized by family and friends and that his suffering is practically non-existent, especially spiritually: "We so like to stress spiritual suffering; and yet this is just what Christ is supposed to have taken from us . . ." (L.P.P., p. 232). If Christ has removed suffering from the plight of the representative, how can suffering still be a mark of the true church, from God, etc.? The difficulty seems to be founded in a deeper theological paradox, viz. the tension between the kingdom of God that is "now", already established, and the kingdom that is "not yet", still to be consummated. Thus although Bonhoeffer does know that the reconciliation has been accomplished he also believes that the consummation of the reconciliation is yet to occur. The representative suffers, therefore, "between the times", aware that the outcome is ultimately favorable, yet participating in the drama that is unfolding until the final day. See

This communion with God through suffering indicates one positive ultimate result of suffering and rejection. Bonhoeffer understands that through suffering the representative will arrive at a new attitude toward the cross, one which will realize that ". . . the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ."¹⁰⁷ Through suffering the representative is taught, certainly not to seek out his cross, but to accept its inevitability with expectant joy rather than with fear and regret.

Through suffering the representative is also afforded a new perspective from which to interpret the world. In "After Ten Years" Bonhoeffer recalls his experiences of resistance and suffering throughout the 'thirties and early 'forties. He writes there to his fellow conspirators that they have learned an invaluable lesson: "We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled -- in short, from the perspective of those who suffer."¹⁰⁸ Bonhoeffer's conception of a suffering Christ implies that the common view of real-

Bonhoeffer's interpretation of Christ as the center of history, C.C., pp. 61-64.

¹⁰⁷C.D., p. 79.

¹⁰⁸L.P.P., p. 17. This final paragraph on "The view from below" was likely written somewhat later than the bulk of this essay. See ibid., n. 2.

ity must be overturned and a new perspective discovered.¹⁰⁹ He finds that new perspective in suffering itself: "We have to learn that personal suffering is a more effective key, a more rewarding principle for exploring the world in thought and action than personal good fortune."¹¹⁰ Suffering therefore results not only in a new attitude toward the cross for the representative, but also in a new perspective on reality when the representative looks through the eyes of those rejected by the world.

Hiddenness, suffering, and rejection have been established as what Bonhoeffer believes are the consequences of single-minded conformation to Christ. All are the inevitable, unsolicited outcome of single-minded obedience, further demonstrating the relationship between "representation" and the theology of the cross at this juncture in Bonhoeffer's thought.

5. The cross of the representative identified with the cross of Christ

In a previous chapter of this study Bonhoeffer's theology of the cross was examined. There it was demonstrated that Bonhoeffer extended the Lutheran conception of the theology of the cross into two further concepts, the first of those concepts being the identification of the cross of Christ with the cross of the disciple. A more thorough examination of identification from the perspective of the

¹⁰⁹Supra, pp. 56-57.

¹¹⁰L. P. P., p. 17.

human representative himself can now be undertaken, with the emphasis here upon how the representative is to be further conformed to Christ.

- By his experience of the hiddenness, suffering, and rejection that are the consequences of single-minded conformation, the representative is drawn toward what Bonhoeffer describes as the identification of the cross of the representative with the cross of Christ. It can be properly said of Bonhoeffer, as is here said of Luther, that "For him the cross of Christ and the cross of the Christian belong together." The cross of Christ is to him not an isolated historical fact to which the life of the Christian stands only in a connection of causality" ¹¹¹ In a 1935 sermon on the reproach of the cross Bonhoeffer himself conveys this same meaning. There he establishes first that not only the world, but the Christian as well, are crucified on the cross: "Now no longer do I see the world on the cross, with me facing it -- now the world is facing me and I myself am the crucified one, the one condemned by God; and the world casts its judgement and its scorn over me." ¹¹² Then, Bonhoeffer writes, after this first discovery the Christian

¹¹¹ von Loewenich, p. 21. (My translation) "Das Kreuz Christi und das Kreuz des Christen gehören für ihn zusammen. Das Kreuz Christi ist für ihn nicht eine isolierte historische Tatsache, zu der das Leben des Christen nur in der Beziehung der Kausalität steht"

¹¹² G.S. IV, p. 215. (My translation) "Jetzt sehe nicht mehr ich die Welt am Kreuz, indem ich ihr gegenüberstehe -- nun steht die Welt mir gegenüber und ich selbst bin der Gekreuzigte, der von Gott Verurteilte; und die Welt spricht ihr Urteil und ihren Hohn über mich."

makes a second:

The cross, on which 'I am crucified to the world', is indeed none other than the cross of Christ. To be crucified to the world means to participate in his cross. It is because I am (through God's own judgement) crucified by God really with Christ that I can suffer the suffering of Christ along with Him.¹¹³

This process of identification is what Bonhoeffer describes in the Letters . . . as ". . . allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ, into the messianic event,"¹¹⁴ and into ". . . messianic sufferings."¹¹⁵

Bonhoeffer's conception of the identity of the cross of the representative with the cross of Christ is best understood as his development of the traditional doctrine of the church as the Body of Christ. That doctrine is evidenced in his thought as early as Sanctorum Communio, in which he characterizes the Christian community as "Christ existing as the church."¹¹⁶ The theme that Christ exists as the church is soon extended and focused in his doctoral thesis when he defines Christ as the "collective person" who

¹¹³G.S. IV, p. 215. (My translation) "Das Kreuz, an dem 'ich der Welt gekreuzigt bin', ist ja kein anderes als das Kreuz Christi. Der Welt gekreuzigt sein heisst ja, an seinem Kreuz teilhaben. Weil ich von Gott wirklich mit Christus gekreuzigt bin, durch sein, Gottes, Urteil, darum kann ich das Leiden Christi mit-leiden."

¹¹⁴L.P.P., pp. 361-362.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶S.C., p. 85.

constitutes the church.¹¹⁷ The doctrine of the Body of Christ is then closely related to discipleship and to the theology of the cross in The Cost of Discipleship, where Bonhoeffer demonstrates that the cross of the representative can be identified with the cross of Christ because of the present, ecclesiastical Body of Christ that exists in the world after the death of the body of Jesus. Whereas the first disciples experienced the cross of Christ firsthand, the disciples of subsequent ages experience it through the present Body of Christ:

The Body of Christ is identical with the new humanity which he has taken upon him. It is in fact the Church. Jesus Christ is at once himself and his Church (I Cor. 12:12). Since the first Whit Sunday the Life of Christ has been perpetuated on earth in the form of his Body, the Church. Here is his body, crucified and risen, here is the humanity he took upon him.¹¹⁸

This present Body of Christ in which the representative participates is interpreted by Bonhoeffer, quite according to tradition, as the arena wherein redemption can now be found. That redemption of course depends upon the cross of Christ. Because the representative participates in the present Body, he benefits from the redemption won by the crucifixion of the earthly body. Bonhoeffer explains:

The earthly body of Jesus underwent crucifixion and death. In that death the new humanity under-

¹¹⁷G.S. III, p. 47. Clifford Green offers an excellent analysis of the conception of the Body of Christ in Bonhoeffer's early writings: see Green, The Sociality of Christ. . ., pp. 77-88, 126-132.

¹¹⁸C.D., p. 216.

goes crucifixion and death All whom he bore suffer and die with him. It is all our infirmities and all our sin that he bears to the cross. It is we who are crucified with him, and we who die with him And so as he dies, Jesus bears the human race, and carries it onward to resurrection.¹¹⁹

Insofar as Bonhoeffer interprets identification through the doctrine of the Body of Christ he is on solid traditional ground. He can rightly say that the cross of the representative is identified with the cross of Christ precisely as the present, ecclesiastical Body of Christ is united to the earthly body of Jesus Christ.

But Bonhoeffer's particular contribution to the conception of the identity of the cross of the representative with the cross of Christ goes further than this. He insists that only in his own suffering and rejection, only in the experience of his own cross, will the Christian understand that indeed he is united to the cross of Christ and that he is in fact justified and redeemed by the crucifixion of Christ's earthly body.

This vision Bonhoeffer develops in conjunction with his increasing awareness of the need for a non-religious, worldly interpretation of biblical concepts. It is of paramount importance for the understanding of his mature conception of "representation". It is precisely what he means when he stipulates that in the world come of age the mature Christian must be conformed by Christ the

¹¹⁹C.D., p. 214.

Crucified One.¹²⁰ Because this principle is of such importance, it will be explained more completely in the following section and its implications will be developed in the section of this chapter dealing with the non-religious interpretation of the Word and the sacraments. Presently, however, it is important to examine what occurs in the moment when the representative discovers the unity of his cross with the cross of Christ.

The major event that occurs in this particular moment may be discovered by recalling one of the primary themes of The Cost of Discipleship. There Bonhoeffer attempts to demonstrate that the moment at which the individual Christian discovers the identity of his cross with the cross of Christ is nothing less than the moment at which he is made aware of his justification by the cross of Christ. The "cheap grace" doled out by the church had so destroyed the true meaning of justification that it needed to be rediscovered and revitalized. Bonhoeffer regards the experience of the cross as the way in which that meaning could in fact be rediscovered by the Christian. Bonhoeffer sees this succinctly exemplified in the person of Peter, who receives grace in the midst of hearing Christ say "Follow me":

This grace was certainly not self-bestowed. It was the grace of Christ himself, now working upon the disciple to leave all and follow him, now working in him that confession which to the world must sound like the ultimate blasphemy, now inviting Peter to the supreme fellowship of martyrdom for the Lord he had denied, and

¹²⁰Supra, p. 141-142.

thereby forgiving him all his sins. In the life of Peter grace and discipleship are inseparable. He has received the grace which costs.¹²¹

From this point in his thought onward Bonhoeffer emphasizes that the moment of representative suffering and the moment of justification by faith are inseparable in the Christian life.¹²²

That inseparability of the experience of justification from the experience of the cross implies that at the moment when the representative experiences the suffering and rejection in his own cross, he is driven to the recognition that his cross is deserved, while the cross suffered by Christ is undeserved. Bonhoeffer knows that the cross is set upon the representative not only so that therein the representative might meet Christ, but also simply because it is the end result of the sinful state of humanity. All people suffer the cross, being a part of the old humanity in Adam, as Bonhoeffer stipulated as early as Sanctorum Communio.¹²³ But the difference

¹²¹C.D., p. 38.

¹²²The groundwork done by Gerhard Ebeling is invaluable here. His interpretation of religion and non-religiousness by means of the category of the law/gospel distinction illumines many of the seminal ideas of Bonhoeffer that were never developed. See Ebeling, "Non-religious Interpretation . . .", pp. 141f. The one difficulty with Ebeling's category, and the point at which this present study differs from Ebeling's interpretation, is this: just when the law/gospel category has led him to what he agrees is the "keynote" of Bonhoeffer's thought, the theologia crucis (p. 158), Ebeling ceases his analysis. He fails to extend his treatment of the theology of the cross into the field of discipleship, a theme which occupied Bonhoeffer throughout his writings. The result is that Ebeling's law/gospel category, instead of appearing as a concept which arises out of Bonhoeffer's own ideas, appears rather as a concept which Ebeling is importing into them.

¹²³See S.C., p. 73.

between one sufferer and another, he believes, is that the representative willingly accepts his cross as justified and is aware that because it is united with the cross of Christ it represents life as well as death. One who does not admit that his cross is justified fights against it, seeking rather to avoid it and seeing in it only death.

In Life Together Bonhoeffer describes the need for the Christian to understand that even in the suffering and rejection involved in his cross he is receiving less than he deserves due to his sin: "What does it matter if I suffer injustice? Would I not have deserved even worse punishment from God, if He had not dealt with me according to His mercy? Is not justice done to me a thousand times even in injustice?"¹²⁴ With this realization of the propriety of his punishment the representative is brought low before God; so low, in fact, that Bonhoeffer believes that he will be driven to regard himself as the greatest of sinners, responsible for sins extending far beyond himself, deserving a punishment greater than all others:

To forego self-conceit and to associate with the lowly means, in all soberness and without mincing the matter, to consider oneself the greatest of sinners. This arouses all the resistance of the natural man, but also that of the self-confident Christian. It sounds like an exaggeration, like an untruth. Yet . . . There can be no genuine acknowledgement of sin that does not lead to this extremity. If any sinfulness appears to me to be in any way smaller or less detestable in comparison with the sin of others, I am still not recognizing

¹²⁴L.T., p. 95.

my sinfulness at all.¹²⁵

In this genuine acknowledgement of sin the representative finally sees his identification with one other who also was made into the greatest of sinners, viz. Christ: "He is really made sin for us and as the peccator pessimus he is crucified. Luther says, 'He is himself thief, murderer, adulterer, as we are, because he bears our sins.'¹²⁶ As he identifies with the other one who, though sinless, was made sinful for his sake, the representative experiences the astounding truth that the old Adam, of which he is a part, is redeemed by this new Adam, He whose every act ". . . was performed on behalf of the new humanity which he bore in his body."¹²⁷ Thus in the acknowledgement of sin through the willing acceptance of his cross, the representative discovers the basis for his justification in the cross of Christ.

It should not be thought that Bonhoeffer's belief in the identification of the cross of the Christian with the cross of Christ is an attempt at a mystical union in which the uniqueness and historicity of the earthly cross of Christ is forgotten. There are important limits to the identity. The crucifixion of Christ, he cautions, ". . . is in the strictest sense unrepeatabe."¹²⁸ Christ is not only united to His present ecclesiastical Body, according to

¹²⁵L.T., p. 96.

¹²⁶C.C., p. 108.

¹²⁷C.D., p. 214.

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 249.

Bonhoeffer, whose interpretation here follows traditional Pauline lines, but is also the head of His Body and lord over it. There must be no premature, unqualified identification, or otherwise Bonhoeffer believes theology will forfeit the benefits of one other event in the life of Christ, the Ascension:

The historical fact in the story of our redemption which . . . rules out any idea of a mystical fusion between Christ and his Church is the Ascension of Christ (and his Second Coming) It is the same Lord and the same Church in both places, and it is one and the same Body But it makes a great deal of difference whether we are here or there. So it is necessary to give due weight both to the unity of Christ and his Church and to their distinction.¹²⁹

It is not a repetition of the cross of Christ which occurs in the cross of the representative, but more of an actualization, a living-out of the original event.

Given these limits, however, the identity of Christ with His church is still to be emphasized. The cross of Christ is not repeated in the cross of the representative, but it is nonetheless made one with it.

6. "Representation"¹³⁰ as the assumption of the suffering of Christ

Bonhoeffer's recognition that the human representative must assume the suffering of his own cross is linked to a second,

¹²⁹C.D., p. 218.

¹³⁰Dorothy Sölle, in Christ the Representative . . . , p. 67, notes that the specific word "representation" (Stellvertretung) is absent from the New Testament. She nonetheless asserts that the idea of "representation" is found in the Greek ὑπὲρ ἑμῶν ("on behalf

equally significant, discovery. Now Bonhoeffer knows, because of the unity of Christ and His church, that the Christian is ". . . summoned to share in God's sufferings at the hands of a godless world."¹³¹

There are really two affirmations within that one statement, yet in their conjunction the axis of Bonhoeffer's mature theology can be discovered. In the first place, he knows that the representative is called to participate in the sufferings of God. Secondly, these are the sufferings of God that occur in the midst of a "godless" world. Each affirmation must now be considered in turn.

1) It has been demonstrated that as a member of the present ecclesiastical Body of Christ the representative becomes aware that he suffers with Christ, i. e. "In the fellowship of the crucified and glorified body of Christ we participate in his suffering and glory. His cross is the burden which is laid on his Body, the

of" or "for the sake of" us). This idea, she argues, is evident in II Cor. 4:10-12, Col. 1:24, Gal. 6:17, etc. Sölle also lists four characteristics of "representation" which she finds present in the New Testament: its historicity, its "once-and-for-allness", its voluntariness, and its inherent connection with suffering. Bonhoeffer would be in basic agreement with her here, but would emphasize not only the "once-for-allness" but also the continuing actualization of "representation". He would also doubtless emphasize that what appears as a voluntary act is in reality more of a response to the graceful call to discipleship which precedes and facilitates the action.

¹³¹L. P. P., p. 361.

Church. All its sufferings borne beneath this cross are the sufferings of Christ himself."¹³² Yet for Bonhoeffer there are two further aspects of the total conception of "representation". First, it must be understood that the representative is suffering not only with Christ but also for Christ, in place of Him. And then, it must be understood that by suffering in the place of Christ the representative is thereby suffering for the sake of all the people for whom Christ Himself suffered.

The first of these aspects of "representation" is developed by Bonhoeffer on the basis of the Pauline term ὑστερήματα, or the "residue" of Christ's suffering left for His church.¹³³ The development begins with Bonhoeffer's belief that Christ specifically chooses some of those who participate in His Body to suffer for Him:

" . . . to some, who are not ashamed of their fellowship in his body, he vouchsafes the immeasurable grace and privilege of suffering 'for him', as he did for them."¹³⁴

¹³²C.D., p. 219.

¹³³The term ὑστερήματα, see ibid., p. 220, is developed by Paul in Col. 1:24, and is used in conjunction with the term ἀναπληρώω, meaning to "fill up" or "complete" that which is lacking. Further evidence of this theme in Paul's thought is found in II Cor. 1:5, 4:10, or I Thess. 3:3.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 219. This belief that the Christian suffers for Christ is expressed movingly in Bonhoeffer's prison poem "Christians and Pagans" (L.P.P., pp. 348-349), especially in the second stanza:

Men go to God when he is sore bestead,
Find him poor and scorned, without shelter
or bread,
Whelmed under weight of the wicked, the weak,
the dead,
Christians stand by God in his hour of grieving.

Bonhoeffer is aware of the audacity of such a claim to suffer for Christ, but he is emboldened toward it by Paul's statements and by his own conception of the Body of Christ. He believes he can make the claim because the call to suffer for Christ is ". . . the miracle of grace we enjoy in our fellowship in the Body of Christ."¹³⁵ He understands that the redemptive gift of grace establishes a fellowship which is called upon to further the Body of Christ by suffering for Him:

Although Christ has fulfilled all the vicarious suffering necessary for our redemption, his suffering on earth is not finished yet. He has, in his grace, left a residue (ὑστερήματα) of suffering for his Church to fulfill in the interval before his Second Coming (Col. 1:24). This suffering is allowed to benefit the Body of Christ, the Church.¹³⁶

The suffering fellowship which is established, the Body of Christ, takes the place of the earthly body of Christ in His suffering for others. Bonhoeffer's interpretation of "representation" is necessarily drawn to the idea that members of the Body of Christ suffer for all those for whom Christ Himself suffered, because the Body of Christ, to Bonhoeffer, has assumed the responsibilities that the earthly body once had: "Since the first Whit Sunday the Life of Christ has been perpetuated on earth in the form of his Body, the Church."¹³⁷ Suffering for Christ is nothing else than suffering for

¹³⁵C.D., p. 220.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 216.

others. And because Christ, for whom the representative suffers, became man, Bonhoeffer knows that voluntary suffering must extend to all people. Acting in the name of Christ, the representative regards ". . . any attack even on the least of men . . ." as an ". . . attack on Christ, who took the form of man . . ." ¹³⁸

In the Letters . . ., the suffering for others within the Body of Christ is extended by Bonhoeffer into the terminology of "otherness", with less emphasis placed upon a Body defined by visible limits. The one whom Bonhoeffer comes to call "the man for others . . .", the one who ". . . is there only for others . . .", ¹³⁹ is regarded as a fountainhead from which springs the new life of the larger community. Now instead of the individual suffering for the church, the church suffers for the world. Representative suffering, the ". . . new life in 'existence for others'", is still a "participation in the being of Jesus" ¹⁴⁰, but the being of Jesus is extended further into the world. This concept will be elaborated in the final section of this chapter.

Despite the fact that the representative suffers in the place of Christ and for the sake of those for whom Christ suffers, Bonhoeffer does not transgress the proper limits of this vicarious suffering by claiming that the sufferings of the representatives are themselves redemptive and able to atone for sin. Indeed, it is only because the

¹³⁸C.D., p. 272.

¹³⁹L.P.P., p. 381.

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

sins of all have already been borne by Christ that Bonhoeffer advocates conformation to the Crucified One. To encourage "representation" for the sufferings of Christ and other men without the assurance of Christ's previous victory over suffering would be a harsh, ungracious command. The representative ". . ." would certainly break down under this burden, but for the support of him who bore the sins of all. The passion of Christ strengthens him to overcome the sins of others by forgiving them."¹⁴¹ Because atonement has in fact occurred, Bonhoeffer does not fear to call for "representation".

This knowledge that Christ has borne the sins and suffering of all provides a clue to the interpretation of what occurs when the representative does bear the suffering of others. He bears the suffering of others because he bears their sin: "My brother's burden which I must bear is not only his outward lot, his natural characteristics and gifts, but quite literally his sin,"¹⁴² In bearing the sins of others, the representative is cast back upon the one by whom all sins are borne, says Bonhoeffer. He discovers thereby that he is able to bear the sins of others only by forgiving those sins: ". . . the only way to bear that sin is by forgiving it in the power of the cross of Christ in which I now share Forgiveness is the Christlike suffering which it is the Christian's duty to bear."¹⁴³

¹⁴¹C.D., p. 80.

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³Ibid.

The one supreme act of the representative in his relation to others is thus his forgiveness of their sin. Yet this is not a casual, verbal forgiveness but one which arises out of the bearing of those very sins and the sufferings which rightfully accompany them. This is what Bonhoeffer means when he says that the suffering due to sin ". . . has to be endured in order that it may pass away."¹⁴⁴ Through the bearing and enduring of the sin and suffering of others and the forgiveness of that sin, the representative for the first time creates a true fellowship between himself and those who were hitherto separated from him by sin. In bearing that sin and suffering, the representative is formed to the image of Christ, who was able to overcome the suffering of the world and create the basis for true fellowship by drinking the cup of suffering "to the dregs".¹⁴⁵ By bearing and forgiving, the representative fulfills the summons to ". . . share in God's sufferings."¹⁴⁶ How that bearing and forgiving is to occur in a "godless" world is the next issue.

2) Much of what Bonhoeffer conceived as 'representation' is present in his earliest writings.¹⁴⁷ To these initial ideas he

¹⁴⁴The "enduring" or "bearing" which Bonhoeffer proposes for the representative also includes a bearing of the guilt that accompanies sin. He refers to this in Nachfolge as "Schuld-tragen", p. 66. In the Ethik, where the concept is further developed, the term has been altered to "Schuldübernahme", and is interpreted as the inevitable consequence of truly responsible action, pp. 255ff. See also supra, pp. 66ff.

¹⁴⁵C.D., p. 81.

¹⁴⁶L.P.P., p. 361.

¹⁴⁷See S.C., pp. 128f. Or, e.g., A.B., p. 140: "The

gave an extensive development in The Cost of Discipleship, as is seen from the excerpts above. Yet only in sections of the Ethics, and especially in the Letters . . ., does Bonhoeffer begin to relate "representation" to his understanding of the world come of age, that "godless" world which nonetheless draws the Christian closer to God. The relationship between the representative's assumption of the suffering of Christ and the "godless" world can be viewed from two perspectives.

The first facet of this relationship can be approached through recalling the concluding section of the previous chapter.¹⁴⁸ It was shown there that Bonhoeffer believes that Christ, formed as the Crucified One, provides the further conclusion that only through "representation" will the Christian understand his proper place within the "godless" world come of age and the direction toward which the age is being drawn by Christ. Bonhoeffer is convinced, in other words, that only by suffering with and for Christ, as a member of the Body of Christ, will the Christian correctly perceive that ". . . the development towards the world's coming of age . . . , which has done away with a false conception of God, opens up a way of seeing the God of the Bible, who wins power and space in the world by his weakness."¹⁴⁹

person 'is' only in the self-giving act."

¹⁴⁸Supra, pp. 140-147.

¹⁴⁹L. P. P., p. 361.

This first facet of the relationship between representative suffering and the world come of age means for Bonhoeffer that to understand God's revelation correctly one must suffer representatively for Christ and for others. Yet it is the second aspect of this relationship that is so unique to and vitally important in Bonhoeffer's theology, for he not only believes that through the understanding of "representation" one better interprets the world come of age, he also believes that the advent of the world come of age drives the mature Christian toward "representation".

That the world come of age does prompt the Christian toward "representation" was indicated briefly in the previous chapter. The idea stems from Bonhoeffer's belief that Christ transforms and sustains the world come of age.¹⁵⁰ But only now that the elements of "representation" have been delineated can that brief indication be developed from the viewpoint of the representative himself. Now an attempt may be made to describe Bonhoeffer's understanding of the concrete manner in which Christ employs the world come of age to drive the mature, worldly Christian toward "representation". The central thesis of this study, that "representation" provides the key to non-religious interpretation, will be understood only abstractly unless the interaction between "representation" and worldliness can be concretely examined in a specific example.

As a background to this concrete example, it will be help-

¹⁵⁰Supra, p. 147.

ful to recall Bonhoeffer's description of the two attitudes of the worldly man which Christ, formed as the Incarnate One, commends to the Christian who wishes to participate fully in the world come of age, viz. concern for earthly happiness and sorrow, and social responsibility.¹⁵¹ Bonhoeffer interprets the work of Christ here as if He were employing these two attitudes of man come of age to draw the Christian toward "representation". By concerning himself with the earthly happiness and sorrow that results from the attainment or loss of the objects of this-worldly desires, and by exercising the social responsibility that results from a high regard for the importance of the political issues daily affecting humanity, the worldly Christian is led toward participation in the suffering of Christ.

These two attitudes of the worldly man, and the manner in which they lead to "representation", are concretely illustrated in Bonhoeffer's decision to engage in the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler.¹⁵² His writings during the period of the conspiracy exhibit

¹⁵¹Supra, pp. 105-109.

¹⁵²There is no intention here to provide an exhaustive examination of Bonhoeffer's motives for involving himself in the conspiracy. The concern is merely to show that Bonhoeffer embodies his own theological concerns and is thereby himself led toward "representation". A comprehensive treatment of the particulars of the conspiracy is provided by Bethge in D. B., pp. 811-896, D. B. E., pp. 626-702. Bethge's later analysis of Bonhoeffer's decision to join the conspiracy (Exile and Martyr, pp. 133-136) draws attention to Bonhoeffer's deliberations on responsibility and "representation" in the Ethics. He argues (p. 134) that this earlier affirmation of responsible "representation" was instrumental in Bonhoeffer's ultimate decision. The most discerning analysis of Bonhoeffer's ethical evalu-

on the one hand a desire to live life fully, for example in "After Ten Years": "Time lost is time in which we have failed to live a full human life, gain experience, learn, create, enjoy, and suffer; it is time that has not been filled up, but left empty."¹⁵³ And on the other hand they exhibit a new preoccupation with the definition of responsibility, as in the section of the Ethics entitled "History and Good".¹⁵⁴ Immersed in the political affairs around him in an attempt to discern and further a higher morality, Bonhoeffer arrives at a definition of responsibility which includes the realization that ". . . the totality of life is pledged and that our action becomes a matter of life and death."¹⁵⁵

In this context Bonhoeffer's specific comments regarding his conspiratorial involvement accurately reveal the need for repre-

ation of the conspiracy and the relationship of the conspiracy to his earlier pacifism is given by Larry Rasmussen, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance. Further debate about the propriety of Bonhoeffer's action is found in Geoffrey Kelly, "Interview with Jean Lasserre", Union Seminary Quarterly Review, XXVII, #3 (Spring, 1972). Lasserre here expresses qualified disapproval. One who agrees with, but erroneously interprets, Bonhoeffer's motives is Richard Kim, "The Two Bonhoeffers: Love's Dilemma", Journal of Church and State, XVII, #2 (Spring, 1975). His statement, p. 185, "In Nietzschean fashion Bonhoeffer saw pacifism as a moral weakness and proceeded to activate a philosophy of strength . . ." takes insufficient account of the theology of the cross and "representation".

¹⁵³L. P. P., p. 3.

¹⁵⁴E., pp. 214-262. See Bethge's remark in the "Editor's Preface to the . . . Sixth German Edition", E., p. 13: "Bonhoeffer worked on this most political of chapters during the climax of his activity in the conspiracy."

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 222.

sentative suffering in the world come of age and the manner in which that "godless" world drives Christians toward "representation". Consider, for example, his statement to Bishop Bell during their 1942 meeting in Sweden. Explaining the motives of the resistance movement, Bonhoeffer declared that, for themselves as well as for those they opposed, "There must be punishment by God We do not want to escape repentance. Our action must be understood as an act of repentance."¹⁵⁶ This statement is clear evidence that Bonhoeffer, accepting the responsibility for the sins and guilt of the German people, is acting in the spirit of "representation", placing himself in the stead of his fellow countrymen, and that he is prepared to accept the possible punishment. This spirit of "representation" is likewise reflected in his affirmation in "After Ten Years" that "The ultimate question for a responsible man to ask is not how he is to extricate himself heroically from the affair, but how the coming generation is to live."¹⁵⁷ Bethge and others¹⁵⁸ have demonstrated that Bonhoeffer was fully cognizant of the sinfulness of a plot to assassinate even a tyrant. He made no attempt to justify himself or the means necessary for removing Hitler by seeking an exception to the commandments of God or the established laws of men, but was ready simply ". . . to bear responsibility for

¹⁵⁶T.P., p. 22.

¹⁵⁷L.P.P., p. 7.

¹⁵⁸See Bethge, Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr, pp. 133-134, and Geoffrey Kelly, "Interview with Jean Lasserre", p. 154.

himself and his time, leaving the justification to God."¹⁵⁹

Ultimately, indeed, the bearing of that responsibility did lead Bonhoeffer to punishment and suffering. In the willing acceptance of a punishment that was more deserved by those who made no attempt to oppose Hitler than by those who did, Bonhoeffer himself typifies the representative. He is one who, conformed to the Incarnate One already, then "throws" himself ". . . completely into the arms of God."¹⁶⁰ In this willing acceptance of undeserved punishment Bonhoeffer is acting in accordance with his description of the merciful that had appeared previously in The Cost of Discipleship: "If any man falls into disgrace, the merciful will sacrifice their own honour to shield him, and take his shame upon themselves."¹⁶¹

By bearing the shame of those who have fallen into disgrace, Bonhoeffer offers a concrete example of "representation" in its relation to the world come of age. He is driven toward representative suffering because he embodies the attitudes of the worldly man. And in that representative suffering he then is able to regard the world come of age from the perspective of Christ and to understand it properly.

The final and decisive element in Bonhoeffer's view of

¹⁵⁹Bethge, Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr, p. 134. See also D.B., pp. 995-996, D.B.E., pp. 791-792.

¹⁶⁰L.P.P., p. 370.

¹⁶¹C.D., p. 101.

"representation" is the disciple's readiness to suffer in the place of Christ and thereby suffer for those for whom Christ suffered. This vicarious suffering is the culmination of the previous elements of Bonhoeffer's definition that have already been delineated. It also establishes the proper basis for the relationship between "representation" and the world come of age.

All the elements of "representation" may now be summarized as follows: The disciple represents Christ only when, having penitently confessed ~~his~~ sin, he allows himself to be conformed to Christ, responding to Christ with a single-minded obedience that inevitably draws him toward suffering and rejection, wherein he discovers the identity of his cross with that of Christ and then further discovers that he is called to share in and assume the sufferings of Christ and to suffer for those for whom Christ suffered.

B. The Non-Religious Interpretation of the Word and Sacraments

In his final letter to Bethge -- the last letter exhibiting his theological development -- Bonhoeffer discusses his work on the study previously sketched for Bethge in the "Outline for a Book":¹⁶²

"Sometimes I'm quite shocked at what I say, especially in the first part, which is mainly critical; and so I'm looking forward to getting to the more constructive part."¹⁶³ Whether Bonhoeffer ever com-

¹⁶²See L. P. P., pp. 380-383.

¹⁶³Ibid., p. 393.

pleted for himself that more constructive part is not known, for nearly all his work subsequent to this letter has been lost.. But it is possible to know the topic that would constitute that more constructive part, since throughout his last year he reiterated his desire to offer a non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts.¹⁶⁴

The concluding section of this present study is an account of some of Bonhoeffer's ideas which, properly understood, would have led him to a preliminary, non-religious interpretation of the Word, particularly the Word of proclamation, and the sacraments, specifically baptism and the Lord's Supper.¹⁶⁵ The tentative nature of such an interpretation is apparent, given the incompleteness of Bonhoeffer's mature thought. Yet the center of and key to this interpretation has already been established and described, viz. "representation". Indeed, it may be said that "representation" is non-religious interpretation, and that the task of this final section is merely to interpret Bonhoeffer's view of the Word and sacraments in terms of his final understanding of "representation".¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴See the letters of 30 April, 5 May, 18 July and the "Outline . . ."; ibid., pp. 280, 286f., 362, 382 respectively.

¹⁶⁵A comprehensive study of Bonhoeffer's sacramental theology has very recently appeared in Gerhard Müller, Bonhoeffers Theologie der Sakramente (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Josef Knecht, 1979). Müller's work appeared too late to be incorporated into this present study.

¹⁶⁶This final section distinguishes this present study from the work of Geoffrey Kelly, "Revelation in Christ: A Study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theology of Revelation". Kelly explicates the concept of Christ the representative (thesis, pp. 92-95; dissertation article, pp. 43-44), especially in terms of Christ as the suffering mediator

The biblical concepts of the Word and the sacraments are chosen instead of other concepts because together they comprise the central ideas of Christian theology, because they include lesser concepts within them, and above all because Bonhoeffer, at some point in his career, specifically addressed these ideas in a manner that can now be given a proper framework within his understanding of "representation" as non-religious interpretation.¹⁶⁷

This last section will employ ideas from Bonhoeffer's earlier writings as well as ideas that emerge after his specific explanation of the world come of age. This procedure is fully legitimate because the themes that dominate Bonhoeffer's characterization of "representation" are apparent in his earlier work.¹⁶⁸

of revelation who is to be interpreted via the theology of the cross. But Kelly consciously refrains from any attempt to delineate the relation between representation and religionless Christianity. His explicit treatment of Christ as Word and sacrament is conducted within his analysis of Bonhoeffer's early writings only. See his thesis: "Revelation in Christ . . .", pp. 192-195. Also, he does not draw specific implications of the form of Christ for discipleship and non-religious interpretation. See, for example, his dissertation article: "Revelation in Christ . . .", n. 87, p. 68: ". . . an examination of Bonhoeffer's expression, 'religionless Christianity' is beyond the scope of this article . . ." In the conclusion to his thesis, Kelly states that Christ, historically present in the Church, ". . . stands as the visible point of contact between God's revelation and man's experience." (p. 473) The final section of this present study attempts to describe certain aspects of that 'visible point' of revelation in the world come of age.

¹⁶⁷The selection of the Word and sacraments, the gifts of Christ to His church, is also in keeping with Bonhoeffer's belief that proper theology begins with consideration of the gifts of God to the world rather than with human problems. See E., p. 356: "The way of Jesus Christ, and therefore the way of all Christian thinking, leads not from the world to God but from God to the world."

¹⁶⁸See Bethge on the broad continuity in Bonhoeffer's

The one procedural difference this situation requires is that these early themes must now be set within a new context determined by Bonhoeffer's knowledge that engaging in "representation" in the world come of age will direct one toward the true God rather than toward the God of religion. The criterion to determine the validity of both the earlier and later ideas of Bonhoeffer regarding the Word and the sacraments is therefore the extent to which these ideas minimize in Christianity the religious characteristics of two-sphere, inward thinking, metaphysical conceptions of divinity, and privilege. Only by seeing how Bonhoeffer's conceptions of the Word and sacraments, understood in terms of "representation", do minimize these religious characteristics can one perceive how he believed that the gospel may be communicated in the world come of age.

One final preliminary question remains before a specific non-religious interpretation of the Word and the sacraments is attempted. In order to understand that Bonhoeffer conceives of "representation" as the key to non-religious interpretation, it must be realized that when he predicts the emergence of a new "non-religious language"¹⁶⁹ he does not mean thereby that non-religious interpretation is primarily a matter of hermeneutics and re-interpre-

thought and the roots of his later ideas in his earlier writings, D.B., pp. 997-999, D.B.E., p. 793.

¹⁶⁹L.P.P., p. 300.

tation of language, which would be separated from the form of representative suffering that the church and individual disciples must assume. In other words, Bonhoeffer's non-religious interpretation is, as E. Bethge asserts, ". . . more an ethical than a hermeneutical category, and also a direct call to penitence directed at the Church and its present form."¹⁷⁰

The acceptance of Bethge's assertion here places this present study in opposition to other commentators, e.g. Gerhard Ebeling, who insists, regarding non-religious interpretation, that ". . . Bonhoeffer's view of the coming changes in this connexion is simply not concerned at all with the problem of form, but with the problem of language."¹⁷¹ Ebeling does qualify his stance by stating later that there is an "inseparable association" between the proclamation and the form of the church.¹⁷² And this second statement, so far as it goes, is a correct interpretation of Bonhoeffer's view of the relationship, since for Bonhoeffer the representative suffering of the disciple is ultimately bound up with renewed proclamation. But Ebeling reduces proclamation to language ("That is the problem of proclamation and therewith a problem of interpretation and therewith again a problem of language and in all that an eminently

¹⁷⁰D.B., p. 987, D.B.E., p. 783. See also his "The Editing and Publishing of the Bonhoeffer Papers", p. 19.

¹⁷¹Ebeling, "Non-religious Interpretation . . .", p. 122.

¹⁷²Ibid., n. 4.

theological problem."¹⁷³), whereas Bonhoeffer purposely extends proclamation beyond language into the realm of ethical forms of life. Ebeling is finally able to maintain this "inseparable association" between the language of proclamation and the form of the church by affirming that ". . . the whole problem of the church is concentrated in the problem of language."¹⁷⁴ He is joined in such an affirmation by Heinrich Ott, who does believe that Bonhoeffer is concerned with the ". . . existential behaviour of the Church in the world"¹⁷⁵ in non-religious interpretation, but who believes that this is a secondary issue, a problem within the more important problem of language.

This present study wishes to emphasize a different perspective from Ebeling and Ott. Rather than referring to the "behaviour" or "form" of the Church as an issue within the problem of language, Bonhoeffer would, this present study concludes, more likely regard the solution to the problem of theological language as a by-product of the more fundamental need for representative discipleship. If the Christian practices "representation" in all its facets, the issue of hermeneutical reinterpretation will be resolved without special effort. This is undoubtedly the meaning of Bonhoeffer's closing thoughts in his letter to his godson: "Our earlier

¹⁷³Ebeling, "Non-religious Interpretation . . .", p. 124.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p. 122.

¹⁷⁵Heinrich Ott, Reality and Faith: The Theological Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, trans. Alex A. Morrison (London: Lutterworth Press, 1971), p. 101.

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. All Christian thinking, speaking, and organizing must be born anew out of this prayer and action."¹⁷⁶

The following attempt at the non-religious interpretation of the Word and sacraments is therefore founded upon the conviction that the language employed to convey the meaning of the Word and the sacraments in the world come of age will remain religious language unless it arises out of representative discipleship.

1. The Actualization of the Word of God
in silence and in "representation"

Throughout his prison letters Bonhoeffer confesses his doubt that Christian proclamation in the world come of age can survive without radical changes in the method of proclamation. One of the most striking passages revealing this doubt is in the letter of 30 April, 1944: "The time when people could be told everything by means of words, whether theological or pious, is over . . ."¹⁷⁷ Likewise, in the baptism-letter to his namesake he concedes, that "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

¹⁷⁶L.P.P., p. 300.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., p. 279.

bound to lose their force and cease"178

Yet in these same letters a second theme is evident which exhibits Bonhoeffer's allegiance to the traditional doctrines which are to be proclaimed and his conviction that they must be reinstated rather than forsaken:

. . . we are once again being driven right back to the beginnings of our understanding. Reconciliation and redemption, regeneration and the Holy Spirit, love of our enemies, cross and resurrection, life in Christ and Christian discipleship -- all these things are so difficult and so remote that we hardly venture any more to speak of them. In the traditional words and acts we suspect that there may be something quite new and revolutionary, though we cannot as yet grasp or express it. 179

These two complementary themes reveal Bonhoeffer's mature attitude toward proclamation of the Word in the world come of age: the common means of proclamation have little effect in a world inured to repeated statements of traditional doctrines, but these doctrines themselves nonetheless retain the fundamental message of Christianity and would reveal that message if revitalized through pertinent proclamation.

At the center of the preparation and revitalization which must occur before the day ". . . when men will once more be called so to utter the word of God that the world will be changed and renewed by it"180 is Bonhoeffer's belief that the church must

178 L. P. P., p. 300.

179 Ibid., pp. 299-300.

180 Ibid., p. 300.

enter a period of silence, a period in which it refrains from speaking the words of the gospel and instead infuses the Word into the world non-verbally.

Such silence is necessitated by two factors: first, the church has forfeited the credibility of its message through its desire for self-preservation at all costs; secondly, the church, over-anxious to proclaim the gospel in every situation whether or not those in the situation have been prepared to receive it, destroys the concreteness of the Word and causes the hearers to become immune to it.

Bonhoeffer believes the church has forfeited the credibility of its message because it is far more concerned with ". . . the attempt to rescue the church as an institution of salvation . . ." ¹⁸¹ than it is with sacrificing its own life for the life of the gospel: "The decisive factor: the church on the defensive. No taking risks for others." ¹⁸² Contributing to this misconception of the church is the element of religion examined previously ¹⁸³ which Bonhoeffer describes as religion's "privileged status". This particular error of the church can no longer be afforded in the midst of a world that has come of age, because the glaring discrepancy between a gospel of sacrificial love and the practice of an over-privileged

¹⁸¹L.P.P., p. 381.

¹⁸²Ibid.

¹⁸³Supra, pp. 87-92. Also see infra, pp. 238-239 and 252-253.

church destroys the credibility of the gospel in the eyes of the non-religious, mature observer. Even in an early article on the proper manner of interpreting the text in preaching Bonhoeffer is aware of this, for he tells the Finkenwalde brethren:

The world's real offense at the church's proclamation no longer lies in the incomprehensibility of its texts and sayings about cross and resurrection, but in their credibility [Glaubwürdigkeit]. Because the church and its pastors say something different from what they do; because there is no difference between the life of a pastor and the life of a citizen . . . Thus the question remains under this theme -- how far we have already made the words of the text incredible by our life and by the life of the church.¹⁸⁴

The result of a word made unbelievable by the lives and attitudes of those who proclaim it is that the responsible, worldly man refuses to hear the genuine word of redemption that is being hypocritically proclaimed, and the church is left speaking to those ". . . few 'last survivors of the age of chivalry', or a few intellectually dishonest people, on whom we can descend as 'religious'."¹⁸⁵

The second factor necessitating the silence of the church is more subtle. It arises, Bonhoeffer believes, from the inability of the church to recognize the different forms of Christ in the world and the resultant concreteness of the Word. Therefore the church commits the one error that Bonhoeffer's whole Christology is designed to prevent, viz. the reduction of the gospel into eternal,

¹⁸⁴N.R.S., p. 320.

¹⁸⁵L.P.P., p. 280.

unchanging principles.¹⁸⁶ Thus, whatever the occasion, whatever the state of preparation of the hearers, the church utters the gospel in the same manner, in the same form, as static principles. The result of such static proclamation, Bonhoeffer regrets, is that the church in the past ". . . gave away the word and sacraments wholesale, we baptized, confirmed, and absolved a whole nation unmasked and without condition."¹⁸⁷ And this unmasked-for "grace" in turn cheapened the gospel, profaning by incautious overuse that which is holy. Bonhoeffer laments this profanation of the Word in a section on the misuse of God's name in his 1944 prison discourse "The First Table of the Ten Commandments":

The misuse of the name of God in matters of good is more dangerous, because it is more difficult to recognize. It occurs when we Christians mouth the name of God so self-evidently, so often, so slickly, and so familiarly that we diminish the sanctity and wonder of his revelation. It is a misuse when, for every human question and need, we have precipitately on hand the word 'God' or a Bible quotation, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world that God responds to all human questions and is ever and always ready to help in any difficulty.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶Supra, pp. 24-30.

¹⁸⁷C.D., p. 45.

¹⁸⁸G.S. IV, pp. 607-608. (My translation. The translation by Godsey in Preface to Bonhoeffer . . ., p. 62, is inadequate.) "Gefährlicher, weil schwerer zu erkennen, ist der Missbrauch des Namens Gottes im Guten. Er geschieht, wenn wir Christen den Namen Gottes so selbstverständlich, so oft, so glatt und so vertraulich im Munde führen, dass wir der Heiligkeit und dem Wunder seiner Offenbarung Abbruch tun. Es ist Missbrauch, wenn wir für jede menschliche Frage und Not vorschnell mit dem Wort Gott oder mit einem Bibelspruch zur Hand sind, als wäre es das Selbstverständlichste von der Welt, dass Gott auf alle menschlichen Fragen antwortet

Silence again is the response Bonhoeffer deems appropriate to this situation, a silence imposed by the church until it can recover the proper concreteness of the Word and learn to proclaim the gospel with pertinence.¹⁸⁹

In his resolve to substantiate the need for silence Bonhoeffer revives the practice of the secret discipline, the arcanum of the early church: "There are degrees of significance; that means that a secret discipline must be restored whereby the mysteries of the Christian faith are protected against profanation."¹⁹⁰ What Bonhoeffer is seeking here is a sense of reserve, a sense that there is truth in the Biblical caution that pearls must not be thrown before swine. The wisdom Bonhoeffer would adopt from the secret discipline is its recognition that the sacraments, mysteries, and benefits of the church must be withheld from those who have not been prepared, through instruction and through their own acts of commitment, to receive them.

und in jeder Schwierigkeit immer schon zur Hilfe bereit ist."

¹⁸⁹See Bonhoeffer's definition of "pertinence" (Sachgemässheit) in E., pp. 235-236: ". . . that attitude to things is pertinent which keeps steadily in view their original, essential, and purposive relation to God and to man." Pertinence therefore consists not in making God relevant to the actions of man but in interpreting those actions in relation to God.

¹⁹⁰L. P. P., p. 286. See also p. 281. An exhaustive account of the arcanum in Bonhoeffer's theology is beyond the scope of this study. See Gisela Meuss, "Arkandisziplin und Weltlichkeit bei Dietrich Bonhoeffer", in Die mündige Welt, III, 68-115, or Paul Ballard, "Worship in a Secular World: Bonhoeffer's Secret Discipline", Princeton Seminary Bulletin, LXVII, #2 (Autumn, 1975), pp. 27-36. See also Ott, pp. 149ff.

The connection which Bonhoeffer intimates in the Letters . . . between the secret discipline and the ultimate/penultimate distinction further clarifies his intention.¹⁹¹ The church will benefit, in other words, if it is silent about the ultimate categories Bonhoeffer has distinguished (the supernatural, the New Testament Gospel, and faith), until the penultimate categories (the natural, Old Testament law, and works) have been heard and experienced by the prospective Christian. This can be seen in Bonhoeffer's statement quoted above that the word of God is misused because Christians falsely assume that it is ". . . the most obvious thing in the world that God responds to all human questions and is ever and always ready to help in any difficulty." If the church remains silent about, or at least does not everyday unguardedly proclaim, the incredible loving grace of God until after the church has proclaimed the awesomeness and majesty of a judging, lawful God, then, Bonhoeffer believes, the miraculous nature of grace will retain its proper meaning. Silence is part of the preparation for the living Word.

Yet Bonhoeffer's recovery of the arcanum and his desire for silence is not simply a technique which he employs mechanically to revitalize Christian proclamation. Silence had long been to him a fundamental component of the very nature of proclamation, as his earlier writings reveal: "Teaching about Christ begins in silence . . . The silence of the Church is silence before the Word. Inso-

¹⁹¹L. P. P., p. 281.

far as the Church proclaims the Word, it falls down silently in truth before the inexpressible When the Church speaks rightly out of a proper silence, then Christ is proclaimed."¹⁹²

Bonhoeffer encourages silence for the church not only so that proclamation may be reinstated but also because silence reflects the proper attitude of humility before the Word. The church will remain silent because it knows that hearing God requires waiting for the form of His Word to take shape in the life of the church:

Silence is the simple stillness of the individual under the Word of God. We are silent before hearing the Word because our thoughts are already directed to the Word We are silent after hearing the Word because the Word is still speaking and dwelling within us We keep silence solely for the sake of the Word, and therefore not in order to show disregard for the Word but rather to honor and receive it.¹⁹³

This silent waiting upon the Word, which Bonhoeffer commends to the church, thus arises from the character of the Word itself. Bonhoeffer may believe, as stated above, that silence has the beneficial effect in the world come of age of reinstilling credibility into the words of proclamation by recovering the concreteness of revelation, but he does not merely employ silence to that end; it arises perforce in a proper relationship to the Word.

Given Bonhoeffer's resolve to recover the credibility of

¹⁹²C.C., p. 27. See also Clyde Fant, Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1975), pp. 62ff. Here Fant rightly underlines that Bonhoeffer does not wish to substitute silence for proclamation totally but that his intention is to allow silence to cleanse and reinstate proclamation.

¹⁹³L.T., p. 79.

proclamation by re-emphasizing the silence and the secret discipline, it is important now to delineate his conception of the proper way of proclamation, the way which will minimize the religious components in proclamation and facilitate the hearing of the Word in the world come of age.

Bonhoeffer's major writings on proclamation and interpretation appear during the period of his leadership of the Finkenwalde seminary, including the 1935 lecture "The Interpretation of the New Testament",¹⁹⁴ and the 1938 address "Our Way according to the Testimony of Scripture",¹⁹⁵ and the homiletics lectures delivered between 1935 and 1939.¹⁹⁶

Considering that these homiletical writings occur prior to the last period of Bonhoeffer's life when he became increasingly open to the worldliness of the new age, it could be argued that a

¹⁹⁴N.R.S., pp. 302-320. For the original see G.S. III, pp. 303-324, "Vergegenwärtigung neutestamentlicher Texte". The translation by Bowden and Robertson of Vergegenwärtigung as "presentation" is inadequate. Before revision, their translation utilized both "presentation" and "interpretation" for Vergegenwärtigung. Bowden and Bethge, in the revision, do recognize the inadequacy of "presentation". (Cf. n. 3, pp. 302-303.) Even with this notation, however, "presentation" does not suffice. Vergegenwärtigung literally means "the making present of" texts. "Representation" actually is the most appropriate translation. But to avoid possible confusion with "representation" as Stellvertretung, this present study employs "actualization" as the most suitable translation, for "actualization" does convey the sense of "making present".

¹⁹⁵W.F., pp. 173-193, esp. 173-179. Again, compare the original German, G.S. II, pp. 320-345.

¹⁹⁶These lectures (the copy now extant is actually a reconstruction from student notes) were delivered every term between 1935 and 1939. They are translated as "Bonhoeffer's Lectures on Preaching" by Clyde Fant in his Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching, pp.

description of Bonhoeffer's theology of the Word that is based on these early writings is inapplicable to his later work. Indeed, given his strict insistence upon the close correspondence of proclamation to the written word (to be explicated below), it could be argued that Bonhoeffer's early homiletics employ a "triumphalist" view of the Word that conflicts with the later view of Christ as the suffering one for others. His early homiletics, that is, seem to involve a form of "positivism of revelation" not unlike that for which he later criticizes Barth.¹⁹⁷

However, the examination of Bonhoeffer's homiletical principles that is to be offered here will reveal that those principles testify to the incarnate Christ, to the earthly, human Christ and his church in the world. There is thus an affinity of these homiletical principles with his emphasis on the positive worldliness of the new age, for both receive their life from the incarnate Christ. Further, as the homiletical principles are shown here to eliminate religious tendencies toward otherworldliness, a more genuine worldliness will be fostered. Bonhoeffer does not, therefore, come in the Letters . . . to reject his earlier homiletical method, but instead allows it to direct him into a new dimension of worldliness that is welcomed by the Incarnate One.

One major principle dominates Bonhoeffer's homiletics

123-180. For the original edition of these student notes by Bethge, see G.S. IV, pp. 237-289.

¹⁹⁷L.P.P., p. 328.

and hermeneutics: the written and proclaimed word is founded upon and has no meaning apart from the incarnation of Christ. This principle is evident in his lectures on preaching:

The proclaimed word [Predigtwort] has its origin in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It neither originates from a truth once perceived nor from personal experience. It is not the reproduction of a specific set of feelings. Nor is the word of the sermon the outward form for the substance which lies behind it. The proclaimed word is the incarnate Christ himself. As little as the incarnation is the outward shape of God, just so little does the proclaimed word present the outward form of a reality; rather, it is the thing itself. The preached Christ is both the Historical One and the Present One Therefore the proclaimed word is not a medium of expression for something else, something which lies behind it, but rather it is the Christ himself walking through his congregation as the Word.¹⁹⁸

The identification of the Word with the Incarnate One has many implications, including the facts stipulated above by Bonhoeffer that the Word is neither the outward form for the substance of revelation nor a truth derived from personal experience. These implications strengthen the connection between Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the Word and the traditional theological concepts underlying his christology, specifically that Christ reveals Himself concretely as a person and that God is not an abstract, static idea.¹⁹⁹

One prime aspect of Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the Word which arises from these implications is his insistence that proclamation must adhere strictly to the written word. Exegesis and

¹⁹⁸Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Preaching", in Fant, p. 126.

¹⁹⁹Supra, pp. 22-30.

proclamation must be practically inseparable. The reasons for this inseparability are explained by Bonhoeffer in his writing on the actualization of New Testament texts. He sees that what is at stake in this issue is nothing less than who will control the meaning of the Word:

In principle, it is possible to interpret the question of the actualization [Vergegenwärtigung] of the New Testament message in two ways. The phrase means either that the biblical message must justify itself to the present age and in that way show itself capable of actualization, or that present age must justify itself before the biblical message and in that way the message must become present.²⁰⁰

If the text is called to account for itself by the present age in such a way that the present age demands that the text become relevant to present difficulties, then to Bonhoeffer the text loses its authority and becomes subject to the whims of its interpreter. In such a situation interpretation occurs in such a manner that ". . . the biblical message is passed through the sieve of man's own knowledge -- what will not go through is scorned and tossed away."²⁰¹ But the proper relation of the text to the interpreter is the opposite of such selective interpretation, Bonhoeffer holds, so that the interpreter's present difficulties, indeed the whole definition of the present age, are known only by considering the text first:

²⁰⁰N.R.S., pp. 302-303.

²⁰¹Ibid., p. 304. This recalls Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the self-enclosure of human reason and the need for revelation to break into human circular reasoning from outside. See supra, pp. 20-22.

For: the concept of the present is not determined by chronology but by the Word of Christ as the Word of God. The present is not some feeling of time, interpretation of time, or spirit of time, but the present is only the Holy Ghost. Where God Himself is in His Word, there is the present, there He establishes the present The concretissimum of the Christian gospel and of textual exegesis is not a human act of actualization but it is always God Himself, it is the Holy Spirit.²⁰²

The only manner by which the preacher can avoid the same error of judging and sifting through the Word is by aligning himself closely to the text itself and allowing the text to speak for itself rather than using the text in the solution of the problems of a congregation:

Because the 'content' of the New Testament is this, that Christ speaks to us through his Holy Spirit, and because this does not happen outside or alongside, but solely and exclusively through the word of Scripture, keeping to the content [Sachlichkeit], i. e. the adherence of preaching to the Scriptures, is itself actualization [Vergegenwärtigung] For the matter of this content is the Holy Spirit himself, and He is the presence of both God and Christ.²⁰³

Bonhoeffer's own sermons are characterized by the extent to which he refuses to stray from the text and refuses to turn his sermons

²⁰²G.S. III, p. 307. (My translation; the translation of Bowden and Robertson in N.R.S., p. 306, is inexact.) "Denn: der Begriff der Gegenwart ist nicht bestimmt durch eine Zeitbestimmung, sondern durch das Wort Christi als des Wortes Gottes. Gegenwart ist nicht irgendein Zeitgefühl, eine Zeitdeutung, ein Zeitgeist, sondern Gegenwart ist allein der Heilige Geist. Wo Gott selbst ist in seinem Wort, dort ist Gegenwart, dort setzt er Gegenwart Das concretissimum der christlichen Botschaft und Textauslegung ist nicht ein menschlicher Akt der Vergegenwärtigung, sondern ist immer Gott selbst, ist der Heilige Geist."

²⁰³N.R.S., p. 306.

into one-half explicatio and the other half applicatio.²⁰⁴ He emphasizes that the Word itself is already concrete, and that "Every application on our part indicates that we stand above the Word rather than beneath it; that we regard it as a principle which has to be applied to each individual case."²⁰⁵ The incarnate God who has become the Word requires no relevant arrangement of what words apply to what situation but requires only an obedient rendering of the relevance already present in the text.

If the exegete and preacher follow Bonhoeffer's principle of actualization and interpretation, the three tendencies inherent in religious interpretation can be minimized. Through a brief examination of the reduction of these tendencies, this study can demonstrate that a non-religious interpretation of proclamation of the Word is primarily constituted by Bonhoeffer's concept of strict exegetical preaching, which is founded upon the belief that the Word is the incarnate God, and which is prepared for by a period of silence that restores the credibility of the proclaimer.

The religious tendency toward what Bonhoeffer describes as two-sphere, individualistic thinking has influenced the doctrine of the Word by separating the words of God and the words of man, by determining that one is eternal and the other temporal. In a

²⁰⁴See D.B., p. 507, D.B.E., p. 362. Bethge notes that most of Bonhoeffer's students had difficulty accepting Bonhoeffer's theory on this point and followed the explicatio/applicatio theory offered by, e.g., Karl Heim. For examples of Bonhoeffer's sermons see G.S. IV, pp. 391-465.

²⁰⁵Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Preaching", in Fant, p. 140.

description of the presupposition of such two-sphere interpretation Bonhoeffer says that according to this interpretation there seems to be something to be found in the past which is "supra-temporal":

It is therefore said that in history there is something eternal, in the contingent there is something necessary, in the individual instance there is general validity. This validity, this eternal can be a doctrine, it can be an ethical norm, it can be a general human feeling, it can be a myth. Presentation means . . . discovering the eternal doctrine, or the general ethical norm, or the myth, contained in Holy Scripture and the application of this general element to the present situation of each person today.²⁰⁶

But once the separation of the contingent and historical from the necessary and eternal is accomplished and the application is attempted, one falls into the error described by Bonhoeffer above, viz. the selective interpretation which passes the text through the sieve of one's own knowledge. One then re-learns that the discovery of the eternal in the temporal is possible "Only by the interpreter himself having control over the eternal standard . . ."²⁰⁷

Inevitably, the two-sphere thinking which Bonhoeffer opposes also leads to a mistaken conception of the authority and inspiration of the text. The separation of the words of God and the words of man into eternal and temporal, necessary and contingent, ultimately implies that the temporal and contingent is unreliable. Therefore, if the text is to be reliable it must, according to two-sphere thinking, come solely from God and be invulnerable

²⁰⁶N.R.S., p. 308.

²⁰⁷Ibid.

to human error. But Bonhoeffer in his christology lectures reacts against such an hypothesis, first by affirming the complete incarnation of Christ: ". . . God's Word has really entered into the humiliation of the words of men."²⁰⁸ Then he emphasizes that the resurrection of Christ does not mean the eternalization of history:

. . . verbal inspiration is a poor substitute for the resurrection. It amounts to a denial of the unique presence of the risen one. It gives history an eternal value instead of seeing history and knowing it from the point of view of God's eternity . . . One must be ready to accept the concealment within history and therefore let historical criticism run its course. But it is through the Bible, with all its flaws, that the risen one encounters us.²⁰⁹

Bonhoeffer allows no separation of the words of God and the words of man into distinct spheres because the incarnation means to him that God communicates to humanity in, with, and through humanity. Worldliness is affirmed not outside of the text or in opposition to it, but through the text!

The relationship of the second element of religion to Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the Word can also be approached through consideration of the authority and inspiration of the text. The conception of God in metaphysical categories, as metaphysically omnipotent, metaphysically transcendent, etc. contributes to the mistaken separation of the words of God from the words of man. The abstract, necessary, doctrine or ethical norm which two-sphere

²⁰⁸C.C., p. 52.

²⁰⁹Ibid., pp. 73-74.

thinking wishes to discover in the text is the appropriate mode of revelation from a God who, transcendent and omnipotent due to His aseity, sends down from a protected region principles of conduct and propositions of truth. Bonhoeffer understands that the result of this metaphysical conception of divine omnipotence and transcendence is the unwitting loss of true transcendence and omnipotence of God by the exegete and preacher. Whereas the metaphysical conception of God's presence in the text ultimately results in the degeneration of the text into abstract principles which finally depend on human decisions for how they should be applied, a non-religious, non-metaphysical, strictly exegetical actualization of the text means that "God alone says where his Word is, and that again means that God alone actualizes his Word, that the Holy Ghost is the principle of actualization [Vergegenwärtigung]. . . ." ²¹⁰

Since Bonhoeffer does emphasize that the text must be exegeted and proclaimed in such a manner that God alone says where His Word is, there will be no place in his doctrine of the Word for the third element of religion, viz. the religious believer's use of God to secure a privileged status in the world. A central part of the means whereby the religious Christian turns faith to his own selfish advantage is through the interpretation of texts according to his desires and constructions: "We have the criterion for the Word of God, it is in our reason, in our conscience, or in our

²¹⁰ N.R.S., pp. 309-310.

experience, fashioned by our nation or in any other way. The criterion for the Word of God lies outside it, "in us . . ." ²¹¹

Given Bonhoeffer's insistence upon strict exegetical preaching, however, the religious believer is afforded no opportunity to find the criterion for interpretation within himself, but is forced to regard the Word as its own interpreter.

The final bulwark against the use of the Word for furtherance of privileged status is the character of the Word itself. Not only does Bonhoeffer emphasize that the Word is the incarnate God; he also insists that the incarnate God is the suffering God as well, and that to conform to the Word is to conform to the form of the Crucified One:

In the incarnation the Word became flesh. God, the Son, took on human form. So he accepts all of mankind and bears it in himself, in that he is fleshly [indem er Fleisch trägt]. He embraces the whole of humanity with its genuinely sinful nature It is not enough to say that he suffers with mankind -- he actually takes mankind upon himself. ²¹²

Given this particular character of the Word, Bonhoeffer is convinced that if the Christian adheres to a strict exegetical actualization of the text he will not contribute to the privileged character of religion but will instead be led toward the form of the Incarnate and Crucified One.

²¹¹N.R.S., p. 309.

²¹²Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Preaching", in Fant, pp. 126-127.

The one question which remains in the discussion of Bonhoeffer's non-religious conception of the Word is the relationship between his exegetical method of proclamation and his view of "representation" as it was spelled out earlier. If "representation" is the key to non-religious interpretation it must occupy a central position in Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the Word. The relationship between "representation" and interpretation is two-fold: "representation" is the means whereby credibility is silently restored to proclamation, and it is the end toward which proclamation must be directed in the world come of age.

Bonhoeffer's call for silence and the consequent recovery of the secret discipline as the means whereby credibility is returned to the proclamation of the church is supplemented by his call for "righteous action among men".²¹³ His emphasis on the need for such action, which to him necessarily implies "representation", is evident in a 1940 letter to a friend:

Surely you know the books of Bernanos? There when the pastors speak, their word has weight. The reason for that is that they do not come from a verbal reflection or observation, but quite simply from the daily, personal intercourse with the crucified Jesus Christ. This is the depth from which a word must come if it expects to be of any import Where the word comes, as it were directly from the cross of Jesus Christ itself, where Christ is so present to us that it is actually he himself speaking out of our own mouth, there alone can the fearful

²¹³L.P.P., p. 300.

danger of empty spiritual chatter be eliminated.²¹⁴

Here the proclamation of the church, as Bonhoeffer says, has "weight" or "import", a weight which depends upon the absorption of the one who proclaims the gospel message into the life of Christ the Crucified One. The weight that is gained arises when the one who hears the proclamation of the Word realizes that the one who has proclaimed the Word does not do so complacently or in order to gain privilege through religion but because his whole life is dominated by a costly, sacrificial faith. The weight that is gained is what Bonhoeffer later calls the power of "human example": The church ". . . must not underestimate the importance of human example (which has its origin in the humanity of Jesus and is so important in Paul's teaching); it is not abstract argument, but example, that gives its word emphasis and power."²¹⁵

²¹⁴G.S. III, p. 43. (My translation) "Sie kennen sicher die Bücher von Bernanos? Wenn dort die Pfarrer sprechen, hat ihr Wort Gewicht. Das liegt daran, dass sie nicht aus irgendeiner sprachlichen Überlegung oder Beobachtung, sondern ganz einfach aus dem täglichen, persönlichen Umgang mit dem gekreuzigten Jesus Christus kommen. Es ist die Tiefe, aus der ein Wort kommen muss, wenn es wiegen will Wo das Wort sozusagen unmittelbar vom Kreuz Jesu Christi selbst herkommt, wo Christus uns so gegenwärtig ist, dass geradezu er selbst unser Wort spricht, dort allein kann die furchtbare Gefahr der geistlichen Geschwätzigkeit gebannt werden."

²¹⁵L.P.P., p. 383. Bonhoeffer does not assume that the power of human witness is required because the words of Christ in the proclamation of the church require a prop or a vindication: The witness ". . . does not want to add anything with human words to Christ's words. He is not to dominate, but Christ Therefore he does not want his hearers to look at his life and regard it as a prop for his testimony." ("Lectures on Preaching", in Fant, p. 133.) ". . . he does not want to, and indeed may not, cite his

The human example of the proclaimer, although it obviously cannot make the words of Christ true or false, does at least aid in restoring the credibility of the church and thus helps prepare the way for the reception of the Word.

In order to understand why Bonhoeffer believes "representation" is also the end toward which the proclamation of the Word is directed it is essential to recall his belief that the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts is directed toward the mature, worldly dimension of the life of the modern Christian, the dimension which has experienced -- knowingly or unknowingly -- Christ the Incarnate One, and which now can discover a more complete revelation of Christ by encountering the Crucified One.²¹⁶ The non-religious interpretation of the doctrine of the Word is designed, therefore, to display the suffering, crucified, Christ before the eyes of the religionless world come of age so that the relationship of worldly man to Christ might be made manifest and individuals might realize their identification with the cross of Christ. Thus

own accomplishment as the confirmation of his testimony." (*Ibid.*, p. 134.) This caveat is important, for otherwise Bonhoeffer would be guilty of underestimating the sovereignty of the Word. His insistence on human example through "representation" must be understood rather as his belief that without the sacrificial discipleship of the proclaimer the Word is incompletely presented, inadequately offered, since the Word of Christ in the form of the Crucified One would be omitted, and the hearer of the Word would be asked to respond to only a partial presentation of the Word.

²¹⁶Supra, pp. 128-131.

Bonhoeffer insists that "It is by seeing the cross and the community beneath it that men come to believe in God."²¹⁷

That vision of the cross and the suffering community is prompted by Christ Himself, who transforms and preserves the world come of age so that in this particular moment His form as the Crucified One might be known. Bonhoeffer therefore believes "representation" is the goal of the non-religious interpretation of the Word precisely because he believes this is the will of Christ and the direction toward which Christ is leading twentieth-century Christianity. Therefore, insofar as the exegete and preacher allow the text, which is instilled with Christ the Word, to direct them and their hearers toward "representation" and identification with the Crucified One, Bonhoeffer believes they are preparing the way for the concrete will of God that is being revealed in the Word in the world come of age. "Representation" is the key to the non-religious interpretation of the Word because only through "representation" will the fullness of the Word be revealed to a religionless age, and only as the fullness of the Word is revealed will the world come of age rightly understand its own true worldliness and "hopeful godlessness".

2. The sacraments as non-religious and as instruments of the Body of Christ

As with the analysis of Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the Word, the discussion of his conception of the sacraments will proceed

²¹⁷C.D., p. 108.

according to two questions, viz.: How does his doctrine of the sacraments minimize the religious interpretation of baptism and eucharist?; and What is the relationship between that doctrine of the sacraments and "representation"? Intimations of the direction in which Bonhoeffer was moving in an attempt to answer these queries can be derived from his earlier theology, primarily in his christology lectures of 1933 and in The Cost of Discipleship, as well as in a later exegetical and theological study of infant baptism which he was commissioned to write in 1942.²¹⁸

Prior to answering these two questions, however, it is useful to note that Bonhoeffer believes that eucharist and baptism must be viewed as aspects of the Body of Christ, i.e. that the sacraments are ecclesiological concepts and that they lose their proper meaning if considered outside of the context of the church:

How then do we come to participate in the Body of Christ . . . ? It is certain that there can be no fellowship or communion with him except through his Body. For only through that Body can we find acceptance and salvation. The answer is, through the two sacraments of his Body, baptism and the Lord's Supper The sacraments begin and end in the Body of Christ, and it is only the presence of that Body which makes them what they are. The word of preaching is insufficient to make us members of Christ's Body; the sacraments also have to be added. Baptism incorporates us into the unity of the Body of Christ, and the Lord's Supper fosters and sustains our fellowship and

²¹⁸See G.S. III, pp. 431-454, "Zur Tauffrage". The English translation is in T.P., pp. 143-164.

and communion (κοινωνία) in that Body.²¹⁹

Both sacraments exist for the purpose of strengthening and furthering the Body of Christ, and although Bonhoeffer's undeveloped concepts lead to a non-religious interpretation of those sacraments, they do not lead to an extra-ecclesiastical interpretation. Instead they reflect Bonhoeffer's insistence to Bethge that a sacrament ". . . is a gift of grace bestowed on the church . . ." ²²⁰ Precisely because the sacraments "begin and end in the Body of Christ", their efficacy in making Christ present to mature, worldly, men will diminish unless those men come of age are drawn into the church community.

An appreciation of how Bonhoeffer's conception of the sacraments minimizes the religious elements can be gleaned first from an examination of his theological and exegetical response to a critique of infant baptism offered by Arnold Hitzer. Bethge has written that "Bonhoeffer took exception to Hitzer's concept of belief as subjective and individualistic."²²¹ And Bonhoeffer himself criticizes the individualism inherent in Hitzer's formula: "The definition of belief (faith) as 'personal faith', 'personal decision for Jesus', 'free decision of the individual', which predominates

²¹⁹C.D., pp. 214-215.

²²⁰L.P.P., p. 237. This further demonstrates the questionable nature of interpretations of Bonhoeffer which emphasize a division between his christology and his ecclesiology in the later works. See Phillips, Christ for Us . . ., pp. 187f. See also supra, p. 44-45.

²²¹D.B., p. 794, D.B.E., p. 611.

Hitzer's study, almost imperceptibly gives the biblical concept an alien colouring which must have doubtful consequences."²²² Bonhoeffer defends infant baptism, partially at least, to combat that inherent individualism in Hitzer's study. He sees that individualism in three major ideas of Hitzer.

The first idea is Hitzer's insistence upon regarding baptism from the perspective of the reception of faith by the individual. He thus analyzes the psychological readiness of the recipient and reaches his conclusion about the nature of faith from his understanding of the individual's reception of it. But Bonhoeffer objects strongly to this manner of interpreting God's actions in terms of man: "The nature of faith is independent of our ability to present it in psychological terms! Faith is a theological, not a psychological concept! . . . The N. T. does not reflect further upon the psychological possibilities of this act of receiving. The N. T. is not interested in the predominant point of Hitzer's study."²²³ The attempt to interpret baptism on the basis of individualistic psychological categories is opposed by Bonhoeffer, who therefore believes it is wrong to withhold baptism from children simply ". . . because they do not have the psychological potentialities of a personal confession and decision."²²⁴

²²²T. P., p. 149. "Glaube" is translated here by Bowden and Robertson both as "belief" and "faith". A summary of Hitzer's essay is offered by Bethge in G.S. III, p. 431.

²²³T. P., p. 151.

²²⁴Ibid., p. 152.

Secondly, Bonhoeffer discerns that Hitzer has fallen err to conceiving of an "idea" of God, of thinking of God as He should be or must be, rather than as He is, as testified by scripture. So Bonhoeffer sees Hitzer making an ". . . appeal to a grace of God which is 'greater' than baptism' . . . , of which no mention can be found in Scripture."²²⁵ And Bonhoeffer rejoins that "The God who, according to our thoughts and wishes, is to be 'greater' than his grace is not the God of the Bible."²²⁶ Seeing that the temptation of individualism in the interpretation of the sacraments is furthered by Hitzer's conception of a particular workable "idea" of God, Bonhoeffer must oppose this second theme as well.

The third idea prompts the recollection that individualism arises from two-sphere thinking, for Bonhoeffer believes Hitzer's rejection of infant baptism is based on a desire for a ". . . pure community, set apart from the world."²²⁷ Bonhoeffer readily allows that infant baptism has been misused and has thereby contributed to the degeneration of a vital Christian alternative to an iniquitous society, but he denies that Hitzer's programme for a pure community of believers isolated from the world is the appropriate response to such a situation, because then the purity of the community itself becomes the goal of faith. Instead, the purity of the community must be gained as a byproduct: "The separation of

²²⁵T.P., p. 157.

²²⁶Ibid.

²²⁷Ibid., p. 159

the community from the world, purity, readiness to fight, truthfulness, are not goals to be striven for directly, in themselves; they are the fruits which automatically follow from an authentic proclamation of the gospel."²²⁸ Insofar as he sees two-sphere thinking dominating Hitzer's position, Bonhoeffer opposes it.

From his opposition to these three ideas of Hitzer, the following conclusion can be drawn: Bonhoeffer's defence of infant baptism opposes individualism and two-sphere thinking. It does so in order to allow for what he calls a "representative faith" of the godparents and the believing community in which the infant is placed.²²⁹ An interpretation of the sacraments dominated by psychological conceptions of the readiness of the recipient, by a workable "idea" of God, and by a desire for a pure, isolated community would maximize rather than minimize the individualistic element in the sacraments and would reduce the effectiveness with which the sacraments can speak to man come of age.

Not only does Bonhoeffer's non-religious interpretation of the sacraments repudiate individualist, two-sphere thinking, it also challenges all attempts to interpret the sacraments in such a way that God is conceived of in metaphysical categories. Thus Bon-

²²⁸T.P., p. 160.

²²⁹Ibid., p. 154: "The faith of the community always precedes the faith of the individual . . ." This same sense of representative faith of the godfather, the family, and the believing community is a significant theme in Bonhoeffer's "thoughts . . ." to his godson at the child's baptism. L.P.P., pp. 294-300.

hoeffer emphasizes, for example, that the Word which is present in the sacrament is dangerously misconstrued if it is considered to be merely a symbol or a representation of a separate, metaphysically transcendent God: "The Word in the sacrament is embodied Word. It is not representation (Repräsentation) of the Word. Only that which is not present can be represented. But the Word is present."²³⁰ Underlying this assertion is Bonhoeffer's insistence on the complete incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ and his accompanying emphasis that it is through Christ alone that man comes to know God. Since the Word is incarnate, Christ now is embodied in the elements (water in baptism, bread and wine in the eucharist) which give Him a corporeal form in His present ecclesiastical Body. Bonhoeffer's particular insistence upon the bodily presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements is exhibited in a 1940 study-letter to the brethren. There, analyzing the 7th article of the Lutheran Formula of Concord, Bonhoeffer affirms: ". . . we receive the body of Christ not only spiritually, but 'orally' So deeply does Christ humble himself, so intimate is his communion with us, so immediately does he bear witness to any one of us, that we receive his body with the mouth and drink his blood."²³¹ His argument here against the Reformed doctrine of a simple "spiritual

²³⁰C.C., p. 53.

²³¹G.S. III, p. 395. (My translation) ". . . empfangen wir den Leib Christi nicht nur geistlich, sondern mündlich' So tief erniedrigt sich Christus, so innig ist seine Gemeinschaft mit uns, so unmittelbar bezeugt er sich einem jeden von uns, dass wir seinen Leib mit dem Mund empfangen und sein Blut trinken."

presence" of Christ accentuates the full worldliness of Christ as the Word, and inhibits any religious conception of the sacrament, that would prefer to maintain a safe distance between a metaphysically transcendent God and His world.

Attempts to understand God through metaphysical categories have prompted what Bonhoeffer admits is a "labyrinth of misunderstanding"²³² in Protestant sacramental theology. He argues that the major Reformed-Lutheran schism over the issue of the extra-Calvinisticum arises from the metaphysical question of "how" Christ is present in the eucharist while ascended into heaven, and that both Luther and the Reformed thinkers erred in proposing the question in this way.²³³

What must be affirmed over against such metaphysical interpretations, Bonhoeffer offers, is the recollection that Christ's presence is always pro me, which in turn means that:

. . . the complete person of the God-man is present, in his exaltation and his humiliation . . . Christ exists in such a way that he is existentially present in the sacrament. His being in the sacrament is not a special property, one quality among others; this is the way in which he exists in the Church. The humiliation is no accident of his divine-human substance, but it is his existence.²³⁴

To emphasize that Christ is "existentially present" in the sacra-

²³²C. C., p. 54.

²³³Ibid., pp. 55-56. He declares that Luther's two doctrines of ubiquity and ubivoluntarianism are both "impossible metaphysical hypostatizations."

²³⁴Ibid., p. 57.

ment is, for Bonhoeffer, to emphasize that ~~two~~ seemingly contradictory statements about Christ must be affirmed simultaneously. A metaphysical conception of God would not allow this. But Christ must, Bonhoeffer feels, be understood as ". . . the one judging and forgiving Christ who is the Word, in both." He is both "the creator of this new creation and at the same time a creature".²³⁵ This means that Bonhoeffer, as stated above,²³⁶ wishes to replace the metaphysical question "how" with the more existential question "who" so that Christ's existence pro me in the sacraments might be better conveyed.

Through this non-metaphysical interpretation of the sacrament, Bonhoeffer undergirds and foreshadows his later statements in the Letters . . ., in which he accentuates how a true encounter with Christ and a true conception of divine transcendence arise in the experience of Christ's "being there for others".²³⁷ Bonhoeffer has made the eucharist, when interpreted non-metaphysically, a nuclear point where the Christian can non-religiously experience divine transcendence.

A non-religious interpretation of the sacraments includes, therefore, not only an opposition to individualistic, two-sphere thinking, but also a persistent effort to avoid metaphysical constructions of the nature of God. Bonhoeffer offers an emphasis on

²³⁵C.C., pp. 57-58.

²³⁶Supra, pp. 21-24.

²³⁷L.P.P., p. 381.

the full incarnation of the Word in Christ and an eminent awareness of the pro me, existential presence of Christ as central bulwarks against such metaphysical constructions.

The ecclesiastical and secular privileges and advantages that Christians frequently believe should be attributed to them due to their religious affiliation are also irreconcilable with Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the sacraments. The grace of which the sacraments are a sign is wrongly received if it is used to provide a "specially favoured"²³⁸ status for church members. Bonhoeffer by no means wishes to deny the benefits of the sacraments. He wishes only to emphasize that the Christ who is present in the sacraments is present as ". . . the humiliated creature . . ." ²³⁹ A proper understanding by the Christian of the sacraments he receives would thus never, according to Bonhoeffer, allow him to become unmindful of Christ's suffering and humiliation. In receiving the sacrament the Christian engages in an act which Bonhoeffer describes as a very real humiliation of Christ: ". . . the incarnate one, who has become flesh and blood, is in the sacrament as the stumbling block. The sacrament is not God becoming man, but the humiliation of the God-man."²⁴⁰ That humiliation and concealment can be discerned in both sacraments. In His baptism the incarnate God humbles Himself before His messenger, even as in

²³⁸L. P. P., p. 281.

²³⁹C. C., p. 58.

²⁴⁰Ibid., p. 54.

the baptism of the Christian the element of water is a sign of the submission that precedes the elevation into community. In the eucharist the body is broken before it is able to give new life.

The humiliation of Christ that is recalled by the sacraments elicits an act of humiliation in the Christian disciple as well, as an important prerequisite to participation in the Lord's Supper, viz. a confession of sin and examination of the quality of his faith. Bonhoeffer cautions that he who would receive the eucharist ". . . should examine himself or submit to an examination by a brother, to prove that he really desires the sacrament of Christ's flesh and blood and his forgiveness."²⁴¹ Even more important, however,

. . . there is also the sacramental confession, wherein the Christian seeks and finds assurance that his sins are forgiven. Confession is the God-given remedy for self-deception and self-indulgence. When we confess our sins before a brother-Christian, we are mortifying the pride of the flesh and delivering it up to shame and death through Christ.²⁴²

Both the examination of one's faith and the confession of sin prepare the recipient for the eucharist by destroying the sentiments of self-sufficiency and religious privilege. By destroying these sentiments, examination and confession prepare the Christian for proper reception of the sacraments, directing him toward the humiliation and crucifixion of Christ in baptism and in the Lord's Supper.

²⁴¹C.D., p. 260.

²⁴²Ibid.

Bonhoeffer's non-religious interpretation of the sacraments includes, therefore, his emphasis on the humiliation and crucifixion of Christ as these are evident in the Lord's Supper and baptism. Coupled with his insistence first that individualistic, two-sphere thought can be minimized by emphasis on the representative nature of faith and by refusing to succumb to an "idealistic" notion of God, and second, that metaphysical conceptions of God can be minimized through diligent recollection of the full incarnation of Christ and His pro me, existential presence, this opposition to the privileged character of religion offers adequate evidence that Bonhoeffer's theology does contain the seeds from which a thoroughgoing theory of non-religious interpretation of the sacraments may be developed.

Again, however, the intimate connection between the sacraments and representative discipleship must be underlined. The importance of remembering the humiliated Christ has indeed been noted, but Bonhoeffer sees a still stronger relationship between the sacraments and "representation".

That relationship is expressed in a comment Bonhoeffer offers in Christ the Center as part of his explanation of the full embodiment of the Word in the sacraments. Having emphasized that Christ has become a new creature who in the eucharist penetrates into the fallen creation, Bonhoeffer continues:

He is the Word of God which has become bread and wine. As new creature he is in bread and wine. Thus bread and wine are a new creation. They are really nourishment for the new being. As elements of the restored creation they are not for themselves, but for men. This being-for-men is what makes them a new creation. (. . . ist

ihr neues Geschaffensein.)²⁴³

The elements of the eucharist have little or no existence for themselves; it is only insofar as they are part of the Body of Christ and exist for men that they have real existence. And only because they exist for men are they indeed part of the Body, part of the new creation. It can be said, therefore, on the basis of this comment, that Bonhoeffer is himself aware of how the suffering, representative form of existence which marks the life of Christ also should be extended into an interpretation of the sacraments. Unfortunately, this insight is not explicitly developed by Bonhoeffer, but the presence of the idea in one of his earlier writings indicates that his doctrine of the sacraments and his conception of "representation", far from being alien to each other, are decidedly compatible.

Simple compatibility between these two ideas is still not the final word, however. The relationship drawn by Bonhoeffer between the sacraments and "representation" becomes one of intrinsic unity when, in The Cost of Discipleship, he emphasizes that the sacrament of baptism ushers the Christian into the Body of Christ and union with Christ Himself:²⁴⁴ "To be baptized therefore means to become a member of the Church, a member of the Body of Christ (Gal. 3:28; I Cor. 12:13). To be in Christ therefore

²⁴³C.C., pp. 57-58. See G.S. III, p. 192.

²⁴⁴This recalls Bonhoeffer's earlier insistence that the sacraments can only be properly understood within the context of the Body of Christ. See C.C., p. 58, or S.C., p. 166.

means to be in the Church. But if we are in the Church we are verily and bodily in Christ."²⁴⁵ Henceforth baptized Christians are not simply followers of Jesus, they are not simply listening to His words, but they are united to Him bodily, and participate in the acts of that Body, including the crucifixion and resurrection:

The disciples have communion and fellowship in the Body of Christ. They live and suffer in bodily communion with him. That is why they must bear the burden of the cross. In him they are all borne and taken up.

The earthly body of Jesus underwent crucifixion and death. In that death the new humanity undergoes crucifixion and death.²⁴⁶

Baptism, at the beginning of the Christian life, and the Lord's Supper, in the repeated remembrance of the suffering and death of Christ, place the Christian in a position of suffering with Christ and in the place of Christ by uniting him to the Body of Christ. This unity means that now, in his suffering with others and in the place of others, the Christian can discover again and again that his cross is held together with Christ's cross. And in that discovery the Christian also will find again and again that he is in fact justified and redeemed by the cross of Christ, and not by the "works" of his own acts of discipleship. This realization is the goal of "representation". The discoveries reveal to the Christian that he is "participating" in Christ, which Bonhoeffer describes in the Letters . . . as the essence of faith: "Faith is

²⁴⁵C.D., p. 216.

²⁴⁶Ibid., p. 214.

participation in this being of Jesus (incarnation, cross, resurrection).²⁴⁷ The Christian, in his worldliness united with the incarnate Christ, suffers the cross united to the crucified Christ, and hopes and trusts in a new beginning united with the resurrected Christ. Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the sacraments leads to "representation", and in turn to participation in Christ, by asserting that the sacraments are inseparable from the Body of Christ and by minimizing the religious elements which would distract the Christian from the discovery of the unity of his cross with the cross of Christ.

The examination of Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the sacraments and the previous examination of his doctrine of the Word have provided an intimation of what might be the "more constructive part" of his final theological endeavour. It must be reiterated that the conclusions attained in this final section are based upon his earlier-developed ideas and upon themes that are dominant but not fully explicated in his later writings. The way in which Bonhoeffer's understanding of the Word and sacraments, based upon "representation", minimizes the religious elements indicates, however, how his proposed non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts might concretely operate. Future writers will refine and extend the concepts of non-religious interpretation. But they will remain heavily indebted to Bonhoeffer both for his incipient ideas and for his unique call for a reassessment and reevaluation of the

²⁴⁷ L. P. P., p. 381.

"traditional words and acts", made with increased awareness of the need for representative suffering in the world come of age. If the church undertakes the task to which Bonhoeffer calls it, it will surely learn that in those traditional doctrines ". . . there may be something quite new and revolutionary."²⁴⁸ This is Bonhoeffer's hope when he predicts that the church will discover ". . . a new language, perhaps quite non-religious, but liberating and redeeming -- as was Jesus' language; it will shock people and yet overcome them by its power; it will be the language of new righteousness and truth, proclaiming God's peace with men and the coming of his kingdom."²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸L. P. P., p. 300.

²⁴⁹Ibid.

CONCLUSION

The thesis which has guided this study is the belief that Bonhoeffer's understanding of "representation" provides the key to his unfinished attempt at a non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts. Bonhoeffer's own theological conceptions of the Word and the sacraments -- conceptions which he developed primarily along traditional lines in his early and middle years of writing -- contain elements which prefigure what he means by speaking in a non-religious manner. But only when these elements are related to "representation", and their meaning is reinstilled and reoriented by that new relationship, do these traditional conceptions acquire vitality for man come of age.

Bonhoeffer's emphasis on "representation" and his desire to interpret biblical concepts non-religiously is actually an attempt to answer his question about ". . . who Christ really is, for us today."¹ Thus the thesis of this study has been examined within the context of two accompanying questions: Who, according to Bonhoeffer, is Christ?; and What characterizes the new age in which he reveals Himself?

The validity of the christology which Bonhoeffer brings to his attempt at non-religious interpretation has been established by

¹L.P.P., p. 279.

underlining his dependence upon and acceptance of the Chalcedonian definition of Christ. That validity has been further established by indicating the traditional Protestant doctrines that undergird Bonhoeffer's conception of Christ as reality. Thus, when he interprets Christ as the Real One who forms Himself concretely as the Incarnate One, the Crucified One and the Risen One, Bonhoeffer is employing the traditional beliefs that reason is incapable of direct access to God, that Christ reveals Himself not in propositions but as a person, that God is not an abstract idea or static truth, that revelation breaks through the self-enclosure of reason by appearing in history, and that Christ exists pro me. It has been further established that Bonhoeffer's christology logically issues into a theology of the cross and a preoccupation with Christ formed as suffering and hidden, as the Crucified One.

In the second chapter Bonhoeffer's understanding of the relationship between Christ and the world come of age has been examined. That examination has demonstrated that, in his description of all the characteristics of the world come of age -- including its rejection of two-sphere, individualistic thought, of attempts at metaphysical conceptions of God, and of the privileged character of religion -- the most important insight Bonhoeffer has offered is his belief that the world come of age is sustained by Christ and is transformed by Christ toward a definite purpose. Therefore when Bonhoeffer refers approvingly to the religionlessness of man come of age he is thinking christologically, interpreting the new age by means of the forms of Christ as the Incarnate One and the Cruci-

fied One. The vehicle for the transition from interpreting the world come of age through Christ the Incarnate One to interpreting it through the Crucified One is Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the ultimate/penultimate distinction. This vehicle helps explain why Bonhoeffer believes that in the modern world Christ forms Himself and reveals Himself differently to the different dimensions, worldly and religious, of the individual.

Finally, the third chapter has demonstrated the new mode whereby Christ is revealing Himself in the world come of age. That new mode is "representation". Christ reveals Himself as the representative, as ". . . 'the man for others', and therefore the Crucified . . ." ² And if the Christian is to further the message of Christ he is called, according to Bonhoeffer, to become a representative himself. Then his demeanour will point away from himself and the religious preoccupations to which he is subject, and toward Christ. This new mode of Christ's revelation means that biblical concepts like the Word and sacraments, which are meant to direct men toward Christ, will be effective only if the interpretation of those concepts always is mindful both of Christ's existence as the suffering representative for sinful men and of the need for Christians to exist as suffering representatives for others.

The theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer has proven a fertile source of provocative theological ideas both on theoretical questions

²L.P.P., p. 382.

raised in academic circles and in the parish-related theology that occurs in the pastor's study. One example of this is Bonhoeffer's far-sighted incipient attempt to reinterpret the providence of God in non-metaphysical terms. Building on Bonhoeffer's lead, the church can eliminate from its understanding of providence any element that would connote a separate God ensconced in the heavens directing from afar off in time and space the affairs that will determine human lives. Instead, the pastor can proclaim the providence of a God who through Christ is engaged sacrificially in human affairs, who confronts and transforms individuals living in the responsibility of their own free decisions. Providence is not to be regarded, Bonhoeffer asserts, as a ". . . timeless fate." Instead, a God involved in the world patiently ". . . waits for and answers sincere prayers and responsible actions."³

This is but one good example of how Bonhoeffer has provided the twentieth-century church with a way of living as a mature and worldly institution without thereby surrendering its distinctive Christian mission and message. There are, however, questions and difficulties in Bonhoeffer's theology which remain unresolved, even when it is understood that "representation" provides an excellent interpretive key for many of his enigmatic concepts. Two of these difficulties can be briefly described here, though no attempt at their solution can be offered.

³L. P. P., p. 11.

One particularly troublesome question to this writer is Bonhoeffer's willingness to accept certain modern scientific conclusions, notably his assent to the idea of the infinity of the universe. In the Letters . . . he employs the scientific conclusion that the world is infinite as a model for his own further conclusions that the world is being taught by God that it must learn to live etsi deus non daretur.⁴ If Bonhoeffer genuinely accepts the infinity of the universe, however, can he logically affirm in his lectures on creation that the "nothingness" or "void" out of which God creates is precisely and absolutely "nothing"?⁵ He explicitly argues against those who would interpret "nothing" as a "primal possibility" or a "substantial" void.⁶ Can he, in fact, ever properly direct his concern toward ". . . this world as created and preserved . . ." ⁷ unless he considerably qualifies his meaning of creation? It remains to be seen whether Bonhoeffer can legitimately employ images of a created world and a creator God when he accepts the scientific interpretation of the universe as infinite.

Bonhoeffer's reception of the world come of age also raises a question about his view of the nature of history and the place of history in theology. By welcoming the world come of age as a time in which improper religious corollaries are eliminated

⁴L.P.P., pp. 359-360.

⁵C.F./T., pp. 18-19.

⁶Ibid.

⁷L.P.P., p. 286.

from Christianity, Bonhoeffer is implying that human history involves a progress from less adequate expressions of faith to more adequate expressions of faith. History, Bonhoeffer says, ". . . attains to its fulfillment" in the interpretation of the reality of Christ.⁸ If that is true, and if the present, mature, stage of history has more adequately interpreted the reality of Christ than have previous stages, then Bonhoeffer is placed in the predicament of having to explain why the providence of God denied centuries of Christians a proper, non-religious interpretation of their faith. This is a predicament which Bonhoeffer does share with numerous other contemporary theologians who embrace a progressive view of history. Nonetheless, the fate of "un-worldly" stages of history is a troublesome riddle in Bonhoeffer's reception of the world come of age.

Despite these possible difficulties in Bonhoeffer's thought, it is still the overriding judgement of this present study that if Bonhoeffer's conviction -- that "representation" is the key to the interpretation of biblical concepts -- is seriously considered by contemporary theologians, the effect upon theology and ecclesiology of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries will be monumental.

First of all, the repeated reference of theological doctrine to "representation" will minimize the individualistic, metaphysical, and privileged character of the thoughts and actions of the church and will thus inhibit any religious falsification of Chris-

⁸E., p. 230.

tianity. Secondly, the church, as a whole and in its parts, will continually review the extent to which its proclamations are in accordance with its actions, and will engage in periods of silent repentance for its failures. Thirdly, the church, refusing to live in a privileged sphere, will fulfil Bonhoeffer's hope that it will ". . . give away all its property to those in need"⁹ and will seek always to be a visible example of the suffering Christ. Finally, theology, i.e. statements about God, will no longer be understood merely as verbal declarations about the nature or disposition of God. Acts of representative discipleship will be considered statements about God just as readily as would written documents. The unity between word and deed will be furthered. These are some of the implications of the theology of representative discipleship which Bonhoeffer has offered to Christianity in the world come of age.

⁹L. P. P., p. 382.

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